



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

*UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)*

Ref. No.: UNAMSIL/PIOR 039/2003

24 October 2003

PRESS RELEASE

THE OFFICER-IN-CHARGE OF UNAMSIL / UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR HOSTS UN DAY CELEBRATIONS

Freetown – Sierra Leone’s Deputy Minister of Defence, Joe Blell today joined the Officer-in-Charge of UNAMSIL and UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Alan Doss, with Heads of UN agencies represented in Sierra Leone, in celebrating the United Nations Day at UNAMSIL Headquarters in Freetown.

“These are difficult times for the world and for the United Nations”, observed the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his statement marking the fifty-eight anniversary of the UN read by Mr. Doss. While “the peoples of the world, lost some of [their] best and most dedicated servants” following a “brutal assault on UN Baghdad headquarters”, Mr. Annan insisted United Nations workers will continue the “work of serving humanity wherever its needs are greatest”. “To do so successfully”, the Secretary-General admitted “it may be necessary to make changes in our international system, including the United Nations itself”. And so, Mr. Annan called on the peoples of the world to make their voices heard “loudly and firmly enough” so that their governments “make the effort to reach agreement to improve it.

In his own statement, the UNAMSIL OIC stated the “enormous challenges” outlined by the UN Secretary-General are “nowhere greater than in countries emerging from conflict”. “This is why the United Nations system is working with the Government of Sierra Leone to consolidate peace and assist the country recover from a decade of war and destruction” said Mr. Doss.

Mr. Doss told the audience that UN agencies in Sierra Leone have been able to support humanitarian relief as well as “longer term initiatives to reduce poverty and to promote good governance”. “Much has been achieved in the last twenty months since disarmament was completed” but he warned quoting a Sierra Leonean “another DDR programme is needed – Difficult Democratic Reforms”. Concluding his statement, Mr. Doss said, “the United Nations will do its part, but Sierra Leone will ultimately become what Sierra Leoneans want it to be”.

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In his statement, Sierra Leone Deputy Defence Minister commended UNAMSIL and Sierra Leone's "development partners and especially members of the Security Council, the African Union, the Economic Organisation of West African States and the Mano River Union for their support in the process of resolving the conflict in Sierra Leone". Mr. Blell paid "tribute to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his officials who made sure that the Peace Agreement signed in Lomé bore the stamp of a process that was homegrown". "I can assure you that, with adequate logistic support to our forces, we can sustain the peace in Sierra Leone", Mr. Blell added.

Concluding his remarks, Sierra Leone Deputy Minister of Defence requested the audience to observe a moment of silence in "honour of those who lost their lives in the process of bringing lasting peace to Sierra Leone".

Members of the diplomatic corps also witnessed the occasion. Others present included the Force Commander, Major General Sajjad Akram and his acting Deputy, Brigadier General Adrian Forster senior Government officials and UN civilian and military personnel.

The United Nations country team in Sierra Leone includes the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Office for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank.