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2500 STUDENTS NURTURED AS AMBASSADORS FOR PEACE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Freetown, Sierra Leone – 26 September 2005 – A special video taped message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone (SRSG) was shown to students in two secondary schools in Freetown on Monday.

In his message, the SRSG, Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, told the students that he thought it important to send this personal message explaining UNAMSIL's withdrawal on 31 December 2005 and all the accomplishments, along with Sierra Leoneans, in bringing peace and stability to the country. He highlighted the major benchmarks for the students so they would understand the full process of getting to this withdrawal phase. He said more than 70,000 ex-combatants were disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated into the society; government authority extended all over the country and the armed forces are well-trained and are 'Forces for Good.'

The 2500 students were the first of nation-wide secondary schools and tertiary institutions listed for the Public Information enlightenment campaign on UNAMSIL's Withdrawal Plan and the Transition Programme.

The Campaign involved the taped message from the SRSG, speeches from UNAMSIL staff members, music of peace by Captain H.L. Penn-Timity and Lieutenant M. T. Johnson of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), who are partners in the sensitization campaign.

During a question and answer session, the Public Information team reassured the students and teachers that although UNAMSIL is leaving, a new office, the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) and the United Nations agencies will remain very active in the country to continue development activities and programmes in an integrated manner.

The schools visited were St. Helen with 2000 students and Ahmadiya Secondary Schools with 500 students.

An enthusiastic crowd expressed profound appreciation for the sacrifices made by UNAMSIL in bringing peace to the country. They were particularly appreciative of the peace

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building efforts of the mission which not only cushioned the effects of the war but also put the country back on the path to peace and development.

The focus of the campaign is to, through the students, further build confidence in the people of Sierra Leone and help them cultivate a culture of ownership and sustainability of the peace process as well as national development. The sensitization tour will be taken to the provinces after the rains end.