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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Joint written statement* submitted by the Child Development Foundation (CDF) and
the Society Studies Centre (SSC), non-governmental organizations in special
consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 August 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Children Involvement in Darfur Armed Conflict

Darfur region in western Sudan has been embroiled in a notorious armed conflict since 2003. The humanitarian crisis which has withdrawn the attention of the whole world has affected all sectors of the local communities specially the vulnerable groups such as women and children. Children have suffered more than any other group, as they lost their parents, stable peaceful life, educational opportunities and much more involvement as combatant in the armed conflict.

The proliferating rebel armed groups in Darfur have been active in recruiting children either from villages, IDP camps or refugee camps set up for victims of Darfur conflict in Chad. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict (Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy) has made special note for that in her report (A/HRC/9/3) dated 27 June 2008 and presented to this session. She states that "Along the Sudan-Chad border, both Sudanese and Chadian armed groups are recruiting children from Sudanese refugee camps in eastern Chad, while Chadian refugee children are being recruited by Sudanese rebel groups in Darfur". This has become a very classical behavior of armed groups in the area.

Despite the UN reports on involvement of children in the armed conflict in Darfur, the recruitment and direct involvement of children as fighters by the armed groups continues. On 10th May 2008, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) have launched an attack on Omdurman the western part of the capital city Khartoum. The invasion attempt was crushed by the Sudanese armed and security forces after hours of fighting in the city. The fight has resulted in loss of innocent civilian lives, civilian properties and spread of terror in the city which accommodates more than 6 million people from all parts of Sudan including Darfur. What was most appalling was there were more than 100 children aged 10 to 17 were among the JEM's fighters. About 99 of them were arrested.

To address the issue of child soldiers among the fighters, Sudanese authorities set up a higher committee to recommends ways of dealing with these children. The children were immediately separated from adults, and given special health care, and psych-social treatment. The Committee considered these children as victims of the war, and not criminal, and recommended the involvement of the Red Cross, and the UNICEF. A group on national NGOs led by Child Development Foundation (CDF) and includes the Society Studies Centre have paid a visit the camp where the children have been accommodated. They found that the children were well treated and in good health. The group also initiated an advocacy campaign against child recruitment and called for release of children associated with all armed groups in the country.

During his latest visit to Darfur, President El Bashir has issued a Presidential Pardon on 24th July 2008 by which the children were pardoned and arrangements have been made to set them free. The Higher Committee set to address their problem has made advertisement on daily newspapers requesting the relatives of those children to come up and take the children home. The ICRC has been leading the Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) efforts in this regard. So far they managed to identify some of the families. Recently the CDF and Save the Children (USA) have been selected to carry out the process of integration in west Darfur.

The Presidential Pardon was well received by the national and international NGOs working in Sudan. It was considered a wise step taken in realization for Sudan's Commitments to the Child Right Convention. We support such moves by the Government of Sudan to protect the children who are victims of war in Darfur.

We call upon the armed groups in Darfur to put an immediate end to the recruitment of children in their struggle with the government and to demobilize those we are currently in their ranks. Continuing the current trend will further deepen the sufferings of the Darfur people.

We also call upon the international community who dispatched the UNAMID to protect the civilian in Darfur to check that the hybrid force is doing its job in providing protection for children against recruitment. We need to remind the UNAMID to ensure that the Code of Conduct is well observed. The European force which was deployed to Eastern Chad with the purpose of protecting the Sudanese refugee in Eastern Chad has also a duty to do to protect the children. If these forces are there with all their almighty military power and recruitment of children from those camps still continues, we should ask ourselves: What else is this force doing?.

Stop involving children in the Darfur armed conflict now.

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