



PRESS RELEASE

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UNAMSIL CURBS THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS

Freetown, Sierra Leone – On various occasions the Secretary-General of the United Nations has underscored the importance of a coordinated international response to address the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic world-wide and highlighted, in particular, the magnitude of the problem in Africa, where it is highly exacerbated by the conditions of conflict, violence and political instability. Seriously concerned by its impact in the context of peacekeeping operations, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1308 in July 2000 calling the concerned UN bodies to incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention, awareness, skills-training and advice for all military and civilian personnel of all international peacekeeping operations.

As the largest and most important peacekeeping operation at the time, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was the first to benefit from this approach at the earliest stage and began implementing a coordinated programme on HIV/AIDS in its area of operation. Thus, the prevention of the transmission of the disease among peacekeepers and host communities has always taken precedence.

The UN has and continues to uphold the overriding principle of non-discrimination and respect for international human rights law in all its preventive efforts. Furthermore, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at UN Headquarters recommended that troop-contributing countries which do not have a mandatory testing policy, should test and screen their personnel for HIV before deployment to peacekeeping missions. Since the establishment of the HIV/AIDS Units in Peacekeeping Missions, all uniformed peacekeepers benefit from a standardized training programme to ensure that they are given comprehensive information about HIV/AIDS and provided with condoms and UNAIDS awareness cards containing basic facts on the disease and are available in more than 10 languages.

UNAMSIL has been working assiduously to stem the spread of the disease by instigating various initiatives targeting the widest cross-section of stakeholders. Its broad-based strategy encompasses programmes in various areas particularly those in areas where Peacekeepers are deployed. Basic education and training on prevention and protection, voluntary testing, counselling, treatment and care are all covered under the awareness umbrella. In turn, these activities ensure outreach to all uniformed services, civilian personnel, both international and national, as well as to vulnerable groups, including women, youth, professional and community-based associations, internally displaced persons and ex-combatants, among others, and in communities which interact with peacekeepers in the mission area.

Induction briefing on HIV/AIDS is given to all personnel, military and civilian, on joining the mission; they are also advised on their respective roles and responsibilities as Peacekeepers, consistent with the UN Code of Conduct. To further reinforce the message of HIV/AIDS awareness for Sierra Leoneans and UNAMSIL personnel, including its military, three radio programmes are broadcast each week on Radio UNAMSIL. It must also be emphasized that the mission uses its Peacekeepers as ambassadors of the prevention message, through initiatives such as its training of peer trainers who are taken from different ranks of the mission's military force. They then coordinate campaigns and sensitization programmes for communities in their locations and for their colleagues.

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UNAMSIL

United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone

It should therefore be underscored that UNAMSIL gives serious concern to the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS among peacekeepers and host communities especially populations already suffering from the devastation of conflict and may be particularly vulnerable to the virus. The Mission will also continue its struggle to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS.

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