



Human Rights Watch

Submission to the Committee on the Rights of the Child For the Periodic Review of the Democratic Republic of Congo

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In the last year, as in many years past, children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) suffered abuse by members of the Congolese armed forces (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC) and police, by combatants from various armed groups, and by adults from their own families and communities. These violations of their basic rights took place in a context of extreme poverty, lack of medical care and education, and—for those in eastern DRC—of continuing armed conflict.

Human Rights Watch, which has been carrying out research on children's rights in DRC for more than ten years, appreciates the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Committee information on the following human rights abuses:

- **Continued presence of children in the ranks of the DRC armed forces and non-state armed groups, and new recruitment of child soldiers, including children who were formerly demobilized.** Human Rights Watch has found that demobilization efforts often fail to reintegrate former child soldiers into their communities because programs supporting reintegration are too brief and located too far from children's home villages. In North and South Kivu, Human Rights Watch found evidence of new recruitment of children by armed groups in the first half of 2008.

- **Arbitrary arrest and detention without charge** of children allegedly associated with armed opposition groups. In Goma (North Kivu) alone in the first half of 2008, officials jailed dozens of children for alleged past involvement with armed groups.
- **Sexual violence against girls**, including rape and prostitution, forced marriage, and discrimination against victims of sexual violence and their children. Hundreds of girls were raped in North Kivu in the first half of 2008; perpetrators were largely government soldiers or members of armed groups but also included civilians.
- **Human rights abuses against street children**, including violence by the police and military; arbitrary arrest; and discrimination by families and communities.

Introduction

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the rights of children are widely and tragically violated each day.

Since the start of the Congo wars in 1996, children have borne the brunt of the violence, particularly in eastern Congo. Following a 2002 agreement, a transitional government of national unity was installed in 2003. In 2006, parliamentary and presidential elections took place, which confirmed Joseph Kabila as president.

At the end of 2007 and in early 2008, considerable progress was made in establishing a basis for peace in eastern Congo. In an agreement made public in the so-called Nairobi communiqué, the governments of Congo and Rwanda agreed in November 2007 to address the problem of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan armed group based in eastern Congo, some of whose leaders participated in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. In January 2008, the government and 22 armed groups signed a ceasefire agreement in the eastern town of Goma; one of the armed groups was the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) of renegade general

Laurent Nkunda, which was fighting the Congolese army as well as the FDLR and other Congolese groups.

While the Goma agreement raised great hope that civilians would finally be protected, armed conflict continues in several parts of eastern Congo, and civilians—including many children—are still being killed, forcibly recruited as soldiers, raped, and subjected to other forms of violence and exploitation.¹

In Congo, perpetrators of crimes, including crimes against children, are rarely held to account. In the last year a small number of low-ranking Congolese soldiers and members of armed groups have been convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Congolese courts. While this is welcome, corruption, political interference, and lack of capacity in the judicial system has meant that most perpetrators escape punishment. Some against whom there is substantial evidence of such abuses have been rewarded with senior positions in the government and army.

In 2007, the International Criminal Court indicted the Ituri-based rebel leaders Thomas Lubanga Dyilo, Germain Katanga, and Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui for multiple counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the recruitment, enlistment and use of child soldiers. These indictments marked a first stage in ensuring international accountability for those accused of recruiting and using child soldiers. Yet the court has far to go before delivering justice for these crimes. The trial against Thomas Lubanga—the first trial in the court's history—was scheduled to begin in June 2008 but has been suspended indefinitely because the court ruled that the prosecutor had failed to disclose exculpatory information necessary for Lubanga to receive a fair trial.²

¹ See Human Rights Watch, *Renewed Crisis in North Kivu*, October 2007, <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/drc1007/>; and “DR Congo: Peace Accord Fails to End Killing of Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 21, 2008, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/07/18/congo19396.htm>.

² See Human Rights Watch, *Courting History: The Landmark International Criminal Court's First Years*, July 2008, <http://hrw.org/reports/2008/icc0708/>; and Human Rights Watch, “International Criminal Court's Trial

Demobilization, Recruitment, and Re-recruitment of Child Soldiers

There are currently an estimated 3,000 children in the DRC associated with non-state armed groups and some units of the Congolese army, primarily in North and South Kivu provinces.³ Many more child soldiers have been demobilized, but lack of adequate support for these children as well as continued recruitment pressure by army units and armed groups has resulted in some of those demobilized returning to the ranks.

Demobilization

The FARDC officially ended child recruitment in 2003, although children remained in individual units. Non-state armed groups continued recruiting children as fighting continued in parts of the country. Between 2003 and 2006 Congolese and international workers identified and removed some 30,000 children from the ranks of both regular military units and armed groups.⁴

Under the 2008 Goma peace agreement, the government and armed groups agreed to release all child soldiers in their ranks and end further recruitment. The government launched a national program of “zero tolerance” for the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups in June 2008 and committed to taking further action on demobilizing all children associated with armed forces and groups.

Over a period of years, thousands of child soldiers escaped, were abandoned, or left the FARDC and armed groups without being officially demobilized.

of Lubanga ‘Stayed’,” Questions and Answers, June 19, 2008, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/06/19/congo19163.htm>.

³ Human Rights Watch electronic communication with child protection officer, Goma, August 9, 2008.

⁴ UN Security Council, report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, S/2007/391, June 28, 2007, paras 54, 57; see also Human Rights Watch, *Renewed Crisis in North Kivu*, p. 48.

Thousands of girls have been recruited and used by armed forces and groups. They performed combat duties, served as porters, provided medical assistance, carried out domestic labor, and served as sexual slaves. Yet very few of these girls have entered official demobilization programs, sometimes because they feared stigmatization by their communities. Some of them are pregnant or have children. They remain traumatized when they go back to the community and are often abandoned, with little or no support for their own reintegration or the care of their children.⁵

Recruitment of Child Soldiers in the FARDC and in Armed Groups

In a report to the UN Security Council in April 2008, the UN secretary-general noted that recruitment of Congolese and Rwandan children by the CNDP, Mai Mai groups⁶ and foreign armed groups such as the FDLR, continue to be reported in the Kivus.⁷

Despite official policy prohibiting the use of children, some children have been integrated into the new Congolese army. Early in 2007, combatants loyal to renegade general Laurent Nkunda were integrated into the national army in a process called “mixage.” An estimated 300 to 500 children reportedly were serving in these “mixed” brigades in North Kivu by April 2007, including some children recruited from refugee camps and

⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Goma, August 3, 2008; and Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, Democratic Republic of the Congo, http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf.

⁶ Local communities organized groups of combatants, known as Mai Mai, to defend themselves against threatening military forces during the Congo wars. Since the end of the second war, some groups of combatants have been integrated into the national army but others continue to operate autonomously, sometimes preying on neighboring communities.

⁷ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on MONUC, S/2008/218, April 21, 2008, para 70.

communities in Rwanda.⁸ By August 2007, the political agreements between Nkunda and the government had collapsed and many of Nkunda's former troops left the mixed units and returned to his control; renewed clashes between Nkunda's troops and government soldiers followed.

According to information gathered by Human Rights Watch, some armed groups in North and South Kivu that were largely dormant before the Goma accord have recently recruited children. The Mai Mai Yakatumba group in Fizi (South Kivu), for example, is said to have recruited 36 children earlier this year, allegedly in preparation for conflict with Congolese army troops expected to arrive in the area.⁹ In Beni (North Kivu), a new Mai Mai group in the Virunga National Park, the Congolese Movement United for the Defense of National Integrity (Mouvement congolais unis pour la défense de l'intégrité nationale), has reportedly recruited more than 40 children in recent months.¹⁰

Child protection agencies began a new effort at identifying children in the armed groups in North and South Kivu in mid-April 2008, but coordination problems between UN agencies halted activities until early July, when work resumed. Following three joint missions of child protection agencies, a total of 66 children were separated from armed groups in North Kivu. Over 500 children escaped from armed groups by other means between January and July 2008, but most of them have not gone through official demobilization programs.¹¹

⁸ See "DR Congo: Army Should Stop Use of Child Soldiers," Human Rights Watch news release, April 19, 2007, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/19/congo15732.htm>.

⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 3, 2008; and Human Rights Watch communication with child protection specialist, Bukavu, August 13, 2008.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch electronic communication with child right's activist, Goma, August 7, 2008.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with child protection specialist, Goma, May 29, 2008, July 25, 2008, and August 13, 2008.

Renewed Recruitment of Once Demobilized Children

Official disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs in the DRC rarely last longer than three months and little or no support is provided for former child soldiers after they leave transit centers and return to their families and communities. As one Congolese children's rights activist explained:

Lots of children were demobilized, but as soon as they got back to their communities, they were recruited again or arrested by the Congolese army or police. We can't send them to a center in town for three months and then expect everything to be fine when they go back to their village. It's a vicious cycle that will continue until we put in place a real mechanism to accompany and follow-up on these children for the long-term.¹²

Recent recruitment of children by armed groups in South Kivu, such as in Kalehe territory, has led some children to flee their homes to avoid recruitment. Maurice,¹³ a 17-year-old who was recruited by a Mai Mai group when he was 14, finally was released after two and a half years and is now at a transit center for demobilized child soldiers in Bukavu. "When I leave the center, I'd like to go back home to my parents," he told Human Rights Watch. "If I'm able to, I want to go back to school. I'm finished with armed groups, but I'm scared that if I go back, I'll be recruited again. I know three or four boys who were recruited this past month from my village, and I know they're still looking for more boys."¹⁴

¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 6, 2008.

¹³ All names of children and victims used in this report are pseudonyms.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former child soldier, Bukavu, August 6, 2008.

Child Labor

Many demobilized child soldiers seek ways to make money in the mines or in other situations where they are exploited and subjected to dangerous conditions. At least 200 children work in the Mukungwe mine in Walungu territory (South Kivu); the majority of these children are reportedly demobilized child soldiers from the "Mudungu 40" Mai Mai group. In July 2008, these children were caught up in a violent dispute over control of the mine in which both sides mobilized the children to fight with rocks and sticks in an attempt to secure control. The nearby village of Kalanga was burned during the fighting and many families in the area have been forced to flee.¹⁵

Arbitrary Arrest and Imprisonment

Former child soldiers and others suspected of being associated with armed opposition groups have also been arrested by Congolese military and police authorities and held for months in military prisons without charge.

In his April 2008 report to the UN Security Council, the secretary-general said that the UN mission in the DRC (MONUC) had documented cases of government soldiers arresting children formerly associated with armed groups. Instead of being transferred to MONUC custody as was done in the past, these children are "detained, interrogated, mistreated and in some instances transferred to Kinshasa for further questioning."¹⁶

According to Congolese intelligence officials, at least 141 children were taken to the Goma military intelligence prison, known as the T2, between

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with NGO workers, Bukavu, August 6, 2008; and Human Rights Watch interview with child rights activist, Goma, August 3, 2008.

¹⁶ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on MONUC, S/2008/218, April 21, 2008, para 70.

January and May 2008. While some were transferred to MONUC child protection officials within 48 hours, others were held for weeks or even months without charge and some were subjected to torture or cruel and degrading treatment. According to official figures provided to Human Rights Watch, 51 were said to be associated with the CNDP, 53 with Mai Mai groups and 37 with the FDLR. At least two Rwandan children associated with armed groups were held at the T2 during this period.¹⁷ Most of these children had turned themselves in to FARDC authorities, hoping to be reunited with their families. While Congolese authorities have officially committed to immediately turning these children over to child protection officers, they have instead detained many of them, allegedly because these children pose a security threat or may have useful intelligence information.

In December 2007 and January 2008, 31 children were transferred from Goma's T2 prison to Kinshasa's central prison, known as Makala, including 14 Congolese, 16 Rwandans, and one Burundian.¹⁸ Twenty of these children were reportedly never associated with any armed group; the others were associated with different armed groups in North and South Kivu. They were held for "state security" reasons but never officially charged of any crime. After much pressure from human rights groups and UN agencies, all 31 children were finally released in mid-March 2008. They were then sent back to North and South Kivu to receive temporary care with child protection agencies until they could be reunited with their families.¹⁹

Children associated with the CNDP or Rwandan groups are often treated as exceptional cases and tend to be detained with the adult prisoners for

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with T2 Military Intelligence Prison official, Goma, May 24, 2008.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Major Chiribwani Peter, T2 Military Intelligence Prison Assistant Director, Goma, January 31, 2008; and Human Rights Watch interview with Major Bwamulundu Jean Blaise, Auditorat Militaire de Garnison, Goma, January 29, 2008. Figures subsequently corrected by information from a well-informed confidential source.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch electronic communication, child protection specialist, Goma, April 16, 2008.

extended periods of time. Nkunda's armed group in North Kivu is identified with the Tutsi ethnic group, and children who are Rwandan or Congolese Tutsi appear to have received some of the worst treatment by Congolese military and intelligence authorities.²⁰

Raphael, a 17-year-old Rwandan Tutsi, escaped from the CNDP and was then detained for over a month and a half at the T2 prison. Orphaned by the Rwandan genocide in 1994, he was recruited by the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)²¹ to become a child soldier at the age of 11. "When the RCD united with the government, Nkunda created the CNDP and I joined," he told Human Rights Watch. "But now I've had enough. I turned myself in to the FARDC, but they took me here to the prison. I'm very hungry and I want to go home to my grandmother."²² He was taken to the T2 prison on March 18, 2008, and was not released until May 5, 2008.²³

Vincent, a 17-year-old Rwandan, was imprisoned at the T2 in March 2008. "I came from Rwanda in November 2007 to visit my uncle who lives in Congo," he told Human Rights Watch. "When I arrived, the CNDP took me by force and I had to work for them as a cook. I was finally able to escape and now want to go back home to Rwanda. I don't understand why I've been arrested."²⁴

In June 2008, police arrested at least ten children in Nyamilima (North Kivu), accusing them of having collaborated with the enemy. Four had already gone through demobilization programs and were released after

²⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with T2 authorities and detainees, Goma, January 30, 2008, March 12, 2008, April 30, 2008, and May 24, 2008.

²¹ The Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD, superseded by a splinter group later known as RCD-Goma) is a party identified with Congolese Tutsi which controlled parts of eastern Congo during the war from 1998–2003 and then secured one of the four vice-presidencies in a government headed by President Joseph Kabila.

²² Human Rights Watch interview with detainee, Goma, April 30, 2008.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Lt. Arthur Ngoma, Chief of Investigations at the T2 Military Intelligence Prison, Goma, May 24, 2008.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with detainee, Goma, March 12, 2008.

an intervention by child protection workers from nongovernmental organizations. Others were sent to army retraining (*brassage*) centers or to the T2 military intelligence prison in Goma.²⁵

As one child rights activist explained, “When the children are demobilized, they go back to their homes and the police arrest them. They then escape to MONUC who send them to Goma where they go through demobilization again – and the cycle continues. Congolese military and police authorities need to be sensitized and trained on the rights of these children.”²⁶

Sexual Violence and Exploitation

The sexual violence that has victimized hundreds of thousands of women and girls since the war began in 1996 continues in eastern DRC. Hundreds of cases of sexual violence against girls were reported in North Kivu province during the first six months of 2008.²⁷ Many other cases are left unreported because of widespread shame and fear of being stigmatized or of being rejected by fiancés or potential marriage partners. Combatants from armed groups and government soldiers make up the majority of perpetrators, but very few have ever been prosecuted and fewer still convicted of these crimes.²⁸

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with child right’s activist, Goma, August 3, 2008; and Human Rights Watch interview with NGO worker, Goma, August 13, 2008.

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 5, 2008.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Congolese NGO workers, Goma, August 9, 2008; See also “DR Congo: Peace Accord Fails to End Killing of Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 21, 2008, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/07/18/congo19396.htm>.

²⁸ See Human Rights Watch, *Democratic Republic of Congo – Seeking Justice: Prosecution of Sexual Violence in the Congo War*, vol. 17, no. 1(A), March 2005, <http://hrw.org/reports/2005/drc0305/>; and Human Rights Watch, *Democratic Republic of Congo – The War Within the War: Sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern Congo*, June 2002, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/>.

Victims include girls as young as three-years-old and women and girls who have been gang-raped, mutilated, and tortured by having objects inserted in their vaginas. Some died as a result of the injuries or were killed after rape. Some become pregnant at a very young age and many risk contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Girls who have been raped and give birth as young as aged 12 are then forced out of their homes; some become professional sex workers in order to feed themselves and their children.

Some of the worst recent fighting and human rights abuses have taken place in Masisi, Rutshuru and Lubero territories in North Kivu, as well as some areas in South Kivu. According to dozens of people interviewed by Human Rights Watch, combatants from various armed groups have repeatedly raided villages for cattle, goats and other goods, raping women and girls, and killing civilians who opposed their activities or whom they accused of being collaborators of their enemies. Children represented a disproportionate number of victims, as did the elderly, because they were unable to flee fast enough to escape assailants.²⁹

During a clash between Congolese army soldiers and the Coalition of Congolese Patriotic Resistance (PARECO) in Kamandi (Lubero territory, North Kivu) in May 2008, two girls were reported to have been raped during the combat—a 15-year-old who was raped by a FARDC soldier and a 12-year-old girl raped by a PARECO combatant.³⁰

Combatants from the Cobra Mai Mai group are reported to have raped at least 20 girls in the area between Sake (North Kivu) and Minova (South Kivu) since January 2008. In May, a widow and her eight-year-old daughter were raped at the same time by three Mai Mai Cobra

²⁹ See “DR Congo: Peace Accord Fails to End Killing of Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 21, 2008, <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/07/18/congo19396.htm>.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Congolese NGO workers, Goma, August 9, 2008.

combatants who came to their house at night. Both later tested positive for HIV.³¹

Mai Mai Cobra combatants have also reportedly forced dozens of young girls to “marry” them. If they refuse, the girls and their family members risk imprisonment. In other cases, the combatants have paid families to keep silent about the abduction of their daughter. A Congolese activist who denounced this practice was arbitrarily detained, as was her husband. Mai Mai Cobra combatants subsequently raped the activist’s younger sister.³²

Girls are especially vulnerable to attack when they are sent to collect water and firewood or to walk on isolated paths to the fields, to the market, or to school. In July 2008, for example, a woman and her three daughters, aged 10, 12, and 13, were raped by FDLR combatants while they were working on their farm in Lubero territory (North Kivu).³³

After years of war and destruction, rape of girls has increased in prevalence even outside the context of conflict. Orphaned children or children who are forced to work in exploitative labor conditions are often denied the care and protection of their parents and are vulnerable to sexual abuse by neighbors and employers.

Children of women and girls who were raped are often stigmatized and rejected by their families and communities. Discrimination is especially strong against children of women and girls who were raped or used as sex slaves by the FDLR, the Rwandan rebel group based in eastern Congo. Despite the Congolese law allowing children born in the DRC to choose their own nationality, families often say such children should be sent to Rwanda.

³¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Congolese NGO workers, Goma, August 9, 2008.

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO workers, Goma, August 9, 2008.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Goma, August 9, 2008.

Marie was raped by Rwandan FDLR combatants in South Kivu province 10 years ago. Her daughter born from this rape, Bridget, was rejected by the community and discriminated against from birth. In late 2007, Bridget herself became a victim of rape, at the age of nine.³⁴

In an appeal to the UN Security Council in June 2008, a coalition of 71 Congolese women's groups wrote:

It is difficult to imagine the number of people, men and women alike, who have died due to sexual violence...We are vulnerable in our fields, in the streets, and even in our own homes. Even our daughters as young as three years old are vulnerable when they are playing with their friends or are on the way to school. The nuclear family, the base of our society, no longer exists. Today in Congo, the woman has become an object. We are not protected. We have no justice. There is a crisis of authority and a culture of impunity.³⁵

Some children who have been victims of sexual violence later become child sex workers. Congolese activists identified 39 child sex workers in a two-square-kilometer area in Bukavu, South Kivu. Many had been rejected by their families after having become pregnant as a result of rape and now live on their own or in houses with other sex workers. Others live with their families, who appreciate the income from their work.³⁶ The girls usually have little or no access to healthcare for themselves or their children.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Goma, August 3, 2008.

³⁵ "Congolese Women Appeal to the UN Security Council to Help End Sexual Violence," Letter to the UN Security Council from a coalition of 71 Congolese NGOs, June 12, 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/pub/2008/women/sec.coun.women.drc.en.pdf>

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 5, 2008.

Their clients pay as little as 200 Congolese francs, less than US\$0.50. Most refuse to use a condom and some beat the child sex workers.

Justine, 16-years old, is a sex worker in Bukavu with a two-month-old baby. "We are beaten almost to death by these men," she told Human Rights Watch. "They will beat us anywhere, but it's often on the face. They say they do it because they don't want us to be loved the next night by another man."

The girls say they turn to prostitution because of poverty, displacement, neglect by their parents, and the negative effects of war on the community. Out of 15 sex workers interviewed by a Human Rights Watch researcher in Bukavu, all said they would go to school or to a professional training program if they had the opportunity to do so.³⁷

Street Children

Tens of thousands of children live on the streets in Kinshasa and other cities in the DRC. In the relatively small city of Goma (North Kivu), for example, one Congolese organization working with street children counted 1,675 children living on the streets in April 2007, a number that has probably increased in the last year because of further population displacements in North Kivu. Few of these children receive adequate nutrition or medical and educational services.³⁸

Soldiers, police, and military police routinely harass street children, forcing them to hand over money or other property. They also frequently threaten or beat the children and sexually assault the girls. Some street children are imprisoned for months for minor crimes such as pick-pocketing. They are often held without trial for prolonged periods, usually together with adults, some of whom are convicted criminals. As one children's rights activist

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with several child sex workers Bukavu, August 5, 2008.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Goma, August 9, 2008.

said, "The prisons become 'reeducation centers' for the kids. They may have only committed a small crime, but by the time they leave the prison, they're professional bandits."³⁹

Police have also carried out mass arrests of street children. In late 2006, authorities arrested hundreds of street children in Kinshasa and scores of street children in Goma, probably because street children were considered supporters of opposition presidential candidate Jean-Pierre Bemba.⁴⁰ More recently a police unit for child protection in Goma has helped improve treatment of street children by the police in that city, offering a model that should be implemented elsewhere.⁴¹

Children are forced out of their homes into the streets for a variety of reasons, including internal displacement, poverty and loss of family members who died from AIDS. Children orphaned by AIDS may be sheltered by foster families who then abuse them, sometimes blaming them for the death of their parents or other ills and accusing them of sorcery. Such children may be brought to pastors and cult leaders to undergo "deliverance" ceremonies during which they are sequestered inside churches, denied food or water, and even whipped. More than 2000 churches perform deliverance ceremonies in Kinshasa alone.⁴²

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 6, 2008.

⁴⁰ See Human Rights Watch, *What Future? Street Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, vol. 18, no. 2(A), April 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/drc0406/>.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Bukavu, August 6, 2008; and Human Rights Watch interview with Congolese NGO worker, Goma, August 9, 2008.

⁴² See Human Rights Watch, *What Future? Street Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, vol. 18, no. 2(A), April 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/drc0406/>.

Recommendations

Human Rights Watch requests the Committee on the Rights of the Child to:

- **Encourage the Congolese government, child protection agencies, and international donors to make demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers, including girls associated with armed groups, a priority in eastern Congo's peace program.** Support community-based programming that provides long-term follow-up and support for former child soldiers and brings them together with other youth in the community for literacy training, children's rights education, medical and psychosocial care, and skills training programs that help youth identify a business opportunity and develop the skills to exploit it.
- **Urge the Congolese government to sign into law and implement the Child Protection Code, and bring to justice perpetrators of human rights abuses against children,** including members of armed forces and groups that recruit child soldiers and/or are responsible for sexual violence against children.
- **Urge the Congolese government to end arbitrary detention** of street children and children allegedly associated with armed groups, and ensure full protection to all children in conflict with the law.
- **Urge the Congolese government to expand special child protection units of the police to all major towns, and to train and educate police and military officials,** including the T2 military intelligence officials in Goma, on children's rights and juvenile justice.
- **Urge international donors to provide adequate support to MONUC child protection staff to monitor and report on child rights violations.**
- **Urge the Congolese government and international donors to improve medical and psychosocial care and training opportunities for victims of sexual violence and for street children.**
- **Support naming a high-level independent Special Advisor on Human Rights for eastern Congo** to focus attention on protecting civilians, including children at risk.