

## **Myanmar Armed Forces discharge minors from military service, take concrete step towards ensuring zero underage recruitment and full discharge of child soldiers**

Yangon, 1 Aug — Myanmar's Tatmadaw, the Armed Forces, released 91 children and young people from the military service through a ceremony marking the handover of discharged minors to parents or guardians on Friday, signifying its commitment to ensure zero underage recruitment and full discharge of those under the age of 18 years in the armed forces.

The discharge of the group numbering 91 was the second mass return to civilian life after 96 children and young people were rehabilitated in January this year. It was the sixth time the Myanmar military released those who were recruited into the armed forces as minors.

The latest releases mean that a total of 364 children and young people had been discharged from the military since the signing of the Action Plan to prevent and end the recruitment and use of children between the Myanmar government and the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting grave violations against children (UNCTFMR) in June, 2012.

The action plan was renewed for the next six months in December 2013, said Brig-Gen Tauk Tun, joint secretary of the committee for prevention of military recruitment of underage children, in his address at the ceremony held in Yangon.

He continued to say that Tatmadaw is committed to continue making sure all underage soldiers are released from military service and the armed forces are child-free. Actions had been taken against 40 officers and 229 other ranks for breaking recruitment rules, he voiced.

"Today's release of 91 children and young people demonstrates an important step in ending the recruitment and use of children in the Myanmar Armed Forces", said Ms. Shalini Bahuguna, deputy UNICEF representative in Myanmar.

During the ceremony, the released children and young people were presented documents allowing them to resign from the military service and citizenship scrutiny cards in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, UN agencies and INGOs.

While briefing the media after the ceremony, the UNICEF deputy chief, who is also the co-chair of CTFMR, welcomed the recent directive of the Ministry of Education that commits to get discharged children to school immediately after their release and at any point in the school year. She also acknowledged the concrete steps taken by the Ministry of Defence, by abolishing the 10th grade exemption in which children who passed the matric can join the army under the age of 18.

In her concluding remarks, Ms. Bahuguna called on the media to make public the number 09-421166701~02, managed by UNICEF and World Vision from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Monday to Sunday. According to official data, a series of releases happened since the signing

of the Joint Action Plan in 2012, with the first release of 42 underage children taking place in September of that year followed by groups of 24, 42, and another 42, 68 and 96 discharged in 2013 and 2014.

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