

Child Soldier Prevention Act (S.1175)

Summary, Talking Points, and Counterarguments for Lobbying

1) Introduction

Why is the issue important? How many people does it affect? How vile the abuses? What is the ask?

- An estimated 250,000 children are exploited each day in government-run armies, paramilitaries, or rebel armed groups around the world. Called “child soldiers,” they serve as combatants, porters, human mine detectors, and sex slaves. Their health and lives are endangered and their childhoods are sacrificed.
- While many people know about the use of child soldiers by rebel armed groups, the recruitment and use of child soldiers by government-run armies and government-supported armed groups receives less attention and remains a significant problem.
- According to the U.S. State Department, nine governments are implicated in the use or recruitment of child soldiers, whether in government armed forces or government-supported armed groups.
- Of these nine, eight receive U.S. military assistance, including Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda. Burma is the only government that uses child soldiers in its armed forces, but doesn’t receive U.S. military assistance.
- In April 2007, Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Brownback (R-KS) introduced the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2007 (S.1175) to encourage governments to disarm and demobilize child soldiers in government armies and government-supported armed groups.

2) Targets

Who should we target with the ‘ask’? Reps? Senators? Both? Certain committee members? What committee has jurisdiction?

- **Targets:** All Senators outside of those that have co-sponsored the bill. As of July 31, 2007, the co-sponsors are Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Robert P. Casey, Jr. (D-PA), Tom Coburn (R-OK), Thad Cochran (R-MS), Susan Collins (R-ME), Russ Feingold (D-WI), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Chuck Hagel (R-NE), Tim Johnson (D-SD), John Kerry (D-MA), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Bill Nelson (D-FL), Jack Reed (D-RI), Pat Roberts (R-KS), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI). If your Senator is already a co-sponsor, please thank them for his/her support. Because more Senators may co-sponsor the bill, please check online to see if your Senator is a co-sponsor at:
<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-1175>.

3) Talking Points

What are several talking points in support of the ask? Include backup info for each point.

- While many people know about the use of child soldiers by rebel armed groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, the recruitment and use of child soldiers by government-run armies and government-supported armed groups remains a significant problem.
- According to the State Department, the governments of Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda are reportedly still involved in the recruitment or use of children for their own armed forces or are directly linked to armed groups that use children in warfare.
- In Sri Lanka, for example, the UN Special Advisor on Children and Armed Conflict said last year that there is "strong and credible evidence" that elements of the Sri Lankan security forces were supporting the forced recruitment of child soldiers into a government-allied armed group.
- In some cases, children that have escaped from rebel armed groups have been re-recruited by government-run armies. Amnesty International is aware of this happening at least in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- For these reasons, Senators Durbin (D-IL) and Brownback (R-KS) introduced the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2007 (S.1175).
- This legislation uses one of the most effective tools the United States has for pressuring governments to comply with human rights standards: it conditions U.S. military assistance (arms transfers and military training) until the governments improve their practices regarding the use or recruitment of child soldiers.

4) Counter Arguments

What are one or two arguments one might have against the ask?

Counterargument: Why does this legislation focus only on governments when armed groups are the real problem?

Answer: Although there are fewer child soldiers fighting in government armies and government-supported armed groups, the numbers are still significant; on average 10-20 percent of those fighting in these groups are children. Significantly, this legislation recognizes government complicity in the recruitment of children by the government-supported armed groups and holds them accountable. Additionally, how can we expect armed groups to stop using children if the government armies or government-supported militias they are fighting are still using children?

Counterargument: What is the U.S. government's position on the recruitment of child soldiers? Is this bill consistent with the U.S. military's recruiting practice?

Answer: The United States ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2002, which expressly prohibits the use of under 18-year-olds in hostilities and allows governments to recruit at or above 16 years old. After ratifying this protocol, the U.S. armed forces adopted new deployment policies to prevent the use of sixteen and seventeen-year old soldiers in combat situations. The bill follows the language of the Optional Protocol.

Counterargument: Is conditioning or restricting U.S. military assistance really going to help persuade governments to improve or change their practice?

Answer: Although it doesn't work all the time, there are clear examples in which restricting U.S. military assistance has effectively urged governments to change their human rights records. For example, conditions on U.S. transfers of armored personnel carriers to Turkey in the late 1990s helped persuade the Turkish government to change some of its security forces tactics regarding Kurds. U.S. military assistance to Indonesia has also encouraged the Indonesian government to improve its efforts to go after and investigate human rights violations. Additionally, as the lone superpower and one of the most technically advanced militaries, the United States has considerable persuasion power.

Counterargument: Doesn't this bill sanction the governments? The aim of this bill is to condition U.S. military assistance until foreign security forces improve their practices. It would not automatically cut off these military assistance programs; governments taking concrete steps to end child recruitment and demobilize child soldiers would remain eligible for assistance directed solely towards the professionalization of their forces for up to two years before any prohibition on assistance would be imposed. If there has been no change in two years, military assistance would be completely cut off.

Counterargument: What if a situation arises in which it is important for the U.S. military to provide assistance to countries for reasons related to the War on Terror or another important reason?

Answer: If it is critical for the U.S. military to provide assistance to particular countries for reasons of national security, then the President can give a specific waiver to that country. Also, the bill will not automatically or immediately cut off aid to countries implicated; those countries implementing effective child soldier demobilization measures would be eligible for assistance for this process and to professionalize their militaries for up to two years.

Counterargument: Don't we already restrict U.S. military assistance to countries based on human rights violations? Why is this specific provision necessary?

Answer: While there are provisions in U.S. law to restrict military assistance based on gross human rights violations, current restrictions are not specific enough to urge the U.S. government to effectively push governments to stop the use and recruitment of child soldiers.