



As Oil Negotiations Waver, South Sudan Demobilizes Child Soldiers

18/11/2011 - Sudan and South Sudan have been slated to continue negotiations related to oil revenues, while more than 50 soldiers from South Sudan have been freed. The two old foes fought a 21-year civil war, in which the use of child soldiers was common.

The United Nations Mission in the Republic of [South Sudan](#) (UNMISS) reported that 53 children serving with the South Sudanese armed forces have been released.

The children, aged 13 to 17, were released in Bentiu, in the country's Unity state under care of the South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission. The Commission, which reunited 26 former child soldiers with their families last week, works in partnership with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children and the VSF Holland to re-integrate these children back into their communities.

According to UN sources, the children had been forced to serve in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) since April. The SPLA is the former rebel group that fought in a civil war against north [Sudan](#). The use of [child soldiers](#) throughout the 21-year conflict was not uncommon. When South Sudan became independent, the SPLA formed the majority of its armed forces but committed to demobilizing its child soldiers by November 2010.

Fighting between the two belligerent in border regions broke out again earlier this year. Now, rain and landmines – natural and manmade hazards – are threatening refugees as they flee the border areas. About 200 refugees running from the Southern Kordofan state arrive in the Unity state every day. The Yida refugee camp there is now home to 23,000 people.

In yesterday's report on the children's demobilization, the UN also called for any remaining children to be released.

Hazel De Wet is the Senior Child Protection Officer with UNMISS. She called yesterday's release a "significant positive development," but provided a reminder that all underage soldiers "should be in schools and not military barracks."

The movement to free child soldiers has been aided by UNICEF, which has given the soldiers material items such as blankets, mosquito bednets, plastic sheeting, soap and buckets to help them begin their civilian life. A partner non-governmental organization has given them goats to rear as a new way of maintaining a livelihood. Sending soldiers back into their communities as civilians can be difficult, especially when soldiers do not have a formal education and may lack literacy skills.

Upon becoming independent, South Sudan gained control of 75 per cent of Sudan's daily oil production of 490,000 barrels, Bloomberg reports. Among the outstanding issues regarding South Sudan's independence are the fees the country will pay to Sudan to transport its oil through a pipelines running across northern land.

Both Sudan and South Sudan have been in peace talks facilitated by the African Union. Today, media stated that Sudan is said to have pulled out of tomorrow talks scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa. South Sudan is reported to have offered the country "billions" in aid in order to make up for oil revenue lost by its old foe, said South Sudan's chief negotiator.