



# United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

## Media & Spokesperson Unit

### Press Release

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#### UNMISS welcomes release of hundreds of former child soldiers in Yambio

More than 300 child soldiers have today been officially released by armed groups in Yambio to begin reintegrating into their communities and learning new skills to support themselves, according to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan.

“Children should not be carrying guns and killing each other. They should be playing, learning, having fun with friends, protected and cherished by the adults around them,” said the UN’s Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMISS, David Shearer.

A total of 700 children have been screened and registered for release in phases - 563 from the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) and 137 associated with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army In-Opposition (SPLA-IO). The first phase of the release project involving 311 young people was today marked at a ceremony in Yambio.

Eighty seven of the children released today are girls with the final total involved in the Yambio project expected to reach 220.

“This is the first time so many young women have been involved in a release like this in South Sudan,” said David Shearer. “They will have endured suffering, including sexual abuse. It is vital that they receive the support they need to rejoin their communities and that they are welcomed home by family and friends without any sense of stigma.”

UNMISS has been leading the project to release the children for more than six months, including providing peacekeeping troops to escort religious leaders into remote bush areas to make contact and negotiate with the armed groups. It has also worked closely with other key partners such as UNICEF, state and local authorities as well as community groups.

“Without the combined effort of all of these partners, today’s release would not have been possible,” said David Shearer. “I would like to pay particular credit to religious leaders who travelled into conflict zones and risked their own lives to bring these children to safety.”

David Shearer said the challenge ahead is to ensure the young people have the financial, practical, and emotional support they need to undertake training, find jobs, and access the opportunities they deserve to reach their full potential.

To assist in this process, UNMISS engineers have rehabilitated the road between Yambio and a nearby vocational training center so the young people can travel safely for training. UNMISS is also progressing other projects to release child soldiers over the coming months in Morobo, Bentiu, and in Pibor where 315 have been verified and registered so far.

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