



**Convention on the
Rights of the Child**

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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 8, PARAGRAPH 1, OF THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL
TO THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON THE
INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT**

Initial reports of States parties due in 2005

SWEDEN

[22 February 2006]

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Sweden was one of the first States to become party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Following a decision by the Riksdag (Swedish Parliament) on 21 June 1990, Sweden ratified the CRC on 29 June 1990. Sweden thereby undertook to guarantee these rights for all children in Sweden. Sweden has also undertaken to promote respect for the rights of the child internationally.
2. Ever since the entry into force of the CRC, Sweden has very actively pursued the issue of the CRC prescribing an 18-year age limit for the involvement of children in armed conflicts. Sweden played an active role in the negotiations for the Optional Protocol and held the presidency of the negotiation group.
3. On 12 December 2002, the Government ratified the Optional Protocol. The ratification was preceded by the approval by the Riksdag on 20 November 2002 of Government Bill 2001/02:178. In addition to Sweden's legally binding obligation to implement the Optional Protocol, the Swedish Government considered the ratification an important political marker with respect to the importance of dealing with violations of the rights of the child caused by the armed conflicts.
4. Prior to ratification of the Optional Protocol, the Government consulted relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and authorities. Among others, views were received by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, the Joint Committee of the Swedish Voluntary Defence Organizations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee, and the NGO Network for the Rights of the Child.
5. Sweden has also been active in raising the issue of children and armed conflict at the international level and within the European Union (EU). In December 2003, as a result of, among other things, Swedish initiatives, the EU adopted common guidelines on children and armed conflicts to endeavour to help children who are in various ways affected by these conflicts. According to these guidelines, the EU should work with a broad spectrum of instruments, on the basis of a rights perspective, focusing on the rights of the child. During the EU presidency of the Netherlands, in the autumn of 2004 the EU adopted an action plan to make these guidelines operational.
6. Sweden's initial report pursuant to article 8 of the Optional Protocol has been prepared by the Child Rights Coordination Unit at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the relevant divisions within, among others, the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture; the Ministry of Defence; the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.
7. NGOs such as for example the Swedish Red Cross, Rädda Barnen (Save the Children Sweden), Swedish UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund), and other members of the NGO Network for the Rights of the Child and the association Folk och Försvar (Society and Defence) have received information about the content of the report and have had an opportunity to submit their views.
8. The report has been submitted to and approved by the Cabinet.

II. PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD ON CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Articles 1 and 2

Participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment into armed forces

9. A total defence service duty applies in Sweden for all residents of Sweden between the ages of 16 and 70. This total defence service duty is governed by the National Total Defence Service Act (1994:1809). This service is performed through compulsory military service, compulsory civilian service or compulsory national service. Compulsory military service is conducted in the military defence. Compulsory civilian service is conducted in the civilian part of the Total Defence, for example as a line repairman or within the civil defence rescue service. Compulsory national service only comes into question should Sweden raise its emergency preparedness. Compulsory national service means, among other things, that the total defence service conscript can be directed to undertake work necessary to maintain an operation that is of particular importance for the Total Defence. There is an 18-year age limit for compulsory military service and compulsory civilian service, while those who have attained the age of 16 are liable to perform compulsory national service.

10. A person who is aged 16 can only be given service tasks within the Total Defence that do not fall within the military defence. For example, this may involve providing information about and escorting others to shelters. There can never be any question of the children taking “direct part in hostilities” or being “compulsorily recruited into [the] armed forces”.

11. The obligation to perform compulsory military service applies for men who are Swedish nationals from the calendar year when the total defence service conscript attains the age of 19.

12. The special selection procedure - enrolment - may be conducted from the calendar year when the person attains the age of 18. The enrolment involves medical and psychological examinations. The test results and the wishes of the individual determine which training he should be enrolled for. The most suitable persons are enrolled for compulsory military service or compulsory civilian service, and the others are placed in a training reserve. However, those who for medical or psychological reasons are not considered capable of completing compulsory military or compulsory civilian service training are released.

13. It is thus not possible to serve compulsorily before attaining the age of 18. There are no rules of exemption that can in any way allow children to participate in the military defence.

Article 3

Voluntary recruitment into national armed forces

14. Besides the personnel subject to total defence service duty, there are a number of categories of personnel who are voluntarily recruited into the military defence. These categories are women who wish to undergo compulsory military service, and home guard personnel and members of voluntary defence organizations (NGOs) who sign service contracts.

15. According to the Act on the Possibility of Women Completing Compulsory Military Service or Compulsory Civilian Service with Long Basic Training (1994:1810), women between the ages of 18 and 24 may apply to be allowed to undergo special acceptance tests that should correspond to enrolment. If there are special reasons, acceptance can also be effected after a woman has attained the age of 25. The application is voluntary. A person who has thereafter been enrolled for compulsory military service is liable to complete the compulsory military service.

16. The Swedish National Home Guard constitutes the main part of the national protection forces. The personnel of the National Home Guard are volunteers who are locally recruited and have the task of protecting vital Total Defence installations in their home districts. The training of home guard units is conducted both locally and regionally.

17. According to the Home Guard Ordinance (1997:146), the Swedish National Home Guard's personnel comprise home guard soldiers and personnel with agreements to serve the National Home Guard according to the Voluntary Defence Operations Ordinance (1994:524). The National Home Guard's personnel also include employees of the Swedish Armed Forces who have war stations within the National Home Guard.

18. According to the Voluntary Defence Operations Ordinance (1994:524), an authority having tasks within the Total Defence shall conclude a written contract with a person belonging to a voluntary (NGO) defence organization if he or she is to serve within the Total Defence. Persons who have concluded such contracts are referred to as "contract personnel".

19. In all the above cases, there is an age limit of 18 years for service within the Swedish Armed Forces.

Youth activities with the Swedish Armed Forces and within voluntary (NGO) defence organizations

20. The Swedish Armed Forces conduct youth activities through arranging courses for young people that provide information about the Total Defence, in particular about the tasks of the Swedish Armed Forces generally, career information, information about compulsory service and voluntary defence activities.

21. The operation of these courses is on a voluntary basis and the aim is to promote interest in the operations of the armed forces and to facilitate future recruitment of career officers. In particular, the need for officers with immigrant backgrounds and women officers is considered. The courses are open to young people who have attained the age of 15 up to and including the calendar year in which they attain the age of 20. Those who have not yet attained the age of 18 at the time of application may not be accepted without their custodian's consent. Firearms training may be undertaken only by those who have attained the age of 15, and firearms training with automatic weapons may only be undertaken by those who have attained the age of 17. Firearms training is only conducted in relation to fixed targets and weapons may never be released to young people for private storage or private use. Training in combat may only be conducted by persons who have attained the age of 18, and is not included in youth operations. The National Home Guard conducts operations for young people in a corresponding way.

22. In Sweden, there are 23 voluntary (NGO) defence organizations that recruit and train citizens on a voluntary basis for tasks within the Total Defence. These voluntary defence organizations are independent organizations and have been created on the initiative of citizens. They are not-for-profit associations and are autonomous in relation to each other and in relation to the Swedish Armed Forces and the Swedish Emergency Management Agency, with whom they cooperate. The voluntary defence organizations conduct Total Defence-orientated youth activities. Their operation comprises training and association activities. Youth training is conducted on the basis of the associations' own rules, needs and training plans. If youth activities are conducted following agreement with the Swedish Armed Forces, the Swedish Armed Forces are responsible for both implementation and for covering expenses.

23. Some Swedish NGOs have stated that youth operations may not be permissible set against the background of the spirit of the Optional Protocol. However, the Government is of the view that youth operations as described here do not fall within the issues covered by the Optional Protocol. These activities do not involve voluntary recruitment to the armed forces. The operations are only aimed at providing information about, and promoting interest in, the Total Defence.

Declaration according to Article 3

24. Upon ratification Sweden made a declaration to the effect that Sweden would apply an 18-year age limit for voluntary recruitment to the armed forces. This corresponds with the position Sweden has pursued internationally for many years. This declaration, which is mandatory according to article 3, paragraph 2, of the Optional Protocol, has been included in the ratification instrument.

Article 4

Recruitment and use of persons under the age of 18 for hostilities within and outside the territory of the State party

25. Armed groups, as referred to in article 4 of the Optional Protocol, are not permitted under Swedish legislation. The foundation or maintenance of such a group is, as such, criminalized.

26. Consequently, in order to prevent the formation of associations that may exercise undesirable power in society, a provision contained in chapter 18, section 4 of the Penal Code on unlawful military activity criminalizes, among other things, the foundation of and participation in an association that is easily capable of developing into an instrument of force, such as a military troop or police force, and which does not with due authority reinforce the national defence or the police. Such an association would cover, among other things, armed groups. It is a precondition that the association does not have the appropriate permission to reinforce the Swedish defence forces or the Swedish police forces. The Swedish Auxiliary Naval Corps, the Scout Movement and security companies fall outside this.

27. A person who founds or participates in an association that is considered to constitute or, in view of its character and the purpose for which it has been organized, is easily capable of

developing into an instrument of force such as a military troop or police force, and which does not with due authority reinforce the national defence or the police, or who on behalf of such an association deals in arms, ammunition or other like equipment, makes available a building or land for its activity or supports it with money or in other ways, shall be sentenced for unlawful military activity.

28. Even other provisions of chapter 18 of the Penal Code may be applicable. According to section 1, a person who, with intent that the form of government be overthrown by force of arms or other violent means or that a measure or decision of the Head of State, the Government, the Riksdag (Parliament) or the supreme judicial bodies be thus forced or obstructed, takes action which involves a danger of the realization of such intent, shall be sentenced for sedition. Attempt, preparation or conspiracy to commit sedition, as well as failure to reveal such a crime, are also offences.

29. A person who, with the intent that the crime be committed against public security or the liberty of citizens, gathers or leads an armed force or keeps it assembled or furnishes it with arms, ammunition or other like equipment or trains it in the use of arms, shall be sentenced, in accordance with section 3, for armed threat against the legal order.

30. Most of the definitions of offences contained in chapter 18 of the Penal Code will apply extraterritorially, that is to say, they also apply to acts committed abroad. However, the provision on unlawful military activity would appear to be limited territorially, which means that the unlawful military activity must be conducted on Swedish territory. However, there is always a national restriction as regards the object of the violation in connection with offences under chapter 18 of the Penal Code. It is only Swedish interests that are protected by these provisions. These offences always constitute a crime against Sweden.

31. Besides the above provisions, chapter 4 of the Penal Code, on crimes against liberty and peace, provides several penal provisions that can apply to the recruitment and use of children in hostilities both within and outside Sweden.

32. A person who abducts or confines a child or some other person with intent to injure him or her in body or health or to force him or her into service, or to practise extortion, shall be sentenced for kidnapping in accordance with chapter 4, section 1, of the Penal Code. For example, to pick up a child on the street in a car with the aim of abducting the child is one example of kidnapping. It is irrelevant whether the child understands what is happening or accompanies the abductor voluntarily. The attempt, preparation and conspiracy to commit kidnapping, as well as any failure to reveal such a crime, is an offence in accordance with the provisions of the Penal Code.

33. On 1 July 2002, trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes was introduced as a new offence in Sweden under chapter 4, section 1 (a), of the Penal Code. This offence sought to cover cross-border trafficking in human beings that was aimed at individuals being subjected to, among other things, certain sexual offences. On 1 July 2004, the scope of the offences was extended also to cover non-cross-border human trafficking and the trafficking in human beings for the purpose of forms of exploitation other than for sexual purposes, for example, for war service and forced labour.

34. The crime of trafficking in human beings includes unlawful compulsion or deception, by exploiting someone's vulnerable position, or, by some other improper means, recruiting, transporting, accommodating, receiving or implementing any other such measure with a person, and thereby taking over control of the person with the aim of the person:

- (a) Being exposed to offences referred to in chapter 6, sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6, exploited for casual sexual intercourse, or in another way exploited for sexual purposes;
- (b) Being exploited for war service or forced labour or other such compulsory condition;
- (c) Being exploited for the removal of organs; or
- (d) Being exploited in another way in a situation that entails a distressful situation for the vulnerable person.

35. A sentence shall also be imposed for this offence on a person who, with the same purpose as mentioned immediately above, transfers the control over such person to another or receives the control of such a person from another.

36. If the act is committed against a person under the age of 18, it is not required that any improper means have been used. Liability for the trafficking in human beings can consequently, in such a case, arise even if no unlawful compulsion, deception, exploitation of anyone's vulnerable position or any other such improper means has been used.

37. The Criminal Code also penalizes attempt, preparation and conspiracy to commit trafficking in human beings, and similarly the failure to reveal such an offence.

38. As regards children, it is in the nature of the matter that a control situation as referred to here may often be deemed to arise solely through an adult's mental superiority in relation to a child, particularly as regards a young child. An example of an instance in which someone is exploited in such a distressful situation, as referred to in item 4, could be that of children who are used in armed conflict without this involving any such compulsory condition as referred to in item 2.

39. In December 2005, the Government decided to direct a commissioner (Directive 2005:152) to conduct a review of the penal provision on trafficking in human beings and, among other things, to deliberate upon whether the penal legislation should be changed to ensure further protection against trafficking in human beings. This assignment will be reported no later than 30 June 2007.

40. In this context, mention may also be made of the provision on unlawful recruitment contained in the Penal Code (chap. 19, sect. 12), which could be applicable to recruitment of children by armed groups for hostilities outside Sweden. According to this provision, a person who, within Sweden and without the authority of the Government, recruits people for foreign war service or comparable service, or induces people to leave the country unlawfully in order to

enter such service, shall be sentenced for unlawful recruiting. This provision is based on an international law commitment and a wish to avoid foreign policy confrontations. Consequently, this provision does not primarily aim to protect the individual from entering into war service. The requirement referring to “people” probably means that more than a few individuals must be recruited. Recruitment of an individual, an individual child, is consequently not an offence under this provision.

41. Finally, the provision on crime against international law contained in chapter 22, section 6 of the Penal Code should be mentioned. A person guilty of a serious violation of a treaty or agreement with a foreign power or of an infraction of a generally recognized principle or tenet relating to international humanitarian law concerning armed conflicts shall be sentenced for crime against international law. This provision provides certain examples of such serious violations, such as use of any weapon prohibited by international law. It is an open question whether the recruitment of children for armed conflicts could be such a serious violation of international law as referred to in this provision.

42. The provision has recently been the subject of a review. In October 2000, the Government decided to direct a commissioner to conduct an inquiry aimed to review, among other things, Swedish criminal law legislation regarding so-called international crimes that, according to international law, should result in personal criminal liability. The commissioner submitted the inquiry report, *International Offences and Swedish Jurisdiction* (Official Government Report - SOU 2002:98), in November 2002. The report proposes the introduction of an Act on international offences covering genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. As a consequence of this, it is proposed that the current “crimes against international law” be repealed. The proposal is based in large parts on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

43. In the inquiry report proposal for a new International Crimes Act, there is a provision, contained in chapter 4, section 3, first paragraph, item 8, that criminalizes, as a war crime, the recruitment of children under the age of 15 years into the national armed forces or the use of such children for active participation in hostilities. The report is currently being processed within the Ministry of Justice.

44. In summary, the recruitment and use of children in hostilities, both within and outside Sweden, is deemed to be an offence according to Swedish law, through primarily the provisions on kidnapping and trafficking in human beings contained in chapter 4 of the Penal Code and the provisions contained in chapter 18 of the Penal Code.

Article 5

Sweden and the ILO Convention No. 182 (1999)

45. The ILO Convention No. 182 and the supplementary Recommendation No. 190, on prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, contain

wording aimed at ensuring that persons under the age of 18 are not compulsorily recruited for armed forces. Both these instruments were presented to the Riksdag through the Government Bill 2000/01:93. Sweden ratified the ILO Convention No. 182 in June 2001.

46. The ILO Convention No. 182 can be viewed as an amplification of article 32.1 of the CRC on the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. Article 3 of the Convention defines the term "worst forms of child labour" as, among other things, comprising all forms of slavery and similar practices. As examples, the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflicts, are mentioned.

Article 6

47. The ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict has not resulted so far in any amendments to Swedish legislation. A review of the obligations under the Optional Protocol and Swedish legislation indicates that our legislation satisfies the requirements of the Optional Protocol.

48. In conjunction with the ratification of the Optional Protocol, it was concluded that Sweden already had the legislation necessary to implement the Optional Protocol. International treaties, for example the CRC, generally do not have "direct applicability" in Swedish law, but must be transformed or incorporated into national legislation in some way.

Authorities responsible for implementation and coordination at national and regional level

49. Within the Government Offices, the coordination of both child policy and the implementation of the CRC has been assigned to a special unit placed within the Coordination Office at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. Among other things, this unit has contributed to the inclusion of the CRC in the Government's National Action Plan for Human Rights. This unit is also responsible for the dissemination of knowledge about both the CRC and the Optional Protocol among the staff at the Government Offices. This is partly done through the establishment of a network of officers who are endeavouring to integrate issues in the various ministries. This special unit also pursues the matter of international adoptions as well as the child rights perspective within the work of the Government, for example through monitoring matters during the legislative process.

50. The CRC and the Optional Protocol have been published on the Government's website for human rights (www.manskligarattigheter.se).

51. According to law, it is the task of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman to pursue the implementation and monitor compliance with the CRC and to disseminate information and mould public opinion regarding the Convention for this purpose. The Children's Ombudsman will also, in this context, have an important role in the dissemination of the provisions according to this Optional Protocol. The Optional Protocol has been published on the Children's Ombudsman's website, together with other information material about the CRC.

Mechanisms and means for follow-up and evaluation of compliance with the Optional Protocol

52. The situation prevailing in Sweden, including the relevant legislation, does not pose any practical problems for compliance with the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Consequently, there has not been any need so far to establish any additional or special mechanisms or methods to follow up or evaluate compliance with the Optional Protocol.

53. However, in conjunction with the formulation of a national action plan for human rights during 2005, 400 stakeholders from Swedish society were given an opportunity to express their views on the Government's work with human rights. In this context, certain opinions have been provided regarding the Optional Protocol (see paragraph 23).

54. During the years 2006 to 2009, the Government intends to organize meetings in conjunction with the submission of the Swedish reports under the United Nations human rights conventions as well as at the reception of the comments by the respective Committees on these reports. As appropriate, corresponding meetings will be held in conjunction with the submission of reports under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Training of peace supporting forces on the rights of the child, including the Optional Protocol on children in armed conflicts

55. The Swedish Armed Forces arrange training for peace support forces that are to be deployed abroad. The training comprises, among other things, information about human rights and international humanitarian law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention. The Swedish Armed Forces cooperate in this regard with NGOs. For example, Rädde Barnen (Save the Children Sweden) has been invited to present information about the rights of the child, the CRC and the two Optional Protocols.

The physical and mental rehabilitation of children and their reintegration into society

56. According to the Health and Medical Services Act (1982:763), health and medical services shall be conducted so that they satisfy requirements for good health care. This means, among other things, that the services should be of good quality. Every county council shall offer good health and medical services for everyone resident within the district of the county council. The county council shall also generally work to promote good health among the entire population. If a non-resident who is staying within the district of the county council needs immediate health and medical services, the county council shall offer such care.

57. Information about a foreign child having been involved in armed conflict may sometimes come to light during the investigation of an asylum matter. The Swedish Migration Board is the authority that investigates and deals with asylum matters according to the Aliens Act. The Swedish Migration Board is also the authority responsible for the reception of asylum-seekers and others.

58. As regards assistance for the physical and mental rehabilitation and reintegration into society of a child, the following can be stated:

On 1 January 1997, in accordance with a decision of the Riksdag, the county councils assumed responsibility for the health care of asylum-seekers. According to an agreement between the Government and the health-care managers, the county councils shall provide asylum-seeking children with the same access to health and medical services, including child psychiatric care, as children who are resident in Sweden. Children who are staying in Sweden and who have previously been asylum-seekers, but whose asylum application has been rejected by a decision that has entered into final legal force, shall have the same access to care. This applies even if the child is avoiding the enforcement of such a decision that has entered into final legal force regarding refusal of entry or expulsion. This follows an agreement between the Swedish Government and the Swedish Federation of County Councils, which applies from May 2000. To the extent that the county councils provide care in accordance with these provisions, government compensation is provided to the county councils in accordance with the Ordinance on Government Compensation for Health and Medical Services to Asylum-Seekers (1996:1357).

59. According to a recommendation from the Committee on the Rights of the Child following Sweden's third periodic report, forms of persecution that are specific to children should be afforded particular attention when considering a child's request for asylum under the 1951 Refugee Convention. In December 2005, in the terms of reference of the Swedish Migration Board, the Government has instructed the authority to consider in asylum matters forms of persecution that are specific to children, and among these the compulsory recruitment of child soldiers. The Swedish Migration Board shall report in 2007 on the measures and results emanating from this assignment.

Other activities

60. In October 2001, the Government decided to make approximately 2.7 million Swedish kronor available to the Swedish Red Cross from the Swedish Inheritance Fund for a project aimed at disseminating experience and methods that have been developed at the Swedish Red Cross Centre in Uppsala to the other Swedish Red Cross centres in Stockholm, Malmö and Skövde. These funds related to the first year of a planned three-year period.

61. The Swedish Red Cross Centre in Uppsala has worked with traumatized children and young people for many years, and this experience forms the basis of the project called "Help to children and young people affected by war and conflict". An interactive form of treatment can be provided for mental and physical problems through the participation of both a therapist and a physiotherapist. The overall aim is to help young people lead a fuller life.

62. The Swedish Migration Board shall, when they meet asylum-seeking children who have been involved in armed conflicts, inform other Swedish authorities, such as the social services and the school, health and medical services that may be able to provide support, care and structure for the life of these children.

63. Methods within this area are being developed on an ongoing basis. All children who are resident in Sweden have the same opportunities for health and medical services. Children seeking asylum have the same opportunities for health and medical services (including child

psychiatric care) and education, preschool activities and school childcare. The Swedish authorities are aware of the need to develop networks between the Swedish Migration Board, the county councils, the municipalities and civil society in order to rapidly identify these children and to provide them with adequate resources taking into consideration their experiences.

64. Naturally, the participation and understanding of parents of the needs of children is important. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, their special representatives, who should assume the role of parents, will play a very important role, both in identifying, among others, former child soldiers, and for their rehabilitation.

65. In Sweden, children who have been victims of armed conflict, including former child soldiers, will get the help and assistance they need for rehabilitation and reintegration into normal life within society. This corresponds with both these provisions and the spirit of article 6 of the Optional Protocol.

Article 7

International cooperation and support for the implementation of the Optional Protocol

66. Sweden is actively working in international contexts to enhance awareness of the vulnerability of children in conflicts, primarily to increase compliance with the existing comprehensive system of international rules to protect children in armed conflicts. The Government supports the United Nations efforts to put these issues in the agenda. Sweden actively monitors discussions in the Security Council regarding children and armed conflicts, and participates in negotiations concerning the recurrent “Omnibus Resolution” on the rights of the child in the United Nations General Assembly. The Government also supports the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and has, in recent years, contributed to the financing of this office. The Government makes contributions to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers which, among other things, contributed to the work of establishing the Optional Protocol to the CRC, and which is working to get more States to accede to and comply with the Optional Protocol.

67. Most initiatives to support children in armed conflicts in other States parties are implemented by means of humanitarian assistance. A large part of the Swedish humanitarian assistance is allocated as annual contributions to major humanitarian organizations. Some of these, such as UNICEF, have a direct mandate and responsibility for child issues. Regarding other major recipients of Swedish humanitarian support, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Programme and the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Government is working to ensure that the child rights perspective should constitute a natural part of their work in the field.

68. Already by the middle of the 1990s, the Government had commissioned the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) to clearly focus on the rights of the child in both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation. The need to throw light on the situation and rights of the child is clearly defined in the Government Communication on a Child Rights Perspective in Development Cooperation (Communication 2001/02:186).

69. Sida is already engaged in activities to protect and support children who have been affected by armed conflicts in various ways. For instance, Sida is contributing to a project for the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers in Sudan that is run by Rädde Barnen. Further, through UNICEF, Sweden supports a corresponding programme for former child soldiers in Liberia. Sida also supports Rädde Barnen and Red Barnet (the Swedish and Danish Save the Children), which are, among other things, working with training on the rights of the child for government armed forces in northern Uganda. Sida has also commissioned the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University to conduct a study on the social networks of children in armed conflicts in order to develop methods to improve the protection for such children.

70. In its concluding observations in relation to Sweden's third report on the implementation of the CRC,¹ the Committee on the Rights of the Child, among other things, recommended that Sweden should continue to strengthen its leading role in international development cooperation projects relating to children. The Committee recommended that Sweden, in its bilateral collaboration with developing countries, should observe the Committee's summary conclusions and recommendations for the respective country and support the implementation of these. These recommendations have been duly taken into account by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and by Sida. It will be considered in future development cooperation with developing countries where the issue of child soldiers and children in armed conflicts is referred to in the recommendations for the respective country by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

¹ CRC/C/15/Add.248.