



# Myanmar's Child Soldiers Return to Civilian Life



Photo: ©UNICEF/Khin Zaw  
Myanmar, 2014

**Children who should never have been soldiers are released from the armed forces and helped with their return home.**

Wearing traditional Myanmar checkered lungyis and starched white shirts with rounded collars, the young people sit down in rows of chairs and wait for further instruction. Most of them sit quietly but some fidget nervously and shift in their seats, craning their necks forward to see how the ceremony is progressing.

They are 80 children and young people, all once recruited and used in the Tatmadaw, the Myanmar armed forces. **It is their final roll call as they prepare to leave the military**, discharged on the grounds that they should never have been enlisted in the first place. Under a programme partly funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund, they are released from the military and reintegrated into civilian life.

One of them is Aung Thura. He was illegally recruited at age 14, after running away from home. Now 19, he served five years with the Tatmadaw. "Being a cadet soldier was much more difficult than being at home," he says, speaking softly.

Aung Thura is one of more than 740 child soldiers released from the Myanmar military since 2012, when the Government signed a Joint Action Plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in the Tatmadaw.

Under the plan, the government and aid organizations launched joint mass information campaigns, operate two 24-hour hotlines to report child soldiers or their recruitment and cooperate to identify and discharge all children. The authorities also committed to take action against perpetrators.

As they return to normal civilian life, the boys and young men will receive regular follow-ups from the social workers who initially conducted their case study interviews, with ongoing support provided through local partner organizations.

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They get help to return to school or the job market through vocational training and mentoring. Myanmar's Ministry of Health is also providing support, ensuring them access to health care and medication once they are back in their communities.

For his part, Aung Thura is keen to attend school again but is aware that there has been a massive gap in his adolescence and that he has missed out on crucial years of schooling and on leading a normal childhood. "It's a bit embarrassing because I'm so much older now but I do want to attend school so that I can do other things," he says. "Also, I want to learn how to drive a car," he adds with a grin.



Photo: ©UNICEF/Khine Zar Mon  
Myanmar, 2015

## ABOUT THE UN PEACEBUILDING FUND

The Peacebuilding Fund has financed more than 400 projects in over 25 countries. Its funding provides United Nations and non-UN organizations with the tools to help sustain peace and prevent violent conflict. The PBF is risk-tolerant and innovative, can act quickly and works on behalf of the Secretary-General. Its funding often provides the impetus for others to follow suit.

## ABOUT PBF IN MYANMAR

The UN Peacebuilding Fund has contributed more than \$3 million to support the implementation of a Joint Action Plan to end and prevent the use of child soldiers in Myanmar and bring about the release of and reintegration into civilian life of former child soldiers in the Tatmadaw and other armed groups. This project promotes the overall protection of children from armed conflict and offers an opportunity for confidence building among different groups in Myanmar. This strengthens the ongoing peace process.

As part of this project, UNICEF, UNDP and ILO, together with the other members of the so-called Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting, work with the Government of Myanmar and several community-based organizations. "The funding continues to be critical for our efforts," UNICEF Myanmar said. "Social and economic reintegration requires long-term investments, and we expect more children to be released by armed groups in the near future."

The Fund has been engaged in Myanmar since July 2012. It has financed targeted initiatives to fill gaps and support peace and reform efforts. So far, the PBF has supported six projects in Myanmar totalling \$7.7 million. Besides the prevention of using children in armed conflict, its funding has focused on promoting peaceful coexistence among Myanmar's diverse ethnic and religious groups.