**Beat: Health**

# UNICEF enabled Hundreds of children released from armed groups in South Sudan

**Over 500 children released since 2018**

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**USPA NEWS -** More than 200 children were released by armed groups in South Sudan on Tuesday. This was the second release of children in a series, supported by UNICEF, that will see almost 1,000 children released from the ranks of armed groups in the coming months.
The first release of children took place in Yambio Town in early February, where more than 300 children were released to return to their families, or to UNICEF-supported care centres. This latest release of a further 207 children continues that effort and took place in a rural community called Bakiwiri, about an hour´s drive from Yambio, in Western Equatoria State.

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During the ceremony, the children were formally disarmed and provided with civilian clothes. Medical screenings will now be carried out, and children will receive counselling and psychosocial support as part of the reintegration programme, which is implemented by UNICEF and partners.----------
When the children return to their homes, their families will be provided with three months´ worth of food assistance to support their initial reintegration. The children will also be provided with vocational training aimed at improving household income and food security. Being unable to support themselves economically can be a key factor in children becoming associated with armed groups. In addition to services related to livelihoods, UNICEF and partners will ensure the released children have access to age-specific education services in schools and accelerated learning centres.----------
“UNICEF, UNMISS and government partners have negotiated tirelessly with parties to the conflict so as to enable this release of children“ said Mr. Mdoe. “But the work does not stop here. The reintegration process is a delicate one and we must now ensure the children have all the support they need to make a success of their lives.“ ----------
The 207 children released (112 boys, 95 girls), were from the ranks of the South Sudan National Liberation Movement (SSNLM) - which in 2016 signed a peace agreement with the Government and is now integrating its ranks into the national army - and from the Sudan People´s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO). An upsurge of fighting in July 2016 stalled the original plans to release children, but momentum is now building for further releases in the future.----------
Despite this progress, there are still around 19,000 children serving in the ranks of armed forces and groups in South Sudan. So long as the recruitment and use of children by armed groups continues, these groups fail on their commitment to uphold the rights of children under international law. As peace talks resume and the future of the transitional government is debated, UNICEF urges all parties to the conflict to end the recruitment of children and to release all children in their ranks.
Adequate funding for UNICEF´s release programme is also essential. UNICEF South Sudan requires US$45 million to support release, demobilization and reintegration of 19,000 children over the next three years. With APO Group, and behalf of United Nations Children´s Fund (UNICEF).

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UPA United Press Agency LTD
483 Green Lanes
UK, London N13NV 4BS
contact (at) unitedpressagency.com
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