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UNAMSIL JOINS GOVERNMENT TO CELEBRATE WORLD FOOD DAY

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 17 October 2005 --- Amidst fanfare and colorful display of various agricultural products, the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago today presented gifts and certificates to farmers and fisher-folks as the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and other UN agencies join the Government of Sierra Leone to celebrate the World Food Day at Newton, east of the capital Freetown.

The ceremony, which was attended by government functionaries and various heads of UN agencies and parastatals, is very important to the government as this year makes it three-and-half years since President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah pledged that by 2007 Sierra Leone would be food-secured

In his address, Ambassador Mwakawago stated that, “today we have a double celebration. We are celebrating the World Food Day, but also marking the commemoration of the International Day for the eradication of poverty declared by the General Assembly for 17 October. The UN family joins the rest of the world to reflect on poverty and hunger being grave social problems, and use the occasion to call for positive change.”

The SRSG noted that progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) especially the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger in Sierra Leone were encouraging but, “there is need to maintain the momentum generated and build upon it.” He used the opportunity to launch the National Popularization and Sensitization campaign of the MDG Report, “a joint advocacy effort of the UN and Government to win the support of the whole nation towards the attainment of the MDG goals.”

President Ahmad Tejan Kaabah said Government “is committed to make sure that Sierra Leoneans are food-secured and work towards the realization of the MDG...but please let’s keep politics out of food security.” He disclosed that Government was reviewing policies to make farming attractive and profitable, adding, “as a nation we will not achieve food security on our own we will need the cooperation of our development partners.” He also stated that plans were underway by investors to establish a fertilizer plant in the country.

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The Resident Representative of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), Mr. Mohammed Farah said, “only through concerted effort can we fight hunger and poverty...the eradication of hunger and poverty can be achieved [and] I have the confidence that Sierra Leone can achieve President Kabbah’s food security vision.”

The Country Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) said the fight against hunger was one everyone should join, noting that hunger and related diseases claimed more lives yearly and reiterated his organization’s commitment to fight it.

Mr. Francis Ngebeh, the Acting Minister of Agriculture, believed Sierra Leone “has joined the fight against global hunger by going towards the goals of the Millennium Development Goals [and] I have no doubt in my mind that Sierra Leoneans are ready to take up the fight against hunger”. He assured that tractors now available would be distributed to farmers for effective cultivation.

Fisheries and Marine Resources minister, Dr. Chernor Jalloh noted that, “food security is not only the affairs of government but all of us should contribute immensely to make it work,” adding that people should think beyond the staple rice when talking about food security.

Earlier, the chairperson Dr. Bernadette Lahai said though UNAMSIL would be leaving, the peacekeepers would be leaving a professional army and police that would guarantee security for food production, and asked that government put agriculture second place to security in the national budget.