



World Bank hosts meeting to discuss demobilizing soldiers in Africa's Great Lakes region

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LONDON (AP) - The World Bank will lead international talks Monday aimed at demobilizing thousands of former soldiers in central Africa's troubled Great Lakes region.

Officials say bands of ex-combatants are a major source of unrest across countries such as Angola, Rwanda and Uganda and say it is vital to reintegrate them back into civilian life.

"Helping combatants become civilians is vital if we are to break the cycle of conflict in the greater Great Lakes Region," said Maria Correia of the World Bank's Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program.

"Armed individuals without place or purpose can otherwise become a serious source of instability. Reintegration reweaves men, women, parents and children back into the social fabric, helping to restore communities, and, ultimately, peace," she added.

The program's advisory committee, made up of donor countries, international agencies and affected countries, regularly reviews the issue. The London talks will last three days.

The World Bank program is funded by 11 donors: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Commission.

It currently targets an estimated 450,000 ex-combatants in seven countries: Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.