Four hundred and sixteen Rwandans who had been caught up with armed groups in eastern DRC have now completed a program designed to help them rebuild their lives back home.

The group finished the 77th round of the Rwanda Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission's (RDRC) program on Thursday, September 10, at Mutobo. Among them were 256 men and 160 women, 130 former combatants, 84 civilians who'd been associated with armed groups, and 202 dependents. The former fighters came out of groups including the FDLR, CNRD, Wazalendo, Nyatura, FARDC, PARECO and RUD.

The program is built around helping people step away from a life defined by conflict, reconnecting with family, rejoining their communities, and picking up the responsibilities of ordinary civilian life.

At Mutobo, participants went through sessions covering Rwanda's history, civic education, Ndi Umunyarwanda, the country's second National Strategy for Transformation, along with practical topics like cooperatives, financial access, health insurance, education, community policing, and entrepreneurship and anti-corruption efforts.

They also studied international and civil law as it relates to genocide, and the importance of pushing back against genocide ideology, denial, minimization, and other things that fuel hatred. Along the way, they sat down with government officials, diplomats, MPs, religious leaders, researchers, journalists, and other guests from Rwanda and abroad.

RDRC chairperson Valerie Nyirahabineza told participants that coming home was a chance to rebuild bonds with family and community and start fresh.

People made their way back through several entry points, Rubavu, Nyarushishi in Rusizi District, and Kijote in Nyabihu District, with most originating from the Western Province: 195 from Rubavu, 60 from Nyabihu, 47 from Ngororero, 34 from Musanze, and 20 from Rutsiro.

For those who completed it, finishing the program marks the start of rebuilding their place in their communities after years tied up in the conflict in eastern Congo.