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and Major Aliyu Yusuf, Military Spokesman

Officer-in-Charge of UNAMSIL decorates Pakistani peacekeepers with UN medals

At a medal parade in Koidu, Kono district, eastern Sierra Leone, the Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, (UNAMSIL), Mr. Alan Doss, December 17 decorated peacekeepers from the Pakistani Contingent (PAKCON III) who had accomplished 90 days of flawless service in the Mission area.

At the ceremony, which took place at the Community Centre Football field and was attended by the Egyptian and Lebanese Ambassadors and representatives from the British High Commissioner and the US Ambassador, Mr. Doss said that “the medals you are conferred today reflect your contribution to the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone. The UN is rightfully proud of the contribution that you have made and are continuing to make to the cause of peace in this country”.

He indicated that “the officers and troops of the Pakistani contingent are entrusted with one of the most important tasks in UNAMSIL - to ensure security in Sector East” and that “peace and stability have returned to this part of the country in large parts thanks to the Pakistani contingent, their professionalism and integrity”. He cautioned that “much vigilance is still required in your sector until the situation in Liberia improves”. He also commended the contingent for their work achieved in support of the local community and stressed that “as you are both Ambassadors of the UN and of peace, “each and everyone must strive to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct”.

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He paid special tribute to Maj. Gen Sajjad Akram, UNAMSIL Force Commander, and Brig Gen Sajjad Bakshi, Sector East Contingent Commander, for their leadership, hard work and professionalism.

Mr. Doss also told the gathering that the peace and security of Kono would be in the hands of the Sierra Leone police, military and people next year, after UNAMSIL's withdrawal. He called on all to make it their business to maintain peace and security in the district to ensure that the efforts by the UN and the Pakistani contingent would not be in vain. The ceremony ended with distribution of wheelchairs to handicapped and sewing machines to needy widows and families of Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) soldiers.

UNAMSIL Force Commander commissions footbridge in Koidu

The Force Commander and Chief Military Observer of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, Maj Gen Sajjad Akram, on December 16 commissioned a footbridge in Koidu, Eastern Sierra Leone. The footbridge, which connects Pakistani Logistic III and the Pakistani VIII camp, is part of the peacekeepers' (Pakcon 3) humanitarian assistance to the people of Koidu.

Gen Sajjad also laid the foundation stone for the construction of a five-classroom block at the Girls Primary School in Koidu. The building is expected to be completed in March 2004.

At the school, the Force Commander said, "this project is one of the 20 Quick Impact Projects by UNAMSIL peacekeepers throughout Sierra Leone". He thanked the Pakistani peacekeepers for their efforts.

The projects are initiated not only to assist but also to win the hearts and minds of the people of Sierra Leone so as to consolidate peace in the country, he said.

He added that the Pakistani peacekeepers had carried out a number of humanitarian projects including the construction of mosques, churches and the skills acquisition center building in Koidu. The contingent has also donated food items, clothes, drugs, books and provided free medical care such as eye surgery as well as free eyeglasses to the local population.

On arrival in Koidu, Major Gen Akram was received by the Commander, Sector East, Brigadier General Ahmed Sajjad Bakhshi.

More international troops and equipment needed in Liberia - UN report

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Inadequate support for peacekeeping in Liberia could hamper future missions in Africa, Secretary-General Kofi Annan warns in a new report urging countries to make good on their pledges of soldiers and support units.

"The slow response from Member States to the [UN Mission in Liberia's (UNMIL)] troop requirements raises concern, not only for effective implementation of the mandate of UNMIL, but also for planning for possible future peacekeeping operations in Africa, including in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and the Sudan," he says in a report to the Security Council.

As of last week, UNMIL's troop strength stood at 5,900 military personnel out of an overall authorized strength of 15,000. More contingents are expected from Bangladesh, Namibia, Pakistan, Sweden and Ukraine in the near future. While thanking countries that already have contributed military and police personnel, Mr. Annan calls on others to urgently make available the "sorely needed" specialized support units considered crucial to UNMIL's effectiveness.

The report warns of persistent political and security problems in Liberia. "Regrettably, the armed groups have yet to demonstrate their full commitment to the peace process, as is apparent from the ongoing skirmishes, the continuing serious violations of human rights and the selfish pursuit of lucrative posts in the Government and public corporations," the Secretary-General says.

The people maintaining such an attitude could be held accountable for impeding peacekeeping work and for human rights violations, he adds.

Calling on donors to be generous, Mr. Annan notes that early next February, the UN, the World Bank and the United States will jointly host a donors' conference on Liberia in New York. Meanwhile, a consolidated appeal by the humanitarian agencies for \$137 million was launched last month to provide emergency assistance as Liberia's interior becomes accessible.

West Africa is destabilized by border-crossing foreign troops, UN says

Stability, good governance and development remain out of reach for four West African countries because of inadequate United Nations peacekeeping troop strength, the possible repatriation of excombatants, the cross-border movements of foreign fighters and a lack of urgent financial assistance.

Stabilizing Liberia "is contingent upon the timely mobilization and deployment of required troops throughout the country, especially as UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia) begins to disarm and demobilize combatants," according to a report from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, responding to Security Council recommendations on West Africa.

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The Council "may therefore wish to call upon those member states that had promised troops for UNMIL to redeem their pledges as soon as possible," it says.

At the same time, the Economic Commission of West African State (ECOWAS) has asked for the expansion of the small UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI) into a full peacekeeping mission because the peace process remains deadlocked, the report says.

The planned withdrawal of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) could be affected by destabilizing factors, including the possible return of Sierra Leonean ex combatants from Liberia and the need for forces to monitor the border with Liberia.

The cross-border movements of foreign combatants fuel instability in West Africa, the report says. In response to a Security Council recommendation, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for West Africa, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, has undertaken a comprehensive study of ways to strengthen the capacity of ECOWAS in the areas of early warning, conflict prevention and peace-building, it says

Meanwhile, the newly formed transitional government of Guinea-Bissau, formed after a brief military coup in September, plans to hold legislative elections by the end of March 2004, but the international community needs to provide urgent financial and other support to help with the preparations, it says.

Liberia: UN to pause disarmament process while improving conditions

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) December 14 announced plans to pause its disarmament of ex-fighters in order to facilitate the overall process.

The payments of an advance "reinsertion allowance" will also be on hold from mid-December to January so that the mission can improve conditions at Camp Schieffelin, located outside the capital.

So far, more than 11,000 former combatants have turned in weapons there. UNMIL said these former fighters will have the option of continuing to receive food, shelter, and other basic support at Camp Schieffelin during the holiday period, or returning to their respective communities until the disarmament process resumes in January.

The decision announced was taken "following detailed discussions with Liberian political and military leaders," UNMIL said.

UN official says more peacekeepers are needed in Africa

The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has issued an appeal to Member States to expedite the deployment of troops they have offered for the

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United Nations Mission and to be prepared to provide troops for anticipated future operations in various other parts of Africa.

During a meeting yesterday in New York for troop contributors, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, said he expected that peacekeepers might be required in Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan and Burundi, in the event that the Security Council decides to establish peacekeeping operations to support the peace processes in those countries.

"It is important that I highlight these possible future calls that the UN may be making on Member States," he said. "We may need substantial numbers of military personnel who will be required to be logistically self-sustained and possess the necessary equipment to ensure a robust and force-protected posture in the conduct of their operations."

There are growing signs that the long-running civil conflict in Sudan is coming to an end, the Under-Secretary - General said, with a power-sharing agreement likely by the end of the month. A team from DPKO is in Sudan to review a draft plan for a future UN mission.

In Burundi, the transitional government and the largest armed group signed a ceasefire last month after a decade of civil conflict. The African Union deployed its own peacekeeping mission to the country earlier this year.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the Security Council last month that he would soon send an assessment team to Côte d'Ivoire to prepare recommendations on how the current UN mission, which comprises 38 military liaison officers, can be reinforced.

Mr. Guéhenno also said the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) needed specialized units to tackle specific challenges, citing the example of a lack of an engineering company in one of the Mission's four sectors.

Questions and Answers

***Question:** I'm Moses Kargbo from For di People newspaper. Yes Mr. Spokesman, you have just highlighted the disturbances in Liberia. Now how can you generally describe the situation in Liberia. And do you think the UN mission there would be up to the task?*

Kemal Saiki: Well, I understand very much your interest in Liberia but, as I have advised on previous occasions concerning UNAMSIL and UNMIL, they are they and we are we. I can't speak authoritatively about what is going in Liberia nor can I speak on behalf of UNMIL. I do not have any information I could share with you that you would not find in the public domain. What I can do is provide you with all the necessary contacts of my Public Information colleagues in UNMIL and I'm sure they would answer all your questions.

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Question: *I'm Alie Kamara from The News. I would like to know why some countries are reluctant to contribute troops to the Mission in Liberia. And I would like to know also what would be the fate of children born by peacekeepers in Sierra Leone as UNAMSIL is folding up.*

Kemal Saiki: Concerning your first question, we do have a mechanism whereby member states are called upon to contribute troops or financial resources when setting up peacekeeping missions. How they respond depends on their readiness and abilities to provide support for peacekeeping operations and is a sovereign decision. As to the second part of your question, I should like to submit that this is a rather individual issue, a situation that needs to be primarily addressed by the persons concerned, but I know from some past cases that child support has been awarded when parental links have been clearly established. I will enquire as to what dispositions, if any, exist in this regard and will get back to you.

Question: *I'm Edward Marah from the Standard Times. I would like to know whether the UN has made any statements with regards to Saddam Hussein of Iraq. And secondly, this is just an observation, for sometime now I have not been seeing some other representatives from other organizations who usually come here to give information about their organizations. Can you comment on that?*

Kemal Saiki: Since we are in Sierra Leone, in West Africa and Iraq being quite far from here I would not wish to comment on the situation in that country other than to say, concerning the arrest of its former leader, there has been a statement from our Secretary General, Mr. Annan, to the effect that it was a positive development and he calling for the return of Iraq to sovereignty. I will provide you with the text of Mr. Annan's statement and I'm sure this will fully answer your question. Concerning the absence of some of our colleagues here, it's true that at some point we had representatives from the Special Court but, since they have finally completed the building of their own facilities, the logistical support we were providing them is no longer needed and they are organizing their information briefings on their own premises. As to UNHCR, Francesca Fontanini is no longer in Sierra Leone and we expect her replacement continue his participation to our briefings.

Question: *Moses Kargbo again. When will UNAMSIL finally fold up its operations in Sierra Leone?*

Kemal Saiki: For the time being the mandate of UNAMSIL will end in December 2004 That's exactly one year from now. But we have also said that the final withdrawal of the Mission will depend on certain benchmarks that need to be met. We have also repeatedly said that the Security Council will review the existing conditions in Sierra Leone, in the light of these benchmarks and will decide as to the timing of the actual withdrawal of UNAMSIL. As of now we are still on track in terms of the withdrawal plan.

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Question: *I'm Zainab Kanu of SLENA. This is for the Military Spokesman. I would like to know the present strength of UNAMSIL and I want to also know what has happened to checkpoints manned by UN peacekeepers.*

Major Yusuf. The present strength of UNAMSIL is about 11,500. And our troops are deployed around Sierra Leone. And to the second question checkpoints are not permanent. They are put in place in emergency situation. When the need arises they come and when the security situation is stable they go.

Kemal Saiki: This, ladies and gentlemen of the Press, concludes our briefing. We wish you all a merry Christmas.

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