



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **Southern Sudan People's Army (SPLA) Launches Child Protection Department**

**Juba, Southern Sudan, 30 August 2010** – The formation and launch of a Child Protection Department in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was hailed as a key milestone today by Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The formation of the Child Protection Department is in line with an Action Plan the SPLA signed in November 2009 between the SPLA and the United Nations committing them to release all children in their ranks by November 2010 and end the use of children as soldiers. Since the signing of the Action Plan, more than 200 children have been released from the SPLA compared to 56 children demobilized in 2009. It is estimated that about 900 children are still associated with the SPLA.

Speaking during the launch at the SPLA General Headquarters in Juba, William Deng Deng, the Chairperson of the Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) said, "The launch today is another concrete sign of the commitment of the Government of Southern Sudan in general and the DDR Commission in particular to keep the protection of children, the future and hope of our country, a priority. By the end of 2010 the SPLA has committed to have demobilized all children from its ranks, and we give our full support to establish strong mechanisms for successful reintegration to civilian life for these children."

Catherine Mbengue, Officer in Charge for the Director of Operation, UNICEF Southern Sudan said, "We need to move beyond this launch and go down right to the smallest unit of the SPLA and indeed to each and every SPLA soldier for them to understand their obligations under the various national and international laws that the Government of Southern Sudan and the SPLA have signed to protect children's rights."

The Child Protection Department which has been created as a department within the SPLA General Headquarters is charged with the responsibility to ensure that no children are in the ranks of the SPLA. It also works with partners during verification, registration and demobilization of children still associated with the SPLA.

"We welcome the commitment by the SPLA to respect the rights of the child and ensure that the SPLA is child free", said Lise Grande, the UN Deputy Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Southern Sudan. "Children are the very core of Southern Sudan and we hope the Government of Southern Sudan and the SPLA give the Child Protection Department the support it deserves to effectively carry out its functions", Ms. Grande added.

The SPLA has appointed a panel of five members comprised of senior commanders to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan and to in turn guide the Child Protection Department.

The recruitment or use of children under the age of 18 in armed conflict is contrary to international law and contrary to the laws of Southern Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, Child Act 2008 and SPLA Act 2009.

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### **For more information, please contact:**

Oluku Andrew Holt, Child DDR Coordinator, SSDDRC  
Mobile: +249 (0)121 135548, Email: olukuholt@ssddrc.com.

Swangin Bismarck, Communication officer UNICEF Southern Sudan Area programme, Juba  
Mobile: +249(0) 919 261 580, +256(0) 477 103 390: Email:bswangin@unicef.org.