

Parliamentarians from Five Continents Visit Muhazi Child Ex-Combatant Rehabilitation Center

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On January 31, 2006 a delegation of parliamentarians representing 15 countries visited the Muhazi Child Ex-Combatant Rehabilitation Center in Rwanda's Eastern Province. The visit was part of a weeklong tour of country development activities and programs.

The group met the sixty former child soldiers who are currently receiving rehabilitation assistance from the *Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Program* (RDRP), one of seven country programs supported by the

Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) in the greater Great Lakes Region.

Children at the Muhazi Center range from ages eight to 17, and were formerly associated with armed groups operating in the Eastern DRC, including the *Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR). The center is working to prepare these children and young adults for reintegration into civilian life. Its comprehensive program includes the addressing of psychosocial and physical needs, as well as the providing of literacy and basic academic and civic training.

Arriving at the Muhazi Center, the parliamentary group was received by local authorities. They were then briefed by a Commissioner of the *Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission* (RDRC), Major General Paul Rwarakabije – himself a former commander of the FDLR – and by Alexis Rusagara, head of the RDRC Child Ex-Combatant Rehabilitation Program.



The presentations detailed the operational challenges of the program and highlighted the progress child ex-combatants have realized through the program. Presenters also stressed the importance of effective partnership with Government ministries, the local population, Save the Children UK, ICRC, UNHCR and the UN mission in the Congo. The Center also informed the group that it recently expanded its capacity, and can now respond to an influx of up to 2,500 child ex-combatants.



Commenting on the delegation's visit, Major General Rwarakabije, said, "It is hoped that after they leave Rwanda, delegation members will become ambassadors for the RDRP. Their support will enable us to improve our reintegration efforts for former child soldiers, and also enhance the repatriation process for the remaining caseload of children, as well of other armed groups."

-- Thanks to Gregory Gromo Alex, Senior Social Development Specialist in Kigali, for contributing this story, and to Sarah Michael, Social Development Specialist in Washington DC, for the photographs appearing here.

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