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(UNAMSIL)

PRESS BRIEFING

Near Verbatim

16 January 2004

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and Major Aliyu Yusuf, Military Spokesman

HIGHLIGHTS

NEW SRSG FOR SIERRA LEONE ARRIVES

The newly-appointed Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Sierra Leone, Tanzania-born Ambassador. Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago arrived Freetown Monday January 12 from New York to head the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which still remains the largest UN Mission in the world. Mr. Alan Doss who has been Officer-in-Charge of UNAMSIL and Director of Administration Mr. Steinar B Bjornsson received Mr. Mwakawago at the Lungi International Airport. On arrival at UNAMSIL Mammy Yoko helipad Freetown, the SRSG was introduced to a cross section of UNAMSIL leadership including Section Chiefs.

Speaking to journalists at the helipad, Mr. Mwakawago said the timing of his appointment was “critical” as the UN still had “an important role to play to consolidate and sustain” the peace in the country. He said, “a great deal has been done by my predecessor and I am here to continue”. The SRSG went on that “with team work, we can pull together and ensure the mission given to us by the international community is accomplished”.

On the situation in neighbouring Liberia and its impact on Sierra Leone, Mr. Mwakawago said the sub-regional dimension of the conflicts in West Africa was critical to Sierra Leone, saying it will be addressed at all levels and in all quarters.

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Mr. Mwakawago was appointed on December 1, 2003 and replaces Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji who was named Nigeria's Foreign Minister in July 2003.

Before his new appointment, the new SRSG had served as Tanzania's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He had also been, at various times, Minister in charge of several ministries in the Tanzanian government including ministries of Information and Broadcasting, Information and Culture, Labour and Manpower Development and Industry and Trade. He had also held a number of prominent positions in Tanzania Parliament.

SRSG PAYS COURTESY CALL ON PRESIDENT KABBAH

The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSG) in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, yesterday January 15 paid a courtesy call on President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah at State Lodge, Hill Station, Freetown. President Kabbah told Mr. Mwakawago that he was delighted to meet with him and said his government would continue to collaborate with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL.

The President described as "excellent" the relationship between his government and UNAMSIL and paid tributes to Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, the SRSG's predecessor, and DSRSG Mr. Alan Doss both of whom he said he has known for decades. "I believe that this relationship will continue," the President said.

President Kabbah said that it was understood that UNAMSIL was in a drawdown phase but stressed, "the international community has invested so much here so I would expect a careful decision to be taken as to drawdown beyond December. The international community cannot waste all investment just for the sake of drawdown."

Government was however determined to ensure there was no security vacuum. "We are planning to have adequate security by the time UNAMSIL leaves," he said.

On the Mano River Union, President Kabbah said efforts were underway to revitalize the institution. It could not be done in the past because "Charles Taylor was a real stumbling block." He disclosed how the ex Liberian leader once scuttled a meeting at the last hour that was planned by the three Presidents of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone to deliberate on the MRU.

He said he has spoken to the interim leadership in Liberia and Guinean leader, Gen. Lansana Conteh again about the MRU. Both countries are interested in having it back. "The problem is, Guinea said we should wait until after their elections." A Guinean Special Envoy was expected to meet with President Kabbah today January 16 and he hoped the MRU would be an issue during their discussions.

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Nigeria's decision to take Taylor into exile "is in the best interest of the security of Sierra Leone," the President said revealing how Taylor shortly before he was taken into exile was considering the option of going back to the bush to restart guerrilla warfare. "That would have been terrible for us."

The SRSG earlier informed the President that an assessment mission would be in Sierra Leone in February to revisit the drawdown timetable. "My job here is to work with government so that as UNAMSIL draws down, government takes over."

Mr. Mwakawago said he was present at the Security Council (SC) consultations on Sierra Leone last week where Council members raised some questions about "the action being taken by government on the winding up of the Civil Defence Forces."

The SC, the SRSG added, was keen to also know the extent to which civil society was involved in the development process. The SC has also stressed that "whatever is being done should take into account the sub-region especially happenings in Liberia and cote d' Ivoire," the SRSG said, and disclosed, "the Secretary General specifically asked me to see how I can assist to resuscitate the MRU."

Mr. Mwakawago earlier met with the Acting Foreign Minister, Dr. Mohammed Lamin Kamara. He told Dr. Kamara that the UN was grateful to the government and people of Sierra Leone for their support so far.

DSRSG PARTICIPATES IN JOINT NATIONAL/DISTRICT RECOVERY COMMITTEE MEETING IN MAGBURAKA

On 13 January, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Mr. Alan Doss, attended the 12th joint National (NRC)/District Recovery Committee (DRC) meeting, which this time took place in Magburaka, Tonkolilli District, Northern Province.

The meeting, which was chaired by the Minister of Development, Mr. M.B. Daramy was considered "one of the most lively" and included representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education, Local Government, Youth and Sports, Fisheries, Works, Children, Gender & Social Welfare, National Commission for Social Action (NACSA) and National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR), EU, World Bank, DFID, the UN country team and NGOs as well as community members, Paramount Chiefs (PC) and Members of Parliament.

The DRC Chairman, Mr. I.M Kamara, stressed that "the strategic areas for immediate intervention in the district included increased support for education, health, agriculture, roads and youth". Concerning civil authority, both the DFID representative, Mr. Ian Stuart and Mr. Doss confirmed their support to the decentralization initiative underway. In addition, DFID indicated that "one of the focus areas of decentralization includes how to best help relations between local councils and the traditional rulers". Mr. Doss

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emphasized the “need to build on and maintain the capacity created through DRCs as a way to transfer authority to the districts”. The DSRSG also informed that “the UN, together with partners, will continue to provide support during the transition from DRCs to District Councils” and encouraged “the Paramount Chiefs to be active in the development of the country as the Government can not do it all”.

In the area of rebuilding communities, the Minister of Health and Sanitation, Dr. Agnes Taylor-Lewis, stated that in Tonkolilli as elsewhere “children under 5 years, pregnant and lactating women and people over 65 will be provided with free drugs and treatment”. In terms of school fees, the Deputy Minister of Education, Mr. Sama Banya, informed parents that “no child in the classes 1-6 should pay a penny” and if they were asked to pay, they should inform the Inspector of Schools. The Executive Secretary of NCDDR, Mr. Francis Kai-Kai, who remembered the meetings held in Magburaka on disarmament, informed that NCDDR had completed its mandate, encouraged everybody to consolidate the peace and thanked the international community for its support, in particular UNAMSIL.

The Agriculture Director, Mr. S.M. Kallon, stressed that the district’s land resources could contribute to the country’s agricultural recovery, but called for increased material and technical input. The Paramount Chief of Kunike, Mr. B. K Kanagboro II, stressed the need for change and to stop “eating what we do not produce and producing what we do not consume”. In addition, the NaCSA Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Justin Bangura indicated that US\$ 2 million had been set aside for micro-finance projects and the EU Representative, Mr. Jeremy Tunnacliffe informed that EU will provide US\$ 50 million in support for roads during the next five years.

Finally the WB Representative, Mr. James Sackey, stressed the need for increased local participation while moving from recovery to development and pointed out that “the joint NRC/DRC meetings were a most healthy way to do development”.

SECTOR WEST COMMANDER HANDS OVER SCHOOL AND CLINIC IN KAMBIA DISTRICT

The Commander, Sector West, of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Brig-Gen Nuhu Bamalli, January 14 commissioned and handed over a reconstructed seven-classroom building and a clinic to the people of Kambia district, northern Sierra Leone.

In his address after cutting the tape to commission the Magbema Islamic Secondary School at Makatic, Rokupr, Brig-Gen Bamalli said the project, which was executed by NIBATT 16 under the supervision of the Civil Affairs Section, was part of the Quick Impact Projects (QIP) “initiated by UNAMSIL Force Headquarters in order to complement the efforts of contingents in the area of humanitarian assistance to the government of Sierra Leone.”

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Brig-Gen Bamalli noted that the reconstruction of the school, “was completed within a record period of two months and there are other similar projects being implemented in various parts of the country under the UNAMSIL Quick Impact Project Fund”. Before he handed over the keys to the building to the school’s principal, Brig-Gen Bamalli personally donated 300,000 Leones as a start-up to buy furniture.

Earlier the Inspector of Schools in that district, Mr. Milton Mansaray Pearce, stated that the day was memorable because UNAMSIL had done something that would never be forgotten by the children who would now have a convenient place to learn. He thanked the UNAMSIL for not only helping to bring peace to the country but in the restoration of government’s authority in the districts.

The Section Chief, Pa Alhaji Alimamy Kafoir, noted that unlike some NGOs, UNAMSIL did not discriminate when it came to reconstructing the school because it was an Islamic one, adding that they were grateful to UNAMSIL for giving their children the opportunity to learn again.

A representative from the Civil Affairs Section, Karl Jorssen, disclosed that the school was one of two projects completed by NIBATT 16 and that members of the community were actively involved in the reconstruction. He stated that it was the first of the QIPs to be handed over and urged the community to maintain the school.

In a related development, the Sector West Commander, today also commissioned and handed over an Under-Five clinic to the people of Ro-Meni Curve, Kambia district. He urged the “District Medical Officer to take keen interest and provide necessary inputs to make the edifice achieve the purpose for which it is meant.” He acknowledged the locals’ enthusiasm during the construction of the project. He also personally donated 300,000 Leones to buy start-up drugs.

The District Medical Officer, Dr. Santigue Sesay, assured that mothers who had been walking miles to get medical treatment for their kids would make good use of the clinic. He promised that the Ministry of Health would provide the necessary medical equipment, personnel and drugs so that it would start functioning within the next three days.

Mr. Osman Sheriff Fofanah, the District Recovery Committee chairman, noted that the clinic was strategically located because it would serve three chiefdoms, and that it would reduce the caseload on the main Kambia Hospital.

Paramount Chief Bai Shebora Bubu Ngbak advised his people to make good use of the clinic, adding, “UNAMSIL has done so much for us that we are lost for words to say thanks.”

The two occasions were climaxed with traditional dancing. Both projects are said to have cost 57 million Leones.

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Way forward on DDRR in Liberia agreed by all parties

(Monrovia, Liberia) - Following a meeting of the leadership of LURD, MODEL and ex-GoL, UNMIL, the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), held on 15 January 2004, at UNMIL Force Headquarters, the following agreements were reached:

On 20 January 2004, the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programme will commence with a 15-day information and sensitization campaign for all combatants in locations around the country, to be identified by the leadership of the groups, and carried out by a joint team comprising representatives of LURD, MODEL and ex-GOL, NCDDRR, UNMIL, UN agencies, and NGOs and civil society groups.

Concurrently, three teams, composed of LURD, MODEL, ex-GOL, NTGL, NCDDRR and UNMIL Force, will be dispatched to identify and initiate the construction of reception centers and cantonment sites in Tubmanburg, Buchanan, Gbarnga and VOA (for Monrovia). It is expected that this phase will take approximately 20-30 days.

Upon the completion of the cantonment sites, the actual disarmament and demobilization process will commence concurrently in all those locations. A detailed schedule of implementation is currently being elaborated.

UNITED NATIONS JOINS FORCES WITH MEDIA GROUPS TO COMBAT AIDS

The Secretary-General January 15 launched a Global Media AIDS Initiative, calling on media organizations to reach the world's people, especially youth, with information about how to prevent and treat HIV and to help combat discrimination related to AIDS.

In a meeting with the heads of some of the world's leading media organizations, the Secretary-General said that among the public at large, there is still a profound lack of knowledge and awareness about AIDS. Recent surveys from more than 40 countries, he said, show that more than half of all adolescents and young adults have serious misconceptions about AIDS and about how the virus is transmitted.

What needs to be done, he is telling the media leaders now, is to designate the fight against AIDS as a corporate priority; to dedicate airtime to public service messages; and to provide prominent news coverage to the epidemic to ensure that it remains high on the political agenda.

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He told them that one lesson has been learned over the past two decades of fighting AIDS: “Silence is death.”

Questions and answer

Question: *I'm Edward Renner from the Christian Monitor. My first question is for Major Yusuf. Sir you promised in the last briefing to investigate the issue of gunshots at Brookfields and in your briefing today you did not mention it. I would like to know your findings. Secondly what's the present security situation in Makeni. And finally, this for the Chief, when will the new SRSG meet the press.*

Major Aliyu Yusuf: On the issue of the gunshots, we are liaising with the Sierra Leone Police and whenever we get any information we will let you know. Then on security situation in Makeni, it is calm and stable just as I told you in the briefs. We do not have our troops in Makeni but our Military Observers, the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the Sierra Leone Police are patrolling the town to ensure that peace and security is maintained. Our force reserve team regularly goes there on exercises. Not only in Makeni but in other areas like Yele, Pujehun, Sumbuya and Bonthe. Wherever we move out troops, our reserve team goes there to reassure the people that the peace which is presently there is being maintained at all cost.

Kemal Saiki: On the issue of the SRSG meeting with the press, he definitely intends to have a get together with the media. This will probably happen during the week of 26th January. As you know, he arrived only a few days ago and has a heavy schedule. He is meeting a lot of officials, with members of the diplomatic corps, with representatives of UN agencies and other institutions active in Sierra Leone. As a matter of fact, yesterday, he had a town hall meeting with UNAMSIL staff to whom he was introduced. He has had extensive meetings with heads of sections of the Mission. So he is in the phase where he is gathering information, getting acquainted with the Mission environment and it would be a bit premature to organize a media encounter before he has the time and possibility to take stock of the situation and to fully acquaint himself with what is happening in the country and in the Mission. So bear with us, he definitely will meet you. Remember that I said that, during his distinguished career, he had been Minister of Information, so he knows very well the demands of the media and of the news cycle and I'm sure he will satisfy your queries at the appropriate time.

Question: *Yes sir I'm Solomon Sawee from the New Citizen. Chief I want to know whether you have an effective monitoring system to ensure that funds allocated to various UNAMSIL battalions for the construction of say schools, hospitals are properly used. If so, how does such a system work? And my next question is for Major Yusuf. Of late sir I've been seeing a truck or two loaded with Nigerian military personnel with red flags. I want to know perhaps in military terms what that signifies?*

Kemal Saiki: Concerning the issue of monitoring funds that various contingents are using, I believe you are probably talking about the Quick Impact Projects. The United Nations have very solid, stringent set of rules, checks and balances, auditing, that allow

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us to monitor carefully the use of funds that are allocated for whatever purposes. The UN is a strong advocate of good governance, transparency and accountability and we are constantly striving to put into practice what we preach.

Maj. Yusuf: The red flag in military terms means danger. As you all know UNAMSIL is doing a lot in capacity building of the Sierra Leone security sector. We are planning to have inter-sector shooting competition together with the RSLAF and SLP. In preparation for the competition, the Sector West battalion is presently undertaking shooting exercise at the Benguema Military Training Centre and I'm sure you have seen the soldiers moving towards the range. The announcement is on Radio UNAMSIL to inform the people that such an exercise is taking place in that area.

Question: *Maj Yusuf, back to this shooting competition again, are you going to use live bullets?*

Maj. Yusuf: The shooting competition is not now. We are planning ahead. The Sector is just preparing for the shooting competition which is in April. And we will let you know in due course how it will be. But the football competition is coming up next week at the National Stadium.

Kemal Saiki: Ladies and Gentlemen of the press, this concludes our briefing. Thanks for coming and see you next week.

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