

South Sudan to transform ex-combatants into productive work brigades

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December 6, 2012 (JUBA) – Ex-combatants who will be affected by the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program in South Sudan will be transformed into productive self-sufficient units that will contribute to the development of the country, says Vice-President Riek Machar.

The region came out of a protracted liberation struggle fought for decades which ended in a peace deal with Sudan in 2005. The peace accord, known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), culminated in the independence of South Sudan on 9th July 2011 following an overwhelming vote in favour of secession from Sudan in an internationally supervised referendum.

The liberation struggle involved hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the combat, leaving thousands of them wounded while tens of thousands others have overgrown their usefulness in the organized forces.

Over 150,000 members from the army and the other organized forces will be targeted for the DDR program as the country downsizes and transforms its men and women in uniform into professional forces. The affected will include the old and the disabled or the “unfit” in the forces among other categories.

Vice President’s Press Secretary James Gatdet Dak told the *Sudan Tribune* that Machar on Wednesday however told a special committee, which was planning the implementation of the DDR program, that the country needed to generate new ideas to move away from the classical DDR which only provides one time package of assistance to ex-combatants to a more productive and sustainable program which will continue to benefit the ex-combatants in their new life outside the organized forces.

This productive program, he said, is to create work brigades out of the ex-combatants and train them in specialized skills of income-generating projects as well as help in infrastructural development in the country.

Machar reiterated that the organized forces needed to transform into quality professional forces capable of adapting to the latest military technologies rather than depending on the quantity of their respective sizes.

The demobilized forces, he said, will be trained in specialized skills such as in constructions of roads, railways and housing, agricultural activities, carpentry, plumbing, among many others.

The ex-combatants will benefit from such projects, he explained, and sustain their economic wellbeing. The specialized groups can be developed into respective cooperative societies, he further added.

The Vice-President urged the main institutions in DDR program which include the ministries of Defence and Veterans Affairs, National Security, Interior and Wildlife Conservation and Tourism to come up with proposed productive projects to which the ex-combatants will be deployed and work in after receiving training and counselling.

The government will also work to revive and create national projects to which the ex-combatants can be recruited.

Also a pension scheme needs to be readied and necessary arrangements made to pay off pensionable ex-combatants who may not join the work brigades.

The chairperson of the DDR Commission, William Deng Deng, reiterated his institution’s readiness to implement the policy of the government in respect to the ex-combatants. He also appealed to the government to allocate sufficient funds for the implementation of the program, which will be in phases and take a number of years.

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