

### Thousands of Ex-Fighters Disarmed and Reintegrated

*December 2005* - One of the most outstanding features of the Sierra Leone peace process was UNAMSIL's success in disarming thousands of ex-fighters, and their subsequent demobilization and integration into society. In February 2004, the Government declared the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process completed after UNAMSIL and its partners had disarmed more than 75,000 combatants.

The success of the DDR programme prompted the World Bank Country Office in Sierra Leone to observe that officials from neighbouring countries and even the Great Lakes region were visiting Sierra Leone because it "is considered as the best practice example throughout the world of a successful disarmament, demobilization [and] reintegration programme." The Bank and the UN Development Programme, along with the Government of Sierra Leone, worked closely with UNAMSIL in planning, funding and implementing DDR.

Under the programme, UNAMSIL disarmed combatants from the main warring factions, the RUF and the Civil Defence Forces, a government militia, as well as elements of the former Sierra Leone Army and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. DDR's main achievements included the following:

- ◆ 75,490 combatants disarmed and demobilized throughout the country, including 6,845 child soldiers (506 girls) and 4,651 women. There are no longer illegal armed groups posing a threat to the State.
- ◆ Almost 55,000 ex-fighters received reintegration benefits. The benefits included skills training programmes and formal education as well as agricultural, fishery or entrepreneurial support, along with tool kits for various craft categories.
- ◆ 42,330 weapons and more than 1.2 million rounds of ammunition were collected from the combatants and destroyed.

A 17,500-strong contingent of peacekeepers provided security as the DDR got under way, thereby improving significantly the effectiveness and pace of the programme. This allowed UNAMSIL to do a careful balancing act; combining flexible and decentralized disarmament procedures with "fast-track" demobilization. Special arrangements set up at care centres with the assistance of UNICEF and other child advocacy groups provided benefits to child soldiers and the dependants of combatants. Another important feature of DDR was the use of public information campaigns to publicize the details of the peace agreements and the DDR exercise as well as to raise awareness among the rank and file of the rebel groups.

The majority of the over 6,800 demobilized child soldiers were reunited with their families. Some 3,000 were absorbed into the community educational programmes run by UNICEF. As a result of these arrangements, Sierra Leone's model for demobilizing and reintegrating child soldiers is widely considered as success that could be applied to other peace-keeping operations.

Demobilized combatants got small cash stipends while undergoing six-month training after which they were then sent back into civilian life with start-up tool kits to help them find work. Carpenters, for instance, received hammers, saws and chisels, while construction workers were given masonry tools.

More than 12,000 ex-fighters opted for formal education and were placed in schools, colleges and even at the local university. Their course fees were paid for and they were given a living allowance for between one to three years, depending on when they registered with the programme. The remaining ex-fighters found jobs in farming and other activities. The entire programme, according to the Government, cost \$36.5 million. International donors provided most of the money.

The success in disarming and demobilizing combatants was not equally matched with efforts to reintegrate and find them decent jobs. Most have now joined the large pool of the unemployed and unless the economy generates more jobs, the presence of former fighters roaming the streets will continue to be one of the Government's major challenges.

**For further information**

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