



PRESS RELEASE

Ref No UNAMSIL/PIO/PR/201/2004

Date: 23 November 2004

UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS
VISITS FREETOWN

Freetown, Sierra Leone – United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, was in Freetown on Tuesday during his tour of UN Peacekeeping Missions in West Africa. On his arrival he immediately met with the Vice President of Sierra Leone, Solomon Berewa

Accompanied by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, Mr. Guéhenno expressed satisfaction at the improved situation in the country compared to when he was last here in 2000.

At the headquarters of the recently-arrived nineteenth Nigerian battalion (NIBATT 19) serving in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), he acknowledged the role Nigeria had played in stabilizing Sierra Leone. The Under-Secretary-General also noted that African troops were working side by side in peacekeeping, along with troops from different continents and backgrounds fostering peace together.

Mr. Guéhenno emphasized to troops that the Mission was in its last but no less difficult phase with “quite a number of very important tasks you are going to perform as we hand over (primacy for security responsibility) to the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and Sierra Leone Police”. A lot of “effort and ingenuity” was needed to help Sierra Leone when UNAMSIL withdrew.

Later in the day, the Under-Secretary-General also held a meeting with staff members of the Mission where he said more needed to be done as Sierra Leone still “remains a fragile country”. The return of security to the country was vital as was the strengthening of the foundation for economic recovery and growth. He also described the challenges in other UN peacekeeping missions such as DR Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Kosovo, Burundi and Afghanistan.

A number of staff members raised questions and issues ranging from the effect on Sierra Leone of the situations in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire, the future of UN peacekeeping in Africa, and the safety and security of UN staff on peacekeeping missions.

Also on Tuesday, Mr. Guéhenno met with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, UNAMSIL senior management and officials of UN agencies and offices operating in Sierra Leone, to discuss issues related to the transition towards post-UNAMSIL UN activities in the country, particularly in the areas of social and economic development.

On Wednesday, the Under-Secretary General met the local and international media based in Freetown, in a press conference held at UNAMSIL headquarters, during which he fielded questions from reporters on issues ranging from the situation in Sierra Leone and in West Africa to UN Peacekeeping throughout the world. Mr. Guéhenno emphasized the fact that, rarely in its history, had the United Nations been so active in peacekeeping, with more than 64,000 troops involved in 17 missions. This could be interpreted as good sign he said, as it indicated the will of opposing parties to rely on the Organization for conflict resolution.

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