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Statement by the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, H.E Olof Skoog, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations, on the mission of the Working Group to South Sudan, 4-7 November 2018.

The conflict in South Sudan has had a devastating effect on the children in the country and has left deep scars in the next generation. The Revitalized Peace Agreement represents an opportunity to turn a corner and make the protection of children a priority as the country moves forward.

The Working Group met with senior Government officials, including with the First Vice President H.E M. Taban Deng Gai, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Gender Child and Social Welfare, the Chief of Defense Forces and Head of the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF), the Inspector General of the Police, the Chairperson of the National DDR Commission, the Governors of Boma and Jonglei as well as representatives of other relevant ministries and security forces.

The Working Group also had the chance to visit reintegration programmes including vocational centers for children previously recruited or used by parties to conflict in Pibor and Bor as well as to engage with the Co-Chairs of the United Nations Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) – UNMISS and UNICEF – with other UN representatives, international and local NGOs, faith-based organizations and with the diplomatic community through the Group of Friends of Children and Armed Conflict in Juba.

We are encouraged by the commitment to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict in South Sudan expressed by our interlocutors, and the demobilisation, release and reintegration of hundreds of children in 2018 and the recent accession by the Government to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on Children in Armed Conflict.

We have presented recommendations to the Government on the way forward, including:

- work with the United Nations to expand the current Action Plan into a comprehensive Action Plan that would address all six grave violations¹ in order to end and prevent all violations and abuses against children;
- revitalize the inter-ministerial high-level and technical committees at National and State level before the end of the year, as these committees will be key in developing and overseeing the implementation of the Action Plan together with the United Nations;
- continue to facilitate the release and reintegration of children as part of the implementation of the Revitalized Peace Agreement (R-ARCSS) and allocate sufficient funds to the reintegration of children formerly associated with armed forces or armed groups into their communities;

¹ The six grave violations are: Recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian access to children ²

- enhance accountability by enforcing existing national legislation and establishing specialized national capacity within key civilian and military justice authorities that would be able to investigate and prosecute serious conflict-related cases, including grave violations against children;
- criminalize the six grave violations against children in the upcoming review of the Penal Code;
- strengthen birth registration by ensuring that the Civil Registry Law is passed into law.

In addition, the delegation encouraged further engagement by the UN CTFMR with the pro-Machar SPLA-IO faction on the Action Plan on recruitment and use and killing and maiming signed with the United Nations in 2015.

In Bor and Pibor, the Working Group had the chance to meet with children affected by armed conflict that have been released from parties to conflict during 2018 and that are now benefitting from reintegration support by UNICEF and implementing partners.

The delegation could see first-hand the immense challenges faced by the child protection actors working in the conflict-affected area to meet the reintegration needs of the many children released, including psycho-social support and programmes that address the specific needs of girls and boys. The working group acknowledged and congratulated the often life-saving efforts made for children by humanitarian actors, often at great personal risk. The working group encouraged the donor community to step-up their commitment to reintegration programming, in particular in light of the peace agreement, which may enable the release of more children in the coming months.

These challenges were reiterated in conversations with international and national NGOs as well as with faith-based organisations, who urged the Government and the international community to place children, as the future of the country, at the heart of the peace process and invest in reintegration and education.

The delegation welcomed the momentum provided by the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict in Juba, composed in-country diplomatic delegations, and encouraged the group to continue to engage with parties to conflict, in particular with the Government, and follow-up on the visit of the Working Group.

The Security Council Working Group looks forward to continuing its engagement with South Sudan.
Note to editors:

Established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed conflict has a mandate to review the reports of the UN Secretary-General and other pertinent information concerning grave violations against children affected by armed conflict around the world and to make recommendations to Governments and other parties to armed conflict with regard to such violations.

In line with its mandate, the Security Council Working Group undertook the visit to South Sudan to assess first-hand the situation of children affected by the armed conflict, to advocate with parties to conflict to

improve the protection of children and to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the CTFMR in the implementation of the UN Security Council mandate on children and armed conflict in South Sudan. During 2018, the Security-Council Working Group will negotiate conclusions on Children and Armed Conflict in South Sudan based on the UN Secretary General's Report on Children and Armed Conflict (S/2018/865).

For more information, please, contact:

*Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
communications officer Fabienne Vinet at vinet@un.org*

UNMISS Acting Spokesperson Francesca Mold at mold2@un.org

UNICEF communications specialist James Aldworth at jaldworth@unicef.org