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PRESS RELEASE

**PRESIDENT KABBAH JOINS UNAMSIL CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UN
PEACEKEEPERS**

Freetown – The President of Sierra Leone, Alhaji Dr Ahmad tejan Kabbah, today joined members of the United Nations family in Sierra Leone led by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Ambassador Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago in observing the International Day of UN Peacekeepers at the UNAMSIL headquarters in Freetown.



*President Kabbah watering a peace tree planted by
Ambassador Mwakawago*

At a ceremony attended by several Government Ministers including the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alhaji Momodu Koroma and Deputy Defence Minister Joe Blell as well as diplomats including the High Commissioners of Nigerian and Ghana and the Libyan and Egyptian Ambassadors, President Kabbah said “no other country can appreciate more the value of peacekeepers than Sierra Leone... Without the contribution of UNAMSIL and the support of donors and the international community as

a whole, ending the conflict in Sierra Leone would certainly have been a lot more challenging”. The President saluted the peacekeepers saying, “Where there is war, you restore peace; where there is despair, you bring hope, confidence and reassurance”. He praised the humanitarian assistance the peacekeepers have been rendering in Sierra Leone saying this assistance had endeared them to the people of Sierra Leone especially so when “these facilities have been provided directly from the earnings of the peacekeepers themselves”.

President Kabbah regretted that “peacekeepers are no longer shielded from the heinous act of terrorism” suggesting that the international community “should strive harder to safeguard the lives of peacekeepers so that they can perform their noble jobs without fear or hindrance”.

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On the issue of UNAMSIL's drawdown plan, the president expressed his appreciation "for the consideration given by the UN for staggering the drawdown of the Peacekeeping Forces as we...strengthen our security".

Reading the statement of the UN Secretary-General, Ambassador Mwakawago said the day was in commemoration of "more than half a century of dedication and sacrifice by peacekeepers serving under the UN's blue flag around the world to build confidence, reconcile warring parties and relieve suffering." He said the past 12 months had "given us many more such sacrifices to mourn," adding "Every one of these sacrifices commands our deep respect. They should also inspire us. We must continue to strive, as those brave peacekeepers did, to make it possible for the community of nations to live in peace."



SRS, President Kabbah and Force Commander attending to Sierra Leone's National Anthem

The statement adds that more than 53,000 uniformed personnel and at least 11,000 civilian staff from 94 countries were serving in 15 missions across the world, saying those numbers are likely to increase with new missions being planned for Burundi and Sudan. This, the statement continues, is "a welcome sign that many countries are choosing a healthier path as they emerge from violent conflicts. But it places enormous strain on our existing resources." The statement calls on UN

members states "to provide the additional peacekeepers that will be needed, and the resources to go with them."

Ambassador Mwakawago said UN peacekeeping had evolved beyond its traditional role of monitoring ceasefires, saying the peacekeepers were also engaged in such tasks as "assisting political transitions, building institutions, fostering the spread of the rule of law, supporting economic reconstruction, supervising elections, disarming militias and former combatants, facilitating humanitarian aid programmes and re-settling refugees and displaced persons." He pointed out Liberia and Sierra Leone where peacekeepers were disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating "former combatants from two brutal civil wars," as well as in East Timor where "they are helping a fledgling nation take its first steps and build national institutions."

The statement calls on all to eschew violence, saying "the most expensive peacekeeping operation costs far less than the cheapest war." It adds that peacekeeping missions, by themselves could "never end wars" but that "they do offer the best possible way of ensuring there is a sustainable peace."

The celebrations were climaxed by a tree-planting by Ambassador Mwakawago and President Kabbah in memory of those peacekeepers who have died in Sierra Leone, saying, "May Peace Prevail in Sierra Leone and the peace live longer than this tree." Also present at the ceremony was UNAMSIL's Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Sajjad Akram.

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