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**TO:** Lt. Gen. Rabi Mujung Emmanuel (TGoNU)  
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**FROM:** The Chairperson, CTSAMVM

**DATE:** 16 March 2022

**SUBJECT: CTSAMVM REPORT 2022/08 – INTERIM REPORT ON FORCED RECRUITMENT BY THE SSPDF**

Dear CTSAMVM Technical Committee Senior Party Representatives,

Please find attached an interim report concerning the forced recruitment of young men in Unity and Lakes States.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Brigadier General Saeed Mohamed Alshiekh  
Deputy Chairperson



**Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring and Verification Mechanism**

## **CTSAMVM REPORT 2021/08**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **INTERIM REPORT ON FORCED RECRUITMENT BY THE SSPDF**

Towards the end of 2021 CTSAMVM became aware of persistent rumours and allegations of forced recruitment by the SSPDF in the Bentiu area, specifically in and around the IDP camp.

Investigations have been hampered by the unwillingness of witnesses to give information, because they are scared of repercussions. However, CTSAMVM has gathered some witness statements from relatives and from one victim to suggest there has been forced recruitment in the area.

The SSPDF have denied any forced recruitment, but have said members of armed groups were flown to Juba for integration into the SSPDF, and that the SSPDF had been rounding up “deserters”.

Last October CTSAMVM interviewed ten young men, some probably underage, who had deserted from the SSPDF base in Nassir. They all claimed to have been forcibly recruited in Lakes State in 2021.

There have been allegations that the SSPDF has been training recruits at Digala, near Juba. CTSAMVM has been denied access to Digala since September 2021.

Any recruitment and training since September 2018 is in clear violation of the R-ARCSS. Forced recruitment is in clear violation of the R-ARCSS. CTSAMVM will continue to investigate this issue and report accordingly.



## INTERIM REPORT ON FORCED RECRUITMENT BY THE SSPDF

### Introduction

#### 1. Background:

- a. Under article 2.1.8 of the R-ARCSS, the Parties agreed to “cease security forces recruitment and training”. Any forced recruitment – IE recruiting civilians against their will – would not only be in violation of article 2.1.8 but also those provisions of article 2.1.10 which protect the rights of civilians.
- b. Since the signing of the ACOH CTSAMVM has received many allegations of forced recruitment by the Parties. It had proved to be a challenging issue to investigate; the Parties are unwilling to cooperate and too often witnesses unwilling to talk to CTSAMVM for fear of reprisals. CTSAMVM was able to provide a detailed report on forced recruitment by the SPLM/A-IO in Western Equatoria State (CTSAMVM report 2022/03), however, CTSAMVM has not so far submitted a report on forced recruitment by the SSPDF.
- c. During 2020 there were allegations of forced recruitment in Unity State, specifically in the Bentiu/Rubkona areas. CTSAMVM undertook an investigation but was unable to find any evidence it had been taking place. SSPDF commanders told CTSAMVM that “deserters” or soldiers who had left the SSPDF to return to their villages had been brought back to their units, but no actual new recruitment had taken place.
- d. Towards the end of 2021 and into 2022 CTSAMVM became aware of more persistent allegations of recruitment in the Bentiu/Rubkona areas, and in particular in the IDP camp. On 25 January 2022 the Bentiu IDF Youth Forum issued a press statement which condemned the “rampant” arrest of young people by the armed forces.
- e. In September 2021 CTSAMVM received allegations from the SPLM/A-IO that the SSPDF was training “new recruits” in Digala. CTSAMVM has so far been

denied access to Digala, and indeed on 8 February 2022 was turned back at gunpoint whilst attempting a visit (CTSAMVM Report 2022/06)

- f. On 22 September 2021 10 SSPDF soldiers deserted the SSPDF camp at Nassir and were held by the SPLM/A-IO in Ulang. They all claimed to have been forcibly recruited by the SSPDF in Lakes State. Despite appeals to various international agencies to take them, the deserters remained in Ulang until the end of January 2022 when they were sent back home by the SPLM/A-IO authorities.

2. Allegations: The specific allegations covered in this interim report are that:

- a. The SSPDF forcibly recruited young men from the Bentiu/Rubkona areas including the IDP camp and flew them to Juba for training and subsequent deployment.
- b. That the 10 deserters from Nassir were forcibly recruited in Lakes State, and furthermore some were underage.

3. Aim: The aim of this interim report is to present initial findings of CTSAMVM investigations into allegations of forced recruitment by the SSPDF, and to seek the cooperation of the SSPDF for further investigations.

4. Methodology:

- a. Unity State: CTSAMVM spoke to a range of witnesses between 14 February and 7 March 2022 including:
  - i. The Bentiu IDP Youth Group.
  - ii. GOC 4 Division SSPDF
  - iii. IDP Camp Joint Police
  - iv. Family members of those recruited.



v. A victim.

5. Upper Nile State: CTSAMVM interviewed 10 deserters from the SSPDF garrison in Nassir, all of whom claimed to have been forcibly recruited in Lakes State.

6. Limitations:

- a. CTSAMVM has found it difficult to find witnesses in Unity State willing to give information about what is a sensitive issue. People are scared of repercussions.
- b. CTSAMVM has been denied access by the SSPDF to Digala where is has been alleged recruits have been trained.

### **Findings - Unity State**

7. The Bentiu IDP Youth Group reported to CTSAMVM that:

- a. In mid-January 2022 they received complaints from families of young people being abducted by security forces at night in the IDP camp.
- b. Some young people stopped using the IDP camp library and sports facilities in the evening for fear of abduction.
- c. On 28 January 2022 the Youth Group held a peaceful protest and met with security forces, who denied they had been abducting young people, but only rounding up “deserters”. The Youth Group were shown no list of deserters.
- d. Some business people were abducted, but were later released following the payment of a fine.
- e. They had a list of 11 people allegedly recruited and the names of the family members who had reported them missing. CTSAMVM was given the list.

8. CTSAMVM has so far been able to speak with the family members of two abductees and directly to one abductee:

- a. A woman resident of the IDP camp reported that her 16 year-old nephew (who has lived with her since 2016) was abducted by the SSPDF with others in December 2021 whilst shopping in the market at Rubkona prior to returning to school. He was taken to SSPDF 4<sup>th</sup> Division HQ in Rubkona where he was held overnight. The woman tried to visit him at the barracks but was turned away. The boy was flown to Juba the next day. Some days after that she heard from a relative that he was in a barracks in Juba. The last she heard from him was on 15 February 2022: he said he had escaped from the barracks and did not know his exact location and was hiding for fear of arrest but said he was in Juba. He was trying to get back home.
- b. A male resident of the IDP camp told a similar story about his 16 year-old cousin who was taken by the SSPDF in Rubkona in November 2021 and then sent to Juba. The family were shocked but only reported the incident to their block leader in the camp because they did not trust the Joint Police who they said were involved in the abductions. The last time the man heard from his cousin he said he was in an SSPDF Barracks in Juba, but he did not know where.
- c. CTSAMVM was able to speak directly to an abductee, albeit by telephone. The young man (age not specified) said he was “recruited” by the SSPDF in Rubkona market in November 2021, taken to SSPDF 4<sup>th</sup> Division and then sent to Juba. He said that he was told by the SSPDF that he was in an SSPDF-aligned armed group called “Tong” which was being integrated into the SSPDF. He described how he was flown to Juba with 144 others and taken to an SSPDF barracks near Juba. He was unable to say exactly where the barracks were. He escaped with two others and is currently in Juba.

9. SSPDF: Maj Gen John Maluit Wic Gatyang, commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Division SSPDF, denied that there was any forced recruitment in the area. However, he said that:



- a. The SSPDF had been collecting deserters.
  - b. Members of SSPDF-aligned armed groups who had been gathered at Tong (before it flooded) were being integrated into the SSPDF and had been sent to Juba.
10. IDP Joint Police Commander: CTSAMVM met with the commander of the Joint Police in the IDP camp. He said that there was recruitment by SSPDF-aligned armed groups based in Tong last year, and that when the police heard about this they spoke to the commander and some of those recruited were returned. He claimed that since then there has been no recruitment. However, in November 2021 the police received lists of deserters from SSPDF 4<sup>th</sup> Division and SPLM/A-IO Div 4B and accordingly they found and returned these people.
11. The Unity State General Secretary told CTSAMVM that there had been recruitment by armed groups allied to the SSPDF in Tong before the flooding.

### **Findings – Upper Nile State**

12. In late September 2021 10 young soldiers deserted from the SSPDF base in Nassir. They were found by armed youths and taken to Ulang where they were questioned by the senior SPLM/A-IO CID officer. They told him they were forcibly recruited in Yirol and were underage. Brig Gen Choul Makuach, the commander of SPLM/A-IO 1 Brigade took responsibility for the deserters.
13. On 5 October 2021 CTSAMVM interviewed all 10 of the “deserters”, recorded their names and photographed them. It was observed that:
- a. Ages and appearance: One of them claimed to be 13 years old, three said they were 14, four said they were 15 and two said they were 17. CTSAMVM observed that five of the “deserters” looked very young and were probably under 18, and the other five could have been over 18, but of course it is difficult to tell. Many of them were vague when asked the year in which they were born. One of them, who looked very young and frightened, burst into tears



when he was being interviewed and just said he wanted to go home. They were all in civilian clothes, and claimed they were being well looked after.

- b. Origin: Eight of the ten said they came from Yirol County. One did not know which county he came from and the other was from Rumbek.
  - c. Recruitment: They all told the same story. They all said they had been 'forcibly recruited' – some said arrested, some said captured – from either their homes or the fields or bush. 6 of them said they had been taken in July 2021, two in June, one in May and the other was not specific. They all said they had been taken to Juba and kept in "jail" – one said "Jamus barracks" – in Juba until they were sent to Nassir, where they received two weeks training and were issued with uniforms and weapons. They deserted soon after their training was complete; they took their weapons but said they left the SSPDF barracks in civilian clothes. None of them wanted to be in the army, and they all wanted to go home.
14. Maj Gen Justin Nhial Batoang, the commander of the SSPDF Special Operations Brigade in Nassir told CTSAMVM that the 10 deserters were indeed from the SSPDF force under his command, and that they took weapons and sold them to civilians who escorted them to Ulang County. He went on to say that it is not the mandate of CTSAMVM to monitor the issues of deserters soldiers who abandoned their duties, and that this is an internal service matter. He said the Commander of SPLM/A-IO 1 Brigade should hand them over unless they have joined his forces.
15. The SPLM/A-IO commander and County Commissioner in Ulang asked several international agencies to remove the deserters and take them back to their homes, but this did not prove possible. During a visit to Ulang on 4 March 2022 CTSAMVM was informed by the County Commissioner that the deserters had been sent home towards the end of January, but this has not been verified and it is not known how they were returned.



## **Interim Assessment**

16. It is evident that young men have been sent from Bentiu to SSPDF barracks in the Juba area. Some of these were from SSPDF-aligned armed groups from Tong and might have gone of their own free will, but the information gathered by CTSAMVM so far suggests there has been forced recruitment.
17. The deserters from Nassir appeared desperate to get away from the SSPDF, and all told stories of forced recruitment and 'imprisonment' in Juba. Even if they were not actually forcibly as they stated, the very fact they were recruited and joined the SSPDF after the signing of the R-ARCSS constitutes a violation of the agreement.
18. It can be difficult to ascertain the exact age of children and young men, but it was the clear opinion of the CTSAMVM team which interviewed the deserters in Ulang that at least half of them were under 18. Even if they were wrong about this, they certainly would have been very young at the signing of the R-ARCSS 3 years previously.

## **Observations and recommendations for further investigations**

19. CTSAMVM will endeavour to get more information about forced recruitment in the Bentiu area, especially first-hand statements from abductees and their families.
20. CTSAMVM needs to understand more about exactly who has been flown by the SSPDF from Bentiu to Juba, especially the issue of 'other armed groups from Tong' being integrated into the SSPDF. CTSAMVM will investigate accordingly, and asks for the full cooperation of the SSPDF.
21. CTSAMVM asks the SSPDF to release the records of the ten Nassir deserters, in order that their ages and dates of their recruitment can be checked.

22. CTSAMVM has been deliberately denied access to Digala by the SSPDF since September 2021. There have been allegations that training is taking place at Digala. CTSAMVM will continue to request support at the political level in order to gain access to Digala.