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Featured News

SSDDRC unveils head office



31 August 2010 – Acquiring a main operating base, the Southern Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (SSDDRC) inaugurated its head office today in Juba.

Attending the inauguration ceremony was Vice-President of the Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) Riek Machar Teny, who hailed the opening of the commission's office.

“I am happy that today you have an office that you can call your own,” said the GoSS vice-president. “This is important in respect to the performance of the commission.”

The office was built with funds from the office of the GoSS Presidency and support from the Japanese government.

Also on hand were ministers of the GoSS and the Central Equatoria State government, representatives of the European Union, the United Nations, donor countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), members of the diplomatic corps, senior officers of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and state-level DDR coordinators.

Various speakers noted hurdles that have faced the DDR programme since its inception.

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“Reintegration of the ex-combatants has been very difficult because (they) have no adequate skills,” said Dr. Machar. “If they don’t have skills, then you are reintegrating them into poverty.”

Although 90,000 SPLA soldiers should have been demobilized and integrated back into civilian life during the six-year interim period of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the GoSS vice-president noted that only 6,000 of them had gone through the process thus far.

“Though there is progress made so far, it is very slow,” said SSDDRC Chairperson William Deng Deng. “We need the government to take the lead in the DDR process, (which) can succeed only when the government takes the full responsibility of the process.”

UN Deputy Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator for Southern Sudan Lise Grande called for a review of the national DDR strategic planning document, as the programme had reached what she called “a critical juncture.”

“If we don’t get the DDR right, the risks are enormous,” she added.

At a ceremony held at its headquarters outside Juba on 30 August, the SPLA unveiled a child protection unit seeking to complete the demobilization of all remaining child soldiers.

Over 22,000 SPLA troops below the age of 18 have returned to civilian life in the past 10 years, but UNICEF estimates that there are 900 child soldiers still serving in the Southern Sudanese army.

They represent one of the four categories of ex-combatants targeted by the DDR programme.

Under an action plan signed with UNICEF in November 2009, the SPLA pledged to demobilize within a year’s time all estimated 1,200 teenaged troops then in its ranks and arrange for their transition into civilian life.

Reporting: by Emmanuel Kenyi.