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U.N. Cites Child Recruiters But Omits Leading Offenders

(New York, December 16, 2002) — A landmark report to the U.N. Security Council brings needed scrutiny to governments and armed groups using children as soldiers, but omits some of the world's worst offenders, Human Rights Watch said today.

The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, released today, for the first time includes a list of specific parties to armed conflict that recruit or use child soldiers in violation of international law. Limited to countries on the Security Council agenda, the report lists parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Burundi and Afghanistan.

"The list sends an important message by singling out specific governments and armed groups as violators," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. "But the list excludes countries with widespread child recruitment, including Burma, Colombia and Uganda."

Human Rights Watch has documented large-scale forced recruitment of children by Burma's national army, and believes the country may have the largest number of child soldiers in the world. In Colombia, both guerilla and government-linked paramilitaries use large numbers of child soldiers in the country's long-running civil war.

In northern Uganda, the abduction of children for use as soldiers by the Lord's Resistance Army has increased dramatically in recent months. At least 10,000 children have been abducted over the last 15 years.

"We urge the Security Council to actively monitor the countries named on the Secretary-General's list, and to demand progress or suffer possible sanctions," said Becker. "The Security Council should also expand its scrutiny to include all countries where children are being recruited or used in violation of international law."

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers has documented illegal use of child soldiers by 72 parties in about 20 countries.