



PRESS RELEASE

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PUBLIC INFORMATION SECTION ENDS SENSITIZATION ON UNAMSIL DRAWDOWN IN BO AND KENEMA DISTRICTS

The Public Information Section of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has ended its sensitization campaign on UNAMSIL's drawdown in Kenema district, eastern Sierra Leone, two weeks after completing a similar exercise in Moyamba and Bo districts in the south.

The nationwide campaign is scheduled to end in October.

The campaign is embodied in a performance by a local comedian group, 'Young Professionals', which tells Sierra Leoneans that UNAMSIL came to the country to restore peace, but since that peace has now been restored, UNAMSIL is withdrawing. At each location, hundreds of people including local authorities, district administrators, women and youth watched the performance. It calls on Sierra Leoneans to have confidence in the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) as they have received comprehensive training from UNAMSIL authorities. Communities are also encouraged to support and cooperate with the security forces. The comedians stress that communities should take over implementation of their own development programmes, especially through their local councils.

Most people said they understood the message being disseminated in the performance, but they remained concerned about the effectiveness of the SLP and RSLAF, and the Yenga border problem between Sierra Leone and Guinea. Questions were also asked about the legitimacy of the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone.

UNAMSIL military observers (MILOBS) and civilian police (CIVPOL) accompanied the team to all locations and assured audiences that UNAMSIL had confidence in government security agencies. On Yenga, they said the problem was to be solved at a diplomatic level between the countries. They emphasized that UNAMSIL would leave no security problem unsolved.

Audiences were also informed that the Special Court was brought to Sierra Leone to address impunity by bringing to justice those who bore the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed during the war so that it would not happen again.

The campaign continues in all five districts of the northern province in September and its success can be credited to the format, as comedy is traditionally one of the most successful means of reaching out to the people of Sierra Leone.

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