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UNAMSIL HANDS OVER MORE EQUIPMENTS TO GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 December 2005 ----- Equipments worth \$5.4 million were yesterday handed over to the government and people of Sierra Leone by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, in a short but impressive ceremony held at Hastings, eastern Freetown.

The handover, which according to the SRSG, represents the last of UNAMSIL's handover ceremonies, involved the donation of over 758 communications equipments and 25 light vehicles, as well as the returning of part of the UNAMSIL Base in Hastings to the government of Sierra Leone. Another gifting worth \$3 million is to be done after the completion of the liquidation phase of the mission.

Speaking at the ceremony which was attended by the President, Alhaji (Dr) Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the Vice President, Ho. Solomon Berewa, Cabinet Ministers as well as members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corp, Ambassador Mwakawago, stated that the gifting was in line with General Assembly Resolution but also as a mark of gratitude to the government and people of Sierra Leone for their unstinting support to UNAMSIL. "Your cooperation and support have been crucial to the success of UNAMSIL and in the process we were able to lay down the foundation for the consolidation of peace and prosperity in the country. I would like to reiterate once more that without your cooperation, it would have been very difficult to accomplish UNAMSIL's mandate and mission in Sierra Leone as we have seen elsewhere in the continent." He said adding, "with these donations, we hope that the capacity of the

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government to discharge its duties and responsibilities to the people of Sierra Leone will be greatly boosted.”

In his response while receiving the equipments, the President, Alhaji (Dr.) Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, expressed profound appreciation to UNAMSIL on behalf of his government and the people of Sierra Leone, for a fantastic job in bringing peace and security to the country.

He stated that he had been under intense pressure from many quarters to not let UNAMSIL leave the country. “But I had to accept the fact of the mission’s departure so that the government and people of Sierra Leone could consolidate the peace brought about by the mission, and one way of doing that is to ensure there is foreign investment here so that we can create job opportunities for the people, which will in turn move the country towards the path of development.”

The president explained that foreign investors may be very skeptical of a situation where there is a large contingent of peacekeepers in the country. He reiterated that the people of Sierra Leone are not in a hurry to say goodbye to UNAMSIL, but have to painfully come to terms with the fact of the mission’s final withdrawal so that the country could accelerate the process of consolidating the hard won peace.

President Kabah maintained that the fond memories of UNAMSIL will ever remain indelible in the minds of all Sierra Leoneans including those unborn. He prayed God to protect the SRSG and all those who worked selflessly to bring about peace to the country.

Highlights of the ceremony included the signing of handover documents for the equipments between UNAMSIL Chief Administrative Officer, Kiplin Perkin, and Sierra Leones Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Momodu Koroma, as well as a tour and inspection of the equipments and facility led by the SRSG.