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**Ongoing Underage Recruitment and Use by the Myanmar Military and  
Non-State Armed Groups:  
Briefing for the UN Secretary General's Annual Report on Children and  
Armed Conflict - March 2016**

**Summary of concerns**

Myanmar's November 2015 Parliamentary election resulted in a sweeping victory for the National League of Democracy (NLD), generating hopes that the new NLD-led government will bring about a demonstrable improvement in the country's human rights situation. Child Soldiers International has documented the widespread recruitment and use of children as soldiers in Myanmar for over a decade, and believes that the new government needs to make a renewed commitment to ensure that the *Tatmadaw Kyi* (Myanmar military) becomes a child-free army.

Almost four years since the UN and the Myanmar government signed a Joint Action Plan (JAP) to end the recruitment and use of children in June 2012, children continue to be present in the ranks of the *Tatmadaw Kyi* as well as non-state armed groups (NSAGs), although recent trends indicate that active recruitment of children by the *Tatmadaw kyi* appears to have significantly reduced. The *Tatmadaw Kyi* discharged 146 children in three separate releases in 2015, and a further 46 on 12 March 2016, bringing the total number of children discharged since the signing of the JAP to 745. Due to an absence of comprehensive monitoring, it is not currently possible to determine the number of children present in the ranks of the Border Guard Forces (BGF). However, the BGF discharged one child in 2015, indicating that other children may also remain in the ranks.

Nonetheless, children continue to be unlawfully recruited into the *Tatmadaw Kyi*; **210** cases of "suspected minors" were reported by the Country Task Force for Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR) for age verification in 2015. The CTFMR received complaints on these cases through its public phone line, the forced labour complaint mechanism of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and community monitoring initiatives. Ongoing armed conflict in Kachin and Shan states, related insecurity and high levels of attrition have ensured that the *Tatmadaw Kyi* is under pressure to maintain its troop strength, thereby necessitating ongoing recruitment, including of children.

Child Soldiers International also received reports of increased recruitment by NSAGs, including of children, in the backdrop of escalating conflict between the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Shan State Progressive Party / Shan State Army North, and the Palaung State Liberation Front / Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA); and between joint Myanmar military-Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army South forces and the TNLA since September 2015.

This 'recruitment economy' has contributed to the creation of a network of informal recruitment agents (civilian brokers), who receive payments for delivering new recruits to the *Tatmadaw Kyi*. Over the course of 2015, the use of civilian brokers continued to be reported with no movement to clarify the legal avenues to hold civilian brokers accountable. It has also generated pressure on

recruiting officers to ignore national legal restrictions of the minimum recruitment age, in a context where adults are unwilling to volunteer and where accountability mechanisms designed to deter underage recruitment have been lax. Despite welcome measures to spread greater awareness about the unlawfulness of underage recruitment, including through the operationalising of a more centralised system for recruitment, children continue to be among those forcibly recruited, and remain easier to trick and more susceptible to pressure to enlist than adults. Where children from economically deprived or troubled backgrounds have volunteered for enlistment, the absence of rigorous enforcement of safeguards has facilitated their recruitment.

Information gathered by Child Soldiers International shows that military officers and civilian brokers continue to use deliberate misrepresentation, intimidation, coercion and enticement to obtain new recruits, including children. Civilian brokers have frequently recruited boys under false pretences, often offering them a different job, such as a driver.

ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) came into force in Myanmar on 18 December 2014 following ratification by the Myanmar government in 2013. However, the necessary implementing legislative framework has yet to be put in place. In particular, the accountability framework with regard to the prosecution of civilian brokers remains vague.

## **Child Soldiers International has the following serious concerns regarding underage recruitment and use in Myanmar**

### **Ongoing recruitment of children**

Research conducted by Child Soldiers International in January 2016 shows that children continue to be unlawfully recruited into the ranks of the *Tatmadaw Kyi*, although reported cases of new recruitment are significantly lower in comparison to previous years. For the period January-December 2015, 210 cases of ‘suspected minors’ were reported to the *Tatmadaw Kyi* by the CTFMR but only three cases of new recruitment have so far been verified for this period. The CTFMR received new information regarding cases of children recruited in 2014, bringing the total number of new recruitments in 2014 to 29 as compared to the 17 previously reported.

Information received by Child Soldiers International shows that due to on-going conflicts, new recruits, both adults and children, continue to be deployed to the front lines, including recently in southern Shan state.

### **Slow identification and release of underage recruits despite increased awareness**

A total of 745 children and young adults recruited as children have been released from the *Tatmadaw Kyi* under the Joint Action Plan since it was signed in June 2012.<sup>1</sup> These include 146 children and young adults released in 2015 through discharges made in January, June and November.<sup>2</sup> A majority of cases are identified through complaints of underage recruitment made

<sup>1</sup> Forty-six (46) children released by Myanmar army, UNICEF, 12 March 2016, [http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media\\_25304.html](http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media_25304.html)

<sup>2</sup> Fifty-three children released by Myanmar army, UNICEF, 30 November 2015, [http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media\\_24942.html](http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/media_24942.html). This acceleration in discharges is said partially to be due to the new tripartite case-management meeting, which has occurred on a monthly basis between the CTFMR, *Tatmadaw*-MOD and Ministry of Immigration since August 2014.

to a public hotline number.<sup>3</sup> A small number of cases stem from direct interventions made by parents following training and awareness raising sessions conducted by the ILO.

Despite a commitment to promptly identify, verify and release children under the Joint Action Plan, the number of children identified and released remains very low when compared to reported high levels of child recruitment in the past. This limited number is partially a result of the age limit relating to underage recruits under the JAP<sup>4</sup> and the fact that, since a large number of individuals recruited as children are now in their 20s or older, they are covered under the ILO's Forced Labour Complaints Mechanism.<sup>5</sup> In addition, some individuals recruited as children who are now adults are presented with a choice to remain in the military and some of them choose to stay.

While processes to verify and release children under the Joint Action Plan apply to both the BGFs and the *Tatmadaw Kyi*, it remains unclear whether members of all BGFs are aware of these mechanisms and so far only one child has been released from its ranks.<sup>6</sup> The CTFMR conducted monitoring missions to areas under the command and control of seven BGFs<sup>7</sup> in 2015 and did not identify children present in the ranks of those monitored.<sup>8</sup>

The *Tatmadaw Kyi* has incorporated information on preventing underage recruitment into training programs for military personnel, and Sergeants and Corporals receiving annual training on this issue.<sup>9</sup> Military focal points (of the rank of Lt. Colonel) located in the 14 Regional Military Commands (RMCs), all Adjutant Officers from the RMC who are responsible for staff administration and Battalion commanders and quarter masters in every battalion have been provided training in prevention of underage recruitment and implementation of the JAP.<sup>10</sup> Additional Directives on ending underage recruitment and use issued by the Commander-in-Chief are reportedly widely disseminated.<sup>11</sup> In her March 2016 report to the UN Human Rights Council, the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar Yanghee Lee noted that according to the Ministry of Defence, "18,699 members of the military have received training on preventing underage recruitment."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In November 2013, the UN CTFMR supported the Myanmar government to launch a nation-wide campaign to raise awareness on its commitment to end the recruitment and use of children by the *Tatmadaw Kyi*. As part of this campaign, and on behalf of the UN CTFMR, UNICEF and World Vision are managing two hotlines (09-421166701 and 09-421166702) where anyone can report suspected cases of children recruited by the *Tatmadaw Kyi*.

<sup>4</sup> Under the JAP, the government commits to discharge from service those under the age of 18.

<sup>5</sup> The ILO has received 962 complaints of underage recruitment from February 2007 until September 2013. In addition, other UN organisations, including UNICEF, have received reports.

<sup>6</sup> In 2011, BGFs were named for the first time in the UN Secretary-General's annexes to his annual report on children and armed conflict (together with the *Tatmadaw Kyi*) as parties that recruit and use children in armed conflict. UN GA, Annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/65/820-S/2011/250, 23 April 2011, Annex I.

<sup>7</sup> There are 23 BGFs in Myanmar out of which monitoring has been conducted in BGFs 1008, 1009, 1010 (Eastern Shan), and BGFs 1011, 1012, 1015, 1016 (Kayah state). No access has been possible in areas where conflict is continuing namely the Southern Shan and Kachin states.

<sup>8</sup> Child Soldiers International, confidential interviews, January 2016, London.

<sup>9</sup> Child Soldiers International, Meeting with Myanmar government delegation led by Major General Than Soe, Deputy Adjutant General, Ministry of Defence, Naypyitaw, 10 December 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Child Soldiers International, Interview with Major General Ngwe Thein, Director, Directorate of Military Strength, Naypyitaw, 10 September 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Child Soldiers International interview with UN CTFMR representative, May 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, UN Doc. A/HRC/31/71, 8 March 2016, para 61,

[http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A.HRC.31.71\\_AEV.docx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A.HRC.31.71_AEV.docx)

The Myanmar military is required to follow agreed protocols<sup>13</sup> for identifying underage recruits in a battalion or recruitment centres, including identification by the officers and self-identification by the children. In practice, the number of cases identified by the Tatmadaw as part of the agreed procedures rose to 28 by April 2015, however in September 2015 only one case was reported by the Tatmadaw.<sup>14</sup> This is said to occur due to a variety of reasons, which include a fear of accountability within the *Tatmadaw Kyi*. In 2015, nine children came forward within the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and identified themselves as underage; of these one was reportedly intimidated to withdraw his complaint by officers. In the past, children have been threatened, beaten, handcuffed and on occasion forced to take on duties involving hard labour after self-identification.<sup>15</sup>

In theory, those tasked with verifying the age of recruits with Township authorities and the child's parents, which include the Sergeant Clerk, Adjutant Battalion or Battalion Commander are said to have received monthly trainings on the age verification process which should leave little room for malpractice. However, widespread corruption within Township authorities and the significant, if unofficial, influence that the military exerts on them ensures that documentation is often falsified and an accurate proof of age is seldom obtained. As a result, the *Tatmadaw Kyi's* progress in identifying children within its ranks has been slow.

Despite this, there has been some progress in terms of the *Tatmadaw Kyi's* recruitment procedures, as recruitment at the battalion level has now been prohibited and mobile units are no longer functional as a recruitment source.<sup>16</sup> Hence recruitment, as previously recommended by Child Soldiers International, is centralized through the four recruitment centres in the country.

### Ongoing falsification of identity documents

The practice of falsifying age documentation continues to be reported.<sup>17</sup> Some military personnel and civilian recruitment brokers reportedly forge documents before bringing children into recruitment centres. In other cases, recruiters are reported to have taken children to a different state to the one they are registered in and had a second Citizenship Scrutiny Card (CSC) or National Registration Card (NRC) issued in which the recruit is registered as 18 years old. Age verification documents are easily falsified at local photocopy shops, where templates of birth certificates, family lists and school registration forms are readily available.<sup>18</sup> Child Soldiers International understands that, in addition to age, recruiters falsely registered other information at the time of recruitment, for example altering the child's biographical information (i.e. the father's name) to make it more difficult for parents or the authorities to subsequently locate the child.<sup>19</sup> After their recruitment, children are often issued with a CSC containing false information.

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<sup>13</sup> Agreed procedures which form part of the work plan between the Myanmar military and the UN CTFMR incorporate processes which include: mass identification where officers are required to separate out and question those who visibly appear young in age; through a system of self-identification, where underage recruits can come forward and declare their age in response to announcements made by officials; and by carrying out a review of recruitment documentation to identify through a set of agreed procedures, the presence of an underage recruit in the battalion or recruitment centre.

<sup>14</sup> Child Soldiers International, confidential interviews, January 2016, London.

<sup>15</sup> Child Soldiers International, confidential interviews, January 2016, London.

<sup>16</sup> Child Soldiers International, Confidential interviews, January 21, 2016, London.

<sup>17</sup> Child Soldiers International, Confidential interviews, January 28, 2016, London.

<sup>18</sup> The ILO received testimony from a child who was taken by a recruitment officer to a copy shop near Mandalay train station where he observed documents being counterfeited to establish that he was over 18.

<sup>19</sup> See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Sold to be Soldiers: The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Burma*, October 2007, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2007/burma1007/burma1007webwcover.pdf>

The Myanmar government admitted in 2014 that the falsification of documents remained an ongoing problem but denied that this led to the recruitment of children since recruitment only took place “once the documents were checked and approved by officials from the Ministry of Immigration”.<sup>20</sup>

In its attempt to ensure that all recruitment files are complete and all soldiers have a CSC, the *Tatmadaw Kyi* works closely with the Ministry of Immigration to prepare identity documents in all cases. There may be very little or no substantiating documentation prior to the issuance of this card, so its veracity cannot be confirmed. Similarly, officials from the *Tatmadaw Kyi* regularly support new recruits to gather up all of their documentation. In a situation where a sergeant goes to a school administrator to request a copy of the School Testimonial, there is a high risk that intimidation or coercion will result in a document that supports the needs of *Tatmadaw Kyi*, resulting in the availability of numerous contradictory documents. In some cases, parents have also falsified documents to allow their child into school earlier or later than the rule, which also contributes to the confusion.

### Ongoing “use” of children without formal recruitment

The JAP explicitly identifies steps such as age verification practices and monitoring and oversight mechanisms to end the “recruitment and use” of children by the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and the BGFs. However, information gathered by Child Soldiers International shows that the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and other state security forces have continued to use children without formal recruitment into the armed forces.

In 2015, the use of underage children by the *Tatmadaw Kyi* was reported in Shan and Kayin states, however, these cases could not be verified.<sup>21</sup> Patterns of use of children have been reported from Rakhine state since 2013.<sup>22</sup> Members of the Rohingya community are specifically targeted. Although, as “non-citizens”,<sup>23</sup> they cannot be recruited into the army, the use of members of the Rohingya community as forced labour by the security forces has been documented.<sup>24</sup> In January 2016, Child Soldiers International received specific information on Rohingya children being subjected to forced labour by the *Tatmadaw Kyi*.

On 3 April 2015 a directive was issued by the *Tatmadaw* Commander in Chief specifically prohibiting the “use” of children.<sup>25</sup> Information received by Child Soldiers International shows that the directive has been disseminated widely, including among battalions posted in the

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<sup>20</sup> Child Soldiers International, Meeting with Myanmar government delegation led by Major General Than Soe, Deputy Adjutant General, Ministry of Defence, Naypyitaw, 10 December 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Information gathered by the UN CTFMR, December 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Widespread incidences of forced labour by the Myanmar military, Border Guard Police, Myanmar Police and township and village administrators have been reported in Arakan state. According to confidential information received by Child Soldiers International, nearly 2,000 children were subjected to forced labour in northern Arakan state in 2013, and nearly 400 cases have been reported in 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Myanmar’s 1982 Citizenship Law has effectively prevented ethnic Rohingya from obtaining Myanmar citizenship. Under this Law, children born to non-citizens do not obtain citizenship and in order for a Rohingya child to attain Myanmar citizenship, one parent must be a Myanmar citizen under three specified categories. “Burma Citizenship Law,” Chapter II, 15 October 1982, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b4f71b.html>. See also: *IRIN News*, “In Brief: 40,000 Rohingya children in Myanmar unregistered”, 19 January 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/94672/in-brief-40-000-rohingya-children-in-myanmar-unregistered>

<sup>24</sup> See for instance: The Arakan Project, *Forced labour during the Arakan crisis: An overview of forced labour practices in North Arakan, Burma (June to August 2012)*, 31 August, 2012, [http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/Arakan\\_Project-FL-Arakan\\_crisis.pdf](http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/Arakan_Project-FL-Arakan_crisis.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> The Directive is not on file with Child Soldiers International.

frontlines of the conflict in Shan and Kachin states.<sup>26</sup> The impact of this directive on the behaviour of the *Tatmadaw Kyi* remains to be assessed.

### Detention of former child soldiers

Child Soldiers International remains concerned that children who escape from the *Tatmadaw Kyi* continue to be detained and treated as adult deserters.<sup>27</sup> While commitments and policy directives regarding the arrest and prosecution of underage runaways have been issued at higher levels of government, this practice is not supported at the level of battalions and regiments, where such arrests continue to take place. Children arrested in this manner are charged with “desertion/Absent Without Leave (AWOL)” and “criminal action”.

In 2015, the CTFMR received information on six cases of the detention of children, one of whom was detained specifically for being “AWOL”.<sup>28</sup> While no specific orders have been issued requiring arresting officers to check the documentation of alleged deserters to ensure that they were indeed of legal age when recruited, there is a directive ordering officers not to arrest or perform any legal procedure and harass those in possession of an ILO protection letter, which is a letter issued by ILO stating that the individual should not be arrested on grounds of desertion.

Under the JAP, the Myanmar government agreed to share with the ILO on a regular basis a list of persons arrested or incarcerated for desertion, with a view to verify the legitimacy of that charge in respect of their age on recruitment; however, this has yet to occur on a regular basis.<sup>29</sup>

### Accountability

Limited accountability measures have so far failed to end child recruitment.

According to information received by the CTFMR, from January-December 2015, the *Tatmadaw Kyi* have reported accountability measures against 11 commissioned officers and 14 non-commissioned officers.<sup>30</sup> According to information provided by the Ministry of Defence in March 2016, “Military disciplinary actions were taken against a total of 382 military personnel which include 73 military officers and 309 other ranks in connection with underage recruitments.”<sup>31</sup> Under the ILO Complaints Mechanisms, since 2007, a total of 42 commissioned officers, 262 non-commissioner officers and 22 civilians have received punishments varying from a deduction in wages to a term of imprisonment.<sup>32</sup> However, these reports do not provide information on which specific cases they relate to or identify officials against whom action has been taken. As far as Child Soldiers International is aware, no accountability measures have been taken against soldiers and officials who have aided and abetted the recruitment of children.

<sup>26</sup> Child Soldiers International, Confidential interview, May 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, A/HRC/31/71, 8 March 2016, para 61, [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A.HRC.31.71\\_AEV.docx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session31/Documents/A.HRC.31.71_AEV.docx)

<sup>28</sup> Child Soldiers International, Confidential interview, London, 29 January 2016.

<sup>29</sup> ILO Governing Body 323<sup>rd</sup> Session, Geneva, 12-27 March 2015, UN.Doc. GB.323/INS/4.

<sup>30</sup> According to information provided by the *Tatmadaw Kyi* to the CTFMR, since the signing of the JAP, action has been taken against 352 military officers.

<sup>31</sup> Observations by Myanmar on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, A/HRC/31/71/Add.1, 8 March 2016, para 14, [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/71/Add.1](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/71/Add.1)

<sup>32</sup> Information provided by the *Tatmadaw Kyi* to the CTFMR.

No systematic and effective investigations or prosecutions have been initiated with regards to civilian brokers who play an important role in luring and forcing children to the military recruitment officers. This could partly be because of an absence of a clear legal avenue for prosecutions, which the CTFMR had been trying to address by advocating for a Presidential Decree to fill this gap. However, according to information provided by the Ministry of Defence in March 2016, “one civilian was sentenced for one year for assisting underage recruitment.”<sup>33</sup>

### Underage recruitment and use by non-state armed groups

Non-state armed groups active in several regions of Myanmar have been known to recruit children and use them in hostilities. Some of these groups are considered persistent perpetrators, having been listed for at least five years in the annexes of the UN Secretary-General’s annual reports on children and armed conflict. Research conducted by Child Soldiers International on three groups, the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) shows the continued practice of formal and informal association of children with these groups, coupled with the absence of effective age verification procedures, which places children at considerable risk of unlawful recruitment and participation in hostilities.<sup>34</sup> In meetings with Child Soldiers International in November 2015, KIA officials admitted that children continued to be recruited, and in some instances deployed to frontline posts, despite official policies prohibiting underage recruitment. They also stated that violations related to the recruitment and use of children tended to occur in posts located in more remote areas further away from the central headquarters.<sup>35</sup>

As the UN Security Council Working Group noted in its August 2013 conclusions,<sup>36</sup> the current efforts to resolve the armed conflicts in Myanmar constitute an important opportunity to address the issue of child soldiers. The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signed in October 2015 includes a provision to end forced labour and calls on parties to “avoid killing or maiming, forced conscription, rape or other forms of sexual assault or violence, or abduction of children.”<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

The *Tatmadaw Kyi* continues to face pressures to increase troop numbers and a system of incentive-based quotas drives a demand for recruitment. This puts children at particular risk. Most cases of underage recruitment in recent years have been as a result of coercion, with children being tricked or lured into the army through false promises. The practice of falsification of age documents, including NRCs, CSC and family lists, continues unchecked and no measures

<sup>33</sup> Observations by Myanmar on the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, A/HRC/31/71/Add.1, 8 March 2016, para 14, [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/71/Add.1](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/31/71/Add.1)

<sup>34</sup> Child Soldiers International, *A Dangerous Refuge: Child recruitment in the Kachin Independence Army*, June 2015; Child Soldiers International, *Chance for Change: Ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Myanmar*, January 2013, [http://child-soldiers.org/research\\_report\\_reader.php?id=624](http://child-soldiers.org/research_report_reader.php?id=624)

<sup>35</sup> Col Zaw Tung, Director of Tactical Military Research and member of the Kachin Independence Organisation Central Committee, and Col Yaw Htung, Joint Secretary of the Kachin Independence Council and Member of the Kachin Independence Organisation Central Committee, November 2015.

<sup>36</sup> UN Security Council, *Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, Conclusions on children and armed conflict in Myanmar*, UN. Doc. S/AC.51/2013/2, 16 August 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, October 2015, available at: <http://mmpeacemonitor.org/images/2015/oct/nca%20contract%20eng.pdf>

have been taken to establish accountability for this practice. Efforts to support the government with national birth registration campaigns in order to improve legal documentation needs to be strengthened.

Attempts to address accountability for underage recruitment and use in Myanmar remain limited. It remains unclear what legal procedures and models for investigation are used to prosecute military and civilian personnel for using, aiding and abetting the recruitment of children. Holding perpetrators of serious violations of the rights of children accountable remains the key gap in prevention.

## Key Recommendations

### Recommendations to the Myanmar government

- Implement the Joint Action Plan fully, resulting in the identification, registration and discharge of all children present in the ranks of the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and the BGFs;
- Provide the CTFMR with unimpeded access to its military sites and other areas where children may be present (such as military and civilian detention centres and prisons) to enable them to ensure there is full understanding of and implementation of the Joint Action Plan;
- Strengthen its efforts towards preventing future underage recruitment through: (a) strengthening recruitment procedures, especially by implementing Standard Operating Procedures on age verification within the army and the civilian police, and oversight across all recruitment sites in the country; (b) establishing a central database with personal information of individual *Tatmadaw Kyi* and BGF recruits; and (c) reforming the civil registration system to ensure that all children are registered at birth free of charge and without discrimination;
- As part of the Joint Action Plan, issue and disseminate directives on the prohibition of “use” of children to all military units. Strengthen the understanding of “use” and its prohibition in existing trainings, policies and operations, including requesting all units to substantively increase awareness on the issue during assemblies and monthly meetings;
- Immediately end the practice of harassing, detaining and imprisoning children on the grounds of desertion from the armed forces, and ensure their immediate and unconditional release; in particular, the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Home Affairs should issue a joint directive to all military and civilian police stations, stressing that suspected minors should not be arrested/detained for desertion and request that age assessments are carried out by military and civilian police before any arrest for desertion;
- Strengthen efforts to bring to justice those responsible for child recruitment or use by the *Tatmadaw Kyi* and the BGFs, including those with command responsibility and civilian brokers who assist in the unlawful recruitment of children;
- Allow and facilitate access by the CTFMR and other independent humanitarian organisations to non-state armed groups in order to enable the negotiation of action plans and other measures, and to monitor and verify reports of child recruitment and use;



- Ensure the safe release and reintegration of children associated with these groups;
- Fully incorporate child protection throughout peace and ceasefire agreements and in mechanisms aimed at monitoring their implementation. In particular, recruitment and use of children should be considered a violation of the NCA. The Nationwide Ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee should, with the support of the CTFMR have an explicit mandate to monitor such violations and to report them to the UN through current mechanisms, namely the 1612 Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the ILO's Supplementary Understanding;
- Ratify without delay the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.
- Introduce in Parliament and adopt without delay the Child Law to strengthen accountability on the involvement of children in situations of armed conflict.

### **Recommendations to Non-State Armed Groups**

- Fully incorporate child protection throughout peace and ceasefire agreements and in mechanisms aimed at monitoring their implementation. In particular, recruitment and use of children should be considered a violation of the NCA. The Nationwide Ceasefire Joint Monitoring Committee should, with the support of the CTFMR have an explicit mandate to monitor such violations and to report them to the UN through current mechanisms, namely the 1612 Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism and the ILO's Supplementary Understanding;
- Issue, publish and widely disseminate orders to all members of armed groups to refrain from recruiting or using children in hostilities;
- Ensure that children do not take part in military operations and are removed from frontline operations with immediate effect;
- Facilitate access to the UN and other independent humanitarian organisations for the purpose of identifying ways forward to rehabilitate all under-age recruits back into the community, and concluding action plans.