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PRESS BRIEFING HIGHLIGHTS
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Near Verbatim

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MAJOR ONYEMA NWACHUKWU, MILITARY SPOKESMAN

Umaru Fofana: Members of the press I want to welcome you all to our usual weekly briefing today. I'm sitting in for the Chief Public Information Officer who is also the Spokesman. Incidentally, he is out in the provinces with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago visiting voter registration centres in Port Loko and Makeni in the Northern Province, which underscores UNAMSIL's facilitating the conduct of the Local Government elections that are scheduled to be held in May this year. Just to let you also know that we are joined today by the Commissioner of UNAMSIL Civilian Police (CIVPOL), Commissioner Hudson Benzu and also the new Public Information Officer for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Rachel Goldstein-Rodriguez. They will both talk to you later.
Now to the Briefing Highlights of this week:

**SRSG Decorates UNAMSIL CivPol officers as DSRSG Hands over
Refurbished Structures to SLP Training School**

Freetown – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, accompanied by his Deputy, Mr Alan Doss and UNAMSIL's Director of Administration, Steinar B. Bjornsson on Thursday 26 February decorated 38 UNAMSIL Civilian Police (CivPol) officers

with United Nations Peace Medals at a colourful ceremony at the Sierra Leone Police Training School at Hastings, outside Freetown.

Addressing the officers who come from 25 different countries, Ambassador Mwakawago said the medals, which are awarded to peacekeepers and CIVPOL officials who complete a minimum of 90 days unblemished, was in appreciation of their “professionalism, sacrifice and devotion towards the restoration of law and order and the consolidation of lasting peace in Sierra Leone”. He said 35 CivPol officers had been assisting in training the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) while 79 others deployed throughout the country had been mentoring SLP officers “who in turn have enhanced the spread of Government authority throughout the country; and also in maintaining law and order”. 17 other CivPol officers, he went on, based at the Mission’s headquarters in Freetown, had been supporting the SLP in a variety of tasks including cross-border and airport policing.

The SRSRSG thanked development partners including the Commonwealth for its Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP), the British Department for International Development (DfID) and the United Nations Development Programme “whose assistance to CivPol has afforded it to play catalytic role in helping the SLP build up itself”.

Ambassador Mwakawago informed members of the SLP about UNAMSIL’s drawdown plan saying it was being pursued “in a manner whereby you, the Sierra Leone Police, and the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces gradually take over security responsibilities from UNAMSIL troops leaving any security vacuum.” He urged them, especially their commanders, to realize that the security of Sierra Leone rested in their hands, adding that while they would be in “the driver’s seat, UNAMSIL CivPol will be by your side until the target of 9,500 personnel [for the SLP] is achieved” and entreated them to “double your smartness and resourcefulness.”

“I need hardly emphasize that you need to work closely with your people” the SRSRSG went on, adding that “Any bad elements amidst the police must be weeded out so that the confidence of the people is not shaken. The people’s confidence and cooperation are vital for any good police force”.

After decorating the CivPol officers, the SRSRSG and his deputy, Mr Alan Doss proceeded to hand over newly constructed and furnished additional classrooms and dormitory for the Hastings Police Training School funded by the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

Speaking at the dedication ceremony, Mr Doss, who is also the UNDP Country Representative said he was “particularly pleased that this occasion is graced by the presence of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, who since his arrival as head of UNAMSIL has given unreserved support and leadership in galvanizing United Nations’ assistance to Sierra Leone including in the strengthening of the capacity of the Sierra Leone Police.” These efforts, he went on, had received great support from UNAMSIL, the Commonwealth, and DfID, which is financing a major expansion of the Training School.

The DRSRSG said the project had been implemented as part of a much larger international effort to strengthen the capacity and professionalism of the Sierra Leone Police. “A well-trained and equipped professional police force - dedicated to serving the population in the maintenance of the rule of law and citizens’ security- is one of the fundamental pillars of good governance.” Mr Doss added “the role of police in Sierra Leone is critical as the country grapples with the challenge of addressing the legacy of the conflict and consolidating peace.” He said that with UNAMSIL’s drawdown underway, the role of the SLP is becoming ever more important. “We are confident

that this training school and the newly constructed facilities will contribute to achieving the target of increasing the number and quality of the Sierra Leone police force to meet these challenges.” He thanked the other partners including the Deputy Inspector General of the SLP Oliver Somassa and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA). The Ghanaian High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Kabral Blay-Amihere also attended the occasion.

DSRSG Commissions Two Schools IN Lungi

Freetown – The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (DSRSG) For Governance and Stabilisation, Mr. Alan Doss, on Tuesday 24 February commissioned two six-classroom blocks built by the eighth Ghanaian battalion (GHANBATT 8) under the Quick Impact Project (QIP) modality, in the northern district of Port Lolo.

In his address before commissioning the Baptist Primary School at Masoila and the Ansarul Islamic Secondary School at Rotifunk, Mr. Doss said “the commitment of Ghana to peace in the sub-region and the personal interest of President Kufuor in the resolution of the conflict in Sierra Leone, have been greatly appreciated by the UN and above all the Sierra Leonean people,” adding that “the construction of these schools by UNAMSIL shows that peacekeeping is about helping rebuild...communities for a better future.” In closing his remarks, Mr. Doss urged the community to register for the local government elections as a way of showing its appreciation for the UN which had contributed so much to help Sierra Leoneans regain that right.

The DSRSG noted it took sacrifice, commitment and fortitude from GHANBATT 8 to execute the project, and paid glowing tribute to the UNAMSIL staff both at the headquarters and in the field whose direction and assistance contributed to the successful execution of the projects. He advised the pupils to “use this unique opportunity offered to you to learn and chart bright futures for yourselves” and the communities to care for the edifices so that they “could serve this present generation and the next ones.”

The Ghanaian Contingent Commander, Col. Michael Amuzu thanked all for their presence and assistance towards the implementation of the projects and assured that the incoming GHANBATT 9 would step adequately into their shoes. He asked the government and NGOs to provide the structures with furniture.

Earlier the Deputy Chief of Civil Affairs, Mr. Abiodun Bashua said that as UNAMSIL was about to withdraw, it was the Mission’s hope that peace would be sustained. “Education is no longer a men’s affair,” he added, and urged the communities to ensure that every girl child was given the same opportunity as their male counterparts.

A representative from the Ministry of Education, Mr. Dickson Rogers lauded the efforts of GHANBATT 8, saying that the government appreciated such efforts especially at a time when Government was striving towards improving access to education for all.

The Head Teacher of the Baptist Primary School, Daniel A. Kamara said the project was an accomplishment of what was started in 1994 by Ghanaian soldiers of the ECOWAS

peacekeeping force, ECOMOG. He expressed gratitude that school which started off 30 pupils could now boast of over 700. He said 60% of the pupils are girls, noting that he was proud of GHANBATT 8 which completed the school within three months, and asked the community to rename the school The Ghana-Sierra Baptist Primary School.

Paramount Chief of Kuffu Bullom chiefdom, Bai Shebora Komkanda II thanked the Government of Sierra Leone and the international community for bringing peace to the country, referring to the days “a day of thanksgiving ... [and] a day of joy. Today we are enjoying the benefits of peace. GHANBATT 8 has performed and is still performing humanitarian gestures” including the opening of a clinic in his chiefdom and rehabilitation work on the roads. “A friend in need is a friend indeed,” he said rounding up with a song of praise which his people sang along with him.

Mr. Doss and entourage then took a conducted tour of the classrooms after unveiling the dedication plaques.

SRSG, FC Decorates Russian Aviation Peacekeepers with UN Peace Medals

Freetown - The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, together with the UNAMSIL Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Sajjad Akram yesterday decorated one hundred and fifteen officers and men of the Russian Aviation Unit serving in the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) at a colourful ceremony at the international airport town of Lungi, northern Sierra Leone. They were also joined by Sierra Leone’s Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Mrs. Melrose Kai-Banya and the Russian Ambassador to Guinea and Sierra Leone, Igor Ivashchenko

Addressing the recipients of the peace medal, who included their unit commander Maj. Gen. Peter Kazak Ambassador Mwakawago said the peacekeepers deserved to be decorated after a “distinguished and meritorious service” especially in the last three months, and urged them to do even more as the drawdown phase of UNAMSIL required “more flying hours and more vigilance” with the troop level now at 10,500 peacekeepers. He praised the Russian peacekeepers for providing “armed escort for ground convoys, air reconnaissance, air cover of other UNAMSIL operations” and for undertaking “deterrence patrol mission along the borders of Sierra Leone and its neighbours”, which have included 900 flights amounting to 1,100 hours since last September. The SRSG said the appearance of the Russian helicopters alone “contributed significantly to a quiet and stable situation [that] succeeded in deterring potential mischief-makers along the border”.

The SRSG said the medals, awarded to UN peacekeepers who complete 90 days unblemished, were being awarded to the Russians “in recognition of your professionalism, gallantry, sacrifice and devotion towards the realization and consolidation of lasting peace in Sierra Leone”.

In her statement, Sierra Leone's Ambassador to the Russian Federation, Mrs. Melrose Kai-Banya congratulated the peacekeepers, saying they were awarded a significant date to Russian soldiers - Russian Armed Forces Day.

UNAMSIL Force Commander Commissions Classroom Blocks For Tokeh Village School

Freetown - The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, Major General Sajjad Akram Monday 23 February 2004 commissioned two eight-classroom blocks at the Bangla-Sierra Khulafai Rashideen Islamic Primary School, at Tokeh village outside Freetown. The blocks were built by the third Bangladesh Signals battalion 3 (BANSIG 3).

General Sajjad Akram told the community people that as part of their service to the communities in their areas of deployment, UNAMSIL peacekeepers had been providing basic amenities such as building schools, vocational institutes, churches, mosques as well as food, clothing and free medical treatment to Sierra Leone's needy populace. The Force Commander said UNAMSIL military units have so far implemented eighteen quick impact projects throughout the country. He described the pupils of the school as "the life, hope and future of Sierra Leone and the world in general", urging all parents and guardians to invest in them. He further emphasized that sound educational and moral training for Sierra Leone's children would bring about a more stable, prosperous and peaceful country in the days ahead.

Responding, the Head teacher of the school, Mrs. J Coker said the school, which was founded on April 13 1983 had a pupil capacity of just twenty, but that with the latest development it can now accommodate up to four hundred pupils. She expressed gratitude to officers and soldiers of BANSIG 3 and UNAMSIL in general.

Other dignitaries who graced the occasion included the Sector West Commander, Brigadier General Nuhu Bamali, the Ghanaian Contingent Commander Colonel Michael Amuzu and the chiefs and opinion leaders in the Tokeh community.

Umaru Fofana: I will now hand you over to the Commissioner of CivPol, Hudson Benzu. Commissioner, Sir.

Commissioner Hudson Benzu: Thank you very much Mr. Fofana. Today we are going to look at CIVPOL's strides in its training programmes...As you are aware, training of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) is part of our benchmarks and so far we have made lots of efforts in assisting the Sierra Leone Police on its recruitment drive. Like Mr. Fofana said, we are sensitizing the Sierra Leone community to send their children to join the police...women as well as men. Our quota of women is 30% or more. This is what we are encouraging them to do and...em...so far, by break down of regions, Freetown in the Western Area, 960 candidates sat to the exams and they are now being checked to know how many of them will make it through. In Kenema in the Eastern Province, we had 94 candidates. In Makeni in the Northern Province there were 60, while Bo in the southern

Province had 49. Of these figures, we want a total of more than 1,000 to add to the 400 we have in the databank. As you are aware, the commissioning yesterday of the facilities at Hastings means the expansion of our training school at Hastings. By April, we expect the school to take about 700 students at a time. Now this would mean we have to redouble the efforts in the recruitment drive that CIVPOL and the SLP have been doing for the past two months. Apart from that, CIVPOL has been involved in the promotion exams for SLP, starting from Sergeant, Assistant Superintendent of Police and Superintendents. More than a thousand people sat for promotion examinations and these have been handed over to the SLP headquarters for final check. CIVPOL has also been working hand in hand with SLP on cross border activities. We concentrated on Guinea and Liberia [with] a cross border adviser who has been working with them and also working with the marine unit of SLP and RSLAF. As a way of information, for the past one week a lot of activities took place and we are trying to harmonize our operations to make sure activities at the borders are checked and also reports are made to relevant authorities. Apart from that CIVPOL has also been working with the national drug agency. We have two officers who are attached there and they have done a lot.

Apart from the above strategic plan, we are sure we now have a crop of [SLP] officers that would take over from us as we are going. Also we are training officers at the airport. Those officers are going to be involved in checking and also assessing situation at the airport.

We have a number of officers who are involved in criminal intelligence services of the SLP. Our role was to identify areas where the SLP can be involved and where we can assist them in identifying the candidates that need to be recruited. We have developed appropriate training materials to run these programmes and we have so far managed to cover a number of police stations where we deployed officers who will assist in fighting crimes, identifying possible suspects and also analyzing how these crimes are committed so the SLP through their CID would be able to catch up with these criminals. Having said that, I want to inform you that we have been working around the clock with UNAMSIL to put up training centres in Makeni, Bo and Kenema. This also includes Hastings. And so far we have more than six courses in these places. Come end of March we would have updated training in Makeni and Bo where we would put up strong structures refurbished by UNAMSIL funding, and we will be handing them over by the end of March. As I said, these will help in managerial training for middle managers of the SLP – Sergeants and Inspectors. Coming to the other part of training...as you are aware, Sierra Leone would be having elections not far from now. CIVPOL has provided a lot of materials for training SLP and we are going to have an in-house training because we want the SLP to understand the role they are going to play in the elections and security provisions. Having said that, our intension is to train not less than 5,000 SLP officers to be deployed in various centers throughout the country to monitor the elections. In the original training centers as I said, some structures have been taken over by DfID and they are working hand in hand with UNAMSIL to put up these structures to alleviate problems of training at Hastings and also we are assisting in Motema and Koidu where we are putting up some billets so that officers who would be passing out from here can have places where they would be accommodated because of the draw down which is imminent. From that angle I will hand you back to Mr. Fofana.

Umaru Fofana: Thank you very much Commissioner Hudson Benzu. I will now hand you over to the Public Information Officer from UNHCR, Rachel Goldstein-Rodriguez.

Rachel: Good afternoon. I don't have a press briefing note to give to you today. So if you want we can have a talk afterwards or you take down notes as I speak. In an incident earlier this week a refugee girl in the Jimmi Babor refugee camp was slapped by two male Sierra Leonean students from the host community. The incident was reported to the school principal and [words indistinct]. In the meantime, tension brewed at a football match between the host community and the refugee community. After the match it emerged that refugees vandalized three dormitories and a dining hall of a local boarding school. In response boys of the community torched four houses in Jimmi Babor and as well as destroyed one completely. In addition they destroyed partially the school. In response to the situation UNHCR invited the Sierra Leone Police to quell the riot. In addition we held meetings with Paramount Chief as well as agencies working in the area to request improved cooperation and harmony in the community. The Sierra Leone Police are investigating the situation and will come up with their findings shortly. But currently the situation is calm and the UNHCR will like to thank the Sierra Leonean government for their hospitality towards the Liberian refugees. Thank you.

Umaru Fofana: Thank you Rachel. I will now hand over the microphone to you members of the press for questions.

Questions and Answers

Question: This question is for Commissioner Benzu. Sir I would like to know whether CIVPOL is training the SLP in prosecution aspect of policing because that particular aspect of the policing is very weak.

Commissioner Hudson Benzu: Thank you very much. The answer is no. We are not involved. As you are aware CIVPOL is not working alone in advising SLP. That wing is handled by Commonwealth's Community Safety and Security Programme (CCSSP). If SLP feels we should jet in, the Inspector General of Police will advise us to assist in that area. As at now we are not involved in training prosecutors.

Question: I'm Abubakarr Kargbo I write for the Standard Times. To the UNHCR officer, I understand that we still have some Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia. I just want to know their present status and how do you intend repatriating them.

Rachel Goldstein-Rodriguez: That's true. We do have Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea and Liberia and other neighbouring countries. In Guinea the UNHCR will stop assistance to Sierra Leonean refugees as of June 2004. As a result we do not take this as a determining factor as to whether refugees will come back or not. Refugees will come back if they choose to...if the situation in Sierra Leone is better. The kind of assistance provided in Guinea and Liberia is very limited...so that it will not be one of the reasons why people should stay in asylum. But we do expect that all refugees would have returned by June 2004. The repatriation will soon start from Liberia into Sierra Leone.

Question: Joseph Turay. I represent the African Champion. I just want to know the role CIVPOL will play in the forthcoming Local Government election.

Commissioner Hudson Benzu: Like I mentioned when I started, CIVPOL is already involved in the Local Government elections [by] providing security for the materials and also assisting the SLP in the training of their officers. Apart from that we are also mentoring the people on the ground and through UNAMSIL we are providing logistics. That's the role we are playing and would be playing even in post-election time.

Question: Abubakarr again. To the Commissioner you said you are going to provide materials. I just want to know the type of materials.

Commissioner Hudson Benzu: When I say we are providing logistical material support...that's...the SLP and people on the ground will be using UNAMSIL vehicles to carry some materials and all that...em...that's the role CIVPOL is playing...and in training we use our own materials like papers and other things to print. So far we've come up with training modules which will be given to SLP.

Question: To the UNHCR representative. We have been getting reports that the refugees in Liberia are stranded through due the neglect of UNHCR. Can you react to that.

Rachel: I have no idea on that up to this moment.

Idrissa Conteh (another UNHCR official): As far as we know all our refugees in the camps...we are providing them with assistance and very soon we will resume repatriation by road. We will be using the Mano River bridge to bring them into the country with the help of UNAMSIL. So there are no problems actually...we have enough food...we have enough non-food items...and other facilities and everything is in place. As I have been telling you here, most of the Sierra Leonean refugees are not willing to come back home...They have been complaining about the damage being done to their homes...and areas of return...so these are some of the reasons they have been citing. But as far as we are concerned if you talk about the economic problems you have gone beyond the refugee status...I've been to Liberia and have explained to them...and there are about 33,000 of them and those who are living in the camps are about 15,000 so it has been very difficult for us to bring them back. But for your information we will be bringing in people in the same organized repatriation twice weekly. In a week we will be bringing in 800 but this is only to those who want to come back. So this is very strange to what you have said because it has no solid foundation.

Question: Idriss Gbangay is my name I write for the New People newspaper. Commissioner Benzu this is for you. I would like to know the current strength of CIVPOL and whether CivPol will withdraw as the military withdraws as dictated by the Adjustment, Drawdown and Withdrawal (ADW) of UNAMSIL.

Commissioner Hudson Benzu: Well the current strength of CIVPOL is 131 and this is because of our rotation. And talking about ADW...CIVPOL officers, as I was saying, are

supposed to be 170 but some contributing countries have not sent their officers on time while some have pulled them out when they feel they are not impressed and that's why the number is going down. The military ADW is different from CIVPOL's because the military will pull out as a battalion. For us, we are going to draw down not now. So CIVPOL is here and they will continue to be here until when they will be told: Now you can draw down.

Umaru Fofana: Since there are no more questions, I would like to thank you for coming. See you next week.