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Joint Statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and UN Special Representative Leila Zerrougui on the occasion of the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and UN Special Representative Leila Zerrougui made today the following statement:

The International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers today serves as a reminder that thousands of children continue to be abducted, recruited, killed, maimed or raped in conflicts around the world. Images from recent conflicts in Syria and Mali provide us with a human face of the suffering of these children.

"Children in conflict are separated from their families, are forced to kill, and experience violence and abuse," the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Leila Zerrougui says, highlighting the lifelong impact of the recruitment on children's health and wellbeing.

While deeply concerned about the tragedy of children in armed conflict, Ms Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, welcomes the progress made in addressing the issue. *"Many countries and armed groups have signed action plans with the United Nations to end underage recruitment which have resulted in the release and reintegration of children, as well as the prosecution of perpetrators. I urge other parties to follow suit with immediate effect."*

P R E S S

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The European Union has played an important role in encouraging other countries and non-state actors to implement international human rights norms and standards and to work towards action plans for the protection of children. Since 2008, the European Union and its Member States have provided almost € 300 million for the implementation of such agreements. The 2012 decision to use the Nobel Prize award to provide education to children affected by conflict is emblematic of Brussels' lasting pledge to support such efforts, both politically and materially. *“As a committed partner to child protection, we will continue to work hand in hand with the European Union and reach out to new regional partners in an effort to make the world a safer place for children,”* the Special Representative said.

Ms Zerrougui and Ms Ashton expressed their support for the fight against impunity for persistent violators of the rights of children in conflict. *“Without serious attention to this issue the credibility of the international child protection system will suffer. We hope that the landmark ruling of the International Criminal Court in the Thomas Lubanga case sent a clear signal that grave violations will not remain unpunished.”*
