

Uganda's Amnesty Commission in Final Phase of Issuing Resettlement Packages to Ex-Combatants

N&N no. 12 – May 18, 2006

Gulu, UGANDA—On Friday the 28th of April, Uganda's Amnesty Commission entered the final phase of issuing resettlement packages provided to former members of various rebel groups that have been fighting the government of President Yoweri Museveni since 1986.

The packages, which include household items and agricultural tools, are provided under a \$4.2 million grant by the World Bank Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP). The Commission is aiming to distribute them to approximately 15,000 ex-combatants of the total estimated 20,000 individuals – known as “reporters” – who have demobilized and embraced amnesty under the Amnesty Act of 2000.



The program, started in January 2005, aims to provide broader support to the Commission in its work towards peace and reconciliation, and to help former rebels to return to civilian life. To date, 8,953 reporters have received their resettlement packages under MDRP support, while 3,997 reporters had already received them with funding from other sources.

In Northern Uganda, the region most affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war of Joseph Kony, the Amnesty Commission has so far registered 4,860 reporters in the Gulu region and 5,156 reporters in the Kitgum area. In the Acholi sub-region – comprised of those two areas – 4,902 reporters have by now received resettlement packages from the Amnesty Commission with MDRP support.

“We shall complete issuing of packages to all those currently eligible by the end of June,” said the Commission's Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist Patrick Ssemanda in Gulu as the final phase of package distribution began.

News & Noteworthy

A major challenge for the Amnesty Commission and its staff in Northern Uganda is that most of the reporters cannot return to their real homes. Continuing for close to 20 years, the war in Northern Uganda has displaced about 1.6 million people, many of whom are now in camps for internally displaced people.

“The challenge we are facing is that the war has not yet ended,” explained Demobilization and Resettlement Team (DRT) Officer for the Gulu region Mary Oker Maiko on Friday as her team began issuing resettlement packages to over 2,210 reporters. “We are still continuing to receive two, three or four reporters, every day. Our worry is that we are not going to get all the children in captivity back. Worse still, the environment here for their reintegration is not a normal one because we take our reporters to IDP camps,” she said.

Particularly in Northern Uganda, the reporters are often very young. These children need special care in their resettlement and reintegration process. Some 6,059 children have so far been demobilized by the commission, of whom 5,341 are from the Acholi sub-region.

Senior Resettlement Officer, Esther Atim who is responsible for registration of reporters in Gulu region was quick to add, “Our biggest worry is the children born in captivity especially those whose mothers have been killed in the war.”

How many such children exist is unknown, but Atim reports that some of the caretakers have approached them for assistance. Since the Commission has no policy on assistance to children below 12 years of age, it works closely with other governmental and non-governmental partner organizations – as is the case for many of the Commission’s activities.

The Amnesty Commission, with the support of MDRP, is indeed starting to reach many former child soldiers and their families and making a difference in their lives.

One girl, Mary Lalam, says that she is grateful to the Amnesty Commission for the resettlement support. In 2001, while still in Primary six at Pabo, she was abducted along with two brothers and another sister while harvesting in their garden. She escaped two years later and today in senior two at Koc Goma secondary school, where the fee is 54,000 shillings.

“I could not pay the school fees for the last term,” she explained. “With this money, I will pay for two terms straight away.”

-by Moses Draku, Public Relations Officer, Amnesty Commission, Uganda

For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.