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**PRESS RELEASE**

**UNAMSIL FORCE COMMANDER DECLARES FALLEN PEACEKEEPERS MARTYRS**

*Freetown* - UNAMSIL Force Commander, Major General Sajjad Akram has described the 24 victims of the recent helicopter crash as “martyrs and heroes”. He was responding to the commiserations of peacekeepers of the Northern Command during his working tour of its headquarters at Murray Town last Friday.

The Force Commander described the 29 June incident as a very tragic one, which claimed lives of highly professional and dedicated officers. He paid tributes to the fallen peacekeepers, reiterating that, “highly professional and dedicated officers were lost in the crash. They laid down their lives for the pursuit of global peace; a task which they were carrying out very dedicatedly until they were taken away”.

“They are heroes and martyrs and would be remembered always by the United Nations,” he declared. General Akram reminded all that the best form of tribute that could be paid to the fallen heroes was to continue to work vigorously to accomplish the task of peace building in Sierra Leone. He expressed gratitude to the people of Sierra Leone for sharing in UNAMSIL’s grief during the tragic moment.

Commiserating with the Force Commander on behalf of the peacekeepers, the Commander Northern Command, Brigadier General Nuhu Bamalli noted that “there is no denying the fact that UNAMSIL has continued to make great strides in its peace building efforts in Sierra Leone”. “These achievements,” he added, “have however not come without a price.” Brigadier General Bamalli pointed out that the incident was a painful test not only to the immediate families of the victims but to their countries, the United Nations and the entire world.

He described the incident as a tragedy that “puts to test our courage, strength, hope and our individual and collective abilities to close ranks with the bereaved”.

He assured the Force Commander of the command’s loyalty and diligence in carrying out its duties professionally. “We are yet undaunted and we shall not rest on our oars in seeing to the successful execution of the Force Campaign Plan and Adjustment, Drawdown and Withdrawal (ADW) Plan,” he emphasized. Further driving home his point, Brigadier General Bamalli pointed out that as soldiers who are trained to overcome both physical and psychological obstacles, the Command still carried out routine duties to keep up the guard and react to any eventuality even during the trying period.

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Also at the occasion to extend their condolences were the Chairman Provincial Security Committee (West) Mr. Lawrence Bassie, the Commander Regional Police (West) Mr. S.I.S Koroma, Commanding Officers of GHANBATT 9, NIBATT 17, KENBATT 12 and NIBATT 18, the Commander Freetown Garrison, Colonel T.M Momodu, the Assistant Director of Prisons Sierra Leone, Mr. E.E Brown and the Chief of Murray Town Pa Ali Mammy Koroma.

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