



Demobilisation Under Way, Despite Hitches

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Bujumbura, Jun 18, 2007 (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) –

Elias Bizimana, 25, and his 19-year-old wife Beatrice Uwimana have 10 years' fighting experience between them - they were combatants for the then rebel Conseil national pour la defense de la democratie-Forces pour la defense de la democratie (CNDD-FDD - now Burundi's ruling political party).

Now they have been demobilized and live at a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the northwestern province of Cibitoke. Bizimana was a CNDD-FDD combatant for six years and Beatrice for four years. They have one child.

"We combined our demobilization fees and bought a motorcycle to run a taxi business and to start this kiosk," Bizimana said at the camp in the commune of Buganda. The camp has both civilian IDPs and demobilized former combatants.

The couple is representative of thousands of young ex-combatants who have been demobilized since Burundi conducted democratic elections in 2005, in which the CNDD-FDD, led by President Pierre Nkurunziza, emerged victorious. The elections were a major step towards restoring peace in a country emerging from more than a decade of civil war that claimed an estimated 300,000 lives since 1993. Millions were also displaced, both internally and externally.

In his first report on Burundi to the UN Security Council on 17 May, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the National Commission for Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration had demobilized 22,688 combatants since the beginning of the program in December 2004. Of these, 3,041 were minors and 494 women.

The demobilization process

The head of the National Commission for Resettlement and Reintegration (CNDRR), Brig-Gen Silas Ntigurirwa, said in early June that although there had been delays in the reintegration process, at least 99 percent of all those demobilized were regularly receiving their resettlement packages. The process, he said, entailed preparation for reconciliation and good cohabitation with neighbors, as well as work training.

Another CNDRR official said the demobilized received a lump sum followed by payments every three months for another 18 months.

The official said there had been difficulties in reintegrating 6,500 demobilized former combatants because the CNDRR had taken time to come up with a reintegration strategy. He explained that the process involved funding a demobilized person to help them undertake a development project. Each demobilized person seeking reintegration had to submit a project proposal for an amount not exceeding US\$600.

The official said CNDRR would seek more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as partners to help speed up the process, notably in collecting submissions of development project proposals and helping them to draft the proposals. So far, only three NGOs - Africare, Padco and Twitezimbere - are involved.

Nkurunziza said the demobilization would help the government attain its desired figure of 25,000 troops in the national defense force "to cut down the high expenses in the defense sector". He said the money saved would be used on other development projects in the country. Nkurunziza also called for the extension of DDR.

The World Bank funds Burundi's DDR process, with contributions from Germany, Belgium, France, Canada, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Britain, Sweden and the European Commission.

FNL hurdle overcome

In a key deal, agreement was reached on 17 June between Nkurunziza and the Forces nationales de liberation, the last rebel group still holding out, to release its members from prison. The issue had delayed full implementation of the nine-month-old ceasefire.

Government and rebel officials had not been able to agree over the past nine months on which FNL members qualified as political prisoners.

Security reforms

On progress towards reforming Burundi's security sector, Ban said that with the assistance of bilateral partners, the Ministry of National Defence and Veterans' Affairs had conducted a review of administrative and personnel structures in the ministry and the army, Forces de defense nationale (FDN).

"The challenges associated with the integration of the FDN, including varying qualifications, training and experience of combatants, are also being addressed," Ban said. "The ministry is planning to put in place a personnel management system to meet the specific needs of the integrated FDN."

The establishment of such a system, he said, would also allow the ministry and the general chief of state to strengthen command and control over the FDN as well as their financial management capacity.

Regarding the national police, Ban said efforts had also been made to improve governance within the force, and the need for a code of ethics and conduct had been identified as a priority. But there

were still several challenges hindering the effective reform of the sector, including lack of adequate training, equipment and logistical capacity.

"A solid foundation for stability in Burundi will require, inter alia, significant progress in the area of security reform, including the focused and sustained provision of adequate training and equipment, and ensuring civilian control of the armed forces," Ban said. "The Burundi national police should also be provided with the necessary resources to fulfill its responsibilities for internal security."

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