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## **RESS RELEASE**

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### **RUSSIAN AVIATORS RECEIVE UN PEACE MEDALS**

*Freetown, Sierra Leone* - One hundred and ten officers and warrant officers of the Russian Aviation Unit were conferred with United Nations peace medals yesterday during a brief military parade at Lungi in the Western Area.

Decorating the peacekeepers with the medals of honour, alongside UNAMSIL Director of Administration Mr. Ronnie Stokes, Force Commander, Major General Sajjad Akram noted that it was a memorable occasion as it coincided with the observance of the Russian Air Force Day.

General Akram applauded the peacekeeping efforts of the Russian Armed Forces which represented a “distinguished history of involvement in UN peacekeeping operations”. “The Unit’s efforts have contributed immensely to the success story of UNAMSIL and earned them the special gratitude of Sierra Leoneans and the appreciation of the international community,” he added.

General Akram highlighted the achievements of the Russian Aviation Unit in Sierra Leone when he made clear that the patrol flights undertaken by the Unit’s Mi-24 gunships have deterred any would-be aggressors and ensured the integrity of Sierra Leone’s borders.

He used the opportunity to reiterate UNAMSIL’s resolve to tenaciously implement its Adjustment, Drawdown and Withdrawal (ADW) plans. “UNAMSIL cannot stay in Sierra Leone forever. UN soldiers will remain in Sierra Leone until at least June 2005 with this Unit remaining at Lungi for the foreseeable future.”

The current Russian Aviation Unit, with Major General Victor Ivanov as its Commanding Officer, joined the mission on 24 April 2004. UN medals are usually awarded to peacekeepers after 90 days of continuous unblemished service with the Mission.

The event was witnessed by Minister-Counselor of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Guinea and Sierra Leone Mr. Leonid Tsivarev, UNAMSIL Deputy Force Commander Brigadier General Paul Opoku, Commander Northern Command, Brigadier General Nuhu Bamalli, Assistant Chiefs of Staff Logistics and Information operations Colonels Kofi Yeguo and John Siame. Armaments of the MI-24 Helicopter gunships were also displayed.

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