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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS BRIEFING
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1. The aim of my briefing is to update the press on UNAMSIL's adjustment and drawdown. You should all be aware that the Security Council announced on 30 March 2004 that UNAMSIL will retain a residual presence in Sierra Leone for an initial period of 6 months from 1 January 2005. This decision formed part of Security Council Resolution 1537 (2004) on Sierra Leone. The residual force will be an infantry brigade organization of no more than 3,250 supported by 141 military observers. UNAMSIL will drawdown to this level between now and 28 February 2005.

2. I do not want to discuss the role of the residual force as plans are not yet firm enough to disclose and, indeed, I have to report back to the Security Council before 15 September this year on how the force will operate. It would be unwise to brief the press before I have briefed the Secretary General! However, I do want to cover our adjustment and drawdown for this year. I will do this under three banners: transfer of security responsibility; camp closures; and the humanitarian impact of our draw down.

3. As far as the overall security regime is concerned I think I can report good news. You may already be aware that security primacy of both the Northern and Southern

Provinces has already been handed over to the Government of Sierra Leone. In short, the national Police lead in these two Provinces; we are available to mentor and support them as required. Security primacy for Eastern Province will pass to the Government on 4 August 2004. The passing of primacy follows a set of major security exercises; I believe some of you saw the Kono exercise on Tuesday. These exercises include pre-briefing, a map-based exercise and then a full real-time scenario with UNAMSIL providing the bad-guys, and the SLP and RSLAF dealing with the situation. We mentor and monitor the exercise and de-brief as appropriate. So far, these exercises across all Districts have been a considerable success. You should all be proud of how far both the Police and the Army have come. To continue the motion, security primacy for the Western Area should be handed over to the Government on 23 September.

4. It is important to understand that the transfer of security primacy is a very good thing. Noting that UN troops will be in Sierra Leone until at least 30 June next year, this transfer allows the Country's Security Services to bed in and increase their preparedness in the knowledge that, should there be a crisis of overwhelming proportion, UNAMSIL is here to help out. You should note that we will continue to wholeheartedly support both the SLP and RSLAF over the next 12 months to ensure that they develop into coherent organizations, capable of keeping the peace. I am confident that by the time UNAMSIL leaves both forces will have improved a great deal and they will be ready to face the challenges ahead.

5. Moving onto the drawdown. Currently the UNAMSIL Force is around 9,000 strong. By February next year, we will have drawn down to just over 3,000 soldiers and

reconfigured into 3 battalion locations: one in Freetown and its environs; one in Bo; and one in Kenema. These battalions will be underpinned by support and logistical units (such as engineers and medics), predominantly based in Freetown and Kenema. In addition, and an important feature of the UNAMSIL force, we will have military observers based throughout the country; these teams will continue to provide an unarmed observer presence across Sierra Leone. The Force will be commanded by a small headquarters in Freetown.

6. This reorganization will inevitably mean that barracks and locations will close. My staff have handouts for all members of the press which shows the current barracks closure plan and details which locations we intend to keep open. I must add at this point that all of these plans are provisional; they could change to meet the operational need at short notice. And we can only predict what the operational need might be many months down the line; we cannot guarantee it.

7. Finally on to the humanitarian impact of our drawdown. We are proud of our assistance to the humanitarian effort across the country. The Force has undertaken 21 quick impact projects over the last 7 or 8 months; overall we have contributed over \$230,000 to these programmes. We have reconstructed schools and supported agricultural projects. There have been numerous local initiatives supported by national contingents; indeed too many to mention. I have many reports of soldiers contributing one-dollar a month from their wages to help support a local charity or project. In addition, we have sponsored local medical clinics and given away our own rations. This work has been immensely satisfying for those concerned – soldiers enjoy helping out.

8. Our drawdown and barrack closure plan will inevitably reduce our ability to assist with humanitarian programmes. This is unavoidable; but it should not be disastrous. We will continue to carry out quick impact projects, supporting those programmes which we consider to be the most important. Where we can, we will also continue to give local humanitarian relief. However, the most important facet to ameliorating the humanitarian impact of our drawdown is for the local community, in which I include local Government, Chiefdoms and the population at large, to work harder to meet their own demands. We, UNAMSIL, cannot stay in Sierra Leone forever. It is important, therefore, that local communities put their own plans in place to prioritize their own needs and meet those that they can.

9. Finally, I want to finish by reminding you all that UNAMSIL ultimately remains responsible for the security of Sierra Leone. Today's Force is well placed to meet the security needs of a country well on the way to full recovery. Next year's Force will be equally well designed. Our aim remains to sustain the peace whilst bringing on the Sierra Leonean Security Services. We are in this together – we all have a common aim. It can be done if everyone played one's part.

10. I thank you for your attention. I'm ready to take your questions.

Question: I'm Clarence Macauley writing for the Associated Press. From UNAMSIL's point of view can you tell us about the situation in Yenga?

Ambassador Mwakawago: You are all keen on Yenga. Yenga is not a big deal. I want to assure that I'm aware of Yenga. But I'm also aware that the Government is working on it. At the last MANO River Union on May 20, President Kabbah took advantage of his being in Conakry and discussed the issue with his counterpart, the president of Guinea and they agreed on modalities of how to go about it. There are technical committees working on it at the moment. So I'm aware of the Yenga problem and I'm aware that the Government of Sierra Leone is on top of it. It hasn't come to the situation where UNAMSIL has to come in.

Question: Abu Bakarr Kargbo from the Standard Times Newspaper. I understand that security primacy will be handed over to the Sierra Leone security force, I just want to know how the handing over would look like.

Ambassador Mwakawago: You are interested in the ceremony? Well the Force Commander is here and he will explain to you. I thought you were interested in more than the ceremony.

Maj-Gen Sajjad Akram: It is not the first time we will be holding this ceremony. You already had ceremonies for handing over of the northern and southern provinces. And this one will be on the fourth of August for handing over of the eastern part. The Vice-President has been the chief guest of the previous two ceremonies and I'm positive he will be chief guest as well of this ceremony. At the last ceremony we had the Deputy SRSG and this time I will be representing the SRSG. The ceremony starts with the recitation of the holy Koran and the Bible followed by troops who have been lined up there for the parade and is followed by speeches by the Paramount Chief, the Resident Minister, the representative of the SRSG and finally by the Vice-President. And then there is handing over of the flags of responsibility from the representative of UNAMSIL forces to the SLP Rep of Sierra Leone. And of course there is a march past of that force before the Chief guest.

Question: Abu Bakarr again Sir. I just want to know how far have you gone with training the SLP (Sierra Leone Police) so far?

Ambassador Mwakawago: Well CIVPOL is training the SLP and you want to know how far we've gone. The target figure of the police is 9,500 that figure will be realized by June next year. Currently as I'm speaking to you the force is 7,900. So we have about 1,600 to be trained and the training is on at Hastings. So between now and next June we should be able to train the remainder -- the 1,600. Does that answer your question?

Maj-Gen Sajjad Akram: If I may add to the last question that you raised, before handing over this security primacy on the fourth, we had an exercise in Kenema district and we had an exercise in Kono district where we found out that the SLP was in a position to take over full responsibility for the internal security of the country. So we are very confident that the SLP has the ability and capacity to handle any security situation in the country and particularly the eastern province where the primacy will be handed over to them.

Question: I'm Agnes Pratt representing The News newspaper. This is for the SRSG. Sir, now that UNAMSIL is handing over security primacy to the government, what's your assessment of the overall security in the country?

Ambassador Mwakawago: There are twelve months to go, it's too early to answer that question.

Question: Abu Bakkarr Kargbo. This is for the Force Commander, can you describe the security situation in the country right now.

Maj-Gen Sajjad Akram: I'm very happy to report that the security situation in the country is very stable, peaceful and there is no cause for alarm.

Question: My name is Zainab Kanu representing SKKY Radio. I want to know your assessment of the army, whether they would be able to respond to any security threat without UNAMSIL.

Maj-Gen Sajjad Akram: The basic problem with the RSLAF (Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces) is of funding and logistics. As far as leadership is concerned, as far as training is concerned, as far as tactical and operational knowledge and activities are concerned, I think they are up to the job. The Government knows the problem and they are doing their utmost to solve the problems, basically to come up with the shortages in accommodation, transport and communication. So, whatever possible is being done to recruit and then meet these shortages. Other than that, as far as training is concerned, their professional abilities are concerned, I think they are up to the mark and will be able to deliver. The SRSG is making his best endeavours to talk to the donors. He raised this issue in the last meeting he had with the Security Council, he is going to re-raise that issue with the donors. Depending on the resources he would receive I think they will be in a position to be able to handle the external security situation of this country before UNAMSIL leaves.

Question: Clarence Macauley. What is UNAMSIL's relationship with the Special Court with regards to providing security for that war crimes tribunal, taking into consideration the fact that there is now the likelihood that this court will continue to sit until either mid-2006 or until the end of 2006.

Ambassador Mwakawago: Good question. We are providing security to the Special Court and the whole drawdown programme has taken on board the requirement of providing security to the Special Court. So at the material time because nobody can say now that the Special Court would continue up to 2006, but when it is pretty evident that the Special Court would go beyond 2005, I'm absolutely sure that the Security Council will make the appropriate decision. Of course, I will report to the Council and recommend and the Council will make the right decision. For now it is academic. Thank you.