



PRESS RELEASE

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UNAMSIL HANDS OVER WESTERN AREA SECURITY TO GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

Freetown, Sierra Leone – During a symbolic and solemn ceremony at State House in Freetown, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) today handed over security primacy for the Western Area, including the capital Freetown, to the Government of Sierra Leone security forces. It was the last of the country's four provinces to be handed over.

United Nations peacekeepers lowered the UN flag for the last time and handed it over to the Commander of UNAMSIL's Northern Command, Brigadier General Alhaji Nuhu Bamalli, who then gave it to the Regional Police Commander in charge of the Western Area, Chief Superintendent Sahid Ibrahim Koroma. The Brigadier also handed over documents pertaining to the Western Area security. There was also a change of guard from UN peacekeepers to officers of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP).

Speaking at the ceremony, UNAMSIL Force Commander, Major General Sajjad Akram said the Mission was handing over primacy of security to the police, but peacekeepers would "remain ultimately responsible for security, but now in consultation with the Government... We will still proffer advice, identify solutions and always be available to support the security agencies to deal with serious security issues".

He urged the SLP and Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) to "do their job efficiently, within the law and respect the government and the people they support... You must always remember that you are a bastion of hope to the people of Sierra Leone. You must not let them down," he told them.

Without peace there would be no development. Security was a collective responsibility and the general citizenry must also cooperate with their forces, the Force Commander went on.

Referring to the occasion as "an important milestone" in the country's post-conflict recovery, Vice President Solomon Berewa assured that the SLP and RSLAF had been "trained and tested" and had proven worthy of trust. Effective mechanisms had been put in place to shore up the country's defence and judicial systems in the interest of all. The Vice President paid glowing tribute to those peacekeepers who had died in the quest for peace in Sierra Leone and entreated Sierra Leoneans to nurture that peace. "Sierra Leone has again entered the community of peaceful nations," he said.

Earlier, religious leaders from the country's main Muslim and Christian faiths prayed for the souls of those peacekeepers who lost their lives during their service in Sierra Leone.

The landmark event was witnessed by Government Ministers, heads of the country's police and armed forces, the Mayor of Freetown and members of the diplomatic corps.

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