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UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)

PRESS BRIEFING

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and UNAMSIL Spokesman**

**LIBERIA STILL TOO 'FRAGILE' TO LIFT SANCTIONS, SECURITY
COUNCIL PRESIDENT SAYS**

The President of the United Nations Security Council yesterday, Thursday, 6 November 2003, said the security situation in Liberia was too fragile to lift sanctions imposed in 2001.

Ambassador Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins of Angola, this month's President of the Council, told the press after a closed-door meeting the situation in Liberia "is still fragile." Instead, he said, the Council had asked its sanctions committee "to do a more thorough and more comprehensive review," of the security situation in Liberia for further examination by the full 15-member body. The sanctions are aimed at blocking arms imports to Liberia, diamond exports, and the travel of senior members of the government.

On 1 October the United Nations took over control of 3,500 soldiers from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), stationed in Liberia since the government and rebels signed a ceasefire in August. The troops are the vanguard of what will eventually swell to a 16,000-strong UN peacekeeping operation.

Although the troop strength has increased with the addition of a battalion from Bangladesh, a UN spokesman in New York said Thursday the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) "is still not in a position to deploy troops throughout Liberia." The spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, said UNMIL "reports that the overall security situation in Monrovia is stable and improving, while the situation in other parts of the country, particularly in the areas still controlled by the two major rebel groups, remains volatile." In Liberia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative, Jacques Paul Klein, noted "with great concern and dismay" reports of skirmishes between various warring

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factions, and of serious atrocities against civilians in the western county of Nimba. Mr. Klein said in a statement that it was clear that the fighting is between former Liberian Government militias and fighters from the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).

Mr. Klein said that atrocities being committed against civilians constituted war crimes, for which all perpetrators would be held accountable, "since there is no amnesty for such crimes." UNMIL is keeping a record of all those who commit atrocities against civilians for possible future prosecution, Mr. Klein added.

SECRETARY-GENERAL WELCOMES UPCOMING CONFERENCE OF IVORIAN PARTIES

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan yesterday, Thursday, 6 November 2003, welcomed a plan by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to bring together government leaders, rebel groups and opposition politicians from Côte d'Ivoire next week in Accra, Ghana, in an attempt to revive a French-brokered peace process. The meeting Monday with the Ivorian groups is to precede a summit of the 15-member union of West African nations, scheduled to start on Tuesday.

A UN spokesman said in a statement the Secretary-General "encourages all Ivorian parties and their leaders to cooperate with ECOWAS on this important initiative and to ensure a successful outcome of the meetings in Accra." "The Secretary-General hopes that the meetings will focus on reaching agreement on a calendar for the implementation of the key provisions of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, in particular on the early disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the armed groups and the restoration of State authority throughout the country," the statement said.

The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, signed at Linas-Marcoussis, France, on 24 January, by the main political parties and rebel groups, is aimed at putting an end to the political crisis and civil unrest nearing civil war that has engulfed Côte d'Ivoire since 19 September 2002. It calls on the Government, rebels and political opposition to share power in a transitional government until elections in 2005.

The rebel Forces Nouvelles walked out of the Government of National Reconciliation in September. Mr. Annan last month expressed his "deep concern" over the actions taken by the Forces Nouvelles and urged the group to re-join the Government of National Reconciliation

SIERRA LEONE: MARKED PROGRESS IN HUMAN RIGHTS - OHCHR SAYS

Sierra Leone's human rights situation has improved significantly in the past one year, but the country still faces considerable challenges in areas like punishing offenders of past and ongoing human rights abuses.

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A report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the human rights situation in the country, released on Wednesday, 5 November 2003, said there were also security concerns relating to the capacity of the armed forces and police to provide security and protect the country. It said instability in neighbouring Liberia was an internal security risk factor for Sierra Leone "which should not be underestimated".

Noting that some progress had been made in providing reintegration opportunities for ex-combatants, OHCHR said that their long-term reintegration could only be achieved through the revival of the war-ravaged economy.

It said an acute problem of homelessness despite the formal declaration of completion of resettlement remained in the country, adding that preparations for the gradual draw down of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) should take these factors into consideration.

OHCHR said the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which is now in the final phase of its operation period and the Special Court for Sierra Leone that has issued a series of indictments, had complemented the peace process.

The resumption of court sittings in all districts demonstrated that some progress, although limited, has been made in the rehabilitation of the judicial sector. Administrators of peace and justice have been trained and deployed to over 20 locations nationwide in order to reduce the backlog of cases and pressure on the courts.

Nonetheless, reports submitted by human rights officers based on visits to police stations and prisons indicated overcrowding, unhygienic detention conditions, prolonged detention of suspects in police stations beyond legally established limits and loose separation of categories of prisoners in violation of established international standards, it noted.

On children's rights, the report said that child protection had been fully reflected in the various aspects of UNAMSIL operations with special attention paid to children in regular monitoring by human rights officers of the police, prisons and courts. Of the 7,134 children registered with child protection agencies either as separated or as ex-combatants, 98 percent had been reunited with their families, it said.

The report looks at others areas, including gender-based violence and women's rights, refugees, returnees and the displaced people. It also examines charges against the Revolutionary United Front who committed grave human rights violations, ranging from amputations, murder and rape during the 10-year civil war in Sierra Leone that officially ended in January 2002.

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ACTING SRSG COMMISSIONS AND HANDS OVER HOME ECONOMICS CENTRE IN PORT LOKO

The Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Alan Doss, on Friday, 31 October 2003, commissioned and handed over to the Ministry of Education a five-classroom Home Economics Centre in Port Loko, northern Sierra Leone. The Centre, which was built by Nigerian Battalion (NIBATT) 16, will accommodate about 600 children from ten schools in that district.

Mr. Alan Doss expressed his appreciation to the Nigerian contingent for the remarkable contribution they had made to the return to peace in Sierra Leone, mentioning the commitment of the peacekeepers and of President Obasanjo to stability in the sub-region. He indicated that UNAMSIL peacekeepers were also peacebuilders and congratulated NIBATT 16 for contributing to build Sierra Leone's future by responding to the priorities set by the Port Loko authorities in the national recovery process. "You can't keep the peace without stability; there can be no stability without employment; and without skills there will be no employment". He expressed the hope that the centre will turn young Sierra Leoneans from "job seekers to job providers".

The OIC UNAMSIL called on the Port Loko community and authorities to maintain the building. Noting that "UNAMSIL will not be in Sierra Leone forever", he urged the Ministry of Education to make the necessary arrangements for the center to be "adequately staffed". "The centre will give the youth the opportunity to learn a trade", he said.

Earlier, NIBATT 16's Commanding Officer, Lt-Col Abdul Sani Mustapha, disclosed that before embarking on the project they had consulted UNAMSIL Child Protection Unit and the Ministry of Education. The Commanding Officer of the Nigerian contingent in Sierra Leone, Brig. Nuhu Bamalli, expressed the hope that graduates from the centre would provide jobs for themselves and impart what they will learn to others.

The Deputy Minister of Education, Martin Sama Banya, expressed satisfaction, saying the construction of the centre was another "demonstration of good relationship between Sierra Leone and Nigeria. "We owe a lot to our brother Nigeria," he said, adding, "The centre will be a landmark."

UNAMSIL CONDUCTS EXERCISE DIAMOND HAVEN II IN THE SOUTHERN PROVINCE

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) will be conducting, on 13 and 14 November 2003, a training exercise code named 'Exercise Diamond Haven II' in Pujehun District. This military operation would involve UNAMSIL force reserve troops of Ghanaian Battalion (GANBATT) 8, Kenyan Battalion (KENBATT) 10, UNAMSIL Sector Centre reserve troops and the Government of Sierra Leone security forces.

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Aimed at practicing the tactics, techniques and procedures for the deployment of force reserve, this exercise will enhance the joint operational capability of UNAMSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone security forces.

Although UNAMSIL is implementing its Adjustment, Drawdown, and Withdrawal (ADW) plans, the Force remains capable to deploy rapidly, anywhere in Sierra Leone. UNAMSIL's force reserve is airmobile and on standby to robustly counter any security threat.

UNAMSIL SUPPORTS NCDDR ACTIVITIES

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) provided logistical to the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) in Kailahun, Pedembu and Daru. NCDDR started on 28 October to distribute funds to the remaining ex-combatants enlisted in the DDR process. UNAMSIL provided security and facilitated the movement of NCDDR from 28 October 2003 to 7 November 2003.

Ms. Francesca Fontanini (UNHCR): I mentioned last Friday we had a repatriation meeting in Freetown with colleagues from Guinea and Dakar. Modalities have been put in place in order to start the repatriation from Guinea around 20 November. Concerning Kailahun, we'll operate flat-bottomed boats from 1-15 December, and then we'll resume the operation again next year, in consideration of the Christmas holidays plus the Guinean presidential elections scheduled for 21 December. In effect, we'll stop operations from 15 December to 4 January 2003.

Concerning the other countries of asylum, the repatriation from Guinea-Bissau and Mali will be done by air starting 2 December with the goal to repatriate about 1,600 Sierra Leonean refugees by 2004. From Gambia and Senegal, UNHCR will facilitate the return of up to 300 Sierra Leonean refugees by air by 2003, and by ship next year with the aim to repatriate 3,500 Sierra Leonean refugees. When our colleague from the Gambia was here, a tripartite agreement was signed on the 31 October with the Sierra Leone government.

On the Liberian side, we've had reports of intensified fighting in Saclepea. For this reason, a task force has been created. UNHCR is part of this inter-agency team, which conducted an assessment mission on 6 November. Of course, this fighting has created a number of IDP cases. Meanwhile, three IDP camps have been recognized as official camps, and will be included in the regular food distribution and UNHCR will continue to support the relocations in size from other three schools. Once the locations are vacated, the resources will be directed to other parts of the country. As I mentioned last Friday, a mass information campaign took place in Liberia, in Banjul camp on 4 November, at Samkai camp on 5 November with the involvement of UNHCR-Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Government. We'll start tomorrow at the VOA camp, in Monrovia.

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Maj. Yusuf: Those who are interested in covering Operation Diamond Haven II can drop their names on the list. We would facilitate the movement on the 13, 14 and 15 November.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

Q: Regarding the situation in Liberia, part of the country is calm and quiet while the other side has been volatile. What has been done by the peacekeepers in Liberia to see that the situation is normalized?

Mr. Saiki: It is difficult for me to provide you with detailed and updated information about the situation in Liberia. What I do have is second-hand information provided by our colleagues in UNMIL. For the time being, there are roughly 4,500 peacekeepers in the country. Most of them are deployed in Monrovia and the Greater Monrovia area. Some of them are a bit further out; others are conducting patrols on a regular basis. It has been made clear by the SRSG and the Force Commander for Liberia that, until such time there is a critical mass of troops—a sufficient number of peacekeepers in the country—the ability of UNMIL to fully control the situation in Liberia is going to be limited. The best thing we could do is look at the pace of deployment of troops. As soon as a sufficient number of troops arrives into the country, UNMIL will progressively extend its reach and control over areas beyond Monrovia.

(Standard Times): You mentioned of a part two of the diamond exercise. Can you elaborate?

Maj. Yusuf: UNAMSIL is on its third phase of the Adjustment, Drawdown and Withdrawal plan. We have most of our troops withdrawn from some areas within Sierra Leone, areas like Pujehun, Sumbuya, Makeni, Kamakwie, Kambia. We're doing our best to ensure that even as we're drawing down we're jointly working with the Sierra Leone armed forces and SLP so that no security vacuum is created in those areas. All these exercises are part of the contingency plan. In case there are any eventualities, UNAMSIL together with SLP and RSLAF will be able to quell the situation any time, any day.

From the areas already vacated by UNAMSIL, SLP has been carrying on with enforcing security and order. We've not had any complaints, any problems for now. I can assure you that they're doing their best.

(New People): What are the successes you gained from the Blue Vigilance operation, and when is the second phase going to start?

Mr. Saiki: We told you that this was a two-phase operation. The first phase was completed and we've entered the second phase, which is kind of open-ended. The purpose of Blue Vigilance is to ensure that the issue of border crossing is fully under control. So far what I've heard from my military colleagues, the operation is successful. One has to bear in mind the old military saying according to which 'you train hard so

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you'll fight easy'. Basically, that's what all our troops and the Sierra Leone Police and Armed Forces are doing. They're training very hard, almost permanently, to maintain their capability to ensure, as per their mandate, the peace and security of Sierra Leone. Blue Vigilance is going on and it's going on with no major problems. That wraps up our weekly briefing. I should like to thank you for your presence and wish you a good weekend. For those who are fasting, *Ramadan kareem...*

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