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## South Sudan optimistic over demobilization and disarmament policy

June 8, 2011 (JUBA) — Four weeks before its independence, South Sudan leaders remain optimistic that the new policy paper, which was drafted to guide the next phase of the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) program looks set to meet required mandates.

The new policy outline, currently being discussed in Juba at a consultative meeting, was reportedly developed by a technical committee that comprised of 10 senior officials from South Sudan Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) and South Sudan's Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA).

"The technical committee did his its part. After these deliberations, the policy will be presented to cabinet for approval. We expect it to be ready at least before July 09," William Deng Deng, the SSDDRC Chairperson said. . The current DDR program was an integral part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), designed for one country and two systems. The first phase of the program, which started in June 2009, initially targeted approximately 34,000 special needs groups such as the elderly, former combatants and women associated with armed forces.

Already, a total of 11,944 DDR participants, according to SSDDRC, had been demobilized as of mid-March in selected South Sudan states of Central Equatoria, Lakes, Western Bahr El-Ghazal, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Eastern Equatoria.

South Sudan will become independent in July following a referendum in favour of secession in January. The plebiscite was agreed as part of the 2005 peace accord, which ended decades of civil war.

"The next phase of the program, which is expected to begin after South Sudan's independence declaration, will mainly focus on disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating active SPLA soldiers," Deng added.

Held on Tuesday at Home and Away Hotel in Juba, the meeting was by South Sudan minister of information, SPLA officials, UN agencies, and representatives of donor community.

Barnaba Marial Benjamin, the region's information and broadcasting minister reiterated his government's commitment to make the DDR program a priority in the post-independence era.

Top of the plan, the minister added, is government's plan to ensure that the current number of southern forces are downsized, properly trained and later transformed into a regional peace keeping force.

Marial, however, distanced his government and its forces from repeated allegations of having extensively recruited child soldiers during the over two decade civil war with the north.

"The children who came to the SPLA barracks were mainly orphans and those who had no where to go. What the army did was to send them to school and they now they are well educated and serving in various disciplines within the country," he emphasized.

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