



PRESS RELEASE

Ref No UNAMSIL/PIO/PR238 /2005

Date: 22 June 2005

3-DAY CONFERENCE ON DEMOBILIZATION, DISARMAMENT AND REINTEGRATION AND STABILITY IN AFRICA OPENS IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE.

Freetown, Sierra Leone- A three-day conference on “Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration and Stability in Africa” jointly organized by the Office the Special Adviser for Africa (OSAA) and the Government of Sierra Leone starts at the Miatta Conference Center Freetown Sierra Leone.

The main objective of the conference is to review the challenges of DDR programmes, examine the extent to which current practices of DDR programmes genuinely lead to stability and development as well as identify the necessary preconditions for success, and will focus of African Perspectives on DDR from the viewpoint of stakeholders of affected counties.

Welcoming participants to the three day conference, the Under-Secretary- General and Special Adviser on Africa, Professor Ibrahim Gambari, stated that the Secretary General accords the highest priority to issues related to peace and stability in Africa of which DDR is a major component. He further explained that a recent report of the Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change notes that “demobilizing combatants is the single most important factor determining the success of peace operations and that without demobilization, civil wars cannot be brought to an end and other critical goals – such as democratization, justice and development – have little chance of success.”

According to the USG who was represented by Dr. Namanga Ngongi, former SRSRG for the Democratic Republic of Congo, DDR programmes for good reasons had placed emphasis primarily on the Demobilization and Disarmament of ex-combatants; however the greater challenge to lasting and durable peace is how to integrate them into well functioning and well governed societies that offer attractive long term opportunities and benefits for all citizens, particularly the youth.

Professor Gambari explained that the inspiration for the conference grew out of a Ministerial Round Table Breakfast entitled “Do Current Practices of Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Lead to Stability and Development in Africa?” organized by the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) in June 2004 and expressed satisfaction that with the encouragement of some donor countries, the present conference was not only proposed, but it has become a reality. He thanked the government and people of Sierra Leone for co organizing the conference.

In his opening statement at the conference, the Sierra Leone President, Alhaji (Dr) Ahmad Tejan Kabbah stated that Sierra Leoneans feel exceptionally proud and challenged by the choice of their country to host the important event at this point in their post-conflict transition.

President Kabbah decried the gruesome conflicts and senseless acts of violence which have engulfed Africa within the past two decades which have made the continent unsafe from within and without adding that these conflicts whether ethnic, civil or inter-state wars, have dehumanized, killed and displaced people and led to gross abuse and violation of their human rights.



He also lamented that the conflicts have eroded the human resources base and overall potential for development in the continent with the effect that the continent is experiencing deepening poverty and governance problems.

The president however applauded the initiative for the conference which he said sends the right signals and shows the continued commitment of the United Nations and the rest of the international community to breaking the cycle of violence and promoting durable peace and stability in Africa. He lauded the presence of UNAMSIL which he said has provided enough secured environment for his government to operate and achieve modest results.

President Kabbah expressed on behalf of his government and people of Sierra Leone deep appreciation to the United Nations, and in particular, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) for giving them the opportunity to host the first DDR conference in Africa which he said was a clear testimony of the confidence the international community now have in the peace and stability that prevails in the country.

Earlier, the Conference's Co-Chair and Sierra Leone's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon. Momodu Koroma, drawing from Sierra Leone's experience of the DDR programme, decried the ad-hoc basis on which DDR programmes have been carried out on the continent, and said it has been responsible for a fragile peace and the resurgence of conflicts in some countries. Ex combatants, he said, are hurriedly demobilized and disarmed with no substantial change in their lives and nothing to look forward to in the future; a situation which he said leaves them with no option but to recourse to taking up arms to revert to war.

The Minister counseled that for Africa to attain sustainable development in line with the Millennium Development Goals, high premium must be placed on peacefully resolving the conflicts that are tearing the continents apart.

According to the Minister, DDR programmes are a vital component of any peace process but they cannot be implemented in a vacuum nor can they on their own make a peace process successful. He called for an examination of the environment and the interlinkages that are bound to have an impact on the success of the DDR and the sustainability of peace.

Many experts and practitioners are expected to deliver papers at the conference which draws participants from many African countries and the donor community.