



## **ACTION PLAN SIGNED TO END RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN BY THE MYANMAR ARMED FORCES**

### **Watchlist calls for an inclusive and transparent implementation**

**New York City, 29 June 2012** – On Wednesday, the Government of Myanmar signed an Action Plan with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of children by its armed forces, the Tatmadaw Kyi.

An Action Plan is a time-bound agreement that lists concrete activities and benchmarks to ensure the release of all children from the ranks of an armed party, and sets in place a range of preventative measures to avoid future recruitment. The successful completion of an Action Plan results in the delisting of the armed party from the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict.

“The Myanmar armed forces have recruited and used children as soldiers consistently for more than 20 years”, says Eva Smets, Director of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, an international network of non-governmental organizations advocating for children's rights in armed conflicts. “While the law is clear in prohibiting under-age recruitment, a treacherous policy of recruitment quotas has turned the recruitment of children into a profitable activity. A network of intermediaries coerces children into joining the army or lures them with promises of food, shelter and a salary. As a result of weak penalties, local commanders often choose child recruitment over the failure to meet their recruitment quotas, which carries harsher penalties”.

With the signature of this Action Plan, the Myanmar armed forces commit to release all children from their ranks. It also grants the UN unimpeded access to military sites for monitoring purposes.

“We hope that the Action Plan will end the practice of quotas for recruitment, and ensure that all army recruitment is voluntary and over the age of 18” - says Saw Albert Moo from the Karen Human Rights Group, a local non-governmental organization active in eastern Myanmar - “We also believe that local communities have an important role to play in the implementation of the Action Plan, particularly in areas of the country that remain largely inaccessible. The process should be well-publicized to increase public confidence in the measures being taken”.

The signature of the Action Plan comes after several years of negotiations. The Tatmadaw Kyi has been listed in annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict since they first appeared in 2005. The Myanmar armed forces are one of the “persistent perpetrators” - armed forces or groups that have been listed for five years or more.

This reality may soon change, provided that the Action Plan is implemented in an effective and transparent way.

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*Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict*, established in 2001, is an international network of non-governmental organizations striving to end violations against children in armed conflicts and to



guarantee their rights. As a global network, Watchlist builds partnerships among local, national and international NGOs, enhancing mutual capacities and strengths. Working together, we strategically collect and disseminate information on violations against children in conflicts to influence key decision-makers to create and implement programs and policies that effectively protect children.

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