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PRESS RELEASE

**UNAMSIL HANDS OVER SECURITY PRIMACY OF EASTERN SIERRA
LEONE TO GOVERNMENT**

Freetown – The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) yesterday handed over security primacy for the Eastern Province to the Government of Sierra Leone at a colourful and emotional ceremony in the eastern provincial headquarters town of Kenema. It was the last of the country’s three provinces to be handed back.

The handover of security primacy by UNAMSIL will culminate in September when the Western Area, including the capital Freetown, is given back to the Government.

The symbolic handover of the flag marking the transfer of primacy was accompanied by a spectacular parade by the peacekeepers, the RSLAF and the SLP.

The occasion was attended by Vice President Solomon Berewa, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Force Commander, Major-General Sajjad Akram, Director of Administration, Ronnie Stokes, UNAMSIL Chief of Staff, Colonel Roland Ladley and Commanders of UNAMSIL’s Southern and Northern Commands, Brigadiers-General Sajjad Ahmed Bakhshi and Nuhu Bamali. Also present were senior Government officials including Minister of Finance Joseph B. Dauda, Minister of Development and Economic Planning Mohamed B Daramy, Deputy Minister of Defence Joe Blell, Ministers of State for the South and East Dr SUM Jah and Sahr Fillie-Faboe, Chief of Defence Staff Major-General Sam Mboma and Inspector-General of Police Brima Acha Kamara.

Thanking the peacekeepers for their “invaluable support” in returning peace to Sierra Leone, Vice President Berewa said for a significant number of years “UNAMSIL has played an impressive role in the restoration of peace and in the maintenance of stability in the country”, adding that Government was “highly impressed with this role and the dignified manner” with which the UN had handled the country’s security. He said the “professionalism which you have displayed will be the phenomenon worthy of emulation” by the Sierra Leone Police and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces.

Mr Berewa said his government was committed to ensuring security for Sierra Leoneans; hence had ratified a National Security and Central Intelligence Act which provided for additional structures in the security administration of the country. He said the Provincial and District Security Committees set up by Government would complement the effort of the security forces.

While the people of the eastern region would miss the peacekeepers, he continued, they were “consoled by the fact that they have left peace with us, which we know our own security forces are committed to maintain and protect”. He said memories of the peacekeepers’ stay in the province would “remain an indelible print in our nation’s recorded history”. He assured his audience, which included traditional rulers and ordinary citizens, that their security after UNAMSIL was guaranteed, urging them to report any strange incident to the security forces. “All of you are part and parcel of the security apparatus,” he added.

Major-General Akram praised the effort of the Pakistani and Zambian peacekeepers in the east, whom he said had done a tremendous job. He said the handover of security primacy was a “historic period [that] will always be remembered as an important milestone not only for the people of Sierra Leone, but also for all members of UNAMSIL who will return home laden with unforgettable memories and rich experience of serving a noble cause”. He said he was heartened by “the depth of good feeling between the UNAMSIL units and the local population”, adding that peacekeepers had worked “tirelessly with the locals” to build up “an extraordinary relationship of goodwill by undertaking a huge amount of humanitarian work”, which he assured, the peacekeepers would continue doing.

The Acting SRSB said the handover of security primacy did not mean a complete pullout by the peacekeepers. He said they would continue to work with the army and police to mentor and advise them, but also to “ensure that they are capable of maintaining peace and security throughout the country” once UNAMSIL left. He urged the traditional leaders “to play their own part” in the maintenance of security. “We must all support the police and the army, and support them wholeheartedly,” he said.

Earlier, the Paramount Chief representing the eastern province, PC Amara Vanga hun thanked the peacekeepers saying, “It is emotional to see our brother peacekeepers hand over to us”. He appealed to all Sierra Leoneans to help nurse peace and embrace each other as brothers and sisters once again.

As the dignitaries dispersed, the crowds chanted praises of the peacekeepers saying they had given them peace and food, repaired their roads and given them humanitarian assistance including free medical facilities.

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