“Our Children are Not for Sale!”

Says Jackie Chan
‘Our children are not for sale’
Jackie Chan makes his voice heard against trafficking

By Sandar Linn

Yangon, Myanmar, July 2012 – the World famous film star, action hero and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Jackie Chan made a three-day visit to Myanmar early this month, rallying support to combat child trafficking.

Jackie Chan, idol of many Myanmar children and adults, began his mission in Mandalay, the country’s second largest city. There Mr Chan met children and young people who had suffered trafficking, who are growing up without parents, those who live and work on the streets. He visited vocational training activities that are designed to equip children with livelihood skills.

At the Girls’ Training school, Chan keenly listened to how human trade inflicted pain and alienation on the children who were affected. They also shared with him their hopes and aspirations.

“The children I met in Myanmar have inspired me,” said Jackie Chan. “The boys and girls who had been trafficked, their optimism and determination to build better lives for themselves has deeply impressed me.”

The captivating advocate for children also met with Myanmar Police Force officials at Anti Trafficking Task Force Unit in Mandalay. Making his rounds to meet children with endless energy, the action movie star later visited children aged between 9 and 16 years at the Boys’ training school, spontaneously joining them in traditional water festival dance and in playing football.

The celebrated movie star was touched when the children in the School for the Deaf showed his name in sign language. In response Jackie Chan passionately sang in sign language: ‘One country, one world’ – a song that he wrote for children. “Jackie’s visit has been an inspiration to the children in our school. Their eyes and faces lit up as he reached out to them. Not only will they remember the visit of the charismatic super hero but also his advice to study hard,” said Daw Tin Mar Ohn, deputy head of the School for the Deaf.

Other places he visited include Myanmar Buddhist Orphanage Association (MBOA), a monastic institution in Mandalay, registered under the Department of Social Welfare where he met boys who come from various parts of Myanmar for shelter and education. A Head Monk and ten other resident monks with the help of some older boys administer MBOA and care for the 162 boys, who are currently enrolled.

Every child and young adult he met, Jackie passed on important messages that his learnt from his father: “Education comes first. Stay in school and study hard and don’t do drugs.”

The tireless movie star also visited the non-formal education programme in Mandalay, he listened attentively to the story told by children. The name of the story was Stranger Danger and the moral of the story was how to be aware of and avoid the traps of trafficking.

Mr. Chan, who amused all with his brilliant martial art moves, met children and young people on his visit and listened to their concerns and hopes for the future, while delivering messages of education, discipline, respect and unity.

After spending two days in Mandalay, Mr. Chan flew to Yangon where he visited a community centre run by local NGO, Ratana Metta Organization.
Jackie spends time with orphans and vulnerable children

(RMO) in collaboration with UNICEF for the protection of orphans and vulnerable children, including those affected and infected by HIV and AIDS.

At the Centre, Mr Chan was amused by children acting out parts from his famous movies following which he happily answered questions from them. At a mission-ending press conference in Yangon, Mr. Chan called for media’s strong support in covering children’s issue.

“Trafficking is not an issue specific to Myanmar; it’s a global issue. Everyone will have to work together to put an end to it, important the media. I would like to see more media coverage on children who were trafficked than on celebrities,” he appealed.

In the same evening, in a dinner hosted by UNICEF and Myanmar Motion Picture Association, Mr. Chan called on many of the Myanmar celebrities present to consider this a responsibility to the society by using their celebrity status.

“Let’s join hands and start today to beat trafficking. If you speak on TV, news or in your film about the issue, your fans, including children, would listen and that’s how it works,” said Mr. Chan.

He concluded his simple but powerful comment at the reception by saying “As a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador I had the opportunity to visit countries and learn more about children. I became aware of lending my voice and sharing what I earned and learned with those who need it. Thanks UNICEF, for giving me a chance to become a better person.”

The charismatic Hollywood star distributed gifts made by children that he bought from the training schools, as a reminder to Myanmar celebrities to work actively on the issue.

“Jackie Chan’s visit was enormously popular. He was welcomed with extraordinary warmth by children and adults alike. Clearly he is a powerful role model and his visit has done much to accelerate Myanmar’s combat to stop child trafficking”, said Ramesh Shrestha, UNICEF Representative in Myanmar. “It is important that we build on Jackie Chan’s call and continue to strengthen our prevention and advocacy efforts.”

Jackie Chan’s successful visit added impetus to Myanmar’s commitment to halt the child trafficking, as presented in the Myanmar National Plan of Action to combat human trafficking.
When I planned to come to Myanmar, my friends asked Why Myanmar? and I said Why not? Myanmar is one country that I always wanted to come.

“I don’t understand how anyone can buy or sell a child. How can you even think of it?”

A nine year old monastic school student takes Jackie around to show where he and his friends sleep.

Young people who survived from trafficking share their stories with Jackie.
Jackie with girls from School for the Deaf in Mandalay, where young people with hearing impairment learn vocational skills.

© UNICEF Myanmar/2012/Khin Zaw

Jackie bows to the audience at the end of Myanmar traditional water festival dance at the residential care centre in Mandalay.

© UNICEF Myanmar/2012/Khin Zaw

Jackie joins hair dressing skill training at the Boys’ training school in Myanmar.

© UNICEF Myanmar/2012/Khin Zaw

“Children, one day you all will be able to help others like me, but now study hard. Remember, education always comes first.”

Jackie with girls from School for the Deaf in Mandalay, where young people with hearing impairment learn vocational skills.

© UNICEF Myanmar/2012/Khin Zaw
In Mandalay, Jackie Chan (centre) with young football players at the Boys’ training school. The school provides care for children with disabilities, former street and working children and children in conflict with the law. They are given formal education, skills training, sports, social services and recreation.

Jackie Chan watches students acting for him at the UNICEF supported special school programme for out of school children in Mandalay. The plays included stories on ‘Stranger Danger’ and moral of the story is to be aware of strangers and to be aware of the risks of trafficking.

“One country, one world” - Jackie sings a Chinese song in sign language for the children at the Deaf school in Mandalay. The song is written by him.

“Never try drugs and never get involved with bad guys. I always remember these two things my father told me when I was six.”
UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Jackie Chan addresses a crowded press conference at the end of his visit in Myanmar.

“Media need to show when a trafficker is caught, need to cover more stories on children’s issue than celebrity news. Expose the horrible crimes. Let people know what happens to kids.”

“As celebrities, we have responsibilities for the society.”

UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador Jackie Chan with Myanmar celebrated actor Lu Minn, also the Vice President of the Myanmar Motion Pictures Association.
Government of Myanmar and the United Nations sign landmark Plan of Action to release children from armed forces

By Ye Lwin Oo

Nay Pyi Taw, 27 June 2012 – The United Nations and the Government of Myanmar have signed a historic Plan of Action to end recruitment of children in the armed forces, release those currently enlisted and prevent the use of children for all military purposes. The signing ceremony took place in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 June 2012.

The Plan was signed in the capital Nay Pyi Taw by Major General Ngwe Thein, Director of the Directorate of Military Strength, Ministry of Defence and Major General Tin Maung Win, Vice Adjtant General, Myanmar armed forces on behalf of the Government of Myanmar. The UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Ashok Nigam and UNICEF Representative Mr. Ramesh Shrestha signed on behalf of the United Nations.

Witnesses to the signing ceremony were Lt. General Hla Min, Union Minister of Defence, and Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

“Between 2002 and 2012, a total number of 588 child soldiers were released from the Tatmadaw. Also action was taken against 201 official and unofficial recruiters involved in under-age recruitment,” informed Lt-General Hla Min, Union Minister for Defence at the signing ceremony.

Through a time bound implementation plan spanning over 18 months, the Action Plan stipulates release of all under-age recruits and work with concerned parties to prevent any further recruitment and use of children by the Myanmar Armed Forces, commonly known as the Tatmadaw. It also supports a community-based reintegra-
tion plan for those released.

The UN led CTFMR* and the Government have agreed to monitoring mechanisms to allow access to bases, personnel and documentation for verification. In addition to site visits as part of the monitoring function, the UN and partners will also rely on picking up 'alerts' from the community on any continuing recruitment.

Talking to the news media later in her visit, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy told the media that UN is confident that the government would adhere to the Action Plan. Ms. Coomaraswamy added that effective from August 2012 the Action Plan will be implemented within the next 18 months.

“The signing of the Action Plan is a welcome event. It is the result of years of consistent preparation. The most important work however begins now to release all children from the Tatmadaw as early as possible and let reunite with their families and communities,” said Mr. Ramesh Shrestha, Representative of UNICEF (Myanmar).

“The signing of the Action Plan brings a great opportunity for the United Nations and the Country Task Force to work together with the Government and send a strong message that children should not, and will no longer, be recruited and used for military purposes,” said the co-chair of the CTFMR UN Resident Coordinator Mr. Nigam.

“The signing of the Action Plan sends a strong message that children should not, and will no longer, be recruited and used for military purposes.”


International Social Protection Conference continued from page 10

At the end of the two-day proceedings, the conference came up with the following recommendations in line with the vision shared by President U Thein Sein, shared his vision on social protection:

- Adopt a ‘Myanmar Social Protection System,’ based on the needs of different social groups and sectors, including children and women, the vulnerable, the aged and people with disabilities;
- Recognize the basic needs of every citizen: comprehensive health care, education, income security and job security;
- Promote the rights of workers and farmers in establishing universal health care system;
- Ensure that social protection policy be developed and aligned with the second phase of the Government’s overall reform strategy, people-centered development approach, and specifically linking social protection with the Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Strategies:
  - Encourage energetic cooperation, including with bilateral and multilateral organizations and NGOs, for an integrated and all inclusive social protection system;
  - Create a high-level national institution (committee) for the coordination of social protection to ensure its policy formulation, and monitoring implementation to inform the policy makers and the public;
  - Develop a comprehensive social protection policy and strategies.

Myanmar is developing substantial policy momentum through the current rapid transition and suspension of economic sanctions. A newly established Hluttaw (Parliament) is active in policy reform and administrative decentralization. Despite these positive trends, the country faces many socio-economic challenges. Almost a quarter of the population lives in poverty.

The conference participants appreciated the leadership of the President and made commitments to follow up on his vision. It was agreed to create a high-level National Committee for the coordination of social protection, led by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. It was also agreed to work towards a rights-based, inclusive and systemic policy development, with due attention given to poverty alleviation and addressing inequities, social exclusion, and emergencies.
International Social Protection Conference: A Call to Action

Recommendations for Strengthening Myanmar’s Social Protection Systems

By Zafrin Chowdhury

Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, 26 June 2012: The first ever International Social Protection Conference concluded its two day proceedings on 26 June with a set of recommendations for strengthening the social protection systems in Myanmar.

The conference was inaugurated on 25 June by H.E. Thein Sein, the President of Myanmar. “We must adopt a Social Protection System for Myanmar. Assistance and support of international organizations including the UN have an important role in social protection coverage” said H.E President U Thein Sein in his opening speech.

The conference was jointly hosted by the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, in collaboration with the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Myanmar Development Resource Institute and UNICEF.

Union Minister for Labour and Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, His Excellency U Aung Kyi, highlighted the role of social protection in minimizing negative impacts caused by economic and social shocks and to reduce extreme poverty and hunger and creating resilience to such shocks and hazard.

Broad-based participation in the Conference had drawn from about 500 delegates from the Government of the Union of Myanmar, Honourable Members of the Hluttaw (Parliament), Regional Chief Ministers, the UN Agencies, the diplomatic corps, multilateral and bilateral organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, the academic community, experts from the region, the media – all assembled for the Social Protection Conference: A Call to Action.


Twelve papers were presented covering a wide range of topics on social protection and social security. Experts from ASEAN countries, South Korea and World Bank shared their experiences for developing policies on social protection in the context of Myanmar.

continued to page 9 >>>

All contributions published in this newsletter are written by UNICEF Myanmar staff members

UNICEF Myanmar Quarterly Newsletter July 2012

Editor: Zafrin Chowdhury
Contributors: Sandar Linn, Ye Lwin Oo
Layout & Design: Khine Zar Mon
14th Floor, Traders Hotel, 223 Sule Pagoda Road, Yangon, Myanmar
Ph: (95-1) 375527 - 32
Fax: (95-1) 375552
Email: yangon@unicef.org
Website: www.unicef.org/myanmar