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UN ENVOY APPEALS TO SIERRA LEONEANS TO UTILIZE RESOURCES

Freetown, Sierra Leone—17th September 2005, -- The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General (SRSG) in Sierra Leone, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, has appealed to the people of Sierra Leone to work hard and utilize the abundant natural resources and fertile land that the country has been endowed with.

He offered the appeal on Saturday 17 September 2005 at the commissioning of Pebu Primary School in Kailahun, the Eastern Region that was financed by UNAMSIL and built by Pakistan Battalion (PAKBATT) in cooperation with the National Army (RSLAF).

“This is an appeal to the people of Sierra Leone...why are you crying of hunger? God has given you a fertile land but you don’t use it...God has been very generous to you...reciprocate that,” he pleaded.

He challenged the RSLAF to spearhead the war against hunger by establishing big farms and apply modern farming methods that would result in bumper harvest to cater for the army and surplus to the people instead of importing food from abroad as it is now.

Ambassador Mwakawago advised peasants to ditch the old methods of sowing and embark on the modern farming methods where minimal seed is used to get higher harvest from a piece of land. He was optimistic that with the resources added with hard work, determination and resolve, Sierra Leone stands to produce enough food for its population and export the surplus.

Regarding education, the SRSG called upon the parents in the country to give chances to all their children regardless of gender. He discouraged early marriages and emphasized more education opportunities for girls.

“By constructing this building you have vowed to get rid of ignorance. An idle mind is a fertile land for Satan...if you have knowledge you distance yourself with Satan,” he said and added: “Take care of this building...use this place profitably. While children can use it in the morning, parents can be here in the afternoon...for literacy and skills training.”

The SRSG also touched on the UNAMSIL's withdrawal by assuring the people of Sierra Leone that there is no need for them to be apprehensive because the Mission has helped to train the new modern army and police that has no resemblance or any affiliation with the old security forces.

Earlier, Deputy Minister of Defense Ambassador Joe Blell thanked UNAMSIL for constructing the buildings and challenged Sierra Leoneans that learning is better than gold and silver and that education always improves condition of life.

Ambassador Blell who preferred to address the gathering in krio, emphasized his point by quoting President Ahmed Tejjan Kabbah who once said to his people: "We must ensure that many classrooms are built in a very short possible time."

Lieutenant Colonel Shariff from the RSLAF acknowledged the SRSG saying that he made a request to have a primary school in the area when the head of Mission visited in May 2004, and that he was extremely pleased to see the SRSG fulfilled his promise and his request bore fruits for the people of Kailahun.

This school will make it possible for the children of 1st Battalion to have easy access to education, before which, they would have to walk seven miles to the nearest school and many could not go. The building consists of a three classroom block with an office, a store and two VIP latrines and it also has furniture for both the pupils and teachers. The construction started at the end of October 2004 and cost about 45.2 million Leones or \$14,000.

210 children from the community now have access to education.