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PRESS RELEASE

**FORCE COMMANDERS' 4TH SUB-REGIONAL INTERMISSION CONFERENCE ENDS
IN MONROVIA**

The 4th sub-regional Intermission Conference of Force Commanders of United Nations Missions in West Africa has just concluded in Monrovia on Saturday 12 June 2004. The two-day intermission Conference which was hosted by UNMIL was attended by the Force Commanders of United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) Maj Gen Sajjad Akram, United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Lt Gen Daniel Opande and the Deputy Force Commander United Nations Operation in Ivory Coast (ONUCI) Brig Gen A. Hafiz.

Top on the agenda for the Conference was a brief on the Security Situation of each of the missions. Briefing on the security state of Sierra Leone, the Force Commander UNAMSIL Maj Gen Sajjad Akram, who led a 4 man team comprising of the Chief of Staff (Force) Col Roland Latley, the Chief of Staff (Observer) Col David Hayes and the Staff Officer 1 In charge of coordination Lt Col Robin Mathews to the conference, noted that the overall assessment of the

Security situation in Sierra Leone indicates that it is calm and stable. He pointed out that the responsibility of security is considerably shifting to the Government of Sierra Leone security agencies particularly the Sierra Leone Police as evident in the recent handing over of two provinces and in the success of the recently held local government elections. "Although UNAMSIL is taking a back sit and transiting from a security guarantor to a security insurer, the ultimate security of Sierra Leone is still the responsibility of UNAMSIL" Gen Akram emphasized.

Speaking on the Special Court, Gen Sajjad Akram said threat assessments were made before the recent trials began and appropriate security measures are already in place to contain any unforeseen threat to the calm and peaceful situation prevalent in Sierra Leone. He added that the threat situation is however relatively low. He harped on the fact that the Sierra Leone/Liberia border is an issue of concern and that the collaborative efforts of UNAMSIL and UNMIL has so far secured the border, stressing that the Southern Command of UNAMSIL and Sector 2 of UNMIL which are located in these borders are cooperating in this regard. Gen Akram allayed fears when he revealed at the conference that movement of arms and fighters across these borders is quite difficult, adding, that permissible movement of persons engaged in legitimate economic activities may however not be ruled out. He reiterated the resolve of the UN Security Council to implement the transition of UNAMSIL into a follow-up force of Brigade strength by 31st December 2004.

Addressing the Conference, the FC UNMIL Lt Gen Daniel Opande, who declared it open itemized the objectives of the Conference as including, focusing cooperative efforts in a coordinated manner

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in the pursuit of peace in the West African sub-region, sharing information that could be of operational assistance to the 3 missions, and to further understand and share knowledge on the intertwined nature of the conflicts in the sub-region with a view to developing ways and means that could proffer “across-the-border” solutions to the complex conflicts in the sub- region.

Gen Daniel Opande, noted that the focus of UNMIL at present is the ongoing Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation and Reintegration process (DDRR) in Liberia. “So far in the ongoing DDRR about 44,112 ex-combatants have been disarmed and about 16,736 arms have been recovered”, he pointed out. “The good news about the DDRR process is that all factions do agree to disarm and support the DDRR process”, he stated. He did however point out that about 100 foreign fighters (non-Liberians) have also come forward for the DDRR.

The Force Commander ONUCI Maj Gen Fahz who was conspicuously absent was represented by the Deputy Force Commander Brig Gen A. Hafiz. Briefing the Conference, Brig Gen Hafiz stated that until 25th of March 2004, the situation in Ivory Coast was relatively calm. He stated that the incident of the said day, which claimed about 120 lives when peace keepers in the mission were attacked, as the problem that stalled the peace process in Ivory Coast. He noted that the political deadlock in Ivory Coast has not helped the existing fragile peace in the country, concluding that “there was apparent hostility on the part of the warring factions toward the UN”. He however expressed belief that this would normalize with time, given the fact that ONUCI as a mission began operation quite recently precisely on 5th April 2004 with a force strength of 3,027 only.

The Force Commanders deliberated on the issue of establishing a Force Commanders’ Secretariat which will be responsible to the 3 missions. They identified the duties of the Secretariat as coordinating the activities of the 3 missions in the sub region, finding out ways of impacting on the host governments of the 3 missions and the entire sub region, scheduling Force Commanders Meetings, developing agenda for Force Commanders’ conferences, Coordinating joint mission responses, and Working out modalities for providing assistance to others within and outside the mission. The Conference passed a resolution to put in place, the machinery for establishing the Secretariat as soon as possible.

UNAMSIL Team at the conference later presented a paper titled “A more Coherent and Cooperative Approach to Peace Keeping in the West African sub region”, which the Chief of Staff (Observer) Col David Hayes delivered on behalf UNAMSIL Force Commander Maj Gen Sajjad Akram. The paper dilated on the unique situation of cooperative operation of 3 missions, which he said was happening in the United Nations for the first time and that more intermission cooperation is beneficial to the UN family. Giving an analogy of “the cockroach effect” in analyzing the conflicts in the sub-region, he noted that fighters move across the borders unrestrained while UN missions are rigidly restricted within their mandates. He identified commonly shared threats of the 3 missions in the sub region as: porous borders, movement of arms and combatants across the borders and lack of respect for international borders. Meanwhile, the paper has been unanimously adopted and would be forwarded to other missions, UNMIL and ONUCI for inputs.

The Force Commanders were later conducted round the DDRR camps at VOA and Tubmanburg where quite a number of ex combatants were seen disarming and undergoing rehabilitation.

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