



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **UKRAINE AVIATORS CONFERRED WITH UN MEDALS OF HONOUR**

*Freetown, Sierra Leone* - UNAMSIL Force Commander Major General Sajjad Akram, accompanied by Commander Northern Command Brigadier General Nuhu Bamalli and Assistant Chief of Staff, Information Operations Colonel John Siame on Wednesday at Hastings conferred United Nations medals of honour on 110 peacekeepers of the Ukraine Aviation Unit during a military parade.

Major General Akram noted that the Ukrainian Armed Forces had continually played active role in peacekeeping operations around the globe. Giving a historical background of Ukrainian aviators in UNAMSIL, he pointed out that they became operational in March 2001. The unit had since the inception successfully accomplished several medical evacuations, search and rescue operations and movement of personnel and cargoes in about 13,500 flights in over 6,000 hours.

The Force Commander reminded the gathering of the ongoing UNAMSIL Adjustment, Drawdown and Withdrawal process (ADW) and said with the prevalent atmosphere of peace and stability in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL will make its exit. "We cannot remain in this country forever, thus the drawdown and withdrawal process is taking place," he stated. He stressed however, that "the country's young democracy needs to be sustained after UNAMSIL's exit". This goal was being vigorously pursued as was evident in the handing over of security primacy of various parts of the country to security agencies of the Government of Sierra Leone and sensitization through public information systems.

The Ukraine Aviation Unit commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Taras Shliukharchule was also in a UNAMSIL "Operation Blue vigilance 5" tasked with carrying out deterrent flights along the country's borders with Guinea and Liberia to forestall nefarious cross-border activities as UNAMSIL downsizes.

In another development, also at Hastings, the Force Commander bade farewell to 822 Zambian peacekeepers who were repatriating from the Tongo Fields in the Eastern Province on completion of their tour of duty in the mission and successful handover of the area. In his commendation, Major General Akram said the area of operation was one of the toughest as it was a former rebel stronghold and prone to Lassa fever disease. Yet in the face of all these difficulties the peacekeepers gallantly nurtured and sustained peace over the years in the Tongo Fields.

The Force Commander also called at the German Engineering Team location at Hastings where he was briefed by German Ambassador to Sierra Leone, Ms. Aristid Iper. The German Government has provided a team of 16 engineers responsible for establishing generator repair workshops and maintenance of over 300 generating sets used by UNAMSIL in various parts of the country.

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