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PRESS BRIEFING

Near Verbatim

KEMAL SAIKI, Chief of Public Information, Spokesman
MAJOR NELSON MBUGUAH, Office of the Military Spokesman

**ANNAN STRONGLY CONDEMNS LATEST TERRORIST BOMBINGS IN
TURKEY**

United Nations Secretary-General today strongly condemned the latest terrorist attacks in Istanbul, Turkey, on the British consulate and the HSBC headquarters in which at least 26 people were killed.

In a statement issued by a spokesman for the Secretary-General, Mr. Annan sent his "deepest condolence to the Governments and peoples of Turkey and the United Kingdom, and especially to the families of the victims."

Mr. Annan also expressed his deep sympathy to those injured "in these latest acts of callous brutality," the statement added. "He hopes that the perpetrators will be swiftly identified and brought to justice."

Speaking earlier Thursday to journalists at UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General said: "We all woke up to another shocking news and I condemn totally the latest terrorist attacks in Istanbul...Those who carried out these attacks have no respect for human life and we should condemn utterly their actions."

**SECURITY COUNCIL BACKS PROGRESS ON PREPARING AFRICAN
GREAT LAKES CONFERENCE**

The United Nations Security Council on 20 November praised the progress made towards staging an international conference on Africa's Great Lakes region, saying the proposed event should help build lasting peace in the region. During a debate in New York, the Council adopted a Presidential statement saying it supported the proposed conference on peace, security, democracy and development.

UNAMSIL Headquarters, Mammy Yoko, P. O. Box 5, Freetown, Sierra Leone
Tel: 232-22-295-000 Fax: 232-22-295-189

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Chief PIS, Kemal Saiki, Tel. 232-22-295-583 mobile 076-692801 email: saiki@un.org

Editor: Rachel Eklou-Assogbavi, Tel. 232-22-295-814, mobile 076-627774 email: eklou-assogbavi@un.org

The statement, read out by the President of the 15-member body, Ambassador Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins of Angola, said the Council "expresses satisfaction at the fact that the countries of the region have launched the preparatory process of the conference...and considers it now crucial to follow up this initial step with intensified efforts." It also said the conference would build on the advances made in the peace processes in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which have both been beset by long-running civil conflict. Formal preparations have begun for the International Conference on the Great Lakes, organized by the UN and the African Union, with the first of two summits involving Heads of State scheduled to take place next June.

The Council said on 20 November it was important that the international community provided political, diplomatic, technical and financial help to the Great Lakes countries. In the debate that followed, Francisco Madeira, Mozambique's Minister for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Issues and the representative today of the African Union's Presidency, said it was "a time of hope" in the Great Lakes region. Mr. Madeira said the region's peoples were "reclaiming their identity and creating the conditions for development."

Speaking on behalf of the Great Lakes countries, Abdulkader Shareef, Tanzania's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, said he appreciated the consensus behind setting up the conference after a decade of consultations. Mr. Shareef said that to be considered a success, the conference must produce concrete measures to improve peace and security. He added that a Marshall Plan-style programme is also required for economic recovery and reconstruction.

Keli Walubita, the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for the Great Lakes region, said the participation of Zambia and the Republic of Congo still needs to be clarified. Mr. Walubita said the African Union was doing all it could to help organize the Conference.

Marcello Spatafora of Italy, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the Great Lakes area had become a major focus of EU foreign policy as a test case of Africa's ability to become master of its own destiny. The conference could provide the framework for ensuring a regional approach to the Union's support for the consolidation of peace and development in the region.

Mr. Spatafora added that African ownership was critical to the success of the conference, which he saw as the beginning of a normalization process rather than as a one-time event. Success would depend primarily on the common political will of the involved countries to achieve shared objectives.

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Ibrahima Fall, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Representative for the Great Lakes region, told the Council that arrangements would be made to ensure that civil society, young people and women would participate in the conference. Mr. Fall said the preparatory conferences being held over the next few months would shape the eventual priorities for the summits and the rest of the conference.

The core countries of the Great Lakes region are Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

UNAMSIL LAUNCHES OPERATION BLUE VIGILANCE PHASE II

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) on Monday, 17 November 2003, started the second first phase of "Operation Blue Vigilance", a military exercise conducted in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). The objective of Operation Blue Vigilance is to increase UNAMSIL forces and the national security agencies' presence along the border with Liberia, thereby preventing potential infiltrations of Liberian combatants into Sierra Leone. Operation Blue Vigilance Phase I was conducted between 20 October and 2 November 2003.

Sector East Commander, Brigadier General Sajjad Ahmed Bakhshi, on 18 November, inspected the security arrangements at various crossing points along the Sierra Leone border with Liberia. During his visit, Brig Gen Bakhshi requested the commanding officers of Pakistani Battalions (PAKBATT) 7, 8 and 9 to review their contingency plans to reaffirm UNAMSIL's operational capability. He also reiterated the need to identify areas requiring better coordination with the Sierra Leone security agencies.

Information gathered at the end of the first phase of Operation Blue Vigilance was handed over to UNAMSIL Sector East and to Sierra Leonean security agencies to carry out joint ground operations. Operation Blue Vigilance Phase II is also supported by air patrols from the Ukrainian and Russian aviation commands.

Operation Blue Vigilance Phase II should be completed on 1 December.

NEPALESE INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE VISITS UNAMSIL, UNMIL

The Inspector General of the Support Division of the Nepalese Police, Rohit Thapa, ending a three-day visit of the United Nations Missions in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), on 18 November called on the Mission's Civilian Police (CIVPOL) Commissioner, Hudson

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Benzu. Inspector General Thapa also paid a three-day visit to neighbouring UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Commissioner Benzu praised the Nepalese officers, saying they had been “resourceful and hardworking” and had adapted well to their assignment in Sierra Leone. While commending the Nepalese Government and its Police Force for its contribution to UNAMSIL CIVPOL, Commissioner Benzu called for an extension of the tour of duty of the 12 Nepalese officers currently serving in UNAMSIL, saying their “training and mentoring of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) must continue uninterrupted”. Moreover, Commissioner Benzu noted that the frequent rotation of the 129 CIVPOL officers negatively impacted on the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) officers, as the latter needed time “to familiarize themselves with their new mentors”

Inspector General Thapa disclosed that the Nepalese Police had completed an assignment mission in neighbouring Liberia and that his Government intended to deploy, by mid-December, 120 civilian police officers for UNMIL. These Nepalese policemen would be armed with weapons and anti-riot gears, and would provide escort to other CIVPOL personnel in UNMIL. He said his country was also considering sending unarmed civilian police personnel to Liberia.

In Sierra Leone, Mr. Thapa and his delegation also visited the southern provincial district of Moyamba where Nepalese peacekeepers are based, and expressed satisfaction at the conduct of his men there.

UNAMSIL PROVIDES LOGISTICAL SUPPORT TO RSLAF

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone is currently carrying Operation PEBU, a logistics support operation to the Government of Sierra Leone security forces. In that context, a UNAMSIL vehicle equipped with dumper and offloading capabilities is being loaned for short periods. Also, UNAMSIL vehicles are used to position some Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) engineer plants, such as light wheeled tractors, at Operation PEBU sites.

UNAMSIL is also assisting with barrack construction, particularly with preparation of the ground and access tracks, at the following sites:

- Moyamba (ongoing)
- Simbakoro (planned for December 2003)
- Yele (planned for January 2004)

Assistance to access RSLAF sites in UNAMSIL Sector East, notably along the Pendembu-Kailahun road, is ongoing and will be continued over the next six months where there is a common requirement to maintain UNAMSIL main supply routes.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

(Concord Times): What is the purpose of the visit to the provinces of the Public Information Office?

Umaru Fofana: At the moment, UNAMSIL has a contract with a theatre group and they're out in the provinces right now, sensitizing people about the withdrawal of UNAMSIL, kind of making the people confident that once UNAMSIL withdraws, there should be no cause for alarm, telling them what the RSLAF and the SLP are doing and what they will be doing once UNAMSIL completes its withdrawal.

Mr. Saiki: For a long time, we've been using groups of comedians because we found that this was a very effective way of communicating with the population, particularly in the provinces where people don't have the same access to news and information, particularly print news. So we found it extremely efficient and very well received to have groups of comedians circulating and talking, making presentations about the issues in relation to the draw-down phase of UNAMSIL.

To all, our best wishes on the occasion of Aid al Fitr. Have a good holyday and see you next week.

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