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**UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REMARKS AT THE UNVEILING
OF THE MEMORIAL TO THE FALLEN**

On Friday 24 October, Kofi Annan the Secretary-General of the United Nations unveiled a memorial to the fallen at the UN headquarters, in New York.

Following are Mr. Annan's remarks: "I'm sure we are all profoundly moved by the solemn beauty and dignity of this place of remembrance. This Memorial to the Fallen was made possible by the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces; but equally, it could not have taken shape without the contributions of the friends and colleagues who put so much empathy, thought and work into the concept.

Let me thank Agnes Gund -- who sadly could not be with us today -- Kynaston McShine, and our own Brian Urquhart for their guidance and advice.

My gratitude also goes to Bernardo Fort Brescia of Arquitectonica for the time, vision and exceptional talent he has devoted to designing the memorial.

As you can see, it is a memorial deeply rich in symbolism -- the slabs hewn from quarries in all five continents; the 191 stones representing the 191 Member States of the United Nations; the fountain pool reflecting the river of time, hope and life.

It is an ideal place for contemplation and for paying tribute to our fallen colleagues. After more than half a century of UN field operations, we finally have a site fit to honour our heroes who made the ultimate sacrifice. We have waited far too long for it. This memorial fills a gaping void.

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It is also a highly appropriate place to reflect upon the ongoing mission of the United Nations, and the men and women who continue to work for peace every day, often risking their lives in the process.

Let us never forget that those men and women serve as a result of decisions taken by Member States of our Organization. And that for them to carry out their mission as effectively and safely as possible, we need Member States to give effect to the resolutions they adopt; to provide genuine and steadfast support for the principles of the United Nations; to pull together on the basis of a collective and coherent policy that is both viable and visionary.

In the increasingly high-risk environment in which we operate, there is no more serious or solemn duty than our responsibility to protect United Nations staff in the field. It is a responsibility we all bear – Secretariat and Member States.

Today, we attempt to fulfill another responsibility -- our responsibility as colleagues and friends, as comrades in peace: to salute the memory of the fallen; to carry forward their legacy; to continue their work; to be inspired by their example.

That inspiration reaches far beyond the walls of the UN itself. Yesterday, the European Parliament awarded its Sakharov human rights prize to the United Nations, in honour of our staff “who have lost their lives in carrying out their work for peace in the world”. That award, as well as the Nobel Peace Prizes of 1988 and 2001, is something we should all take pride in.

Pride in our work is best expressed in respect for our colleagues. I would suggest that from time to time, we stop whatever we are doing to visit this Memorial to the Fallen, and -- as the inscription on this glass wall tells us, in the beautiful words of Brian Urquhart -- remember here those who gave their lives for peace.

Let us remember them now by joining together in a minute of silence”.

FORCE COMMANDER BIDS FAREWELL TO NIGERIAN BATTALION 14

The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Major General Sajjad Akram, on Saturday, 25 October 2003 bade farewell to Nigerian Battalion (NIBATT) 14 peacekeepers who are leaving Sierra Leone after completing their 12-month tour of duty.

In his address to the men and women from NIBATT 14, the Force Commander thanked them for a job well done throughout their year-long stay in the Mission area. He commended the soldiers led by Commanding Officer, Colonel Yonana John Gaje for their “commitment, dedication and high professional skills”, adding that NIBATT 14 had been “one of [his] strongest assets” in manning UNAMSIL Sector West. The FC further acknowledged the Republic of Nigeria’s “tremendous” contribution towards peacebuilding in West Africa, and in Sierra Leone in particular.

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NIBATT 14 joined UNAMSIL in October 2002 and was deployed in Freetown and its peninsula. The battalion's responsibilities included guarding Government of Sierra Leone's buildings, the capital's entry points and vulnerable locations throughout the peninsula. NIBATT 14 will rotate between 28 October and 3 November 2003.

ACTING SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE DECORATES NEPALESE PEACEKEEPERS WITH UN MEDALS OF HONOUR

The Acting Special Representative of Secretary General of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) Mr. Alan Doss and the Force Commander Major General Sajjad Akram decorated, on Wednesday, 23 October 2003, 800 peacekeepers of the Nepalese Battalion (NEPBATT) 4 with United Nations medals of honour in Moyamba, some 100 kilometers south of Freetown.

Speaking at the occasion, Mr. Doss congratulated the peacekeepers for having served UNAMSIL with distinction and thus qualifying for the UN Service Medal. The Ag. SRSG praised NEPBATT 4 for having fulfilled their duties in an "impeccable manner, under their Commanding Officer Colonel Jagdish Pokharel". NEPBATT 4 joined UNAMSIL in June 2003 and are entrusted with ensuring umbrella security in a large area around Moyamba, from Rotifunk to Tolobu, from Mile 91 to Gbangbatok. Mr. Doss further noted that NEPBATT 4 "played an important role in critical events for the security of the country, such as providing special security to the detainees and detention center of the Special Court in Bonthe", an island, in southern Sierra Leone.

Mr. Doss also expressed his appreciation of NEPBATT 4's services towards community and social work, in particular, the battalion's regular provision of free medical services to the local population and its assistance to the local authorities in weapons collection.

The highlights of the day's activities included performances of Nepalese cultural dances and folk songs by the newly decorated peacekeepers. Sector East Commander, Brigadier General Sajjad Ahmed Bakhshi, and representatives of Sector Center and Sector West Commanders Colonel Sarwar and Colonel Ebi Awala were also present at the medal parade.

UNAMSIL LAUNCHES OPERATION BLUE VIGILANCE

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) on Monday, 20 October 2003 started the first phase of a military exercise named "Operation Blue Vigilance". Conducted in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), Operation Vigilance Blue will increase UNAMSIL forces and the national security agencies' presence along the border with Liberia, thereby preventing potential infiltrations of Liberian combatants into Sierra Leone.

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For the first phase of Operation Blue Vigilance, which should be completed by 2 November 2003, the objective is to gather detailed information of the Sierra Leone-Liberia border through air and ground patrols and observation of border crossing points and routes. The exercise will involve UNAMSIL troops, the RSLAF 3rd and 5th Brigades and SLP officers deployed along the Sierra Leone-Liberia border. During this exercise, UNAMSIL's Russian Aviation Unit will be operating MI-24 attack helicopters for patrols while the Ukrainian Aviation Unit would fly MI-8 armed helicopters for patrols and specific crossing points along the border.

At present, while the RSLAF and SLP have static posts along the borders with Guinea and Liberia they also carry out foot, road and river patrols. UNAMSIL performs regular deterrence air patrols with MI-24 helicopters along the border with Liberia, in particular in the areas of Kailahun and Gendema River Bridge. UN Military Observers (MILOBS) also patrol the area and UNAMSIL Sector East organises specific road and foot patrols to Gendema River Bridge.

Information gathered at the end of the first phase of Operation Blue Vigilance will be handed over to UNAMSIL Sector East and to Sierra Leonean security agencies for further operations designed to enhance the capability the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces along the border. On 3 November, Operation Blue Vigilance will enter, for an undetermined period, in its second phase under the sole control of UNAMSIL Sector East.

Ms. Francesca Fontanini, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): An important development this week is we have resumed the repatriation from Monrovia. Twenty Sierra Leonean returnees came from the camps around Monrovia, and they spent one night in Port Loko after receiving their returnees' package consisting of food rations. They left for their final destination, mainly to Kenema, Pujehun and Bo district. They came with the World Food Programme (WFP) flight, now scheduled for twice a week, Monday and Wednesday, with a capacity of 10 passengers per flight. We're also exploring the possibility the start the repatriation by road to Pujehun district, and the modalities will be discussed next week in Freetown between UNHCR office in Monrovia and their counterparts in Freetown. It may start by the end of November. In the meantime this week, our information officer will go to Monrovia on a mass sensitization campaign to explain to the returnees what the situation in Sierra Leone is now. Also, we had this week a repatriation meeting with colleagues from Guinea, Senegal in order to put the modalities for the repatriation of Sierra Leoneans from Guinea where we still have 15,000 registered with us in the camps, the other 14,000 registered with us as well in Liberia. The modalities have been put in place, and work will be done. Probably after the 17 November, we can resume repatriation by road from Guinea.

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:

(Concord Times): NIBATT 17 has already arrived in Freetown. Is it true that they're going to be deployed in the area where NIBATT 14 is?

Military Spokesman: It is true that NIBATT 14 is rotating. They're leaving on Monday and are going to be replaced by NIBATT 17, who is going to deploy where NIBATT 14 was assigned.

(Exclusive): Still on the question of border crisis. Eritrea and Ethiopia is still having a bitter argument with the border problem. Also Nigeria, Cameroon. Now Sierra Leone and Guinea with Yenga. What steps have you put in place for this problem not to develop any further in the future?

Mr. Saiki: It would be difficult for me to comment on the cases you're referring to. As far as Sierra Leone border issue is concerned, we've already mentioned that it's at the level of bilateral discussions between the concerned governments, Guinea and Sierra Leone, with the mediation of other parties. It is an ongoing. I think we have good hope that the governments concerned will be able to find a satisfactory solution. It is a bilateral issue in which the United Nations are not directly involved. But as you know, our mandate is to maintain the security, stability and peace of Sierra Leone. I'm sure that we will keep an eye on any developments in relations to Yenga.

(The News): Last Saturday, I was in Kono. The United Methodist School for Boys was occupied by UNAMSIL. These children didn't have any schools to go. What mechanism has UNAMSIL put in place so these children can go back to school? Secondly, a boy was injured by a mine along Hill Station in Kono. What is UNAMSIL doing to prevent such occurrences in the future?

Military Spokesman: I think I've already talked about the school issue. What I would clarify is as far as the military is concerned, we only occupy buildings that were empty, and whenever there's a need for students to get into them, we always vacate them and leave them in better conditions. We have to corroborate your report. On the issue of mines and explosives, we have experts within UNAMSIL who deal with mines and explosives. We have posters that we've put out everywhere regarding unexploded objects, and the posters are in all the languages of this country. If anybody in the country see any fallen object, they shouldn't tamper with them. They should call in UNAMSIL or the local security agencies who will be able to defuse those objects. In the case of that boy you have mentioned is injured, that's an issue that has to be taken care of by the Government and UNAMSIL.

Mr. Saiki: I would like to take this opportunity to mention that our press briefing is being broadcast live over Radio UNAMSIL, and reiterate our advice to the people of Sierra Leone and particularly to the parents so they can educate their children. Any unknown object that could lead to the slightest suspicion that it could be dangerous

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should not be touched. As the major explained, if you have notice, find, any suspect device, please inform UNAMSIL troops, the military observers, the CIVPOL, the SLP, or the RSLAF. It's better to be safe than sorry. It's better to report something that may eventually not prove dangerous rather than assume that it's not dangerous and later have a tragic accident. It's through this constant repetition, through this type of advisory, that we're going to be able to reduce the amount of tragic incidents. This is a country that has seen war; we have a lot of unexploded ordinance—mortar bombs, grenades—that can kill. In Europe 80 years after World War I there are still ammunitions that kill people every year, the passage of time does not reduce the danger.

Q: As a supplement to border issue, before it was UNAMSIL who told the Guineans on the border, also on the Sierra Leoneans on the border that they should stay put until the problem has been solved. Now we're having mass smuggling coming in to Sierra Leone through that Yenga access. They pay exhorbitant taxes to customs controllers on the Guinean side. What measure did you put to stop smuggling on that Yenga area?

Mr. Saiki: I don't have any indication as to "mass smuggling" into this area. I told you that UNAMSIL, SLP, RSLAF maintain vigorous patrolling in the border area. I would be surprised if there'd be mass smuggling as you'd described because of our presence in there. I'm sure they would not allow such activities on the scale you imply. We could get back to you on that. I'll ask our military colleagues who might have information in this regard. But remember, the border area is a shared responsibility. You have UNAMSIL, but you shouldn't overlook the fact that it's becoming increasingly a responsibility of the security agencies of Sierra Leone, i.e. SLP and RSLAF.

(Christian Monitor): Sierra Leone is more vulnerable to threats during public holidays such as Christmas and Ramadan. Why did UNAMSIL stop the Blue Vigilance exercise at this time before the holidays?

Mr. Saiki: You know the calendar of military exercises is dictated by operational necessity. I wouldn't be able to tell you why the military has chosen this particular period of time.

Military Spokesman: The issue of exercise Blue Vigilance should not be confused with the festivities. Primarily, festivities are monitored by the local police. It is not the work of UNAMSIL to police this country during Easter holidays, Christmas, or any other holidays. But we are there to give the security agencies our advice. The exercise Blue Vigilance is primarily designed to monitor cross-border activities. It's not ending by 2 November. That is the first phase that's ending. We're going to have another phase, but we don't know how long that will take. It will be handed over to Sector East and local security agencies so that they can continue monitoring the border between Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Mr. Saiki: We did mention in the highlights that the second phase, which starts on 3 November, will be for an undetermined period, so it's kind of open-ended.

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*(The Vision): For UNHCR, what is the condition of Sierra Leone refugees in Liberia?
How many are there left?*

Ms. Fontanini: There are 14,000 in Liberia. The conditions are good. After the fighting in the summer, most of the Sierra Leone refugees were camped in the Mamba Point area. But then the UN came and we were able to transport refugees to the camps. There are a lot of humanitarian agencies so there's a joint effort. The situation is improving very fast in terms of health, water and sanitation, and food. We're going to see how many are willing to come back home. Next week there will be a mass information campaign in order to know how many want to return home, for us to organize the convoy sites, and also to involve the necessary number of implementing partners in these repatriation movements.

Mr. Saiki: Since there are no more questions, I wish you a good weekend. See you next week. Thanks for coming.

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