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Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC and DPI of the United Nations, Non-Profit Organization; 501(c) (3)

USFMEP PRESS RELEASE

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Yemen Using Children in Armed Forces

New York, NY, April 14, 2011 - For years now, the population of Yemen has been divided into government loyalists and anti-government oppositionists. In its fight against the government forces, the Yemeni Army has begun recruiting child soldiers to protect anti-government protesters from the retaliatory attacks led by President Ali Abdullah Saleh's government forces. Human Rights Watch ("HRW") has been investigating the situation for quite some time and has testified to encountering several soldiers younger than 18-years-old since the protests commenced in February. President of the United Federation for Middle East Peace ("USFMEP"), Mrs. Sally Kader, asserted in response, "I am horrified and appalled that armies are manipulating impressionable children, supplying them with AK-47s and instructing them to kill; we, as members of the international community, must formulate a collective and integrated approach to cease the recruitment of children for the purposes of war."

HRW Staff interviewed dozens of armed soldiers of the Yemeni Army who stated that they were only 14, 15 or 16 years of age, having served for the Yemeni Army for one to two years. President Kader was alarmed by the confirmations provided by HRW, stating that "The Yemeni Army and other armed groups that seek to recruit child soldiers are placing these children at serious risk of death and dismemberment; the recruitment of child soldiers is a serious issue that must be stopped once and for all."

In addition, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to be protected from performing any work that is likely to weaken their health or hinder their development. Moreover, the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict requires youths be a minimum of 18 years of age to directly participate in any armed conflict. Furthermore, the Optional Protocol also prohibits forced conscription or recruitment of youths over 18 years of age. Yemen has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol, which renders both documents legally binding on the Government of Yemen. President Kader asserted, "Yemen's failure to protect its children constitutes a blatant violation of international law pursuant to both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol."

USFMEP President and Staff strongly demand that the Government of Yemen, and other governments whose armies (either in support or in opposition of the government) recruit child soldiers as participants in armed conflict, cease immediately. President Kader reaffirmed that "children are amongst the most vulnerable groups in society and we must ensure that they are protected from harm, at all costs."

Media contact:

Mrs. Sally (Salwa) Kader (info@usfmep.org)

Phone: +1973-568-8384

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