

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)

5 December 2003

PRESS BRIEFING

Near Verbatim

KEMAL SAIKI, Chief of Public Information, Spokesman

**SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS NEW SPECIAL
REPRESENTATIVE FOR SIERRA LEONE**

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, on 2 November, appointed senior Tanzanian official Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago his new Special Representative for Sierra Leone, succeeding Oluyemi Adeniji, who recently became Nigeria's Foreign Minister.

Mr. Mwakawago served as the Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations from 1994 to 2003. Prior to that, he had served in high positions in the Government of Tanzania, including as Minister for Information and Broadcasting (1972-1977), Minister of Information and Culture (1982-1983), Minister of Labour and Manpower Development (1983-1987), and Minister of Industry and Trade (1987).

Mr. Mwakawago succeeds Oluyemi Adeniji, who was recently appointed as Nigeria's Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Secretary-General expressed his deep appreciation for the effective leadership that Mr. Adeniji provided to the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). Under the stewardship of Mr. Adeniji, UNAMSIL "supported a massive disarmament exercise, as well as national elections in Sierra Leone, and facilitated the restoration of the government's authority throughout the territory of Sierra Leone," according to a statement by a spokesman for Mr. Annan.

Under Mr. Mwakawago's leadership, UNAMSIL, and the whole United Nations family, will continue to assist the people of Sierra Leone to consolidate peace, while the Mission is also drawing down.

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SECURITY COUNCIL AGREES TO MAINTAIN SANCTIONS AGAINST LIBERIA

The United Nations Security Council agreed on 4 December to keep, "for the time being," two-year-old sanctions imposed on Liberia to stem arms trafficking during its civil war, but raised the prospect of holding talks soon on how they could eventually be lifted.

In a press statement, Ambassador Stefan Tafrov of Bulgaria, this month's President of the Council, said the Council had decided to continue the sanctions after consultations on the issue in New York - despite the signing of a ceasefire in the West African country in June.

The sanctions, introduced in 2001 as a long-running civil war raged in Liberia, are aimed at blocking imports of arms to Liberia, diamond exports, and the travel of senior members of the government.

Ambassador Munir Akram of Pakistan, chairman of the Council's Liberian sanctions committee, briefed the Council about the committee's discussions following a recent report by the panel of experts on Liberia.

Mr. Tafrov said "there was general agreement" in the Council that the sanctions should stay "to support the peace process in Liberia and to further consolidate peace and stability in the sub-region." But he added that given "recent positive developments," the Council agreed there was a need to "redefine the legal basis for the sanctions and to evolve appropriate criteria for their eventual lifting."

UNAMSIL OFFICER-IN-CHARGE PARTICIPATES IN THE 10TH MEETING OF THE NATIONAL RECOVERY COMMITTEE, COMMISSIONS MAGISTRATE COURT IN KONO

The Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, (UNAMSIL), and UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Alan Doss, on 2 November, participated in the 10th meeting of the National Recovery Committee (NRC) held at the district level in Kono, eastern Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone Minister of Development Mr. Mohammed Daramy chaired the meeting.

The Report of the District Recovery Committee (DRC) for Kono indicates that significant progress has been made in the past two years, including in the consolidation of state authority, reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructures, and highlights the challenges, in particular in the areas of economic recovery, roads rehabilitation and transportation.

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Mr. Doss expressed satisfaction at the overall progress in the recovery process in the diamond-rich Kono District and emphasized its “strategic and economic importance”. He also stressed that the Government of Sierra Leone and the local people should be prepared to assume full responsibilities for security and recovery, as UNAMSIL proceeds with its withdrawal from Sierra Leone. Representatives of the donor community, while renewing their support to the Government also urged it to assume “increased responsibilities for the development of the country, including through mobilization of domestic revenues”.

As part of the programme of the NRC meeting, Mr. Doss officially handed over to Sierra Leone Chief Justice, Abdulai Timbo, and the Magistrate Court building in Kono District. The building was rehabilitated with the support of UNAMSIL Trust Fund and furnished by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Stressing the interdependence between the promotion of justice, peace and development, Mr. Doss said, “Success will ultimately be measured by the extent to which justice is accessible to all.”

On his part, Mr. Timbo assured that the “Government will continue its efforts in the extension and consolidation of judicial coverage throughout the country”. He further announced that the Magistrate in the eastern district of Kenema would also regularly cover Kono District until a Resident Magistrate is permanently assigned there.

UNAMSIL OIC and members of the NRC also visited various sites in Kono District, including the 9th Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) battalion deployed along Sierra Leone-Guinea border, the ongoing reconstruction of Police Headquarters and barracks in Motema town; diamond mining sites, the Government hospital and the youth center in Koidu town.

UNAMSIL and UNDP have supported the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Magistrate Court buildings in Makeni, Magburaka, Port Loko, Kambia, Lunsar, Moyamba, Pujehun, Kailahun, Kabala and Matru Jong. Furniture and some office equipment have also been provided to these and other courts throughout the country.

Government Ministers and Deputy Ministers from key Ministries and representatives of the British Department for International Development (DfID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union, as well as international and national non-governmental organizations operating in Sierra Leone also attended the NRC meeting in Kono.

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VOICE OF CHILDREN SENSITIZES THE SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND DUMB ON HIV/AIDS

In commemoration of the World AIDS Day, the Voice of Children (VOC) of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), in collaboration with the Mission's HIV/AIDS Policy Officer today held a one-day sensitization programme on HIV/AIDS at the Milton Margai School for the Deaf and Dumb, in Freetown.

The producers of a VOC radio show 'Access' spearheaded this sensitization campaign, to inform disabled youths about the modes of transmission of the HIV virus, and the preventive methods to avoid contracting it. "We wanted to tell the deaf and dumb about HIV/AIDS, in their own language so that they can clearly understand the disease", said Access Producer Arnold Hallowel. "Disabled youths are often marginalised, it's important to speak about HIV/AIDS so that, yet another stigma, is not added"

Addressing the 170 children of the School for the Deaf and Dumb, Mrs. Hirut Befecadu, the HIV/AIDS Policy Officer of UNAMSIL, urged them to remember their ABC, as the preventive measures against HIV/AIDS. "A for awareness, B for Be careful and C for Catch you - don't let it catch you", she said. The UN Secretary-General's message on World AIDS Day was read by a 12-year-old Regina Samah Mondeh, a VOC member.

Highlights of the day included a skit performed by VOC members illustrating the preventives measures to avoid contracting HIV/AIDS and the need to fight against discrimination of HIV-infected people. The pupils of the School for the Deaf and Dumb also participated in a question-answer session.

UNAMSIL FORCE COMMANDER BIDS FAREWELL TO NEPALESE BATTALION 4, IN MOYAMBA

The Force Commander (FC) of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Maj-Gen Sajjad Akram, on 3 December, bade farewell to Nepalese (NEPBATT) Battalion 4 in Moyamba, southern Sierra Leone. NEPBATT 4 would be rotating with NEPBATT 5 from 15 to 23 December 2003.

NEPBATT 4 arrived in the mission area in June 2003 and due for rotation after six months tour of duty Maj-Gen. Akram commended the battalion for their remarkable discipline, uprightness and professional performances in the performance of their duties. "The humanitarian assistance, which this battalion rendered to the people of Moyamba through provision of educational infrastructure, healthcare, recreational facilities, renovation of mosques and churches, are noteworthy" said the FC.

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As part of the farewell programme, the FC commissioned a two-class room building for disadvantage children, built by Nepalese (NEPBATT) Battalion 4 in Moyamba. The building was constructed as part of UNAMSIL Quick Impact Project (QIP). The FC also inspected another QIP implemented by NEPBATT 4. The project includes fencing of the Moyamba sport field and constructing toilets.

Maj-Gen. Akram commended NEPBATT 4 for the quality of their engineering work. He noted that these projects would be part of the battalion's legacy towards the peace process. All this, the FC said, further reinforces the "commitment and devotion of the Nepalese contingent towards consolidation of lasting peace in Sierra Leone".

UNAMSIL FORCE COMMANDER BIDS FAREWELL TO KENBATT 10

The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Major General Sajjad Akram, on 29 November bade farewell to officers and other ranks of Kenyan battalion (KENBATT) 10 stationed in Masiaka, in the Port Loko district, northern Sierra Leone.

Addressing the departing peacekeepers, Maj. Gen. Akram said the battalion had "successfully and professionally accomplished" its tour of duty with UNAMSIL. "Your contributions towards the peace process in Sierra Leone are noteworthy especially the Force Reserve roles, which is not an easy task".

Referring to the humanitarian assistance the peacekeepers extended in their areas of deployment, the Force Commander said, "The people of Sierra Leone especially the Masiaka community would live to remember you always." In Masiaka, KENBATT 10 rehabilitated and constructed several churches, mosques and schools. They also provided HIV testing kits and expertise to the local health centre, organised HIV/AIDS awareness groups and helped renovating the Masiaka Health Centre.

KENBATT 10 joined UNAMSIL in December 2002 and conducted airmobile operational tasks and patrol duties in various districts in northern Sierra Leone, including Kambia, Bombali and Koinadugu. They were also involved in conducting robust security patrols of supply routes, and providing escort for UN re-supply. Their joint patrols with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) enabled all three institutions to better coordinate their operations.

While KENBATT 10 start their 2-week-long withdrawal on 1 December, a new battalion, KENBATT, 12 will replace them.

The Force Commander was accompanied by the Kenyan contingent commander in UNAMSIL, Colonel Raymond Cheruiyot.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

Q: There have been reports of a fatality in the Kambia-Dagabe border between Guinea and Sierra Leone and two Fullahs were reportedly found dead. According to the SLP, they were both businessmen. How far you've gone with the investigation regarding security of the border?

Mr. Saiki: I've seen the news item related to the incident you've mentioned. At this stage, I don't have any specifics, but it seems it is a criminal matter and as such, your question should be directed to the Sierra Leone Police (SLP). But I'll check if we do have any further information.

Q: What is the present humanitarian condition in Liberia, specifically relating to women and children. Secondly, what is the current strength of UNAMSIL?

Mr. Saiki: Normally we do have a representative of UNHCR. I believe the situation hasn't changed very much from last week when you were provided with a full briefing. If you need any update, we'll contact our UNHCR colleague and we'll provide you with this information. As to the strength of UNAMSIL forces, we're in a draw-down phase and it's going according to plan. We are approximately in the strength of 11,500 in the country.

Q: My question is on the TRC and Special Court over the issue of Hinga Norman. The Special Court is calling for a joint interview with Hinga Norman. As a peacekeeping institution, what would you advise in this situation?

Mr. Saiki: I've said this before, the TRC and the Special Court are two different entities, and they're different from UNAMSIL. Any questions you might have on their activities or the status of their activities would be better directed to my colleagues in those institutions. As we are separate, independent, entities, we do not advise each other on issues specific to our respective responsibilities.

Q: The Nepalese and Kenyan battalions, are they going to Liberia?

Mr. Saiki: No. They're leaving Sierra Leone as part of the normal rotation process. Most of the battalions coming into the country have a tour of duty of one year at the end of which they are repatriated. In the case of KENBATT, there is a new Kenyan battalion

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coming in. The same is true for the Nepalese battalion. They'll be replaced by the same number of men and the same equipment.

Q: The forces in UNAMSIL, are they going to be included in the troops that are presently rotating.

Mr. Kingsley Lington (OIC, Spokesman's Office): The Force Reserve will be here until the end of the mission. If they're rotating, more will come, and that's the important thing.

Mr. Saiki: The Force Reserve is ready to address any situation with regard to the security and safety of the Republic of Sierra Leone. They will be in the country until the very end of UNAMSIL.

Q: What's the status of the UN mission in Liberia in terms of manpower and logistics?

Mr. Saiki: From the information I've seen, and this is open source information, which you can access, approximately 5,000 troops are in the country. UNMIL is on schedule as to the movement and deployment of its troops in Liberia, not only troops but civilian police and military observers. For the time being, the figure is slightly over 5,000 troops. They're now starting their DDR programme as of Dec 7th.

Q: The public is interested in the Front Page presentation [a public affairs programme in Radio UNAMSIL aired Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.]. More airtime should be given to this programme.

Mr. Lington: Front Page is one-hour programme. Most of the time we exceed the allotted time. I don't think we should give it more airtime.

Mr. Saiki: This concludes our weekly briefing. I would like to thank you for coming. I'll see you, same time next week.

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