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**Bill Cracks Down on US Military Assistance to Countries Using Child Soldiers**

Following extensive consultation with Human Rights Watch, Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) introduced the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, which would restrict US military financing, training, and weapons transfers to governments involved in the recruitment or use of child soldiers. On April 25, Senator Durbin chaired a Senate hearing on child soldiers, where he launched a short film produced by Human Rights Watch to make a compelling case for the bill. Of the 10 governments worldwide implicated in the recruitment or use of child soldiers, 9 currently receive US military assistance. Human Rights Watch has long been a leading voice against the use of child soldiers worldwide. We co-founded the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and spearheaded the international campaign for a UN treaty to ban the use of children in armed conflict. Read more at: [http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/child\\_soldiers/index.htm](http://hrw.org/campaigns/crp/child_soldiers/index.htm)



A child soldier rides back to his base in Ituri Province, Congo. © 2004 Marcus Bleasdale

**Mexico City Legalizes Abortion**

In a major step forward for women’s reproductive rights, lawmakers in Mexico City voted on April 24 to legalize abortion in the first trimester, making Mexico City the only jurisdiction in Latin America, other than Cuba, where women can decide to terminate a pregnancy in the first 12 weeks. Leading up to the vote, Human Rights Watch strongly urged policymakers to support the decriminalization measure, and to acknowledge that access to safe abortion is a human rights concern. Even in situations where abortion is legal, however, women in Mexico face enormous difficulties obtaining them in practice. In March 2006, Human Rights Watch documented the myriad obstacles pregnant rape victims face in obtaining abortions, which are decriminalized in most Mexican states in cases of rape. Mexico City’s recent decision should have a wide-ranging influence on the abortion debate. We will continue to press for legal abortion throughout the rest of Mexico and encourage much-needed discussion of the obligation of public health systems in the region to provide safe and legal abortions. Read more at: <http://www.hrw.org/women/abortion.html>

**Ethiopian Authorities Admit Secret Detentions**

In response to Human Rights Watch’s exposure of the arbitrary detention, deportation, and enforced disappearance of people who fled the recent conflict in Somalia, the Ethiopian government admitted for the first time it had secretly detained dozens of people. On April 9, Ethiopia admitted holding 41 people arrested in Somalia and, to date, has released five of them. Since December 2006, Kenyan security forces arrested at least 150 individuals along the Kenyan-Somali border following the conflict between the Union of Islamic Courts and Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government and Ethiopia. Our research documented how Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia had cooperated in the secret detention program, and exposed how US security agents

were routinely interrogating people held incommunicado. Human Rights Watch will continue to press for the release of the rest of the detainees and for an end to the secret rendition and detention program. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/03/30/kenya15624.htm>

### **UK Court Rules Diplomatic Assurances Not Reliable in Deportation Cases**

UK efforts to deport terrorism suspects to countries where they risk torture suffered a major blow on April 27 when a British court ruled that two men, alleged members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, could not be sent back to Libya, despite the al-Qadhafi regime's promises not to ill-treat them on return. Human Rights Watch's January 2006 report on civil and political rights in Libya features prominently throughout the decision, which concluded that torture is used extensively against opponents of the Libyan government, in particular against Libyan Islamic Fighting Group members. The court ruled that a "memorandum of understanding," brokered between the UK and Libyan governments in 2005, containing Libya's promises to treat the men humanely could not be considered reliable and the men were thus at risk both of torture and a "complete" denial of a fair trial on return. Human Rights Watch's extensive research on diplomatic assurances against torture has been used in courts around the world, including in the US, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and Russia, to illustrate that such promises do not provide an effective safeguard against torture. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/30/uk15807.htm>

### **Progress on Bill to End Life Without Parole for Children in California**

On April 17, the California Senate's Public Safety Committee approved the Juvenile Life Without Parole Reform Act, a bill that would eliminate life without parole sentencing for offenders under age 18. If passed by the Senate, the bill would allow for parole hearings after 25 years for child offenders who demonstrate convincing evidence of rehabilitation. Human Rights Watch testified at the Committee hearing and, with the help of our California Committee members and young advocates, conducted extensive advocacy. For the past several years, Human Rights Watch has worked to end life without parole for children in the United States, which is one of only four countries in the world to impose the sentence. In 2005, together with Amnesty International, we released the first national study exposing the extent and impact of the sentence. Of over 2,270 such cases in the United States, 227 are in California. By contrast, throughout the rest of the world there are only 12 people serving life without parole for crimes they committed as children. In the coming months, we will continue to push California, and other states, to enact measures to end the sentence. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/campaigns/lwop/>

## **IN THE NEWS** Op-Eds by Our Staff

### **Nigerian Elections Illustrate Widespread Corruption**

In the *Prospect*, Nigeria consultant Ben Rawlence and Nigeria researcher Chris Albin-Lackey argue that Nigeria's elections—rife with vote-rigging, violence, and intimidation—are only the latest example of the corruption and decay that have characterized President Olusegun Obasanjo's rule. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/25/nigeri15770.htm>

### **Egypt Continues to Jail Journalists and Bloggers**

Egypt researcher Elijah Zarwan, writing in the *New Statesman*, describes the recent arrest of an Egyptian journalist and blogger, and denounces the government's continued prosecution of journalists for reporting on human rights violations. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/23/egypt15748.htm>

### **Pelosi Should Condemn Syrian Abuses**

Writing in *The Daily Star*, Syria researcher Nadim Houry and Radwan Ziadeh, of the Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies, discuss US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's failure to raise Syria's appalling human rights record during her recent visit to Damascus. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/06/syria15665.htm>

### **Southern African Leaders Must Hold Zimbabwe Accountable**

In the *Sowetan*, researcher Tiseke Kasambala urges South African President Thabo Mbeki and other leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to publicly press for justice and human rights in Zimbabwe. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/05/zimbab15658.htm>

### **Military Commissions Deeply Flawed**

Writing from Guantanamo Bay, US Advocacy Director Jennifer Daskal highlights in the *International Herald Tribune* how the guilty plea of Australian detainees David Hicks shows, in painful detail, just how illegitimate and dysfunctional the military commissions truly are. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/03/usdom15648.htm>

### **US Should Reject Trade Pact with Colombia**

Senior researcher on Labor Rights and Trade Carol Pier, writing in the *Baltimore Sun*, urges the United States to reject a trade pact with Colombia which, if adopted, would make it a free trade partner to the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. Read more at: <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/04/02/colomb15655.htm>

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