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Troika statement on the use of child soldiers

The Troika Heads of Mission of the United Kingdom, United States, and Norway echo the great concern expressed by the IGAD Council of Ministers at the continued employment of child soldiers by the Parties. It is appalling that South Sudan's children are bearing the brunt of the crisis. UNICEF's December 2017 report on South Sudan estimates that 19,000 children have been recruited by armed groups and that an entire generation of children is at stake as they face death, injury, hunger, disease, recruitment, forced displacement and absence of education.

CTSAMM has verified the existence of child soldiers in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei and Central Equatoria, and reported ongoing recruitment of child soldiers in the Western Equatoria, Unity and Upper Nile states. Both the SPLA-IO led by Taban Deng Gai (TD) and SPLA-IO led by Riek Machar (RM) have been identified as recruiting and using child soldiers in the conflict. The deployment of the child soldiers with the Mathiang Anyoor in the Yei area is the responsibility of SPLA government forces. The identified Parties are all in clear violation of international and national law, and the agreements pertaining to the current conflict.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is prohibited by the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS), International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and reiterated in the December 21 2017 Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians, and Humanitarian Access (CoH).

Within 30 days from the 24 December 2017 signing of the CoH, the Parties to the Agreement should have demobilized any child recruited or enlisted by their group to UNICEF. CTSAMM has not received any verification from either Party or from UNICEF that this process was concluded by 23 January 2018. All the Parties to the CoH have committed to protecting the human rights of civilians at all times, and to take specific measures to protect children.

CTSAMM reports that there is evidence that in some cases the Parties are making efforts to return child soldiers to their families. The Troika strongly encourages all the Parties to cooperate with UNICEF to release all children employed in the war without delay. It is the responsibility of all Parties to ensure that the children of South Sudan are given a hope for a better future.
