



South Sudan: UN mission presses for all child soldiers to be released

17 November 2011 –The United Nations peacekeeping operation in South Sudan today called on the country's military to ensure that all child soldiers within its ranks are released after more than 50 teenage soldiers were let go earlier this week.

Fifty-three soldiers aged between 13 and 17 were released on Tuesday in Bentiu, the capital of South Sudan's Unity state, according to the peacekeeping mission (UNMISS).

The children had been conscripted in April into the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the former rebel group that became the country's military, but were demobilized this week by the South Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission.

Hazel De Wet, the senior child protection officer for UNMISS, told the UN News Centre that she welcomed the release of the child soldiers and commended the SPLA for its action.

"However, we still call upon the SPLA to ensure that all children within their ranks are released," she said. "Children should be in schools and not military barracks."

UNMISS, along with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and South Sudanese child welfare officials, have been advocating for the release of the child soldiers since their recruitment.

UNICEF has given the soldiers blankets, mosquito nets, plastic sheets, soap and buckets to help them reintegrate into civilian life, while a non-governmental organization (NGO) has provided them with goats for rearing.