

# **The Sudan Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)**

## **GENEVA CALL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS**

### **Summary**

The Sudan Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) shares your commitment to full protection of children in armed conflicts and is ready to continue cooperation and ratification of all relevant international conventions.

### **Response to Questions posed by Geneva Call.**

#### **JEM Policies**

JEM has taken numerous measures to protect children in its areas and in line with international laws and treaties. For example, JEM provides training to all its commanders regarding protection of children who happen to pass through its camps. JEM has initiated its own policy regarding protection of children and has publicised that among its commanders and soldiers.

JEM does not keep any children under its care. According to its policies, volunteers under 18 are not allowed to enlist as JEM fighters. JEM medical doctors are commissioned to determine that a volunteer is over 18 before he or she is recruited. Moreover, all JEM fighters are volunteers, irrespective of whether they are 18 or older.

JEM always takes measures to hand over children who happen to call on its camps to their relatives, refugee camps or village sheikhs who can reunite them with their families.

A briefing is now given as part of military training to all new recruits. Soldiers and commanders found in breach of relevant rules are disciplined and punished in proportion to their offences. They could even be expelled from JEM.

JEM does not see conflicts between its rules and relevant international laws on children. However, if there is any discrepancy, international laws apply. JEM is ready for further engagement with NGOs, the UN and other international institutions with regard to protection of children who happen to fall under its care.

#### **Challenges**

A few children appear in JEM camps for different reasons – to get away following attacks on their villages; looking for food and shelter; wanting to connect with relatives in the army or simply for curiosity and fun. JEM always takes care of these children and sends them back to their families or refugee camps.

Children and young adults appearing at JEM camps have no birth certificate and do not know their ages. When in doubt, JEM doctors can be called upon to verify claimed ages. NGOs are unable to cooperate with JEM regarding protection of children, as they require government permission to do so. In 2004, Jamous, the current Humanitarian Officer of JEM, took 80 under-aged children to safety at the Chadian border. For a whole month, there was no NGO willing to help him. JEM is now financing some schools in the area to cater for such children.

In the field of education, JEM is at the moment paying for school teachers for the education of children in more than one locality. Efforts to get some help from international NGOs to assist JEM in its education initiatives have so far failed.

JEM has approached several international bodies for further training as was done with the SLM but has received no response. International organisations working in this field are reluctant to work with JEM as that will jeopardize their dealings with the Government of Sudan.

International experts working with and reporting on JEM treatment of children are unable or unwilling to visit JEM-held areas. Instead, they base their reports on information provided by government centres or elsewhere on material delivered in less risky areas.

### **Major problems**

Absence of NGOs or other bodies who can take care of these children when necessary; JEM has invited numerous organisations to visit its areas to discuss adherence to child protection codes. The invitation is still open and JEM is ready to facilitate that at any time.

Insistence of relevant organisations to work with sovereign states to the exclusion of rebels;

Inability and unwillingness of these organisations to visit JEM areas and discuss and evaluate with them ways of implementing these conventions on the ground and assess the degree of conformity of JEM and others to these rules and;

Drawing conclusions based on secondary information about adherence to conventions on children in armed conflicts.

### **International Cooperation**

JEM has been cooperating with relevant international institutions working in areas of combat, protection of children and humanitarian work. JEM has already signed a memorandum of understanding with UNICEF and OCHA and has continued to engage ICRC in this regard.

Knowledge of how to deal with children in conflict zones is now widespread among JEM soldiers. Commanders are familiar with international codes regarding treatment of children and they act accordingly when it is necessary to do so.

JEM is familiar with international conventions regarding children in armed conflicts but is willing to learn more. The “18 years rule” is an international convention known to JEM as indeed to many across the world.

JEM knew about the UN report from the media and was aware that the report was compiled without visiting JEM-held areas.<sup>1</sup> JEM contested the report and invited those concerned to visit their troops at any time to verify their claims. Also, JEM engaged some of the relevant institutions with regard to cooperation in this matter. As a result, progress was made and some agreements have been signed.

It has already signed some charters and has committed itself in writing to others in the same field.

### **Further notes**

JEM is committed to the protection of children and is ready to cooperate with relevant international organisations to that effect.

JEM is currently working with UNICEF to sign on further commitments and take their approach as a model for other similar agreements.

JEM regrets the failure of UNICEF and others to obtain permission from the government to visit JEM-held areas and appeals to all to facilitate the free movement of all organisations working for the protection of children in conflict zones.

JEM gives unconditional support for the protection of children in armed conflicts and is willing to debate, learn more, sign and implement any international charter that leads to that ideal.

Dr Khalil Ibrahim Mohamed  
President of JEM  
02/09/2010

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent discussions with JEM humanitarian coordinator Jamous clarified that the UN Report in question is the Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Resolution 1591 (2005) concerning the Sudan Issued 29 October 2009) available at; <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/EGUA-7XNSQP?OpenDocument>. The JEM rebuttal to the UN panel of experts report can be found at: <http://www.sudanjem.com/2009/archives/21279/en/>