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European Commission supports peace process in Congo-Brazzaville

The European Commission is supporting, through its Rapid Reaction Mechanism, the urgent disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of the so called Ninja Rebels in the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). The signature on 17 March 2003 of a cease-fire agreement between the Government and the "Ninja Rebels" in the Pool Region has opened up an important window of opportunity for peace. The decision of the Commission, worth 731.000 Euros, responds to this in a concrete manner. Implementation on the ground will be undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which has the capacity to initiate actions within a few days. The UNDP has recent experience of this type of operation from a similar programme implemented in Congo-Brazzaville.

The signature in Brazzaville of a new agreement on 17 March 2003 (confirming the cease-fire agreements of 1999) between the "Ninja rebels" and the Government, creates a potential basis for a more peaceful future. However, the military and political situation following the signature of the new agreement is clearly volatile and a swift and coherent DDR programme targeting the approximately 1000 "ex-rebels" in the region, is a prerequisite for longer-term stability.

The European Commission has today decided to make available 731.000 Euros to fund the disarmament and demobilisation of the 1000 rebels. As a direct follow-up, the programme will also initiate efforts to reintegrate the ex-combatants into their home-towns/villages through income generating actions on a micro-scale during a period of six months. This programme will be followed, in principle, by other interventions funded by the EC, notably through the already existing regional multi-donor disarmament and reintegration programme.

Congo-Brazzaville suffered from three civil wars during the 1990s (1993/94, 1997 and 1998/99) resulting in numerous victims, political instability and widespread destruction of the country's infrastructure. The Government's General Amnesty in favour of the militias on 15 August 1999 and the subsequent cease-fire agreements between the Government and several rebel groups in November/December 1999, enabled peace to be restored and a national dialogue to be initiated. However, the large number of non-demobilised militias and the widespread circulation of small arms in the country was always seen as a major threat to the stability of the country. At the end of March 2002, localised fighting resumed in the Pool Region opposing non-demobilised "Ninja militias" and the Regular Army. This fighting devastated the region, led to numerous casualties and the displacement of around 90,000 people out of a total population in Pool of 200,000.