

Africa

S Sudan grappling with disarmament challenge

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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 becomes independent next week.

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

"These are soldiers seen not be in use after the war. We now need an organized, professional, controllable force," Mr Deng told the *Nation* during an interview in Nairobi.

Southern Sudan is set to be Africa's 53 state on July 7 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 southern Sudan.

"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.

Among those to be disarmed, demobilised and reintegrated back to the communities voluntarily are Sudanese People's Liberation Army and Sudan Armed Forces and 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 does not go well could pose a major security threat to not only southern Sudan but the region as a whole.

“If we cannot control small arms proliferation in southern Sudan it would affect the region. It is something that needs to be addressed if southern Sudan is to be stable and democratic. The neighbouring countries are also vulnerable as they are the easiest places for southern Sudanese to run as refugees,” Mr Deng said.

According to UN figures, there are estimated 2.4 million guns in the hands of individuals who are not in standing army in southern Sudan with a population of about 10 million.

“The security threats are there but to bring an educated, able, professional force we have to downsize and recruit better equipped soldiers,” Mr Deng said.

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

After more than two decades of civil war, Southern Sudan has grappled with a contamination problem of a large scale landmine/Explosives Remnants of War (ERW).

The contamination continues to threaten civilians and impede economic recovery and development.

Contaminated land reduces agricultural activity and productivity and the sustainable livelihoods of rural communities.

Southern Sudan has nine other Independent Commissions & Institutions established by the Constitution.

The chairpersons and members of the independent commissions and institutions are appointed by the President of Southern Sudan in consultation with the Vice-President and with the approval of the National Assembly.

They include the Anti Corruption Commission, Audit Chamber, Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, Civil Service Commission, De-Mining Authority, Employees Justice Chamber, Fiscal, Financial Allocation & Monitoring Commission, HIV and Aids Commission, Human Rights Commission, Land Commission and Peace Commission.

Others are Public Grievances Chamber, Reconstruction and Development Fund and Southern Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission.