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**Brazzaville**—The World Bank and the Republic of Congo (ROC) have signed an agreement for a US \$17-million grant to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate 30,000 former combatants in the country.

The agreement, signed on Tuesday in the Congolese capital, Brazzaville, falls \$8 million short of the \$25 million request the ROC made to the bank in February 2005, under the framework of the Multi-country Programme for Demobilisation and Reintegration. The World Bank representative in ROC, Midou Ibrahima, said any additional funding requests would be subject to separate negotiations.

Demobilising ex-combatants and reintegrating them into society will enhance stability in the war-torn nation and set the stage for post-conflict development. The ROC government, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund reached a poverty reduction agreement in 2004, whose success hinges on the maintenance of peace and security throughout the country. The grant is earmarked for the country's southwestern departments of Pool, Niari, Bouenza and Lékoumou, which were severely affected by civil war. The departments of Brazzaville, the Plateaux, Cuvette and Cuvette West are also scheduled to benefit.

Under the demobilisation programme, ex-combatants would undergo vocational training, be helped to get jobs and receive medical and social care. The funds would also be used to rehabilitate basic infrastructure in communities and support reforms in the police, the gendarmerie and the military.

"The international community feels strongly that this programme should attain its development objective for the greatest number of beneficiaries," Ibrahima said.

With support of the International Development Agency and technical help from the International Organization for Migration, the government demobilised and reintegrated into society some 9,000 ex-combatants from 2001 to 2004.

In June 2005, the government financed an emergency demobilisation and reintegration programme for 450 ex-fighters in the Pool Department, at a cost of 250 million francs CFA (about \$455,000). Under this effort, 507 guns and 3,682 rounds of ammunition were collected and then incinerated.

According to government figures, there are 43,000 ex-combatants in the ROC. However, the anti-government National Resistance Council, led by the Reverend Frederic Bitsangou, alias Pasteur Ntoumi, says there are 50,000.

*[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations ]*