

Interview with Rory Keane, European Commission MDRP Focal Point

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When Rory Keane was appointed a year ago as European Commission focal point for the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), he was well-prepared for the task.

“My PhD was in conflict and security,” he says. “I also spent time in the Balkans working for NGOs and international organizations and was at one point a consultant on small arms and light weaponry for the UN Institute for Disarmament Research.”

He is now the European Union desk officer for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Asked about the Commission’s support for the MDRP, Keane says that it is part of the Commission’s overall commitment to peace and security through the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process in the greater Great Lakes region. It has committed €20 million to the MDRP Trust Fund. The Commission is also currently developing the programming for the tenth European Development Fund that will prioritize, among other things, lasting reintegration as a key follow-up to successful DDR.

In this context, Keane calls the focal point function one that is highly important to MDRP’s success. “In fact,” he says, “It’s vital. The MDRP is a radical departure from the international community’s traditional approach to DDR. It crosses national borders and relies on an active partnership for success. Focal points ensure that this partnership is productive and effective.”

Specifically, as European Commission focal point, Keane is responsible for monitoring the program and giving input to MDRP management on a range of issues, from the political to technical levels. Keane maintains regular contact with the MDRP Secretariat in Washington, discussing “everything from the situation in the DRC to funding issues.” He also goes to the field as part of MDRP Implementation Support Missions to observe program implementation.

“Nothing substitutes for actually seeing,” says Keane. “So many things that work on paper don’t turn out as expected on the ground. Donors need to be able to understand the progress and the challenges so that proper support can be provided. The Commission also has a strong expert-based delegation on the ground that acts as our eyes and ears in this regard.”

He cites MDRP’s principle of national ownership as one of the most important advantages of the partnership. In the MDRP, national commissions lead the DDR process, supported financially and

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technically by the program. This methodology, Keane explains, ensures local political buy-in for DDR and that the process is not imposed.



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On the other hand, he acknowledges that this can also mean that MDRP must at times deal with and confront political spoilers who do not favor the process.

Keane adds, “While supporting the national ownership principle, MDRP has also managed to push the DDR process forward and support the move towards sustainable peace in the region. This has especially been the case in the last year or so, I think, because MDRP has increased its active field-presence on the ground. In fact, I’d say that field-presence seems to be a necessary prerequisite for MDRP success.”

And that success has been significant. “Demobilization is well underway in many countries, like Angola, and even close to completion in some.” Reintegration support has been slower, he notes, but has improved as the program makes significant strides to strengthen national efforts in this area.

This is not, he says, to downplay the challenges. There are, for one, many external factors upon which MDRP’s success depends, but which the program does not control. For example, MDRP’s demobilization and reintegration work requires a successful disarmament process and a stable security sector, but its mandate does not allow it to address these issues.

Another challenge for MDRP can be politics and political will, he says. DDR is a political process, which in the best cases can act as a confidence-building measure from which peace and trust can grow. However, it can also be a process fraught with obstacles, self-interests and complexities to overcome.

“This is why coordination between MDRP and those doing disarmament, security sector work, and other related work is so crucial,” states Keane. “The role of donors and the international community also cannot be understated as a key component in ensuring such coordination. And moreover, while the World Bank does not have a political mandate, MDRP trust fund donors can when necessary speak with one political voice in order to pursue more effective DDR implementation.”

Asked to sum up his DDR experience, Keane says, “That local ownership requires local responsibility; that when donors are capable of coordinating their actions, the results are much more impressive; that DDR is a window towards lasting peace; that reintegration is the key for DDR and that DDR cannot be decoupled from a political process.”

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