



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **DEPUTY-SECRETARY GENERAL ON COMPLETION OF MISSION TO SIERRA LEONE SAYS UN TO REFORM ITS APPROACH TO SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE ISSUES**

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Fréchette, on Thursday afternoon, completed her mission to Sierra Leone meeting with representatives of international non-governmental organizations, with press representatives, and hosting a town hall forum with members of staff of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

Ms. Fréchette told UNAMSIL staff members that any infringement of the Organization's zero tolerance policy against sexual exploitation and abuse could be "perceived as an undermining of UN standards". Although there were different types of personnel in peacekeeping operations, all would be "measured against one set of standards – the UN standards of conduct". Noting the procedures for handling complaints, she said criminal acts, such as rape or paedophilia, would be prosecuted.

In her meeting with international NGOs, Ms. Fréchette outlined the UN's policies concerning sexual abuse and exploitation and urged those organizations to work in partnership with UN offices based in Sierra Leone to curtail the phenomenon.

Later in the day, during a press conference, Ms. Fréchette disclosed that the Organization was reforming its approach by appointing staff members in all peacekeeping operations to work specifically on the issue and would very soon increase its relevant expertise and capacity to carry out investigations.

Commenting on the current drawdown of the Mission, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that the United Nations would continue to work with the people of Sierra Leone for many years to come. Since she had last visited the country five years ago when it was emerging from a "long and very painful conflict" much had been achieved. "I am encouraged by what I have seen through the programmes accomplished, such as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process and strengthening of security institutions," she stated.

Ms. Fréchette arrived in Sierra Leone on Wednesday and immediately met with the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Sierra Leone, Daudi Mwakawago and with a cross-section of personnel working on sexual exploitation and abuse issues. These included UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) focal points and representatives of UN agencies and international NGOs based in the country. On Thursday morning, she met with military and civilian police personnel and with Sierra Leone's President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

Ms. Fréchette was accompanied by DPKO's Military Adviser, Lieutenant General Randhir Kumar Mehta, among others, and departed Sierra Leone this morning for the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).