

# Media Breakfast Briefing

8 February 2007

Welcome to Save the Children Sweden's Media Breakfast Briefing!

Underlying all Save the Children Sweden's work is the need to work with media to campaign to secure children's rights. We are striving to support media with resources, underlying facts and in-depth analysis. We are also encouraging media to take part of our work, meet with our staff and visit our projects in the region to better understand the situation of children, and to take part in promoting child participation and children's rights. If you need an image to illustrate your story, please contact us.

In 2006, we conducted two press visits to southern Sudan, highlighting our projects and meeting children.

Please visit our website, <http://ecaf.savethechildren.se> and find out the latest news related to children's situation and children's rights in Eastern and Central Africa, or gain a deeper understanding of the current issues and ongoing conflicts in our section Special Insight. We also quarterly disseminate a regional e-bulletin, highlighting progresses and successes, but also challenges and difficulties.

## Contacts

Save the Children Sweden has three programme offices; Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Khartoum in Sudan, and Nairobi in Kenya. Please find below contact details to our Communications Officers for each programme, and also contact details to Press Service at our Head Office in Stockholm, Sweden.

### *Addis Ababa office, Ethiopia*

Mishisalla Beyene, Communications Officer

Phone office +251 11 321 0960, [mishisallab@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:mishisallab@ecaf.savethechildren.se)

### *Khartoum office, Sudan*

Dahlia El Roubi, Communications Officer

Phone office +249 183 256 415/16, [dahliar@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:dahliar@ecaf.savethechildren.se)

### *Juba Office, Sudan*

Faith Miyandazi, Communications Officer

Phone office +254 20 386 5888/90, [faithm@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:faithm@ecaf.savethechildren.se)

### *Regional office, Nairobi*

David Neveling, Regional Communications and Advocacy Officer

Mobile +254 736 964 807, [davidn@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:davidn@ecaf.savethechildren.se)

### *Press service, Sweden*

Kristina Granqvist, Press Officer, mobile +46 733 55 34 51

Erica Magnusson, Press Officer, mobile +46 709 32 88 66

#### **Eastern and Central Africa region**

*Ethiopia office*  
Box 3457

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel +251 11 321 0960  
Fax +251 11 321 4234

*Kenya/Regional office*  
Box 19423

202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

*Northern Sudan office*  
Box 3134

Khartoum, Sudan  
Tel +249 183 256 415/16  
Fax +249 183 241 589

*Southern Sudan office*  
Box 19243

202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Email [info@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:info@ecaf.savethechildren.se)  
<http://ecaf.savethechildren.se>

# Principles for ethical reporting on children

Reporting on children and young people has its special challenges. In some instances the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatisation.

These principles are to assist journalists as they report on issues affecting children. They are offered as guidelines that will help media to cover children in an age-appropriate and sensitive manner. The guidelines are meant to support the best intentions of ethical reporters: serving the public interest without compromising the rights of children.

## I. Principles

1. The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.
2. In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is to be paid to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.
3. The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
4. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child's right to have their views taken into account are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
5. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.
6. Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.

## II. Guidelines for interviewing children

1. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.
2. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.
3. No staging: Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.
4. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.
5. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually only ensured if the permission is obtained in the child's language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.

6. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

## III. Guidelines for reporting on children

1. Do not further stigmatize any child; avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.
2. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.
3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
  - a. A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
  - b. A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
  - c. HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent,
  - d. Charged or convicted of a crime.
4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
  - a. A current or former child combatant,
  - b. An asylum seeker, a refugee or an internal displaced person.
5. In certain cases, using a child's identity - their name and/or recognizable image - is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatization or reprisals. Some examples of these special cases are:
  - a. When a child initiates contact with the reporter, wanting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and their right to have their opinion heard.
  - b. When a child is part of a sustained programme of activism or social mobilization and wants to be so identified.
  - c. When a child is engaged in a psychosocial programme and claiming their name and identity is part of their healthy development.
6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.
7. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.

## IV. Use of Save the Children Sweden materials

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### Eastern and Central Africa region

Ethiopia office  
Box 3457  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel +251 11 321 0960  
Fax +251 11 321 4234

Kenya/Regional office  
Box 19423  
202 KNH - Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

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Box 3134  
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Tel +249 183 256 415/16  
Fax +249 183 241 589

Southern Sudan office  
Box 19243  
202 KNH - Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

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<http://ecaf.savethechildren.se>

# Update of the situation in Northern Uganda

## Background

The 20-year-old conflict in northern Uganda has taken a heavy toll on children who are the principle victims of violence. An estimated 1,500 children are still in LRA ranks, and at least 10,000 children remain unaccounted for. In the course of the last 21 years, some 20,000 to 25,000 were abducted forced to endure long marches to the bush; those who become tired were beaten or killed. The children who survived the long march are made to work as sex slaves, child soldiers, porters of looted goods and weaponry and often forced to mutilate or kill friends and relatives.

Tens of thousands of others became 'night commuters', walking long distances every night into towns to try to avoid brutal attack, many of them subjected to violence en-route the sleeping places as there is no protection offered during the journey.

Exact numbers are uncertain, but it is estimated that approximately 53 per cent of the internally displaced persons (IDP) are children. The health conditions of children living in IDP camps are of serious concern. Due to lack of sufficient food, overcrowding, limited safe drinking water, and lack of health care facilities, the child mortality and morbidity rates are significantly higher than the rest of Uganda. The main diseases that affect IDP children are malaria, measles, respiratory diseases, cholera and diarrhoea. The spread of these diseases is facilitated by the lack of sanitation in the camps. Global acute malnutrition rates in the camps are high, ranging from 7 to 21 per cent. Very few have access to adequate education. Many have been in temporary camps all their lives, without the benefit of a normal upbringing.

Until now, the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement of August 2006 has led to increased safety, better access of humanitarian assistance, confidence and hope for children and the communities in the IDP camps. But the talks have stalled and there is an urgent need to get it back on track otherwise there will be far reaching humanitarian consequences for the people of northern Uganda, especially the children.

## Peace Process

The Juba peace talks have been widely perceived by stakeholders as the most likely break through to end the 21 year old suffering of over 2 million people in northern Uganda. For Save the Children and many other stakeholders, the peace process still presents a rare opportunity for peace in northern Uganda, there is no time in the history of the war that the LRA and the government have come close to a mutual agreement like they did in the recent past, we should not let this opportunity slip away.

Over 1.4 million people remain displaced in the most squalid camps, it was reported in the Monitor Newspaper of 30th January, that a survey indicated that increasing numbers of residents in northern Uganda are responding to the tragedy by committing suicide. The survey was conducted in northern districts of Uganda between 2004 and 2006, by Emilio Ovuga, a professor of Psychiatry and Dr. Eugene Kinyanda, a consultant psychiatric at Butabika Psychiatric Hospital. The report shows that between 2004 and 2006, a total of 403 people committed suicide while 1,079 attempted to commit suicide. The majority of the victims were internally displaced persons living in appalling conditions, now the people's only hope, the historic Juba peace talks, have completely stalled.

The LRA abandoned participation in the peace talks claiming that government of Southern Sudan; hitherto the mediators in this process are not a neutral party, hence unlikely to oversee a process that would be fair to the LRA. This situation arose after the government

of Southern Sudan leaders were quoted to have said, they no longer wanted LRA rebels in their country, and if the peace talks failed, they would be militarily pushed out. LRA requested Kenyan government to host the talks, this request was rejected. In a statement, produced in the New Vision Newspaper of 05 February, Kenya's foreign minister stated that Kenya would be ready to play a positive role in the resolution of the problem but see no reason to cast doubt on the process already underway in Juba.

The current suspension of the talks has explicitly raised critical concern among the communities in northern Uganda, civil society organisations and the diplomatic mission in Uganda for the parties to go back to the negotiating table. Meanwhile the LRA and the government of Uganda keep trading public accusations of violations of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. UPDF are reported to be still pursuing rebels in southern Sudan, leading to mistrust and hostility. Groups of LRA rebels have been also been accused of committing attacks on civilians. A strengthened Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team could be the first key step to restore confidence in the peace talks.

Save the Children believes that it is time to stop looking at the communities including the children in northern Uganda just as victims of war but actors in the peace talks, they hold the highest stake if the talks fail and it is absolutely necessary that the decision makers hear what they have to say and have them play a role in the talks. Peace in northern Uganda will go a long way to improve the humanitarian situation in the Great Lakes region, in particular, deescalate tension in South Sudan and DRC.

## Decongestion, security and protection

Since 2005, the government has supported a 'decongestion' process, through which IDPs move from overcrowded camps to smaller settlements closer to their homes. Since May 2006 security dramatically improved, and the LRA largely stopped attacks on civilians moving outside the camps. As a result, IDPs are traveling more freely between their land and the camps. This has enabled many of them to reach more land and carry out crop production to supplement what they have been receiving from the World Food Program (WFP).

With the improvement in the security situation most of the IDPs in Lango and Teso have returned to their original homes, but most of the displaced in Acholiland are reluctant to return until peace is assured; instead, they have been moving to decongestion settlements, with a very minimal percentage said to have resettled in their old homes. It is however also true that most of these moving families have maintained homes in the old camps as a fall back strategy, just in case things go back to what they were in the past.

The movement of large numbers of people to these smaller, less crowded settlements, where they are able to access land more freely, has had an undeniably positive humanitarian impact, but conditions in the settlements vary. Services and assistance are not consistently available in all the settlements areas. This is due to the fact that the Ugandan military was instrumental in identifying new sites, which were often selected for security reasons with little consideration of social service structures. In some cases, there are no water points, schools or clinics in the settlements. There is indication that the government has not provided services in many of them; NGOs and UN agencies are serving both the IDP camps and decongestion settlements but they are very thinly spread.

A negative impact of the ongoing trend of population movement is increased family separation; parents leave their children in the parent camps where they have access to school, health and other services

while they go off to the new settlements to farm and provide for their families. This has resulted into many cases of child neglect and children are increasingly exposed to violence, especially sexual exploitation. The number of defilement cases has increased steadily over the last months; the real number might even be higher since we believe that many cases have not been reported due to lack of proper protection networks.

The UN's Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement and the strategy being used focuses on the principle of freedom of movement; indeed, those who want to return home should be allowed to do so but there is a need for the government to ensure the security and protection of the people in the new settlements. The government's National Peace Reconstruction and Development Plan (PRDP) proposes training and equipping the police by increasing its number from 1,722 to 5,945 police personnel over the next three years and this will be a significant step towards providing security and protection.

However, numbers of guns in circulation, continuing threats of return to violence and the dispersion of people through out the region will require swift action to increase the number of police to prevent a protection vacuum. The police will also need to be well trained and sensitized to the special needs of the populations in northern Uganda to ensure a cordial relationship and to respond to special circumstances such as high prevalence of sexual and gender based violence and protection of women and children.

Equally important, since decongestion is being encouraged despite the stalled peace talks, number of UDF in decongestion and return areas should urgently be increased. IDPs remain skeptical about long-term peace, despite government statements to the contrary; internal displacement is likely to remain a long-term problem in Northern Uganda.

### **Formerly abducted children**

Some children have over the years been able to escape captivity or are rescued by the UDF and returned. Some go directly to their communities while others have had the benefit of going through Rehabilitation centres such as GUSCO and World Vision's Children of War Centre.

These centres have helped children make the transition back into the community. Health care and counselling are provided then the long-term work of reintegration begins. Save the Children has been involved in reintegration of the formerly abducted children as well as reconciliation over the past 10 years, primarily through support to GUSCO and other local partners in Gulu, Lira and Apac districts.

We, together with the partners have constantly tried to improve methodologies and approaches to reintegration. Most of the reintegration and reconciliation work in Acholi land is founded on the understanding of the Acholi culture of forgiveness, in particular the ritual "Mato Oput" plays a prominent role in reintegration.

Communities and children work together, using these tools from the local culture, to achieve forgiveness for deeds that the children may have committed, which allows them to be accepted again. Many children are successfully reunited with their families and have returned to school, others have not been as lucky.

### **Child Protection Units**

Children who either escape from the LRA or are rescued during battles over the years are taken to Child Protection Units (CPUs) run by the Ugandan army. Child protection personnel are members of the Ugandan army.

As a result of serious questions raised about these operations, including allegations of lengthy detentions, and direct or indirect recruitment of returnees into the Ugandan army, Save the Children reached an agreement for a project to train the UDF on the promotion, respect and protection of child rights.

Save the Children aims to strengthen the capacity of the UDF by facilitating the taking of immediate action to redress abuse and violations of children's rights by members of the UDF; thereby contributing to the proper development and welfare of children in northern Uganda.

### **Return and Reinsertion Project**

Save the Children and many other stakeholders have been urging the LRA to release women and children since the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Save the Children together with UNICEF have undertaken preparations for the reception of the children by attempting to reinforce the capacity of the existing reception centres, facilitating cross border coordination to ensure evacuation of separated children to a central point in northern Uganda. This will assist in eventual reception, rehabilitation, reunification and reintegration of the children in their communities.

While the issue of return of abducted children still with the LRA is paramount, children who will not return must also be accounted for. In a post conflict Uganda, addressing this issue will be vital to the process of national healing and reconciliation. Post war-rehabilitation and reconciliation is likely to be fraught with difficulties and potential violence and a number of concerns need to be addressed.

For many women including abducted girls, forced into relationships with the LRA commanders and other fighters, no bride wealth was paid when they "married". How will resources be allocated to them and their children?

For this and other reasons, there are large numbers of people who have no clear clan status, and will therefore have no claim to land. Others will have claims to land, but it will be bitterly resisted by some relatives.

For many of the children, IDPs camps are where they have always lived. Will they even want to go and live in rural areas without shops, boreholes or roads? One reason why many children in the past few months have been migrating to Gulu and Kitgum towns is because at night there is electricity and sociable company. Will they want to go and live in the villages?

A long term effect of the war will be urbanization. Strategies need to be put in place to support small town development. Otherwise, thousands will end up in slums at the edge of the major centres.

In addition, it cannot be assumed that Acholi customs will allow communities to re-emerge without pain. Gendered hierarchies will be imposed, various kinds of recompense will be sought by those who able to demand it. Social healing will be complex and sometimes brutal, as it has been in other places, including other parts of northern Uganda.

Dealing with difficulties and potential violence likely to fraught reintegration and reconciliation process will require a comprehensive policy framework that will define the legal status and rights of women and children for instance to marriage, family, clan status, land and property.

### **Education**

The education sector in the north has suffered severely during the 21-year insurgency and displacement. Literacy rates are now estimated to be at about 50% way below the national average of 64%. Teachers in camps have classes of about 150 students and many settlement areas don't have schools. Yet most of the children point to education as their hope for a better life but under such conditions, obtaining it is a major struggle.

Save the Children believes that education can and must be used to protect children from abuse, neglect and exploitation and will be critical in peace building and post conflict reconstruction. Education can be used to rewrite the future of a whole generation of children affected by this conflict. Hence, improving access to quality basic

education over the next five years is vital.

The Government of Uganda and donors must be persuaded to increase significantly their financial contribution to education for children, particularly in northern Uganda, to make learning more relevant to children, contribute to improved quality of teaching and learning, and strengthen participation of learners in the teaching/learning process.

The National Peace Reconstruction and Development Plan (PRDP) is set to improve education in the north by constructing new schools at all levels, recruiting more teachers and providing them with houses. Though a number of trained teachers have already been added to the system, the enormous increases in primary school enrolments far outstrip these efforts.

Proper planning of the education will be required to cater for different segments of the people of northern Uganda, vocational training and adult literacy education for the people who dropped out of school at an early age.

Existing reintegration programs have been critiqued for failing to help young people make a successful transition into the work force. Providing opportunities for economic livelihood is an important alternative to reduce the attractiveness of engagement with armed forces for under-age youth.

Economic livelihoods are put near the top when young people in northern Uganda are asked to identify what could help them. Micro-credit loan programs, vocational training and economic infrastructure like roads should be high priority to help children reintegrate and live economically viable lives.

### Humanitarian situation

Until recently, insecurity prevented humanitarian agencies from providing adequate services in the camps. Given the unpredictability of LRA attacks, humanitarian agencies were understandably cautious in their movements and traveled to camps with armed escorts, usually between 10am and 4pm. Although LRA attacks occurred primarily outside camps, NGOs were reluctant to establish a presence within the camps. Typically, NGO and UN personnel spent only a few hours in camps, and sometimes visited a camp only once a month.

As security has improved, NGO and UN personnel are able to spend the night in some camps, and can travel to most of the camps without military escorts. Despite improvements in access, humanitarian response in Northern Uganda has not made a remarkable improvement especially in the remote camps where few agencies are implementing programs. There is an urgent need for the government to step in and fill this gap.

### Recommendations

- There is no military solution to the conflict and the government of Uganda and LRA must immediately focus on peaceful resolution of the conflict and to abide by the Cessation of the Hostilities Agreement. This is the only way of not to undermining the peace talks and building confidence with the affected communities.
- The LRA leadership must immediately release all women and children in their ranks as a good will gesture and a sign of commitment to the peace talks. The government of Uganda and the international community must insist on the immediate release of women and children.
- The government of Uganda has launched an emergency action

plan and it is important that the transition process is supported but handled with caution. The Government of Uganda must fulfil its responsibility to assist and protect its citizens in northern Uganda, and honour its commitments to immediately address the humanitarian situation through its Joint Monitoring Committee, Emergency Plan for Humanitarian Interventions in the North and Peace Rehabilitation and Development Plan.

- The international community must insist that the government of Uganda provides concrete and time bound benchmarks to measure improvement in the living conditions for civilians in northern Uganda and report on progress made toward these benchmarks.
- If the Juba talks succeed, the fragility of the political and security situations and the scale of the humanitarian challenges will require large scale attention and investment from all stakeholders. Protection of the population from violence, deprivation and coercion will continue to be a major priority, and will require redoubled attention to and investment in responsible community policing, an appropriate role for the army, an adequate and impartial justice system, and broader reform of the security sector.
- The government of Uganda must take concrete steps to account for all missing children as a result of the LRA conflict. The government of Uganda and the regional governments affected by the conflict need to cooperate to trace the whereabouts of the missing children and account for what happened to those that would never be recovered.
- The recent decision of the government of Uganda to increase the number of police officers in the region should be accompanied by measures providing more female officers, equipping the police with the necessary child protection skills and the technical and financial means for carrying out swift investigations.
- The establishment of an effective civilian infrastructure and an equitable approach to the issue of land rights will also require significant attention and investment. The government of Uganda must strengthen the existing community land boards and land tribunals to help the most vulnerable, in particular orphans and unaccompanied children, to safeguard their property rights. The international community must commit resources now for the long term recovery of northern Uganda and ultimately for the development of Uganda as a whole.

### Contact

Prudence Acirokop, Child and Human Rights Advisor  
Save the Children in Uganda

Email [p.acirokop@sciug.org](mailto:p.acirokop@sciug.org)  
Phone Office +256 41 341 714

#### Eastern and Central Africa region

Ethiopia office  
Box 3457  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel +251 11 321 0960  
Fax +251 11 321 4234

Kenya/Regional office  
Box 19423  
202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Northern Sudan office  
Box 3134  
Khartoum, Sudan  
Tel +249 183 256 415/116  
Fax +249 183 241 589

Southern Sudan office  
Box 19243  
202 KNH – Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

Email [info@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:info@ecaf.savethechildren.se)  
<http://ecaf.savethechildren.se>

## Rewrite the Future, Access and Quality Education

Education saves lives. It gives children the skills they need to escape poverty, live healthily and have hope for the future. The right to go to school belongs to every child. However, 115 million children are still out of primary school – that's 18 per cent of the world's primary school-aged population. Save the Children research has shown that at least 43 million of these children – one in three – live in countries affected by conflict.

In 2000, world leaders pledged to get all children into school by 2015 as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, even if current commitments are kept, this goal won't be achieved for children whose lives are torn apart by conflict. These children – who urgently need the protection, stability and hope that school can provide – get the least support from the international community. In 2004, only 30 per cent of education aid to low-income countries went to the 30 countries that Save the Children has identified as conflict-affected fragile states (see map on pages 04/05). The remaining 70 per cent went to the 33 other countries identified as low income. If the international community is serious about providing primary education for all, it must provide an extra \$10 billion of aid per year; approximately \$5.8 billion of which needs to go to conflict-affected states. Without this, the education MDGs will not be met. Ensuring children in conflict-affected countries get an education is one of the biggest challenges facing the international community. It's not easy, even for major donors, to ensure that aid reaches children in countries where governments fail to make

schooling a priority and where aid channels get blocked. But, for children in conflict situations, education is as important as health-care and shelter. It should be a part of every emergency response and a priority in helping to repair and rebuild the lives of children in post-conflict situations.

Save the Children has set itself the challenge to get three million out-of-school children, living in conflict-affected countries, into school by 2010. We will also work to make sure the education they get is good quality, and improve the quality of education of five million more children who are already in school. We are calling on world leaders, international organisations, national governments and individuals to join us and help rewrite the future for all the 43 million children being denied an education in countries affected by conflict.

### Contact

Rose Wahome, Programme Officer  
Save the Children Sweden

Email [rosew@ecaf.savethechildren.se](mailto:rosew@ecaf.savethechildren.se)  
Phone Office +254 20 386 5888

### Eastern and Central Africa region

*Ethiopia office*  
Box 3457  
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Tel +251 11 321 0960  
Fax +251 11 321 4234

*Kenya/Regional office*  
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Tel +254 20 386 5888/90  
Fax +254 20 386 5889

*Northern Sudan office*  
Box 3134  
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Tel +249 183 256 415/16  
Fax +249 183 241 589

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