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(UNAMSIL)

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SRSG HOLDS WORKING LUNCH FOR JOURNALISTS

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2 August 2005 – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago briefed 25 senior journalists, including foreign correspondents, on UNAMSIL’s current mandate and highlighted facets of the implementation of the UNAMSIL/United Nations Country Team transition plan.

United Nations Resolution 1610 extends the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for a further six months to the end of December 2005, after which, a follow-on mission, UNIOSIL (United Nations Integrated Mission in Sierra Leone) will take over to continue the work started by UNAMSIL.

Ambassador Mwakawago said the follow-on Mission would focus on governance, security, human rights and development. It would be a small mission with 10 Military Advisers and 20 Civilian Police (CIVPOL) to monitor the security sector. He noted that the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) would provide security for the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

He made it clear that the integrated office was not going to replace other UN agencies in the country but would provide technical support. This integrated office, he stated, would be 300 staff members, mostly nationals and its lifespan would be initially for 12 months with provisions for an extension.

The SRSG underscored that tremendous progress had been made in Sierra Leone and asked journalists to buttress and build on achievements gained thus far so as to restore confidence and trust of the people. “Sierra Leone is an independent state so it should provide its own security, but the United Nations will still be engaged in this country forever as Sierra Leone is a member of the UN,” he said adding that

although Sierra Leoneans are the only ones that can build their country, “the international community is there to help you”. He congratulated the journalists for improving the standards of their newspapers but he warned, “You still have a lot to do, you are not quite there yet.” He challenged them to report on the positive things that are happening in the country as the onus is upon them to help change the mind set of the people and give them hope.

Responding, the President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Alhaji Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, lauded the efforts of the UN saying that the UN was so concerned about Sierra Leone that it was putting in place a follow-on mission after UNAMSIL. He said that the Government was squandering the goodwill of the journalists and the international community because the government withholds information that should be disseminated. He assured the SRSG, however, that SLAJ would always cooperate with UNAMSIL and the UN agencies on the ground.

The lunch took place at the Balmaya Arts Centre, Congo Cross, west of the capital Freetown.