



Durbin, Boozman, Senators press President Trump on decision to continue providing assistance to countries that use child soldiers

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WASHINGTON — U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL), John Boozman (R-AR), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Patty Murray (D-WA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) today pressed President Donald Trump for information regarding his recent decision to invoke troublingly broad waivers for continued United States military assistance to countries that use child soldiers—assistance prohibited under the *Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008*, which was originally introduced by Durbin and former-Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS).

The *Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008* bans the U.S. from providing military assistance or arms sales to governments that use children in combat, but the president may waive the application of the law for specific countries if it is deemed to be in the national interest. In his September 28, 2018, [memorandum](#), President Trump waived Iraq, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen.

“While we recognize there are challenging and important security interests in many of these nations, the United States and its allies should be doing everything possible to end military support for governments that engage in the abhorrent practice of using child soldiers and to also help reintegrate such children back into their families and society. Using sweeping waivers to continue such assistance undermines such efforts and the spirit of the law,” the members wrote.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

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Dear President Trump:

We write to request greater clarification on your decision to invoke a waiver for continued United States military assistance to countries that use child soldiers—assistance prohibited under the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-457). This law was amended in 2013 (Public Law 113-4) to include similar restrictions on U.S. funding for international peacekeeping missions.

We helped draft the original Child Soldier Prevention Act out of concern that the use of child soldiers around the world remains far too common. Still today, there are estimated tens of thousands of children fighting in active conflicts around the world.

These young boys and girls fight on front lines of combat, serve as human mine detectors, participate in suicide missions, carry supplies, and act as spies, messengers, lookouts, and sex slaves—endangering their health and their lives. They are stigmatized and traumatized by their experiences and left with neither family connections nor skills to allow them to transition successfully into productive adult lives. Not only are they robbed of their childhoods, but the lasting effects remain with them for years if not entire lifetimes.

While we recognize there are challenging and important security interests in many of these nations, the United States and its allies should be doing everything possible to end military support for governments that engage in the abhorrent practice of using child soldiers and to also help reintegrate such children back into their families and society. Using sweeping waivers to continue such assistance undermines such efforts and the spirit of the law.