

Human Rights Watch Student Task Force
11500 W. Olympic Blvd. #441
Los Angeles, CA 90064

The Honorable Madelien A.J. de Planque
Consul-General of the Netherlands
11766 Wilshire Blvd.
Suite 1150
Los Angeles CA 90025

February 11, 2009

Dear Ms. De Planque,

Every year thousands of children continue to fight and die in conflicts around the world, with thousands more left deeply scarred both physically and emotionally. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict is a key tool in efforts to end this practice, one that strengthens the legal protection of children and helps prevent their use in armed conflict. Currently, 126 countries are party to the optional protocol. However, we note that the Netherlands has not yet ratified this important treaty.

As youth advocates for children's rights in Southern California, we urge the Netherlands to demonstrate leadership by ratifying the Optional Protocol without delay, without reservations, and to deposit a binding declaration on ratification that sets 18 as the standard minimum age for voluntary recruitment into its armed forces. We also urge the Netherlands to implement the Protocol's provisions in its national legislation.

For the past year we have joined youth around the world to collect red hands to symbolize our commitment to ending the use of child soldiers. On February 12 at an anniversary ceremony in New York celebrating the Optional Protocol coming into force in 2002, youth advocates from Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Germany and North America will present hundreds of thousands of these red hands to the UN Secretary General, urging the enforcement of the Optional Protocol. In support of this anniversary, we have included with our letter a small representation of red hands we collected in Southern California. These red hands are a demonstration of our commitment to stopping the use of child soldiers.

We look forward to action by your government to end the use of child soldiers, and would welcome a reply regarding your efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Members of the Student Task Force