**Sudan: The continued use of child soldiers in the armed conflict in South Darfur**

The presence and participation of child soldiers was first evidenced during a gunfight between SAF and RSF at the SAF base in Furbarnaqa in June 2023. They were then cited in Division 16 in Nyala. Since then, the participation of children in the conflict has escalated as several children have been cited in Division 15 in Zalingei in Central Darfur, Division 21in Ardamata in West Darfur, and Division 20 Eldein in East Darfur among other states.

The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) was able to obtain names of community leaders in South Darfur who are affiliated with RSF and the names of RSF officers who are involved in the recruitment of children into the conflict, particularly in South Darfur, however, these have been concealed for security purposes. We also noted that the majority of the child soldiers were recruited from the areas of; Tembisko, Bulbul Abu Jazo, Sania Deliba, Kabra, Adal al-Fursan, Umm Jannah, Umm Zaifa, Umm Dafouk, Umm Dukhan, Rhyd al-Bardi and Furbarnaqa in South Darfur, Khazan Jadid located in Sheria locality North East of Nyala in South Darfur State, and Natika and Kas located West of Nyala.

Reliable sources informed ACJPS that the community leaders involved in recruitment on behalf of RSF are paid between 250,000 Sudanese Pounds (approximately 232 USD) to 400,000 Sudanese Pounds (approximately 357 USD) Per child. Some children interviewed by ACJPS confirmed that although they were promised payment, they have never been paid, leaving them with no choice but to participate in looting. Indeed, child soldiers have been cited while looting several areas in Nyala including the Al-Geneina Park market, the Popular Market, the Al-Jabal Market, and the main Market. Other affected areas are; Al-Jir, Khartoum Belil, Al-Istibaliyah, Al-Jumhuriya, Al-Cinema, and Al-Mazad,

**Testimonies**

ACJPS through a monitor/researcher on the ground was able to access Nyala town in South Darfur after it was seized by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) despite all the difficulties *“Although it is difficult to ascertain the actual number of child soldiers in Nyala, it is evident there is an increase of child soldiers patrolling the town following withdrawal of SAF from Division 16,”* he said.

One Mohamed (not real name) aged 15 years old from the Al-Wehda neighborhood in Nyala was interviewed. Mr. Mohamed informed ACJPS that he joined RSF through an officer known as Sadam Mohamed Yagoup Al-Nazir in the rank of Major in mid-June 2023. *“I was appointed as an RSF Military Intelligence personnel and tasked to monitor and report about other RSF officers and affiliates/collaborators. I was given a gun and a cellular communication device. I participated in the gunfights in October 2023 after which I absconded/quit for a short time and later re-joined after RSF seized and took control of the SAF headquarters also known as Division 16 on 26 October 2023. Currently, we (approximately 100 recruits) are undergoing training at the SAF gardens in Nyala,”* Mohamed disclosed. There was no mention of payment during the conversation.

Mr. Ali (not real name) aged 17 years old from the Al-Andlus neighborhood in Nyala, South Darfur State had this to say to ACJPS *“I joined the Rapid Support Forces on 28 October 2023 through an RSF official called Mohamed Zain. I joined together with approximately 200 others majority of whom were children. After we had been recruited, we started training every morning for at least two hours at the SAF headquarters in Nyala that RSF seized on 26 October 2023. Only groups that had joined earlier were allowed to carry weapons because they had been trained on how to operate them unlike, we the new recruits. We were also informed that those groups had participated in the gun battle that led to the capture of Division 16. On 31 October 2023, three child soldiers from our group were killed in Zalingei during a gunfight. We were promised two months’ pay but we are yet to be paid”*

 Mr. Abdallah (not real name) aged 17 years old from the Kabra area of Central Darfur State narrated his experience to ACJPS *“I joined RSF on 4 July 2023 because I was looking for a way to make a living after the outbreak of the armed conflict which disrupted my sources of income. The recruitment and registration process were supervised by one of the tribal leaders and a Sheikh called Mr. Ajeeb who is a triable Shiekh. I was trained and am now able to use and operate an automatic gun. During the training, we were told that the money from all the banks in Nyala had been transferred to SAF headquarters and that we had to fight to get that money. However, in September, I quit because I could not fight anymore,”*

Mr. Hasan (not real name) aged 16 years old from Kas locality located East of Nyala in South Darfur, told ACJPS that *“sometime in August 2023, I decided to join RSF. I went and registered through an officer called Mr. Abdallah Idris also known as Bata. Mr. Bata is also a community leader and Mayor. We participated in several attacks in Nyala after we were trained on how to use automatic guns known as Kalashnikovs. During these attacks, we have lost several colleagues. We were promised a pay on condition that we successfully besiege the SAF headquarters. Although the goal was achieved, we still haven't got paid to date,"*

ACJPS reiterates its calls to the Sudanese authorities and the RSF are to take immediate steps to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law ratified by Sudan and end all recruitment of children, demobilize or release all children from their ranks, and facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The international community, particularly, the Committee on the Rights of a Child and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of a Child should strongly condemn violations against children in Sudan and demand that all parties uphold their obligations under the regional and international human rights treaties.