

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Jeff Fortenberry, author of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act that was signed into law in 2008 by President Bush, today commented on the Obama Administration's decision to continue military assistance to five of six countries found guilty of the flagrant human rights abuse against children - conscription of child soldiers.

The Obama Administration will again this year continue assistance to the following major international violators of the child soldiers prohibition: Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia (peacekeeping operations funds), Sudan (via the new country of South Sudan), and Yemen. The DRC will see its assistance reduced by an estimated \$300,000.

"President Obama's decision today to provide taxpayer-funded military assistance to countries that use children as soldiers is an assault on human dignity. Children belong on playgrounds, not battlegrounds. It is unconscionable that the United States of America continues to facilitate the militarization of children, whose innocence is stripped as they are forced to fight and kill—and are subjected to the real likelihood that they will be killed themselves.

"Good citizens of this country who do not want to be complicit in this grave human rights abuse must challenge 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, yet we continue military assistance with apparent inattentiveness to stopping the use of child soldiers.

"Our law states that America does not fund the use of child soldiers. Any exceptions must be temporary, and intended to help stop this pernicious practice."

Fortenberry is the Vice-Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights. He will offer an amendment tomorrow to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act to lessen US complicity in child soldiering.

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