

STATEMENT

Statement by UNICEF Executive Director, Anthony Lake, on the case of Guantanamo Bay detainee, Omar Khadr

NEW YORK, 26 May 2010 - "UNICEF is concerned about the impending trial of Guantanamo Bay detainee, Omar Khadr. Omar Khadr was arrested in Afghanistan in 2002 for crimes he is alleged to have committed when he was a child of 15 years of age. He is the last child soldier held in Guantanamo Bay.

"The recruitment and use of children in hostilities is a war crime, and those who are responsible – the adult recruiters – should be prosecuted. The children involved are victims, acting under coercion. As UNICEF has stated in previous statements on this issue, former child soldiers need assistance for rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities, not condemnation or prosecution.

The prosecution of Omar Khadr may set a dangerous international precedent for other children who are victims of recruitment in armed conflicts. At a time when the UN celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, we call on all governments that have ratified this treaty, including the United States, to uphold the spirit of the Protocol and all its provisions.

"In addition, anyone prosecuted for offenses they allegedly committed while a child should be treated in accordance with international juvenile justice standards, which provide them with special protections. Omar Khadr should not be prosecuted by a tribunal that is neither equipped nor required to provide these protections and meet these standards."

For further information, please contact:

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