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**UNAMSIL FORCE COMMANDER ASSURES OF SECURITY AFTER
UNAMSIL**

Freetown – The Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Major General Sajjad Akram has assured Sierra Leoneans that there would be “no security vacuum” following the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the country, saying he had confidence in the country’s security forces to maintain peace and stability.

Speaking earlier this week to journalists in the eastern district of Kono just hours before the handover by UNAMSIL of security primacy of the district to the Government of Sierra Leone, Major General Akram said the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) was “very capable” of ensuring law and order, especially when backed by the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) where necessary. He went on to say that the handover of security primacy did not mean a complete pullout of the peacekeepers who would remain in the area albeit in a smaller number. “UNAMSIL will exert its presence with its muscle power” should that be needed before, adding that more than 3,000 peacekeepers would still be in the country beyond December this year.

The Force Commander said the peacekeepers could not stay in the country forever, adding, however, “we will only leave once it is right for us to leave”.

On the issue of the potentially volatile situation on the country’s borders, Major General Akram said, “Sierra Leone has no external threat”. While the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was in control of the Liberian side of the border, he said, UNAMSIL had held several trainings with the RSLAF preparing them to ward off any threat to the country’s territory. On the issue of Guinea, he said that country posed no threat to Sierra Leone. The situation in the disputed town of Yenga between the two countries would be handled diplomatically.

Asked on investigations on the recent UN helicopter crash that killed 24 people, the Force Commander said a board of enquiry was still looking into the cause of the accident and should complete their investigation in about two months.