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PRESS RELEASE

SRSG BRIEFS UN SECURITY COUNCIL ON UNAMSIL

Freetown - The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, recently presented to the United Nations Security Council the twenty-second report of the UN Secretary-General on the situation in that country. The report describes the progress accomplished in the withdrawal of UNAMSIL (the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) and provides an assessment of the security situation, as well as implementation of the benchmarks.

It cautions that while significant progress has been made in consolidating the peace and stability in Sierra Leone, serious logistical challenges confronting the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) must be addressed if progress is to be sustained. The SRSG pointed out that UNAMSIL's troop strength had been reduced to 9,831 troops, and the Mission's deployment structure reconfigured from four sectors into two commands.

He added that as envisaged, the implementation of the next phase of the drawdown would commence in September and would be completed in December 2004. UNAMSIL would still provide the security umbrella and act as insurer of security to Sierra Leone until final withdraw.

On how far the Sierra Leone security sector has gone to shoulder its responsibility, Ambassador Mwakawago disclosed that although the pace of recruitment into the police force had been accelerated, the SLP might not attain its pre-war strength of 9,500 before July 2005. He also noted that regarding the RSLAF, some progress has been made towards building the operational capacity of the force to assume responsibility for external security.

In his report, United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan said the overall political and security situation in the country remained stable, enabling UNAMSIL to move forward with its withdrawal programme. He said the Government of Sierra Leone had made "significant progress" on consolidating peace and in promoting national reconciliation and economic recovery. In this regard, he said "a seamless transition to the UNAMSIL residual presence in 2005 was being finalized".

The Secretary-General, however, said the socio-economic problems remained “a catalyst frustration among the population” and pointed out recent incidents between the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) as “a source of concern”. While he said that the RSLAF would complete its downsizing by its 2007 target, the SLP might not attain its upward pre-war strength by 2005. Another possible source of instability, he went on, was the ongoing trial by the Special Court.

The issue of the disputed town of Yenga between Sierra Leone and Guinea was also raised as a concern.

The Secretary-General lauded the recent conduct of the Local Government elections, which he described as “an important institution of governance”, praising the role played by the National Electoral Commission, the Sierra Leone Police and the international community.

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