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PRESS RELEASE

ACTING FORCE COMMANDER COMMISSIONS SCHOOL BLOCK IN KONO

Freetown - The Acting Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Brigadier General Paul Kwabena Opoku yesterday inaugurated a US \$14,000 five-classroom block at the Roman Catholic Primary School in Koidu, eastern Sierra Leone. The block, identified by UNAMSIL's Civil Affairs section and constructed by the Third Pakistan Engineer company (PAK ENGR III), was funded under UNAMSIL's Quick Impact Project (QIP).

Brigadier General Opoku said the block was constructed "to ease the pressure of congestion [in classrooms] due to the occupation of the sister schools...which have served both as accommodation and Sector Headquarters" for UNAMSIL peacekeepers. He hoped the new structure would cushion the attendant effect of the "rapid increase in student enrolment" in the district and the need for more classroom space. He called for immediate access of the school children to the block "since [they] are still crowded under makeshift structures where heavy rains easily and frequently disrupt their academic sessions".

The Acting Force Commander praised the Pakistani contingent "for their dedication to the project," as well as the local community for "their active support...without which not much would have been achieved". While saying that the structure was public property, Brigadier General Opoku urged the school authorities to maintain it for the benefit of future generations. He called on the pupils "to study hard to secure good future for yourselves" and the teachers "to continue with your sacrifice to turn out useful citizens for this country", adding, "education is the key to national development and all efforts must be made to improve educational standards in this country".

While expressing sadness at the deaths of UNAMSIL peacekeepers in June's helicopter crash and extending his condolence to their bereaved families, the Chiefdom Speaker II of Gbenseh, Sahr M. Gborie said he was happy for the building, which he said would benefit not only the people of his Gbenseh chiefdom but also the entire Kono district. He paid glowing tribute to UNAMSIL for "doing a lot for us including the rehabilitation of roads, building of mosques, schools, as well as the provision of free medical facility". He

said only UNAMSIL “was able to put out the flame that was burning in Kono during the war”.

The Chief Administrator of the Kono District Council, Alice Torto said peacekeepers occupied some schools destroyed by the war, but were handing over rehabilitated and in some cases, brand new structures. A point underscored by the Inspector of Schools, Kono, Thomas MT Komba who said he was “happy and grateful for the new building, which will no doubt lessen the congestion in classrooms”. He said “the parents of these and future children will forever be grateful to you because their children are going to learn in dignity and respect”. He praised the peacekeepers whom he referred to as “soldiers as well as philanthropists. “The poor and the youth will always remember you,” he said.

Also present at the ceremony were the Commander of UNAMSIL’s Southern Command, Brigadier General Sajjad Ahmed Bakhshi, Commanding Officer of PAK ENGR III, Lt Col. Abid Saleem and Civil Affairs Officer based in Kono, Anthony Agyenta.