



Save the Children

PSC Ambassadors
Council of the European Union

7 October 2010

Dear Ambassadors,

In light of your upcoming visit to DRC from 9 to 14 October, Save the Children would like to draw your attention to the dire situation facing children in DRC.

It is well documented from our own and other sources that Eastern DRC presents some of the most significant child protection challenges in the developing world. Save the Children is recognised by UNICEF, MONUSCO, the World Bank and other donors (including Comic Relief and the French Government) as one of the few humanitarian agencies with the experience and expertise to address these challenges.

Whilst the atrocity of sexual violence against women and children by armed groups was recently highlighted, children endure sexual violence and exploitation in many other areas of Congolese life, including by military personnel (regular army, rebel army, peacekeepers) and ex-combatants; family members and key community members, including teachers and health workers. Attacks occur in fields outside villages when water or fuel is being collected, in markets or in school and even in health clinics. From January to June this year, 7685 cases of sexual violence were reported nationally, 2245 for North Kivu, 2275 for South Kivu and 354 for Province Orientale. 61% of these were perpetrated against children, of which 7.2% children under 10.¹ This amount is likely higher due to underreporting and does not take into account the massive rapes, affecting 100 women and girls, which were perpetrated at the end of August in Walikale.

Much attention is rightly brought to the need to have good reproductive health services and medical gender-based violence (GBV) services. However, many of these services are not appropriate or accessible to children. The degree to which children require specialist services which consider their differing physical, mental and emotional development is highly underestimated. Furthermore, the lack of confidentiality and security means children/girls, as well as women, do not go to clinics for treatment following assault.

Another key concern is child labour in military-run mines in eastern DRC. It is known that many children who have originally been in armed groups continue to be under the influence of their commanders through their work and exploitation in the mines. Whilst the government of DRC have taken some steps to end exploitation of children in the mines, the subsequent closure of several mines and expulsion of children from them in 2010, left many hundreds of children at further risk of exploitation and neglect. This shows that closing the mines without ensuring child protection and other alternatives is not a viable solution. Save the Children is currently in discussion with UNICEF on conducting investigative assessments on this issue.

Furthermore, it is understood that the model of DDR programming needs to change. Concentration needs to be placed on responding to community-based recruitment as well as having the capacity to scale-up to respond to release and reintegration needs where and when necessary through the use of local partners. Key learning on how to do this can be taken from Save the Children's work in Uganda.²

Addressing child protection within a community setting is vital. This is particularly so with the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups, as stated by the Paris Principles. Many child protection agencies, including Save the Children, recommend inclusion of other vulnerable

¹ Source : UNFPA

² Here a strategy involving the placement and regular review of necessary supplies, staff capacity and capability and adequate transitory care by Save the Children and UNICEF enabled those agencies who received children coming out of the LRA, Ugandan Army or Southern Sudanese Army to receive a good standard of care and support whenever it was required

children in such projects within communities since this allow children and youth, who have not passed through an official DDR process, to access necessary assistance. This is particularly important for girls, who tend not to go through official release processes and can experience particular difficulties in settling in their families and communities.

Finally, a recent study by Save the Children for the Child Protection Working Group (Child Protection Sub-cluster at the global level), highlighted the paucity of funding of child protection projects in emergency and fragile states. Within the protection sector, only 32% of child protection projects receive funding and only 23% of these receive more than half of what they have requested³. For example, the World Bank has stated that it no longer can or is willing to fund the DDR programmes as it was originally designed. With the inclusion of many armed groups into the national army, the traditional style of DDR is now not as relevant. However, DDR and reintegration work is still needed as recruitment and release goes on. Children are still at great risk of recruitment and re-recruitment within their and neighbouring communities by Mai-Mai-like groups/civil defence forces and other armed groups. In May and June of this year alone over 200 children were recruited in North Kivu⁴. This shortfall in funding, and the small percentage of projects funded has therefore a significant impact on the protection and care of children in emergencies and conflict-affected settings.

Save the Children calls on the EU and its Member States to:

- Identify a focal point within the EU delegation that could join the protection cluster (and if possible the children working group host by UNICEF) and to facilitate the contact between NGOs and EU
- Support the development of a national annual action plan regarding child protection
- Increase funding for child protection projects in DRC

We thank you for your attention to these important matters of concern. We welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely,



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Cc: EU Delegation in DRC

³ Save the Children UK. Advocacy Briefing on Financing of Child Protection in Emergencies, Child Protection Working Group, 2010 - draft

⁴ Source, Child Protection Officer, French Embassy, Kinshasa.