

# WE ARE CHILDREN NOT SOLDIERS

## Myanmar

The Government of Myanmar signed a **Joint Action Plan** with the United Nations on 27 June 2012 to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the **Tatmadaw Kyi** (Myanmar armed forces). In September 2014, the Government adopted a **workplan for compliance** to accelerate the implementation of the Action Plan.

Children suffer from grave violations related to armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups, particularly in Kachin, Shan and Kayin states.

In October 2015, the Government signed a nationwide ceasefire agreement with 8 armed groups, including 4 listed parties. The ongoing peace process, coupled with historic elections in 2015 and the political transition, offer opportunities to strengthen the Government's engagement on the protection of children affected by conflict.

### **Progress in the implementation of the action plan**

There has been steady progress in the implementation of the Joint Action Plan. Eight hundred child soldiers (including young people recruited as children) have been released from the Tatmadaw since the signature of the Joint Action Plan in 2012. The children and young people benefited from services to reintegrate in their families and communities.

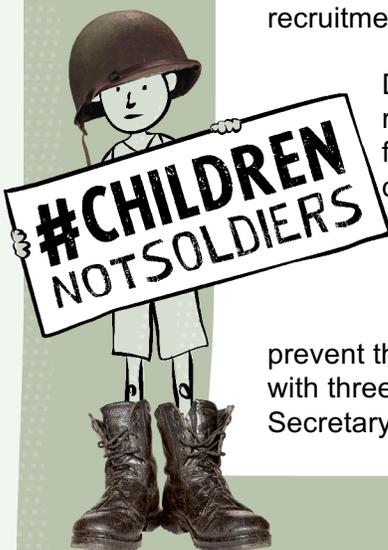
In September 2015, Myanmar signed the **Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict**. The Government is encouraged to ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible.

The Ministry of Defence has taken steps to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children, including by centralizing the recruitment process, training military recruiters on the application of improved age assessment guidelines, enforcing disciplinary and punitive measures for child recruitment, and increasing UN access to military units and battalions for monitoring purposes. There are also monthly case review meetings with the UN to verify suspected cases of underage recruitment.

A national public awareness campaign was launched by the Government and the UN continues to operate a telephone hotline enabling citizens to report cases of underage recruitment.

Despite this encouraging progress, the UN continues to verify cases of recruitment and use of children by the Tatmadaw, including minors sent to the front lines. The UN has also verified incidents of arrest and detention for desertion of child soldiers who ran away from the Tatmadaw.

During her visit to Myanmar in July 2015, Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, acknowledged the progress accomplished, but noted that gaps remain to prevent the recruitment and use of children and ensure accountability. She also met with three of the armed groups listed in the annexes of the Annual Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (*Karenni Army, Karen National*



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*Liberation Army and Kachin Independence Army*) and encouraged them to pursue dialogue with the United Nations to conclude Action Plans. The meetings took place in the context of the ongoing peace negotiations between the Government and ethnic armed groups. Following these meetings, the UN continued the engagement with the armed groups, and one listed party is ready to sign an action plan.

## **The way forward to protect the children of Myanmar:**

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### **Release and reintegration**

In accordance with the Action Plan, suspected minors should be identified and released immediately without conditions. Poverty is a key driving factor of underage recruitment in Myanmar. Resources are required for sustainable reintegration services that include economic opportunities through education and vocational training.

### **Rule of law and accountability**

Support is necessary to strengthen the rule of law and accountability for child recruiters – military or civilian – and those who commit grave violations against children. Underage recruitment and use should be criminalized in the national legislation. Children must not be arrested and detained for ‘desertion’ (absence without leave), and the Government should ensure they are released and treated in line with international juvenile justice standards.

### **Age assessment and child protection training**

Child protection training, including on age assessment guidelines, should be integrated into the military curriculum for systematic training of all Tatmadaw personnel. Age assessment guidelines should be systematically applied in recruitment processes.

### **Engagement with non-State armed groups**

The peace process in Myanmar and the campaign Children, Not Soldiers generated new opportunities to engage with non-state armed groups on the protection of children. To sustain and further this engagement, resources are required for the UN to scale up existing child protection capacity. One listed armed group is ready to sign an action plan, and the UN is engaging to secure the support of the Government.

### **Birth registration**

Access to birth registration services needs to be expanded throughout the country, with a specific focus on registering adolescent boys, the most vulnerable to recruitment.

### **Parties to conflict listed in the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (all for recruitment and use)**

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- *Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)*
- *Kachin Independence Army (KIA)*
- *Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA)*
- *Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council*
- *Karenni Army (KNPP/KA)*
- *Shan State Army South (SSA-S)*
- *Tatmadaw Kyi, including integrated border guard forces*
- *United Wa State Army (UWSA)*

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