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UNAMSIL FC HOLDS JOINT PRESS BRIEFING WITH SLP AND RSLAF

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 19 August 2005 – The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Major General Sajjad Akram, today held a joint press briefing with the Chief of Defence Staff of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), Major General Sam M'boma, and the Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) Brima Acha Kamara at the Staff Club of UNAMSIL at Aberdeen, west of the capital Freetown.

The briefing aimed at informing the public of security arrangements put in place to ensure that the security of the country is not threatened at any point, and also to highlight all the stages of the withdrawal processes and arrangements made to ensure that no security gaps are left.

Major General Sajjad Akram noted that the security situation in the country was calm and stable, and assured that the security agencies of Sierra Leone would be able to provide security once UNAMSIL leave. “This is a different force [meaning the RSLAF] from what you know during the war...they have been fully and professional trained,” he said adding, “UNAMSIL has conducted lots of trainings for both the SLP and RSLAF so that they will be in a better position to provide security for the country.”

The Force Commander stated that there was no imminent security threat from Sierra Leone’s neighbours, saying “I have confidence in the local security agencies”, and that since UNAMSIL handed over security primacy to Government they had never come back for help. “This means they are now capable to handle the security situation in the country,” he said.

Major General Sajjad Akram gave a rundown of UNAMSIL's current status on the withdrawal processes and asked members of the media to be partners with the SLP and RSLAF in their strive to a secured Sierra Leone.

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), Major General Sam M'boma, started by asserting that, "I want to establish here that in terms of security, both from the SLP and RSLAF, it is watertight...we have an effective mechanism that gives day to day reports on security activities...and quite recently, we conducted an exercise to test the alertness of our troops and it was very successful."

Major General Sam M'boma said because the RSLAF had satisfied certain benchmarks set by UNAMSIL, "that's why the UN now believes we are capable to handle the security of this country."

The Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Mr. Brima Acha Kamara, disclosed that he had been assured by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG), Victor Angelo that though UNAMSIL would be leaving the UN has provided 20 police advisers in the follow-on mission to continue training the SLP. "If you look at other police forces in West Africa, you will agree with me that we [SLP] have improved tremendously," he noted adding, "for quite a long time we have never failed to perform our duties." He asked the media to work with them "so that security in this country will become impregnable."

This press briefing was a unique one because participants include members of the civil society groups and local NGO's from the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, ENCISS, Campaign for Good Governance who also raised questions of concern.