**Zalingi, Central Darfur: Urgent call to RSF to end the recruitment of child soldiers**

The African Center for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS) expresses deep concern over the surge in the recruitment of child soldiers in the Darfur region, specifically in Central Darfur since the outbreak of the armed conflict in April 2023. ACJPS is reliably informed that the recruitment, mainly by the Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) follows the same methodology used by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the remobilization of the Popular Defense Forces (PDF) in Darfur following its calls to join them. The recruitment of child soldiers to join the RSF is facilitated by the native administration members who are either in the PDF or are RSF officers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

On 13 November 2023, the RSF released a video of a man named Ahmed Adam Abdul Gadir, aged 60 years old. Mr. Ahmed used to work as a coordinator in the PDF in North Darfur. He is the mayor of Azgrfa village occupied by the Barti tribe. ACJPS documented Mr. Ahmed’s arrest by RSF on 20 September 2023 while on his way back from the Umkadada locality, located East of El-Fashir, the capital of North Darfur State. In the video, Mr. Ahmed talks about his role in the mobilization of PDF members in North Darfur to join SAF following a request from a Sudanese Military Intelligence high command officer.

ACJPS monitoring indicates that recruitment of child soldiers by RSF in Central Darfur state is facilitated by the native administration members affiliated with RSF after the break out of the April 2023 war. ACJPS documented the recruitment of two child soldiers in Zalingi city along with their father in the RSF rank. Both children got injured while participating in the armed fight. Several other child soldiers have been seen at RSF checkpoints. During monitoring, ACJPS confirmed the presence of at least ten child soldiers at checkpoints in the town bridge of Zalingi and in front of the appeal court building.

Members of the native administrations affiliated with the RSF are from both the Arab and Fur tribes. They are playing the role of recruitment of child soldiers from different localities in Central Darfur including the Zalingi neighborhood, Aringa Hella Bida, Wad Salih, Umdakhon, and Saraf Omrah localities. The children are then taken for military training in Zalingi city in the public housing neighborhood located in the western direction of the town, West neighborhood, the old stadium in addition to the premises of the Faculty of Education of Zalingi University. For their participation in the fights, they are paid a fee starting from 10, 000 Sudanese Pounds.

The appearance of the child soldiers among RSF officers in Central Darfur started on 17 May 2023 during their fight with SAF in Zalingi city. Ahmed (not a real name), told ACJPS that after the RSF took control of SAF headquarters, he saw one of his students aged 17 years old with RSF officers. Additionally, a human rights defender in Central Darfur informed ACJPS he has seen at least eight child soldiers in RSF cars since 30October 2023. ACJPS recently documented the recruitment of child soldiers in South and Central Darfur state.

ACJPS calls upon the RSF to take immediate steps to comply with international human rights and humanitarian law ratified by Sudan by ending all recruitment of children, demobilizing or releasing all children from their ranks, and facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. We also urge 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 to strongly condemn violations against children in Sudan and demand that all parties uphold their obligations under the regional and international human rights treaties.

**Background**

Conflict-related violations against children have been happening in Sudan for decades. However, the situation took a turn for the worse when an armed conflict broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on 15 April 2023. The warring parties have been involved in the commission of grave violations against children including the recruitment of child soldiers. Regardless of how children are recruited and their roles, child soldiers are victims, whose participation in conflict bears serious implications for their physical and emotional well-being. The children are commonly subjected to abuse and most of them witness death, killing, and sexual violence. Many are forced to commit violent acts against other children and civilians and consequently suffer serious long-term psychological consequences from such violations.

1. Popular Defense Forces was created by the Sudanese Islamic Movement in November 1989 six months after the June 30, 1989 coup led by former Sudanese President Omer Al Bashir. They played a big role in the fight between the Sudanese Government in power at that time and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement led by the late Dr. John Garang. After the political civil war that started in 1983 to the Jihadist war, the PDF training and service was adopted as an obligation duty to all students joining the Universities and to public servants while for the Islamic Movement or the ruling party members, it fell as parallel duties to the membership affiliation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)