

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN**

**NATIONAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

**ON CHILD PROTECTION**

**Outcomes of the**

**Third National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan**

**Held Under the Theme:**

***“Children Not Soldiers.”***

**17 - 19 September, 2024**

**JUBA – SOUTH SUDAN**

**Outcomes of the 3rd National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan**

17-19 September, 2024

**Copyright © Ministry of Gender, Child & Social Welfare, Republic of South Sudan, 2024**

All rights reserved. No part of this Report may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical or other means now known or hereafter invented, including copying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission from the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare of the Republic of South Sudan.

The views and/or opinions expressed in this report are those of the Conference and its Participants and of quoted sources or references where applicable, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, partners and/or stakeholders, nor the Conference Rapporteurs.

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Published and Distributed By:**

The National Technical Committee on Child Protection

High-Level Inter-Ministerial Committee on Child Protection

C/o The Nationa DDR Commission Headquarters

Juba Na Bari Residential Area

JUBA - SOUTH SUDAN

**Rapporteur Team**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **S/No** | **Name** | **Institution** | **Position** |
|  | Maj. Laguya Kenyi Lupai | South Sudan Peoples’ Defence Forces. Senior Lecturer, Institute of Peace, Development and Security Studies, University of Juba | Chief Rapporteur |
|  | Ms. Rose Akulia Natalino Banja | Lecturer, College of Law, University of Juba | Rapporteur |
|  | Asst. Prof. Jimmy Pitya | College of Economics and Business Administration, Catholic University of South Sudan | Rapporteur |
|  | Mr. Changkuoth Gony | Lecturer, College of Business Administration, Upper Nile University, Juba Campus | Rapporteur |

**Table of Contents**

[**Executive Summary** 1](#_Toc180744376)

[**1.0 Introduction** 2](#_Toc180744377)

[**2.0 Overview of Speeches Delivered** 3](#_Toc180744378)

[**Speech by Children’s Representatives** 3](#_Toc180744379)

[**Speech by Honourable Ayuen A. Jongroor** 3](#_Toc180744380)

[**Speech by UNICEF** 4](#_Toc180744381)

[**Speech by Ms Virginia Gamba** 4](#_Toc180744382)

[**Speech by Mr Nicholas Haysom** 5](#_Toc180744383)

[**Speech by Honourable Akech Tong Alew** 6](#_Toc180744384)

[**Speech by Honourable Aya Benjamin Warille** 6](#_Toc180744385)

[**Speech by Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng** 7](#_Toc180744386)

[**3.0 Overview of Presentations Delivered** 7](#_Toc180744387)

[**4.0 Recommendations** 12](#_Toc180744388)

[**5.0 Conclusion** 15](#_Toc180744389)

[**6.0 Annexure** 16](#_Toc180744390)

# **Executive Summary**

The Third National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan took place in Juba from 17-19 September 2024, under the theme: “Children Not Soldiers.” The overall purpose of the Conference was for the Government and stakeholders to recommit themselves to the prohibition of recruitment and use of children. To achieve this goal, the Conference had four specific objectives: (1) to enhance the capacity of various stakeholders to promptly recognise, prevent and respond to the recruitment and use of children; (2) to acquire critical knowledge for increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in implementing the Government Comprehensive Action Plan to protect children; (3) to advocate for strengthened accountability and response measures to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children; and (4) to strengthen coordination amongst stakeholders to prevent, mitigate, and respond to recruitment and use of children in the country.

In general, there have been areas of progress in relation to the protection of children against use and recruitment in armed conflicts since the previous conference. In particular, the conference appreciate the extensive progress made by the Military Justice Department of the SSPDF in holding perpetrators of child rights abuses accountable through its Mobile Courts system across the country. However, the Conference notes with great concern the increase in violation of child rights in the country, committed by armed forces and groups, since late 2023. The Conference is greatly concerned about the insufficient funding of programmes and activities relating to child protection, including the complete lack of financial support to the National DDR Commission.

The Conference upholds that the primary responsibility for the protection of all children, including their prohibition from recruitment and use in armed conflict, lies with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Child protection is paramount to the stability and future of South Sudan as a nation. Thus, there is urgency in the need to cease all forms of violations against children. It calls on the Government to prioritise allocations and payments of funds in support of child protection. It commends His Excellency the President of the Republic, General Salva Kiir Mayardit, the Vice President, Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, for standing firm on issues relating to child rights. The Conference applauds Her Excellency Mama Nyandeng’s strong conviction that child protection is never a choice but an obligation for the Government.

# **1.0 Introduction**

The Third National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan took place in Juba from 17-19 September 2024, under the theme: “Children Not Soldiers.” It was jointly organized by the Child Protection National Technical Committee and the High-Level Inter-Ministerial Committee under the auspices of the Office of the Vice President and Chairperson of the Gender and Youth Cluster. These committees comprise the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare; the Ministry of Defence and Veterans’ Affairs; the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (NDDRC) and other line ministries. It was supported by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS); the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF); Save the Children; and the Dallaire Institute for Peace, Children and Security, and other stakeholders.

The overall purpose of the Conference was for the Government and stakeholders to recommit themselves to the prohibition of recruitment and use of children. To achieve this goal, the Conference had **four** specific objectives:

1. To enhance the capacity of various stakeholders to promptly recognise, prevent and respond to the recruitment and use of children;
2. To acquire critical knowledge for increased understanding of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in implementing the Government Comprehensive Action Plan to protect children;
3. To advocate for strengthened accountability and response measures to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children; and
4. To strengthen coordination amongst stakeholders to prevent, mitigate, and respond to recruitment and use of children in the country.

In total, 150 participants participated in the Conference. They were drawn from several relevant institutions directly engaged in child protection in the country, ranging from Government institutions and/departments across the national and state levels to the United Nations and other international partners, civil society organisations, the academia, women and youth groups, and representatives of children and persons with disabilities.

# **2.0 Overview of Speeches Delivered**

## **Speech by Children’s Representatives**

Two children gave speeches during the conference, namely ***Agot Garang*** and ***Adam Alan***. In her plea, Agot Garang said it was a hard reality that children in South Sudan are being recruited into the armed forces. Apart from recruitment, she said children continue to be killed, raped, trafficked and sexually exploited. She argued that as a result, many children face trauma due to inability to grow in a healthy environment.

Agot Garang mentioned several other factors affecting children in South Sudan, including lack support, and lack of guidance by parents. She reminded the conferees that “Children are not soldiers,” and adding that they deserve a healthy environment for the growth, and urged the Government to ensure that the safety of children is a priority and that they are always protected. She said that “together we can create a South Sudan that every child can grow without fear.” She argued that it would be much better to come to the national annual conference with success story to celebrate, rather than holding it for the sake of an established routine.

Meanwhile, ***Adam Alan***, a 21-year old boy from Pibor who lost his parents and was left under the guidance of a relative said he saw children experiencing various abuses, sleeping without food, and walking long distances in search of water and food for the soldiers. Alan said he spent time as a child associated with the armed forces, but gained freedom by being let out from the garrisons, after which he joined school. Determined to overcome his fears, he said he took the long journey of adopting a more positive life to the extent that today he feels like a child again, and can dream again, despite the fact that the world earlier on stole his childhood. Alan expressed gratitude for the gift of education, adding that giving children education can allow them to rebuild their world. In his conclusion, Alan said he prays that no child should ever have to go through what he went through. He said “Let all of us in this room allow children to be children.”

## **Speech by Honourable Ayuen A. Jongroor**

The first introductory speech of the conference was made by the Chairperson of the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (DDRC), ***Honourable Lt. Gen. Ayuen Alier Jongroor*.** He appreciated the United Nations Country Taskforce for Monitoring and Reporting (composed of UNMISS and UNICEF), Safe the Children, the Dallaire Institute, all other child protection agencies, and the Child Protection National Technical Committee for their tireless efforts in implementing the Government Action Plan to prevent and end the six grave violations against children in the country. Honourable Jongroor informed the participants that the Comprehensive Action Plan on the Protection of Children in South Sudan was extended for a period of 18 months from 15 April 2024 to 14th October 2025, demonstrating the commitment of the Government in seeking full implementation of the of the plan’s provisions. Furthermore, informed the conference that the United Nations Security Council had moved the South Sudan Peoples’ Defence Forces (SSPDF) and the Sudan Peoples’ Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) from Section A to Section B, indicating progress by South Sudan in implementation of measures to end violations against children. To better shoulder its tasks, Honourable Jongroor emphasised that it was imperative for the DDR activities to be incorporated as part of the mandate of UNMISS, to ensure sustainable resourcing and implementation. He thus implored the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of UNMISS, Mr Nicholas Haysom, to help in persuading the Security Council in this regards.

## **Speech by UNICEF**

In her take, the ***UNICEF Country Representative*** for South Sudan, ***Ms Hamida Laseko***, expressed special commendations to the children representatives who spoke during the opening the conference, and urged all the participants to take the speeches of the children as the point of connection and discussions. She urged all stakeholders to continue doing their best in the quest to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed forces. Ms Laseko reminded the conferees about the work of UNICEF, which includes advocating for and on behalf of children, mobilizing efforts and resources for their better future.

Ms Laseko emphasized that recruitment of children is no longer acceptable, and therefore cautioned the participants that more work still needs to be done. She said no children are supposed to be commanders, spies, cooks, wives or associates of armed forces. She applauded the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare of the Republic of South Sudan, and expressed special commendation to the Minister, Honourable Aya Benjamin Warille for “always being upfront on issues relating to the welfare of children” in the country, and equally applauded the role of UNMISS, Safe the Children and other stakeholders.

## **Speech by Ms Virginia Gamba**

The Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict ***Ms Virginia* *Gamba*** addressed the conference through video. She stated that the protection of children against violations still remains a matter of utmost importance. She asserted that UNNISS continues to monitor and report great violations against children in the country, especially in the war zones. She argued that although the UN Security Council took a strong stance against recruitment of children, recent UN reports indicate verified cases of violations of children’s rights worldwide. She said that in South Sudan alone, children were confirmed to have been recruited by armed groups into the armed forces in the year 2023. She said the reports show that at least 15 girls, some as young as 13 years, were recruited and used in the armed conflict.

Ms Gamba commended all the Parties to the R-ARCSS, and implored upon them to protect children against violations. She offered a special vote of thanks to the UN and humanitarian agencies engaged in voicing out violations against the rights of children, including child recruitment, and for paving ways for integration of children with their families. She concluded by calling for the cessation and prevention of all forms of brutality against children, re-echoed the calls for re-integration of children with families, provision of psycho-social support, and the taking of accountability measures to ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable for crimes committed. She implored the Government and people of South Sudan to address the root causes and effects of the conflict, and promote relevant trainings for capacity enhancement. She underscored the need for decisive and coordinated measures to prevent all sorts of violations against children.

## **Speech by Mr Nicholas Haysom**

In his take, ***Mr Nicholas Haysom***, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General said the conference came at a critical time for children in South Sudan, noting that it was necessary for the efforts of all Parties to prevent acute violations against children. He said that UNMISS worked in close coordination with other UN agencies to enable the release of 49 boys in 2023. He emphasized that the Responsibility to protect civilians including children primarily lies with the Government of South Sudan.

In his conclusion, he said the UN remains committed to support accountability mechanisms against any sorts of violations perpetrated against children; and called on all stakeholders to do their part by re-affirming their commitment to the rule of law and rights of children since now is the time to hear the voice of children in re-shaping their country.

## **Speech by Honourable Akech Tong Alew**

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Defence and Veterans’ Affairs, **Honourable Akech Tong Alew**, Undersecretary for Veterans in the ministry said South Sudan registered progress in the reduction of violations against children. He ensured the conferees that the Ministry of Defence was ensuring every effort to end violation of children’s rights. In this context, he said the Ministry of Defence and the SSPDF were raising awareness and engaging in capacity building of the forces across the country with the aim of strengthening the protection of children. Honourable Tong informed the conference that the SSPDF has no single child in its ranks and files, because the Ministry of Defence has adopted a zero tolerance policy towards child soldiers. He assured the participants, including South Sudan partners, that the Ministry of Defence was exerting all its efforts in collaboration with all stakeholders to ensure the protection of children in the country. He said it is the mission of everyone, including the Ministry of Defence, to protect children, because they are the future of the country. The Honourable Undersecretary commended UNMISS, UNICEF, Safe the Children, the national institutions and the civil society for the continued support and engagement in matters pertaining protection of children and the quest for peace in South Sudan.

## **Speech by Honourable Aya Benjamin Warille**

Honourable Aya Benjamin Warille, Minister of **Gender, Youth and Sports**, argued that one of the most worrying developments in recent times is the act of recruitment and use of children in the armed conflict in the country, which she said has seriously impacted on children, the nation and on global peace. She said many ways have been responsible for the association of children with armed forces, including abduction, conscription by being beaten into submission, and pull factors that attract young people to the military due to poverty, as well as feelings of revenge and desire to defend oneself and the community he or she lives in. As a result, she said many girls and boys are also used in support functions that also entail great risk and hardship.

The Honourable Minister further argued that children associated with armed conflict are exposed to acute levels of violation, as they are direct witnesses to, or are themselves victims of war and forced participation. She informed the Conference that the Comprehensive Action Plan on Children in Armed Conflict is extended up to October 2025, intended to prevent and end the six grave violations against children’s rights. She commended UNMISS and UNICEF for the valuable support on the protection of children, and for the strategic guidance to the national institutions seeking make South Sudan a safe place for children.

## **Speech by Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng**

The 3rd National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use was ***officially opened by Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng***, Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan and Chairperson of the national Gender and Youth Cluster. While expressing her gratitude for opening the function, the Vice President said the issues of child recruitment and abuse demand immediate attention and unwavering commitment. She reminded the participants that “behind every statistic lies a child whose dreams, innocence, and future are at stake.” She said “armed groups and militias exploit the vulnerabilities of children, often forcibly or deceitfully recruiting them into their ranks,” a practice which she argued “robs children of their childhood” and “exposes them to the horrors of war, violence, and trauma that can leave lifelong scars.”

Mama Rebecca urged the participants to always recognise that child recruitment was indicative of broader issues within society, such as poverty, lack of access to education, and social instability. If South Sudan should be successful in ending all violations of child rights, she said it was imperative that the country addresses the root causes underpinning this situation. Mama Rebecca said the theme “Children Not Soldiers” was enlightening,” and emphasised that the Government of the Republic of South Sudan supports the global consensus that children should not be recruited and used in conflict situations. The Vice President implored that the protection of children should not be a choice but an obligation. She concluded by underlining that “Children do not start wars, cannot end them, and that [therefore] they should not be recruited!” She besought God to bless the participants; bless the children; and bless South Sudan.

# **3.0 Overview of Presentations Delivered**

In general, the presentations made and discussions held in the Conference provided a great platform for exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences. They highlighted crucial issues on violations of children’s rights and critical interventions to protect them, including protection against sexual violence in the conflict affected South Sudan.

The presentations were covered by representatives of the DDR Commission, UNMISS, the Ministry of Gender, Child and social Welfare, the Dallaire Institute for Peace, Children and Security, the SSPDF Directorate of Military Justice, the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS), Safe the Children, as a representative of child protection actors.

***Presentation No 1:***

**Trends and Progress on Recruitment and Use of Children in South Sudan**

***Presented by: Honourable Oluku Andre Holt,***

***DDR Commission***

In his presentation, Honourable Holt , representative of the National DDR Commission, highlighted on the following key objective points: (1) Understanding the meaning of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Group (CAAFAG); (2) The push factors that take children to the military such as household poverty , tribalism, the need to seek refuge, mistreatment at home, desire for revenge; and the pull factors which include knowing one would get food, access to money, ability to defend oneself and protect family and loved ones.

He further highlighted and enabled the attendees of the conference to acquire knowledge about the release processes of CAAFAG, and also presented a former child soldier to share a success story.

***Presentation No 2:***

**Child Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Experience Sharing**

***Presented by: Haj. Duku Abdula Adam Blair,***

***Representative, Save the Children***

In the presentation, Save the Children asserted that violence against children is no longer tolerated. The presentation outlined three pillars as follows that are essential to the protection of children:

***Pillar 1:*** Consistently upholding international laws and standards to protection children in conflict;

***Pillar 2:*** Perpetrators of violation of children`s rights in conflict must be systematically held to account; and

***Pillar 3:*** Programmes and interventions to protect children in conflict and rebuild shattered lives must be properly funded and effectively implemented.

Haj Duku concluded by adding the impact of recruitment and use on children by describing that child soldiering has short-, medium-, and long-term effects on a child’s physical, emotional and social development. Among others, the presentation took note of the following impacts: increased risks of exploitation (child labour, economic and sexual exploitation); involuntary/voluntary separation from caregivers; early marriage and complicated pregnancies; constrained educational opportunities (become unskilled and unemployed in the future); mental health and psychosocial wellbeing (horrific incidents, toxic stress, trauma, aggressive and quire behaviour, self-esteem); and that Children often get killed or wounded/disabled.

***Presentation No 3:***

**Legal Frameworks Protecting Children against Recruitment and Use**

***Presented by: Honourable Esther Ikere Eluzai,***

***Undersecretary, Ministry of Gender, Child & Social Welfare***

On her part, Honourable Ikere started presenting about the legal frameworks relating to the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The presentation examined the international, regional and national frameworks in respect of their potential strength to protect children from recruitment and use in armed conflict. She asserts that the development of international legal framework proceeded in stages beginning with the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which laid a solid foundation in 1977 by adopting two Additional Protocols to the Geneva Convention (1949), namely *Additional Protocol I* and *Additional Protocol II*. The Honourable Undersecretary stressed that in Article 77 (2) of the Additional Protocol I and Article 4 (3) (c) of the Additional Protocol II, the issue of prohibition of recruitment of children in armed conflicts was addressed specifically and also that principle that children should not be recruited in armed conflicts, while stressing the duty of parties to provide continuous protection to children during armed conflicts. In addition to that, Article 77 (1) reaffirms the customary international norm that children, due to their age factor and vulnerability, should be given exclusive treatment and care.

Honourable Ikere further elaborated on *International Legal Framework Prohibiting the Use of Child Soldiers* such as; Geneva Conventions Relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Geneva Convention IV, following World War II, relating to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of War. She said Geneva Convention IV was the first international instrument explicitly addressing the protection of children during armed conflict; that Article 24 of Geneva Convention IV addresses measures relating to child welfare.

She stressed that following this, the International Human Rights Law (IHRL) came into the picture; The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was the product of sustained effort by the United Nations to support the proposition that children should enjoy special protection. The CRC was adopted by the General Assembly on November 20, 1989, while the CRC was a landmark convention for the universal rights and special treatment of children, it provided no additional protections for children during times of war. The CRC addresses the protections in virtually identical terms as the Geneva Protocols, stating pursuant to Article 28 of the UNCRC, 1989:

1. States Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for rules of international humanitarian law applicable to them in armed conflicts which are relevant to the child.
2. States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities.
3. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces. In recruiting among those persons who have attained the age of fifteen years but who have not attained the age of eighteen years.
4. States Parties shall endeavour to give priority to those who are oldest.

Also with UNCRC Scrutiny, the CRC came under great scrutiny for failing to protect children in the most dangerous environment - the theatre of war. As a human rights instrument, it may not be appropriate for the CRC to alter the standards such as the age of recruitment established by the Humanitarian law in Additional Protocols, where the humanitarian law is the *lex specialis*. Thus, CRC has rightly maintained the norms fixed in the humanitarian law, with the aim of raising the standards, and the human rights law adopted the Optional Protocol to CRC (OPAC) which prima facie raised the existing standards.

Honourable Ikere further highlighted about the Rome Statue, the International Labour Organisation Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Charter) of 1999, and South Sudan instruments, all of which focus on, or have a focus on protection of children. She highlighted on areas of progress in child protection in the country, including on prosecution of perpetrators of child rights abuses within the recent past, and highlighted several challenges and gaps in the protection of children from recruitment and use in South Sudan.

***Presentation No 4:***

**Action Plan on Children Associated with Armed Conflict and Military Justice**

***Presented by: Colonel Mayiel Jek R. Chamtang, LLM***

***Senior Judge Advocate,***

***Deputy Director of Military Justice, SSPDF***

In his take, Colonel Chamtang started by explaining the objectives of the Directorate of Military Justice, which he said include: (1) to ensure members of SSPDF who commit criminal offences, including against children, and disciplinary offences are held to account, and (2) to ensure a fully functioning military justice system by enforcing criminal and disciplinary law throughout all ranks of the SSPDF.

He further asserted that several violations including against children rights have led to actions such as the Arms Embargo imposed on South Sudan since 2018, the economic sanctions, which include travel and financial measures.

He also highlighted ongoing work action plan and activities undertaken regarding children associated with armed conflict relevant for Military Justice. He said this entail duties to investigate, prosecute, adjudicate and/or discipline members of the armed forces for any allegations of sexual violence, abduction and attacks on schools and hospitals, and the giving of due consideration to the interests and rights of child survivors, families, witnesses and support persons and specialized capacity within the armed forces, with dedicated resources and vetted personnel, to investigate, prosecute and adjudicate violations against children, including sexual violence.

He also listed and stressed on the importance of national legal frameworks applicable to children such as the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan 2011 (as amended), the Penal Code Act, 2008, the Criminal Procedure Act, 2008, the Child Act, 2008, the International Treaties signed by South Sudan, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Under the prevailing laws and guidelines, he said no child shall be sentenced to capital punishment or life imprisonment, and that no child shall be subjected to corporal punishment, and that any child who becomes victim of abuse is accorded treatment and rehabilitation and every child has a right to be protected from sexual abuse, gender- based violence, rape, incest, and female genital mutilation.

He concluded by stressing on the objective of juvenile justice such as system reformation, social rehabilitation and reintegration of child, while emphasizing individual accountability for crimes committed, and restoration of relationship, through reconciliation, restitution and compensation.

On the other hand, the SPLA-IO representative, ***Brig Gen Olobo Odongto***, elaborated on some of the Current challenges and gaps relating to the recruitment and use of children, such as lack of accountability leading to impunity among perpetrators in the opposition side. He underscored that the SSDPF Mobile Courts have no access to the force cantonment centres and assembly areas under the Opposition, thus preventing accountability for crimes against children. The other fundamental challenge he pointed concerns the delay in the unification of the Necessary Unified Forces.

The SPLA-IO representative suggested the following some preventive measures against recruitment and use of child soldiers:

1. Establishment of child protection directorate and training of focal persons in all the division.
2. Training and deployment of child protection officers.
3. Issuing of punitive and command orders.
4. Conducting child protection training to senior officers in all units.
5. Formation of technical committees from the national level to the state level to handle issues/cases of child protection.
6. Engaging in awareness raising workshops across all units. The workshops to include: executive chiefs, commissioners, university students and journalists.

Brigadier Odongto cautioning the participants that the more the Opposition forces continue to remain in the cantonment centres and assembly areas, the more children continue to join the military.

# **4.0 Recommendations**

Having listened to expert presentations, discussed and deliberated for three days, the 3rd National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan came up with the following recommendations:

1. Urges the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGONU) to fully shoulder the financial responsibilities relating to the National DDR Commission, including funding of Child Welfare programmes and activities of the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare;
2. Implores the RTGONU to accelerate the implementation of the remaining aspects of the Transitional Security Arrangements of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, especially completion of the unification of the forces;
3. Encourages the establishment of a Child Protection Desk within the Presidency, particularly in the Office of the Vice President and Chairperson of the Gender and Youth Cluster;
4. Encourages the Government and stakeholders to expand awareness campaigns on the general public, in particular targeting the military, parents and children, about prohibition of recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups across the country;
5. Requests the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, in liaison with the respective ministries at the state level, to establish community focal points in the grassroots, in pursuit of awareness raising on the disadvantages of child recruitment and other important cross-cutting issues pertaining to child welfare;
6. Domestification of all international laws and conventions relating to the protection of children, and implementation of all national laws, in order to end impunity and promote accountability for violations against the rights of children;
7. Encourages the Government, through the respective Ministries of Education at the national and state levels, to establish Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) centres to help build the knowledge and skills base of children and the youth, to help them become better positioned in the job market;
8. Promotion of awareness and education programmes within the security institutions, with a focus on child protection, civil military-relations, and better management of the security sector to guarantee safety and contribute to the overall security of the country;
9. Promoting equity in the administration of justice and in the implementation of DDR opportunities for both girls and boys, especially in reporting and responding to incidents of child violation, and coverage in DDR programmes;

1. Ensuring coordinated and decisive efforts by the Government and all stakeholders towards prevention of all sorts of violations against children;
2. Ensure that the national legislation relating to birth registration is codified, and that the Civil Registry Act and Birth Registration process are operationalized across the country that can enhance easy the problem of children identification;
3. Engaging in comprehensive civil-military relations training for the security forces, with a special focus on operational commanders, to ensure compliance with national and international laws, and respect for all directives intended to prohibit recruitment and use of children;
4. Urges the Government to direct the respective national Ministries of Education to incorporate topics on child rights and child protection into the official education and training curricular across all levels: primary, secondary and post-secondary;
5. Incorporation of topics on child rights and child protection onto the training curricula of the various defence and security institutions, and development of training manuals on the same;
6. Making provisions for transitory care and gender- and age-appropriate support to children including an initial assessment of their well-being, psychosocial support and medical needs, and documentation of children’s personal details to help in family tracing; and establishment of community reintegration centres;
7. Strengthening the role of key Government institutions and stakeholders in the prevention of recruitment and use of children, ensuring accountability for all perpetrators of child rights violations without fear and favour to end the culture of impunity;
8. Encourages the adoption and operationalisation of a Comprehensive DDR programme based on an appropriate framework for rehabilitation and reintegration, with an economic recovery package that while meant for the children’s reintegration into society, would not in itself constitute a pull factor for entry of children into the military; or become a factor for recruitment of demobilised child soldiers;
9. Calls upon the Government, through the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare to encourage the building of social support groups within the grassroots to strengthen community resilience, promote behaviour change communication, and help in reporting of violations and provision of related support;
10. Encourages the Government, with the help of partners, to provide critical training that targets the specific needs of persons with disabilities, to facilitate and ease their interaction with the law enforcement agencies;
11. Urges the Government and all stakeholders to prevent the creation of a vulnerable generation of ex-child soldiers for limited potentials who might become a target for recruitment by violent extremist groups;
12. **Strongly urges the Government to ensure that children throughout the country are given pen and paper; that they are sent to school and to the playground, but not to the barracks and battlegrounds;**
13. **Encourages that the ultimate way to bring peace to our children and protect their rights lies in patriotism, comprehensive security sector reform, nation-building and good governance, characterised by independence and strengthening of the three arms of government; and**
14. **Urges UNMISS, UNICEF, Save the Children, the Dallaire Institute for Peace, Children and Security, the civil society, the academia and all other stakeholders to continue supporting the efforts towards ending all violations against children in South Sudan.**
15. The conference decides to remain seized of all matters concerning protection of children against recruitment and use by armed forces and groups in South Sudan.

# **5.0 Conclusion**

The Conference took place in Juba from 17-19 September 2024, under the theme: “Children Not Soldiers.” Attended by 150 participants, the overall purpose was for the Government and stakeholders to recommit themselves to the prohibition of recruitment and use of children. The conference appreciates the extensive progress made by the Military Justice Department of the SSPDF in holding perpetrators of child rights abuses accountable through its Mobile Courts system. Nonetheless, it is greatly concerned about the increase in violation of child rights in the country since late 2023. It is also greatly concerned about the insufficient funding of programmes and activities relating to child protection, including the complete lack of financial support to the National DDR Commission, whose programmes are critical to the success of child protection efforts in the country.

The Conference calls on all Parties to cease violations against children; and implores the Government and armed groups to provide access to child rights institutions and groups, and prevent attacks against and occupation of schools and other social facilities. It further calls on the Government to prioritise allocations and payments of funds in support of child protection. It commends His Excellency the President of the Republic, General Salva Kiir Mayardit, the Vice President, Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, for standing firm on issues relating to child rights. The Conference applauds Her Excellency Mama Nyandeng’s strong conviction that child protection is never a choice but an obligation for the Government.

# **6.0 Annexure**

***Annex 1:*** *Communiqué of the Third National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan.*

***Annex 2:*** *Speech of Her Excellency Mama Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, Vice President of the Republic of South Sudan and Chairperson of the Gender and Youth Cluster.*

***Annex 3:*** *Speech by Honourable Ayuen Alier Jongroor, Chairperson of the National DDR Commission.*

***Annex 4:*** *List of Delegates (Participants) to the 3rd National Conference on Protection of Children against Recruitment and Use in South Sudan.*

***Annex 5:*** *Members of the Organising Committee for the 3rd National Conference.*