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PRESS RELEASE

SRSR PAYS COURTESY CALL ON PRESIDENT KABBAH

The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSR) in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, today 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.



*President Kabbah, Ag. Foreign Minister, Dr. Kamara
and SRSR Mwakawago*

The President described as “excellent” the relationship between his government and UNAMSIL and paid tributes to Ambassador Oluwemi Adeniji, the SRSR’s predecessor, and DSRSR 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.

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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 is expected to meet with President Kabbah tomorrow and he hoped the MRU would be an issue during their discussions.

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 SRSB 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 SRSB 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 SRSB 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.

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