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PRESS RELEASE

UNAMSIL SRSG Assesses Voter Registration in the Northern Towns of Port Loko and Makeni

UNAMSIL SRSG Mwakawago visits an election registration station in Makeni

Freetown - The Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago today led a delegation of senior officials of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and the National Electoral Commission (NEC) on an assessment tour of the northern provincial towns of Port Loko in the Port Loko district and Makeni in the Bombali district, to ascertain at firsthand the ongoing voter registration exercise for May's local governement elections.

In Makeni, where the SRSG and team were welcomed by the Commander of UNAMSIL Sector Centre, Brigadier-General Shafiq Uzzaman, the Senior Elections Officer for the North, Kemoh Mansaray briefed them on the progress of voter registration. Mr. Mansaray said that the full participation of Paramount Chiefs had given a big boost to the exercise which had otherwise had a low-key start, something he attributed to the lack of a proper sensitization and the state of the country's economy. He said that there had been attempts by some under-aged people to register and some others to register more than once, but that these attempts were forestalled, thanks to the vigilance of the electoral officials,.

Ambassador Mwakawago and entourage proceeded to visit five registration centers at the St. Francis Primary School, Stocco Primary School, Masongbo Registration Centre, Independence Square and the Roman Catholic Primary School. He commended the people of the Bombali Shebora chiefdom for their massive turnout, saying that there had been marked improvement compared to what he experienced during the first week, and encouraged all Sierra Leoneans to be ready to hold accountable those councilors they would vote for.

The delegation had previously visited Port Loko where the Senior Elections Officer, John Simbo briefed them on the progress of the registration. The SRSG advised them to discourage under-age registration and then toured three registration sites, including the DEC Primary School, the Native Administration Court and the NEC Registration Centre.

The northern provincial tour comes days after the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) for Governance and Stabilization, Mr. Allan Doss led a similar delegation of senior officials of UNAMSIL and the National Electoral Commission in inspecting registration centers of the Western Rural District in such areas as Regent, Grafton, Hastings and Waterloo.

At Regent, the chairman of the Mountain Rural District Council, Mr. E.G. Caeser expressed satisfaction at the turnout of the registration. He said that youth in the area had organized themselves into a task force and were sensitizing the people on the local council elections and also encouraging them to exercise their civic right by registering and later voting. He appealed to NEC to send more photographers to his area.

Expressing satisfaction at the positive change of the registration exercise, Mr. Doss urged the chairman to encourage the youth to continue their sensitization programs, saying that if the people voted and got the district councilors they wanted, they would be able to express themselves with regards to their needs for the development of their communities.

In Grafton, Hastings and Waterloo, registrars expressed similar satisfaction at the improved turnout, saying that the start of the photographic aspect motivated several people to register. Later, the Electoral Commissioner Western Area, Mr. Freddie Bright expressed his appreciation at the assistance UNAMSIL and the United Nations Development Program were rendering to the National Electoral Commission. The team also toured NEC's operations center at Kissy.

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