

LINCOLN, NE — Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, author of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2007, which was successfully incorporated into the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2008, today commented on the following statement on the newly-released State Department's 2011 Trafficking-in Persons Report.

The 2011 State Department Trafficking-in Persons Report is the second to contain the Fortenberry child soldiers reporting requirement. Both the 2010 and 2011 Trafficking-in Persons Report identified the following major international violators of the child soldiers prohibition: Burma, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, the Sudan, and Yemen.

"Children—all children, no matter where they are from-- belong on playgrounds, not battlegrounds," said Fortenberry. "It is hard for us to envision a 13 year-old child put in military uniform, a gun in their hand, and made to fight—but it happens in the world today.

"These six governments were found guilty of using child soldiers in the 2010 Report. As the law we passed provided, four were granted national security interest waivers last year in the hopes they would take serious and aggressive strides toward ending this human rights violation. But where is the progress?

"The 2011 report needs to stand as a challenge to President Obama and this Administration. We are operating inconsistently, obligated by law and civilization itself to combat this most serious human rights violation, especially prevalent in the world's ungoverned spaces--but we continue military assistance with inattentiveness to stopping the pernicious use of child soldiers.

"William Wilberforce, the British statesman and unyielding abolitionist for whom our anti-human trafficking law is named, said, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know." President Obama must make it clear to these governments that we know. And we cannot look the other way."

Fortenberry's child soldiers measure, as signed into law on December 23, 2008, prohibits funds from being obligated to the government of a country identified by the Department of State as having governmental armed forces or government supported armed groups, including

paramilitaries, militias, or civil defense forces, that recruit or use child soldiers, unless a presidential national security interest waiver is issued. President Obama issued waivers in 2010 for the governments of Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Yemen. Fortenberry authored a House-passed amendment to H.R. 1, the FY11 House continuing resolution, to prohibit funding for Chad due to its continued flouting of the law following the withdrawal of its UN mission.

Fortenberry is the Vice-Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights.

###