

After years of war, state grapples with delicate task of demobilising soldiers

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Southern Sudan is facing a major challenge of disarming more than 150,000 soldiers and easing them back to civilian life when it gains independence this week.

Southern Sudan Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission chairman William Deng Deng said the new state wants to get rid of excess forces including the elderly, disabled and children.

"These are soldiers that are no longer useful after the war. We now need an organised, professional, controllable force," Mr. Deng told the Sunday Nation during an interview in Nairobi.

Southern Sudan is set to be Africa's 53rd state on July 9 and change its name to South Sudan.

Under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended 21 years of war between north and southern Sudan, the commission is to plan, manage and implement the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes in the south.

"The objective of the DDR process is to contribute to creating an enabling environment to human security and to support post-peace-agreement social stabilisation across the Sudan, particularly war affected areas," Mr. Deng said.

Among those to be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated back to the communities voluntarily are Sudanese People's Liberation Army and Sudan Armed Forces where 90,000 from each group had been targeted under the CPA.

Appealing for support from donors, Mr. Deng said the exercise is crucial, and that if it is not well handled, it poses a major security threat not only to South Sudan but the entire region.

Enhance democracy

“If we fail to control proliferation of small arms in southern Sudan the region will be affected. It is something that needs to be addressed to enhance stability and democracy.

“This is an important programme that needs to be supported by all governments.

We need to instill into the minds of the soldiers that they are being given another assignment and that they could do other businesses as civilians. Some of them have been soldiers since childhood,” he said.

He said the country also needs to downsize and recruit an able and sustainable professional force despite current fears of a return to war due to fighting in Abyei and Southern Kordofan.

The country also faces other challenges including demining, corruption and insecurity.

After more than two decades of civil war, Southern Sudan has to grapple with large amounts of landmines and other explosives which are a threat to civilian life and impediment to economic recovery and development.