

governments such as Cuba, China, and Iran. While the United States argued about the system's potential cost and compatibility with its own constitutional requirements, U.S. opposition appeared to reflect a deeper aversion to the development of international law, as seen also in the campaign against the ICC. (See above.) But the momentum behind this important initiative for the prevention of torture proved unstoppable and the protocol was adopted by a large majority at the U.N. General Assembly in November.

The United States also stood out against its allies at the U.N. General Assembly Special Session on Children in May 2002, where it sought to sideline the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (which only the U.S. and Somalia have not ratified), and roll back previous international agreements to provide adolescents with sexual and reproductive health education and services. Human Rights Watch helped to bring together a coalition of more than one hundred national and international NGOs to press a broad range of child rights concerns, particularly the protection of children in armed conflict and from other forms of violence and exploitation. The session adopted a ten-year plan of action for children around issues of health, including HIV/AIDS, education, and ending violence, abuse, and exploitation. The U.N. also initiated a major new study on violence against children to be carried out over the next two years, which will help to open up an important new policy agenda for children's rights.

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Child Soldiers

The year also saw important developments in the international campaign to stop the use of child soldiers. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which prohibits the use of children under the age of eighteen as soldiers, entered into force on February 12, 2002. Human Rights Watch joined the international Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in marking this important milestone, including by planting thousands of "red hands" (the symbol of the campaign) around the grounds of the U.N. complex in Geneva. By the time of writing, 111 states had signed the Optional Protocol and forty-two had ratified, laying the foundation for a global ban on the use of child soldiers. As part of the campaign in the U.S. on this issue, Human Rights Watch successfully pushed for Senate approval of the Optional Protocol.

The impact of armed conflict on children, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, also received renewed attention in the U.N. Security Council. In November 2001, the Security Council passed Resolution 1379, its third major intervention on this issue. Significantly, it called for the secretary-general to present the Council with a list of governments and armed groups using child soldiers in breach of their international obligations. Human Rights Watch worked with the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers to present the Council with a comprehensive submission, listing twelve governments and eighty-five armed groups in twenty-five

countries. The Security Council unfortunately confined its scrutiny to situations already on its agenda, and although the secretary-general's report had not been presented at the time of writing, it was expected to name government forces and armed groups in just a handful of countries. Nevertheless, the Council's request set an important new precedent for international censure and sanction on this issue.

During the year, Human Rights Watch undertook in-depth research on two of the world's worst cases of the use of child soldiers: Burma and Colombia. In Burma, the national army was found to systematically and forcibly conscript children as young as eleven, and children were forced to participate in combat and in human rights abuses against civilians. Although evidence suggested that as many as seventy thousand children were part of Burma's army, the government persistently denied its use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch documented the use of child soldiers also by most of Burma's ethnic armed opposition groups. In Colombia, Human Rights Watch interviewed more than one hundred former child combatants who had fought with left-wing guerrilla and right-wing paramilitary groups. Many were as young as eleven when recruited, and most had participated in combat. Once in the ranks, children who ran away were often killed as suspected informers if they were caught, and some children were forced to carry out executions themselves.

While these situations remained grave, there were notable breakthroughs elsewhere, with significant demobilization of child soldiers in Sierra Leone and southern Sudan, and some progress in Afghanistan and the DRC. In Sri Lanka, the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam committed to ending child recruitment and demobilizing children as part of their peace negotiations with the government.

Antipersonnel Landmines

There were also great strides forward in global efforts to eradicate antipersonnel landmines. The number of states parties to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty had grown to 130 as of mid-November 2002, and another sixteen countries had signed but not yet ratified. It was particularly notable that Afghanistan, Angola, and the DRC became states parties: all three are heavily mined countries that have recently used antipersonnel mines, only then to reject them in the wake of peace initiatives.

According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2002*, coordinated by Human Rights Watch for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the number of governments actively using antipersonnel mines dropped in the past year from thirteen to nine, and a total of seven million stockpiled antipersonnel mines were destroyed by Mine Ban Treaty states parties. In the five years since the treaty was initially signed, the number of new mine victims each year has dropped dramatically, the number of new mine clearance and other mine action programs has increased greatly, mine action funding has totaled over U.S.\$1.4 billion, the number of antipersonnel mine producing nations has dropped from fifty-five to fourteen, and global trade in antipersonnel mines has been reduced to a smattering of illicit or covert transactions.

However, the report also noted that ninety countries are still affected by landmines and/or unexploded ordnance (UXO), and there were new mine/UXO victims in sixty-nine countries. In the first half of 2002, India and Pakistan engaged in