

Respect for human rights and rule of law brings stability

December 2005 - Abuse of human rights by Government and rebel forces was one of the main causes of the Sierra Leone conflict, concluded a just released report by the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Since it started operations in 1999, UNAMSIL has helped Sierra Leone to ensure the rights its citizens are fully protected; to bring to justice to perpetrators of the most egregious violations of the conflict; and to develop a professional and democratic police force.

The Mission has set up human rights committees made up of Sierra Leonean human rights and pro-democracy organizations as well as, in most of the country's districts. It has trained local human rights advocates who in turn are training human rights monitors and activists.

Many of the key human rights issues that led to, or resulted from the Sierra Leone conflict still persist, such as poverty, corruption, lack of a well-functioning justice system and abuse of human rights by authorities. While serious violations have stopped, thanks to UNAMSIL's human rights awareness training, a culture of human rights and democratic values has yet to fully take root.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which UNAMSIL helped set up, completed its work, which included providing an impartial historical record of what happened during the war, preventing a repetition of the violations or abuses suffered, and responding to the needs of victims. In its final report, the Commission warned that the still unresolved root causes of the conflict must be addressed in order for peace to be sustainable. With assistance from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Commission disseminated the report widely among Sierra Leoneans. A Government-appointed follow-up committee will monitor follow up on the recommendations which if enacted are expected to contribute towards healing and reconciliation among citizens.

Sierra Leoneans recognized hard-won peace could not be sustained without justice. The UN-founded Special Court for Sierra Leone began war crimes trials in 2004 against 13 indictees. The indictees include former rebel and Government leaders accused of being most responsible for ordering grisly atrocities, including chopping off limbs of civilians.

One of UNAMSIL's main achievements was its success in recruiting and training more than 3,500 local police officers. In a joint effort with a team of police officers from Commonwealth countries, UNAMSIL boosted the national police force to its pre-war strength of 9,500 officers by the end of 2005. The current strength of the SLP stands at 9,019, with 15 percent women.

Senior local police officers received specialist training courses and in turn provided on-the-job training to junior officers, while working as mentors at police stations throughout the country. UN police officers also gave specialized training to their local counterparts in areas such as criminal investigation, intelligence services, traffic management, community policing, airport security and cross-border crimes.

With funds from UNDP and the British Department for International Development, UNAMSIL assisted construction of 13 police stations, 68 unit barracks, a recruit training school, and four regional training centres in the towns of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Jui. It also rehabilitated judiciary buildings and opened magistrate courts in all districts to make



Newly renovated police station in Koidu

UN/DP/Photo by Monica Albertini



the judicial system more accessible and credible. UNAMSIL and its partners continue to support Government efforts to increase the number of judges and to monitor police operations and prisons, as well as the performance of the courts.

Much has been achieved in training the police force, but additional help is needed in the form of vehicles, communication equipment, office and barracks accommodation. As the police get better training, the level of public confidence in the force is expected to rise. As testimony to the increased level of professionalism, 10 SLP officers are now serving with the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti.

For further information

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