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*UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE  
(UNAMSIL)*

**PRESS BRIEFING**

*Near Verbatim*

*24 October 2003*

**ALAN DOSS**

**Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General/ UN Resident  
Coordinator in Sierra Leone**

I'm delighted to see the working press here this morning. As you know, today is United Nations Day celebrated all over the world. Some of you may have been at the ceremony we have just concluded. I know in Sierra Leone we think of the United Nations as a peacekeeping mission, which is extremely important and is doing a tremendous job, but there are also other facets to United Nations in Sierra Leone working on humanitarian and development issues. I thought this would be a good opportunity to give you some insights in terms of that work and give you an opportunity to pose any questions.

Before I say a few introductory words, let me just introduce the team. We have a number of agencies represented here in Sierra Leone, not all of them are represented here but a good number are. Starting on my left: Rosemarie Parnell, representing the World Food Programme (WFP); Keith Wright, UNICEF; Dennis Johnson, UN Office for Humanitarian Coordination (OCHA); Musa Abiriga, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); Bert Coppens, UNDP.

Our programmes collectively here focus on four major areas: poverty reduction and reintegration of displaced and refugee populations; good governance, peace and security; economic recovery and human rights and reconciliation. We try very much to work together in developing and implementing these programmes with the Government but also with other partners—civil society, the NGOs, local communities. We work closely with Government but not only with Government. And of course, we collaborate with other bilateral partners and the international financial institutions, in particular the World Bank. Under those four headings, just a brief illustration of what we've been doing.

Under poverty reduction and reintegration, we focus very much on the extension of basic services to population, particularly the most vulnerable and the poor, and areas, for example, where large number of refugees and displaced people have returned. If I can mention just a couple of agencies that have been active in this area—UNICEF, WHO and

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UNHCR have worked on the extension of primary health care, getting primary health care out to people. Because as you know Sierra Leone has an extraordinarily high infant mortality rate, one of the highest in the world, an average of 356 children a year for every thousand that are born, a third of them don't get to be five years old. So you understand the importance of concentrating in that area. We are also very much involved in working on primary education. Again, literacy levels are very low in this country. Few girls go to school. We're focusing on improving education, particularly primary education and especially getting more girls into school. Our colleagues in UNICEF and the World Bank continue to work diligently in that area.

All of us are involved in promoting awareness and prevention of HIV and AIDS. It's a sleeping menace, if you will, but it is there. It threatens everybody and collectively we have assigned that a very high priority. Other areas we are working on are rebuilding communities and structures—clinics, schools. A variety of agencies including UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, WFP have all come together to help the Government's effort to rebuild war-damaged infrastructures and especially social infrastructures. Much of that work in reintegration of internally displaced has been coordinated by our colleagues in the UNOCHA. They have led our efforts to raise funds for Sierra Leone, which has been quite successful in recent years. We've managed on average to raise close to 60-70 million dollars for humanitarian efforts each year for the last 3-4 years; in fact it reached almost a hundred million in 2001.

Governance, peace and security is a critical area. UNAMSIL has helped restore peace but for the future to maintain peace will require state institutions to work effectively, especially the army, the police. We're working closely with the Government to help strengthen the capacity of the SLP and to make sure the SLP is everywhere in this country, not just in Freetown, Bo or other big towns, but where people need the police and to strengthen their ability to get out and police, particularly, the eastern districts. The UNDP has worked particularly closely with UNAMSIL CIVPOL and with the SLP. But also governance, I mentioned this in my speech this morning. We need a second phase of DDR. The first phase you may all be familiar with, but the second phase is about Difficult Democratic Reforms. It's about helping Government serve the people, and not the other way around. Reforms in state procurement reduce corruption. Efforts to decentralize Government with local elections scheduled for next year and above all, the justice system. Last Wednesday, I opened a Magistrate Court in Moyamba; a magistrate will sit there the first time in more than a decade. So this is all part of the work we do together to try to strengthen the underpinnings of good Government in this country. Because, without good Government, all the troubles of the last 10 years, we risk seeing them return. So the Government has to serve the people and not the other way around.

Economic recovery, it's about restoring the private sector, especially in improving and strengthening agriculture. Our colleagues in the FAO and WFP are working hard with food for work programmes, for example, rural roads, but also seeds, tools, and training for farmers so that agricultural production can be revived and restored because that's what

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most people in this country depend on; they depend on agriculture and they need our support.

Last quick overview—I'm just citing a few examples, this is not a comprehensive review of what we do—is the area of human rights and reconciliation. Because without human rights, there will not be lasting peace. And again, through the efforts of UNAMSIL and the efforts of UNICEF, UNHCR, OCHA, UNDP, we've been focusing on helping build the capacity to protect human rights in this country, monitor human rights, to ensure that the international standards are respected, and that human rights become part of the lexicon of development in this country. So next year, for example, we expect to see the establishment of an independent Human Rights Commission which would carry on some of the work that's been started by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Those are just a few of the highlights I've touched on; this is not meant to be a comprehensive review of the work we're doing in this country which, I think, is quite significant, and not just in Freetown. I do want to underline that. We are present everywhere in this country. We have field offices, we have staff in all parts of the country. But above all, we work especially for those who are the poorest and the most vulnerable, and we hope to continue to do that work in the year ahead, and indeed, to increase and intensify our activities in support of Sierra Leone and its people.

#### **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

*(Exclusive): I have just come from Koidu, Kono district. UNAMSIL is doing tremendously well in Koidu where we have a PAKBATT team residing, presently engaged in providing school materials to school children, assisting the needy. What is the role of UNICEF in Kono in assisting other children that had made requests for UNICEF and who were replied that that is not their mandate? Secondly, Kono is devastated with regards to shelter. What are the NGOs under the UN doing to build the development in Koidu, the people are greatly trying to see how best UN can help them. Finally, to Mr. Alan Doss, George Bush recently visited the Sudanese people. Other dignitaries are visiting other areas within the region. What is UN doing to solve the problem between Guinea and Sierra Leone?*

**UNICEF:** Just a brief overview. We focus on health, education, water supply and child protection, working with the Government and NGOs. First of all, in health, we have rehabilitated and are now supporting primary health care units. In the next few years, we'll get all the primary health care units operational. We've trained all of the health staff and enabled the district health management team and the district medical officers to become functional. We have made operational the immunization service throughout the district. When we say throughout the district, the marginal ones, marginal chiefdoms are the least served; we have to put focus on them. In a few weeks' time, there will be measles campaign to cover the whole district as well as covering the whole country. Similarly, in education, we are enabling schools to reopen, supplying books, exercise books, textbooks,

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pens and teaching materials, and also training teachers. In child protection, we're still completing the reintegration of the children who are part of the DDR programme. That's going particularly well. 98 percent of the children who went through DDR are back at home, and 3,000 of those are now in school. We're also working with World Vision to enable children who are currently working in the diamond mines to go back to school so that they no longer need to work in the mines. There's still a great more to be done in that area yet, partly it is to encourage the children to come out of the mines and partly, to ensure that there are alternatives, there are reasonable schools for them to go to where they're going to get good education, and where there are alternative forms of employment. That is a job that is yet to be complete. That's going to be a very substantial job we need to work on for the next years. Finally, water supply is a very big area, water supply and sanitation. We're working with all the schools and health centres to provide sanitation and water, and I cannot remember the exact figure now, how many communities we're working with, it's over 50. That overall is what we're doing. Specifically, the question you asked about some children who claimed they were not part of our mandate. I don't know who those children are, if they're able to come forward, perhaps we can sort out what the situation is. We try to help all children whatever we can, but the needs of individual children are enormous if you add them all up. So we tend to work through institutions rather than individual children. The times we work with individual children are those who are most vulnerable, normally without their parents or with some form of disability or are in very exploitative conditions such as working in the diamond mines.

**Mr. Doss:** On the shelter issue, a couple of UN agencies have been active and I'll ask them to speak. I remember when I first went to Koidu before the disarmament actually began, there wasn't a single roof anywhere, when I flew over the town. I remember it very dramatically. The fact that there are now some roofs is already some progress, perhaps UNHCR which is very active and to some extent, UNDP, will want to say something.

**UNHCR:** UNHCR is responsible for bringing back returnees and reintegrating them into society. Out of the returnee package, which is the first phase, we provide a returnee package that includes plastic sheeting, which provide them with a roof over their heads. Hence, some of the plastic sheeting you have seen in Koidu. Our emphasis is mainly to increase the absorptive capacity in the returnee areas and Kono is one of the major returnee areas. Our programmes mainly target communal assistance in terms of rehabilitating schools, clinics, water wells and so on. In exceptional cases, we provide shelter to the most vulnerable groups. We have done quite a bit in terms of communal activities and from this year, we have deliberately decided that we should not be making decisions for the community. Let the community make the decisions; we'll provide the resources. So we have adapted what we call the community-empowerment programme. We allocate funds and it is the community who decides what their priorities are. So that's the strategy we have now.

**UNDP:** In terms of shelter in Sierra Leone, it's part of the national infrastructure which is probably the poorest looked after and where the needs are the greatest. As part of the

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recovery programme, UNDP has been financing the rehabilitation of a number of buildings in order to allow the Government and government offices and social infrastructures to work. Again, mainly government offices where justice can take part but not so much in the construction of private housing. That's a huge sector, which remains unexplored. There are possibilities there. UNDP is planning to launch with other agencies, other partners outside of the UN, a micro-finance activity programme, and in that context there might be important possibilities to focus increasingly on that as well. I also notice the absence in Sierra Leone of any initiative so far in the construction of low-cost housing. Maybe that's another idea, which may be developed in a country such as Sierra Leone.

**Mr. Doss:** Last, on Yenga, and on the border demarcation issue, let me just say the UN is encouraging both countries to come together, dialogue and resolve the problem in a peaceful manner. There have been several meetings, including technical visits in the border area. We hope that this will, sooner or later, lead to a formal agreement between the two countries on the demarcation of the border as it is obvious that it is an important element in ensuring the peaceful resolution of disputes within the Mano River Union as a whole.

*(SKY News): What are the mission's challenges to face terrorism, which is a threat to world peace and security?*

**Mr. Doss:** Terrorism is a global phenomenon and sadly, as we discovered in August, the UN itself is not immune to terrorist threat. So I think we're working on it on several levels, but on the global level, through the machinery of the UN, there will continue to be a major effort to address the problems of terrorism through legal means, but also working together among countries to understand better the phenomenon and to deal with root causes of terrorism. I think we have to be hard on terrorism, but we also have to be hard on the causes of terrorism. But then locally, of course, because of the events of last August, we have had to take some measures to ensure the safety of UN staff. We're trying to do this in a manner that doesn't inhibit our work because the work of the UN is about working with people; it's not about living in fortresses. All of these agencies that you see around the table, and let me just take this moment to introduce the FAO representative, Muhammed Farah, and Charles Annor-Frempong representing the World Bank. But all of us work outside of this and other offices. That is our job. That's how we function. So we're anxious to ensure the safety of our staff, but at the same time we do not wish to inhibit and prevent us from working with people all over this and many other countries. Otherwise that would be a defeat for the UN. Those who seek to prevent us from doing our jobs would succeed if we could not be out dealing with people and helping them solve the tremendous problems that they and the international community face. So we have taken stock, and we will continue to take stock of the threat posed by terrorism, and this will evolve I believe into a compendium of measures, globally, nationally and regionally to deal with the threat, and also to understand and deal with the causes of that threat.

*(The News): For WFP, our President Kabbah's aim is to ensure food security by year 2007. What is your office doing to help ensure that there's maximum food by the year*

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2007? To UNDP, your senior governance advisor this week said at the press conference held that religion cannot actually bring peace to the world, she said that what can actually bring peace to the nation is to address the causes of the war which she said was the marginalisation of the youth and vulnerable people in the country. She said that we need to sensitize the community, but the roads are very bad in Sierra Leone. I'm suggesting, what can you do to make the roads so that it can help the people.

**Mr. Doss:** Lets start with food security. Let me ask my colleague in FAO to lead off, they've been working with the government on this. And also, WFP – which is very active in this area – and indeed, doing some work on feeder roads, but perhaps to Mr. Farah.

**FAO:** Regarding the pledge that the President has made, we feel that, with the available resources that this country has, it is an objective that can be attained provided that the Government and the people of Sierra Leone take the lead in trying to ensure food security. As far as our organization is concerned, we're working hand in hand with the ministry of agriculture and fisheries as well as with our colleagues at the UN and development partners to enhance the agricultural production and also to have the capacity-building of the farmers in order that they are able to produce. A lot of steps have been taken in which farmers have been given the necessary tools in order to produce, as well as training that they need to enhance their production. Among those is provision of seeds, tools as well as establishing workshops for production of tools, enhancing the production of vegetables through cooperatives, especially women cooperatives which are doing very well, and also having undertaken a very extensive field and executive review with our partners World Bank and IFAD in order to come up with the right way to proceed in order that food security can be attained in the shortest time. In summary, FAO's mandate is basically to assist the Government to alleviate hunger and enhance food production, and this has been going on.

**WFP:** Let me talk a little bit about what we're doing for the short term and for the long term. For the short term, we're taking a two-pronged approach to try to feed the hungry and the poor. For people who are very vulnerable, for example malnourished children, pregnant mothers, lactating mothers, we are providing food aid to those people through identification of the people who need the food the most, also refugees in this country and Sierra Leoneans who are returning from being refugees outside the country. The second prong is to solve long-term needs. An example of this is we're providing food aid to children in over 800 primary schools. We're trying to encourage children to remain in school and to be healthy. We're also providing food aid for food training programmes. We're also working with FAO to train farmers so that the farmers can plant and not eat their seeds. And that's for a longer-term approach. Right now we have people in from UN agencies who are looking at how best can WFP set up a programme for the next five years. So we're beginning that process, studying what the requirement is, and how best we can meet that need with food aid.

**World Bank:** Before I touch on the issue of roads, let me also say one or two words on this agricultural issue, because I am an agriculturist and rural development person

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basically. Most of the time we tend to look at others in terms of how they can provide food for us to eat, and what we can also contribute towards agricultural production. But as journalists, let me throw a challenge to you. You have a big role in bringing the issue in this country upfront to be discussed in the papers and also as a source of conduit of information between sources of technology and those who are producing. I want to see the journalists take a key role in the issue of feeding the nation by the year 2007. You may have to look at it critically and bring the issue to the fore. You have to be reminding both farmers and politicians to be able to meet this goal.

On the issue of roads, the World Bank has been supporting especially in the area of rural roads since the peace process began. The last programme which was actually launched about a month ago, is being implemented by NaCSA [National Commission for Social Action] and has a chunk of money devoted specifically for rural roads. It's also on a demand-driven basis, therefore communities whose roads are bad can request for assistance through NaCSA to have their roads fixed. And they all go to support agricultural production in a way. So that is one main area where the Bank has been involved in so far as rural roads are concerned.

**UNDP:** I happened to read her statement. This was a presentation made in front of religious leaders and I think correctly, she also pointed out that praying and providing a message of hope is positive but it's not good enough. She also pointed that religious leaders have a responsibility in terms of mobilizing the populations and engaging them into a positive attitude and towards participation in community work and self-development. She actually used the terminology to address the causes of the causes of the problems, which comes back to what Mr. Doss mentioned earlier going to the root cause of the problem. It's not enough to have peace in the country, you have to also address the problems of education, infrastructure, agriculture, health, and so on. Collectively, the community needs to encourage the Government and civil society towards engaging into a certain interaction in order to reach a certain objective to overcome all the problems that do exist. I would also wish to emphasize that foreign assistance is only exactly that, foreign assistance. It only comes as a supplement to the national effort and will never be able to replace or finance all the efforts, which are necessary to take a country such as Sierra Leone out of its problems.

*(Concord Times): I know that the UN is celebrating 58 years of existence. How many countries does the UN operate in? What are some of its achievements in these countries in terms of conflict resolutions?*

**Mr. Doss:** All countries in the UN participate in our work, and there are 192 member states at the present time. Of course, they vary in size, from states of a few thousand people to China with 1.2 billion people. We have operational programmes and activities and include all the agencies here in at least 150-160 countries around the world. We have UN Resident Coordinators in 130+ countries. It's a very dense and large network of international cooperation. In terms of what we've been able to achieve in countries, which are emerging from conflict, I think the record is mixed—some success, some failures.

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Perhaps I can ask my colleague Dennis Johnson who has worked in a lot of these countries perhaps to share some of his thoughts on this. As you know OCHA is very close to the ground when it comes to crisis situations. Many of them involve massive human suffering and the UNOCHA is primarily responsible for orchestrating UN response to humanitarian needs of those countries.

**OCHA:** The breadth and depth of crises around the world is almost unprecedented, even as we speak. When you look just next door, Liberia, they're beginning to emerge from a complex emergency very similar to the one here in Sierra Leone. These are some of the kinds of things the UN responds to. We also are very active through the UN agencies and many implementing partners around the world in things like natural disasters—hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes in other countries. Almost always there is a disaster relief team that goes in immediately if in fact there's not one in place already. In anticipation of events such as these, the UN, its agencies, its staff, its many partners around the world have ongoing programmes where they train people to prepare and plan for events such as these so that a lot of the work we're doing isn't just reactionary and responding to a crisis or an emergency or a disaster, but it's also sitting down beforehand, as we did here in Sierra Leone, in anticipation of being able to move people into Liberia from here to sit down and plan ahead to understand clearly what can be done to help people immediately, as soon as teams can move in. So a lot of what we're doing is in anticipation as well; so it's not just reactionary response after something has happened. This is going on in many different places around the world.

*Q: Should I say Sierra Leone is one of the successful countries?*

**OCHA:** I think we can judge for ourselves. I think we have to look to the future. Having been in places like Mogadishu where I can say we were less than successful and that might be a bit of understatement, but I think that as we look at what's happened in Sierra Leone in the past four years that I've been here, the progress has been truly remarkable—free elections; the economy is beginning to revive; there are many more children in school than there used to be; the health services, in fact, are not terrific, they have a long way to go, but most districts have some kind of health care that is being provided. When we look back where we were just in late 1999 when I first arrived, the change hasn't been a transition as we like to say it; it's in fact been a transformation, a transformation from a country coming out of a horrible war into a country at peace. We do need to continue to work very hard, though. We continue to urge the donors that we deal with on an ongoing basis to continue to support the relief programmes such as the refugees who are here, the Sierra Leone refugees in Guinea and other countries who want to return, but also to begin to have a vision of the future. The time has come at this point to start working rather than a week, a month ahead. The time has come to plan for the years ahead. So we're talking more about poverty reduction strategies. The government is beginning to reach further and further into the future. It's certainly a good sign.

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*(The Vision): Charles Taylor is planning to storm the sub-region again. What measures has the UN put in place to counter this plan?*

**Mr. Doss:** As you know, Mr. Taylor is under the indictment of the Special Court. And wherever he may go in the world, he will remain under indictment, and therefore, vulnerable to arrest and prosecution in a court of law. As you know, he's no longer the leader of Liberia. I believe that measures have been taken to prevent him from exercising influence in that country. We would hope that those measures would be successful, and certainly as far as Sierra Leone is concerned, we would remain very vigilant in terms of the border. UNAMSIL has considerable capacity still and maintains a very close watch on the border areas. At the same time, the deployment and build-up of the UN mission in Liberia is a very positive development. We will soon have UN soldiers, blue berets on both sides of the border. That mission, like here, will deploy throughout Liberia. It will oversee a disarmament programme, reconstruction efforts, the rehabilitation of the economy, and the reconstitution of state authority including the armed forces and the Liberian police. It's a big, big job. Let's all hope it would be successful. I think these are very important safeguards for Sierra Leone and the sub-region. I hope that those who might be in a position to cause trouble will take note of that. The Security Council has given a very strong mandate to the mission in Liberia, a Chapter 7 mandate so-called, which allows it to act and react in a strong fashion to perceived threats, as we have here in Sierra Leone. So I think a combination of those measures, and above all, I would like to underline this, the role of ECOWAS and the African Union in helping to protect the peace here and extend that to other countries in the sub-region is critical. There has been a very active and generally very positive support from ECOWAS leaders to this process. They ensured that Mr. Taylor left Liberia. Liberia, Ivory Coast, other countries, will still need a lot of attention and support.

*(Christian Monitor): To UNICEF, among all classes of people children are most vulnerable. The streets of Freetown are beginning to get crowded with children who are orphans. Since there are not enough orphanages, what is UNICEF going to do to help the government with this problem?*

**UNICEF:** You are right in saying the street children are becoming a concern, and many of these children are vulnerable. It is something now at the end of reintegration, as part of the DDR, we must turn our attention. The situation is far more complex than what it appears on the surface. There've been a number of studies for us to try to find answers to this situation. The majority of the children actually come from regular homes. They're there on the streets during the day. They're there for a variety of reasons. They are living with parents or close relatives. With those ones, we have to make sure that they're receiving proper protection from their parents, that they find an alternative, we help them find an alternative to working on the streets, most especially getting them into schools, and making them stay in school. There is a smaller group of children who are on the streets permanently because they have left home. Here the important thing is to find their home, trace their parents, and again, enabling them to go home. That then leaves a small group

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who don't have a home, and now spend their lives now on the street. There's a variety of things that we can do to try to help them. Most important thing for all children is to be in a family home situation. And if they cannot be with their parents or close relatives, then with other adults who can become their parents, foster parents. We need as much as possible to foster this. There is a small number, relatively a small number. An action of last resort is an orphanage. Experiences around the world have shown that orphanages have their place but only when there is no other alternative. So UNICEF works very closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare and all NGOs to deal with this problem. What we find in other countries is that as we work with the children, we must also work on the problems that force the children to go to the streets. We are finding the phenomenon is growing in all the major areas. But it does seem that the pattern in Freetown is different from the pattern in the provincial towns. But it is something that will get a lot of attention in the next few years.

*(Ministry of Information and Broadcasting): Does the UN have a ready force deployed in many countries in terms of crisis? Why is it that you remove your staff immediately when there's a crisis in any country? To UNHCR, how do ensure that you properly screen refugees?*

**Mr. Doss:** As to the first question, no. We don't have a rapid deployment force directly at our command. The Secretary-General always has to assemble a force, that's why it takes some time. Occasionally, he can 're-hat' a force as has been done in Liberia where the ECOMIL troops became UNMIL troops. There are some elements that can be deployed quickly. There is something – which is called SHIRBRIG [Stand-by High Readiness Brigade] – which is some sort of stand-by headquarters staff team that can be put in place fairly quickly, but the Secretary-General has to negotiate with countries to obtain and deploy troops, in terms of engagement, the equipment, the cost—all that has to be negotiated, which makes it very difficult for the UN to deploy forces very rapidly in times of sudden crisis.

On the staffing, I would beg to differ on that. There are many countries in the world where we have evacuated what we call non-essential staff but nevertheless a core staff has remained throughout the crisis. Staff remained in Sierra Leone throughout the crisis, not everybody left. That is the case in many, many countries. Even today in Iraq, we still have a core staff functioning in Iraq, not as many as before for the reasons we know, but nevertheless, we've never withdrawn from Iraq. But we do have to balance the need to be there with the need to ensure safety of staff members. So we do try to achieve that balance. Let me add also that our national staff remain and do heroic work under very difficult circumstances. So it's not true that the UN disappears. It doesn't; it just readapts, but we don't disappear.

**UNHCR:** The 51st Convention, 60 protocol allows us to screen individual asylum-seekers, which include determining their state, to know whether they have well-founded fear of persecution as an individual. However, since we've had numerous wars, particularly in Africa, in 1969 the leaders of Africa decided to have a convention that will allow prima

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facie determination of people who flee from war – so that we can avoid status determination. Imagine during the crisis in Rwanda in 1994, if we have had to screen everybody, over 100,000 people cross the border in one day. That couldn't have been possible. This convention allows us that we give prima facie status-determination to all. It has its problems. One of the problems is combatants slipping through. Normally we work with the Government in a country particularly the police forces in order to see that no armed elements go into refugee camps. In many countries we have packages for ensuring the civilian character of refugee camps. In Sierra Leone, we have been working very closely with UNAMSIL, police and army, to identify those fighters or ex-combatants or who should be separated, unless they are below the age of 18, those who will be separated and taken to MAPE and MAFANTA. Always in situations like this, there will be one or two who will go through the safety net.

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