



## Press centre

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UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake

### Press centre

## Statement

### Statement from UNICEF's Executive Director and the Secretary-General's Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict on the recruitment of child soldiers in Somalia

New York, 4 May 2010 - "We are appalled to learn that the recruitment and use of children as soldiers by armed groups in Somalia is rising. All parties to the conflict are involved, and in some cases children as young as nine years old are being recruited.

Recent reports state that schools are being used as recruitment centers and that child soldiers are often beaten or executed when captured.

The use of children by armed forces and groups is a war crime. It must stop immediately. All parties must release the children within their ranks. Impunity must end and perpetrators brought to justice.

Children who have been recruited are victims and must be treated accordingly.

UNICEF and the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict stand ready to assist in the demobilization of Somali children and help them recover their childhoods and reintegrate into their communities.

We also call on the international community, including those providing support to parties in Somalia, to unanimously condemn this practice and use their influence to bring it to an end.

Children forced to put on a uniform and carry a gun suffer psychological and often physical damage, and without assistance may grow to become instigators of violence, including recruiters of child soldiers, as adults. The use of child soldiers is a tragedy for Somalia right now, and unless urgent action is taken may also threaten the country's future stability. Children and young people are the majority of the population of Somalia and they deserve a childhood free from the terrors of armed conflict."

**Anthony Lake**  
Executive Director  
UNICEF

**Radhika Coomaraswamy**  
Special Representative of the  
Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

### For more information, please contact:

Timothy La Rose, UN, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, NY,

Tel + 1 212 963-0984, [larose@un.org](mailto:larose@un.org)

Christopher de Bono, UNICEF Media, New York, Tel + 1 212 303-7984, [cdebono@unicef.org](mailto:cdebono@unicef.org)

Patrick McCormick, UNICEF Media, New York, Tel + 1 212 326-7426, [pmccormick@unicef.org](mailto:pmccormick@unicef.org)

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