Children, Not Soldiers
A Programme Strategy to End the Recruitment and Use of Children by Government Security Forces

Introduction
Hundreds of thousands of children each year are recruited and used by armed forces or groups, killed and maimed in situations of armed conflict, raped or sexually violated, and exposed to attacks against schools and hospitals. Millions of other children have experienced the debilitating impacts of conflict through family separation, the loss of loved ones or sudden, forced dislocation, causing severe distress and affecting their psychological well-being. Armed conflicts have a devastating effect on children – physically, psychologically and emotionally. Both in the immediate and longer term, every conflict has a detrimental impact on children’s ability to survive and develop. Conflict exposes children to new protection risks and further exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities such as violence in schools and exploitative labour.

Children, Not Soldiers
In March 2014, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and Armed Conflict, and UNICEF jointly launched the Children, Not Soldiers campaign to mobilize political attention, provide technical assistance and support governments who are taking measures to professionalize their security forces, ensuring that they become and remain ‘child free’. The campaign builds on efforts initiated in 1996, when the world united to condemn and take action against the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by armed forces and groups. Since then, thousands of children have been released as a result of the United Nations Security Council-mandated action plans and other efforts to end and prevent these practices. Currently, the annexes of the Secretary-General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict list seven government armed or security forces for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Yemen, with the Chad armed forces recently delisted from the annexes of the 2014 report. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign seeks to put an end the recruitment and use of children by government security forces in these countries by 2016.1

An action plan is negotiated between the government and the United Nations to identify the key actions that the government will pursue to stop and prevent the recruitment and use of children by state forces. The objective of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign is to accelerate compliance with the action plan and support efforts to ensure that government forces are ‘child free’. Seven of the eight governments concerned have signed and are implementing action plans, while the UN and the Government of Sudan are negotiating an action plan. Active attention to these action plans – providing support where needed, acknowledging progress, and drawing attention to those areas where progress is lagging – is at the core of the strategy to make Children, Not Soldiers a success.

Protecting children in situations of armed conflict is both a life-saving measure and a sound investment to reduce the life-long negative impact on children’s well-being and future development. Such work necessitates an integrated multi-sectoral approach encompassing social welfare, education, health, law

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1 55 Non-State Actors (NSAs) remained listed in the annexes of the Secretary-Generals report as of 2013 when the campaign was launched. While Children, Not Soldiers focuses on government practice, work will continue to end the violation among NSAs as well.
enforcement and justice-related interventions. It combines immediate humanitarian response with the need for a longer-term perspective, whereby families, communities and the government are galvanized to build an enduring protective environment – one that is stronger than before the armed conflict.

**Partnership Approach**

The *Children, Not Soldiers* campaign opens the door to constructive dialogue with governments and other parties to conflict on protecting children and women, as well as to press them toward compliance with international child rights standards. In order to achieve the goals of the campaign and strengthen child protection in diverse country contexts a broad inter-agency partnership is essential, including the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, UNICEF, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the International Labour Organization, in close collaboration with relevant Member States, other United Nations agencies and NGOs, as well as communities, families and children, themselves.

UNICEF’s technical leadership and strong field presence provide a comprehensive approach to monitoring and reporting on grave violations of children’s rights, as a basis to inform related advocacy and programmatic response. UNICEF is uniquely placed to ensure that appropriate linkages are made with other types of interventions to strengthen systems and build positive social norms for the long-term benefit of children and women. The implementation of child protection work in emergencies also requires government cooperation. UNICEF seeks to support Member States to build national and local capacities to respond to grave violations against children at the national level.

**Global and regional levels**

The *Children, Not Soldiers* campaign will reach out to Member States and regional organizations to mobilize support, including expertise, advocacy and funding. For example, the recent declaration of intent on children affected by armed conflict signed by the Special Representative on CAAC with the African Union Peace and Security Commission, which will be implemented in partnership with UNICEF, complements the campaign goal by creating a forum for sharing of expertise, consolidation of best practices and promotion of technical assistance, including through South-South cooperation. In addition, UNICEF will regularly consult civil society to share its expertise and provide updates on the progress of the campaign, including through advocacy and national awareness-raising campaigns. Lastly, the broader public will be sensitized through a concerted communication strategy to raise awareness and support the campaign and the children and armed conflict agenda.

**Country level**

The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) is the United Nations body at country level in charge of monitoring, verifying and reporting violations; entering into dialogue with parties to conflict; and supporting the implementation of their commitments. It is co-chaired by the highest United Nations representative in country (the head of the DPKO/DPA-led missions or the Resident Coordinator) and the UNICEF Representative. The CTFMR will continue to support government efforts in the eight countries concerned to finalize action plans and develop operational plans for their implementation and/or roadmaps with clear benchmarks towards full compliance and delisting. UNICEF will mobilize its extensive network of partners to contribute to the campaign and provide technical and other support for release and reintegration to children formerly associated with security forces or armed groups.
Key achievements of the campaign to date include:

- The Armed Forces of Chad were delisted from the annexes of the 2014 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict.
- In Afghanistan the Government in early August endorsed a 15-point road map toward compliance that will aid the implementation of the action plan.
- In Myanmar, the Tatmadaw has released another 91 children as part of a mechanism through which cases are reported to the government for follow up. The government will soon be undertaking a review of the action plan with the UN in order to develop a work plan toward compliance.
- In May, the Government of Yemen signed an action plan with the UN to end the recruitment and use of children.
- In June, the Government of South Sudan recommitted itself to implementation of the action plan. In August, Government of South Sudan endorsed a work plan for ending grave violations against children, following a workshop with key stakeholders from the Government and International Community.
- In the DRC, the Government appointed a Presidential Adviser on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment.
- During a special session on children during the meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council, the AU agreed to cooperate with the SRSG CAAC to strengthen child protection within the AU with the support of UNICEF.

**September 2014 Progress Monitoring Graphic Report:** There are 8 Countries to complete 13 components on each Action Plan.