

### **Yale University/New York City College Survey finds Sierra Leoneans happy with UN peacekeepers**

*December 2005* - A public opinion survey conducted in Sierra Leone early this year revealed that a huge majority of its citizens have a very positive perception of the work done by UNAMSIL, the UN peacekeeping mission, since it started operations.

Some 900 people responded to the survey, which was designed by Dr. Jean Krasno of Yale University and the City College of New York. Dr. Krasno and her team of student researchers used two Sierra Leonean NGOs: the Campaign for Good Governance and the Human Rights Clinic of Fourah Bay College (University of Sierra Leone) to conduct the survey between January and February 2005.\*

The survey polled a cross-section of all age groups from Sierra Leone's 14 districts and included students, teachers farmers, market sellers, police officers, traders, welders, painters, engineers, journalists, clergy, nurses, etc. Two thirds were male and one third female.

The questionnaire included both multiple choice and open-ended questions eliciting narrative responses. Nearly 100 percent of the respondents said the security situation had improved since UNAMSIL has been in the country, and 71 percent indicated they wanted the peacekeepers to remain longer (the mission is withdrawing at the end of this month). Asked to evaluate the UN-organized disarmament process, 84 percent rated it good or very good. On the work done to retrain former fighters, 76 percent said that UNAMSIL had done a good or very good job. The most ambivalence came with a question on whether UN peacekeepers treated people in Sierra Leone with respect: 50 percent answered "always," and 45 percent said "sometimes," with only 5 percent saying UN peacekeepers had failed to respect the population. About 98 percent said that the professional conduct of UN peacekeepers was either good or very good.

Voluntary acts of charity or reconstruction by peacekeepers were cited by many respondents, as were peacekeepers' efforts at reconciliation: 79 percent said peacekeepers had made efforts to solve local problems, and 94 percent said the UN had been helpful when they did get involved.

Respondents particularly praised the UN's Radio UNAMSIL; with 94 percent of those surveyed saying the radio station was "good" or "very good" at getting information out to the people.

Respondents were about equally split when asked whether peacekeeping should be the exclusive responsibility of the UN, with 52 percent saying yes, and 48 percent answering no. Asked what other organization might deploy peacekeepers should the UN not be able to, 36 percent suggested a West African force under ECOWAS command; 48 percent said it should be an African Union force; and 14 percent said other. A following question asked if an African-led force should be followed by the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, and 76 percent agreed.

A question which sought to assess the level of voluntary rebuilding that peacekeeping contingents had performed elicited a profusion of praise and gratitude. Several examples of community development undertaken by the peacekeepers were given. Respondents described how UN peacekeepers had built roads and bridges, shelters, health centers, radio stations, schools, mosques, churches, and market structures. They also gave out free medical care, free school supplies, food and clothing. They built quality water wells, rehabilitated prisons, carried out night patrols, and built town clock towers. Below are a few direct quotes from the responses:

- ◆ A UN observer (Charles Oliver) from his own payment built a nursery school in Port Loko in a bid to solve the problem of accommodation for nursery kids in the town.
- ◆ Apart from the fact that they were physically engaged in building schools, clinics, mosques, and constructing roads and bridges, they all raised awareness that development should be a community issue or responsibility.
- ◆ In my hometown, Port Loko, and its surroundings the troops of Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan provided free medical treatment, rehabilitated feeder roads, built schools, and mosques as well as a church where there were none even before the war.



- ◆ They were helpful. For had they not provided all that they did, it would have been difficult for those amenities to have been provided by the government.
- ◆ The UN mission did not only play a peace keeping role, but nation building as well. So we thank them for that.

While 77 percent said that UN peacekeepers had gone beyond their regular duties to help their communities, the 23 percent who answered negatively seemed to live in towns or districts where no UN contingent was stationed.

Asked to name the best thing UNAMSIL has done, nearly 100 percent answered with positive examples. The most frequent answer was the restoration and maintenance of peace; secondly reconstruction and development projects. Next, the disarmament process and training of the police and military. Many also mentioned Radio UNAMSIL.

Asked to name the worst thing UNAMSIL has done, 41 percent said that UNAMSIL had done nothing wrong and 9 percent had no response. The remaining 50 percent cited a number of problems, with the most frequent criticism on the issue of sexual exploitation.

The survey confirmed the perception shared by the UN and its partners that UNAMSIL's operation in Sierra Leone has largely completed its tasks as set out by the Security Council, and in addition had won the hearts of the local population. The survey also appeared to suggest that the UN's measures to prevent and punish sexual exploitation and abuse are crucial to restore the otherwise respected image of UN peacekeepers.

\* The full survey can be found at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/lessons/>

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