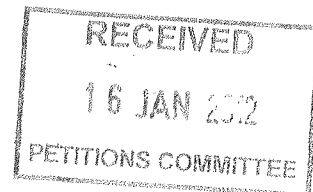




THE HON KEVIN RUDD MP

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CANBERRA

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Chair

Thank you for your letter dated 31 October 2011, regarding a petition recently submitted by the students and community of the King's Preparatory School in Parramatta about the plight of child soldiers.

Like the petitioners, I believe the exploitation of children in conflict, especially their use as child soldiers, to be unconscionable and abhorrent. The Australian Government takes every opportunity to condemn these practices, especially at the United Nations.

At the 18th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) held in Geneva in September this year, Australia condemned the use of child soldiers as 'unacceptable' and spoke in support of the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Australia also expressed its 'grave concern' over continued reports of the use of child soldiers in Somalia. Earlier in 2011, Australia co-sponsored resolutions on the rights of the child at the 16th session of the HRC in March and at the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly in October.

The Government works to promote and protect children's rights through a range of international institutions and instruments. Australia has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Convention), and its two Optional Protocols, as well as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These treaties have benefited children by establishing standards against which international behaviour can be measured and scrutinised. Australia continues actively to encourage all States to uphold children's rights, as well as to ratify ILO Convention 182 and its Optional Protocols.

Aside from our diplomatic efforts, Australia's aid program also supports organisations like UNICEF prevent child soldier recruitment and rehabilitate former child soldiers. For example, in Sri Lanka we support UNICEF's work to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers and assist children affected by the conflict.

In Nepal we have supported Save the Children's work to release and rehabilitate former child soldiers. From 2010-13 we will provide a further \$1.2 million to help the return and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups.

In the Philippines the Australian aid program is supporting UNICEF to help children in conflict-affected communities in Mindanao have access to immunisation, education and protection against recruitment into armed groups.

We will continue to look for opportunities to counter the use of child soldiers around the world. I thank the students and community of the King's Preparatory School for their concern over this pressing international challenge.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Rudd

8 JAN 2012