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South Sudan plans to transform ex-combatants into productive work brigades

September 14, 2012 (JUBA) - South Sudan's leadership has generated plans to establish work brigades from the ex-combatants that will be affected by the country's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program.

Up to 150,000, mostly from the elderly, children and the wounded are destined for disarmament and demobilization as the country's army wants to transform itself from a guerrilla army to a modern force which is focused on quality rather than quantity.

The size of the army in South Sudan has never been officially announced but is expected to be in the hundreds of thousands.

During the launching of the 3rd command council of the SPLA this week, the country's vice-president, Riek Machar, told the top army generals that it was time to transform the army, urging them to provide a strategy and time-frame within which to achieve the transformation.

He also told them that the government would want to see the demobilized forces transformed into productive work brigades to contribute to the development of the new country.

In a meeting on Friday, Machar and chairperson of the DDR commission, William Deng Deng, discussed the possibility of initiating the program, which they said will be productive and shift away from the classical program of the DDR which would only give the ex-combatants a one time package of incentives.

The program will provide special trainings to the able ex-combatants in form of work brigades in the areas of agriculture, livestock management, petroleum, roads and railway construction, housing, river dredging and mining, among others. They will also be trained in mechanics, carpentry, plumbing, etc.

About 50,000 able ex-combatants are expected to benefit from the program which will be gradually implemented over a number of years.

It will also be accompanied by plans to avail development projects in which to deploy the trained work brigades for self-reliance as they will be receiving salaries for their new skills.

A council for DDR will be formed to make the necessary policy and oversee implementation of the program by the DDR commission.

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