

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE  
(UNAMSIL)

Ref. No UNAMSIL/PIOR/143/2004

9 July 2004

**PRESS RELEASE**

**SRSB Hands Over Maternity Hospital To Kenema**

*Freetown* – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago yesterday officially handed over the Kenema Maternity Unit in the east of the country constructed by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with the Italian Committee for UNICEF.

In his goodwill message, the SRSB said the handover was “consistent with national recovery...aimed at providing the mothers and children of Kenema with services offered by the maternity ward of the Government Hospital in hygienic and healthy environment”. He said it would “afford Sierra Leone yet more capacity to deal with the high rates of maternal and child morbidity and mortality.”

Ambassador Mwakawago urged parents “to take their children to the hospital and health facilities regularly” and to also take advantage of the free vaccinations against polio, measles and yellow fever “so that their children can be allowed to grow as normal kids”. He urged parents to space their children, as this would give time to mothers to resuscitate and the fathers to be adequately able to care for the children.

He entreated the doctors and nurses at the center to be compassionate with patients and to not make the facilities and services the exclusive rights “of friends, loved ones or the high and mighty in society”. He also called on the medical practitioners in the war to also see it as “an outreach center providing health education to would-be mothers and women generally” adding that with the prevalence of such diseases as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, health education was important. “Prevention is cheap while cure is expensive,” he said.

The UNICEF Representative to Sierra Leone, Aboubacry Tall said the unit was vital for the resuscitation of the health sector in the country. He said the Ministry of Health and sanitation had rehabilitated or constructed 668 peripheral health centers, comprising 96% of the country’s health clinics. He said UNICEF had assisted in the revamping of 322 of that number, in active collaboration with the World Health organization. He said the new Maternity Unit had 50 beds, medical and surgical equipment and a modern operational theater as well as other rooms and offices for staff.

Mr Tall called for the upping of the number of staff in the unit and urged these staff to treat patients as guests in their homes. He said there was no reason why the country should lose “so many good women to child-birth”.

The Director General of Medical Services, Dr Noah Conteh said the unit was a feat in the fight to reduce the infant and maternal mortality and morbidity rates, which he said, were three of the three major problems facing the country’s health sector.

On the issue of providing adequate staff for the unit, Dr Conteh said the Ministry had lost many doctors and nurses to retirement and the search for greener pastures elsewhere but informed that the Government had secured the provision of some 30 specialist doctors from Libya, Cuba and Nigeria some of whom he said would be sent to the Kenema Maternity Unit since it is a referral hospital for the eastern province. He urged would-be mothers to make the unit their first place and not the last, and called on men to mobilize their communities to utilize the center.

The Hospital Medical Superintendent, Dr John Demoh referred to new structure as a “palace hospital” and assured it would be well taken care of. The Provincial Secretary, east, Lansana Koroma said the people of the district were “tremendously grateful” for the outfit, and assured that they would provide “comfortable accommodation” for the staff. The Deputy Chairlady of the Kenema Town Council, Margaret Shaka said it was a befitting place for the delivery of the future generation of the district and the country as a whole, and paid glowing tribute to the UN family for the provision and reiterated the call that pregnant women should be treated with care and that money consideration should not be put before life.

Also present at the handover were Country Representatives of the UNHCR and the FAO.

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