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PRESS RELEASE

**UNAMSIL OFFICER-IN-CHARGE BIDS FAREWELL TO NIGERIAN
TROOPS TO BE DEPLOYED IN LIBERIA**

Freetown - The Office-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Mr. Alan Doss, bade farewell to about 40 Nigerian peacekeepers who left Sierra Leone early this morning on a new peacekeeping mission in neighbouring Liberia. The first batch of the troops left in two MI-8 UN helicopters which took off from Hastings, just outside Freetown.

“You are going on a historic mission. Liberians need your help. Africa and the United Nations are counting on you,” he told members of the Nigerian contingent at Hastings minutes before they departed for the Liberian capital, Monrovia. The contingent is the first of about 150 peacekeepers of the Economic Community of West African States Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) force expected to be in Monrovia today for peacekeeping duties.

The force, part of UNAMSIL’s Nigerian Battalion (NIBATT) 15 of more than 770 troops who recently completed their tour of duty in Sierra Leone, was scheduled for repatriation back to Nigeria but will now be redeployed in Liberia. NIBATT 15, which was based in Makeni, has now been renamed NIBATT 1 in Liberia gave three hearty cheers to the visitors.

Mr. Doss said UNAMSIL has been actively involved in the preparation for the movement of the peacekeepers and that the Mission would continue to provide support for the unit in Liberia. Under a UN Security Council mandate, UNAMSIL is expected to provide logistic support for the peacekeepers for up to 30 days. Mr. Doss said he was impressed with the morale of the troops. Mr. Doss had seen the troops singing, dancing and raring to go. “I am confident you will do a wonderful job,” he said.

UNAMSIL Force Commander Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Opande told the departing troops they were going to do a difficult job. “That job is to bring Liberia back to normalcy,” he said, adding that he was confident that “whatever you are required to do in Liberia you will do very well as you have done in Sierra Leone.”

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The Commanding Officer of Sector West, Brig. Gen. Nuhu Bamalli, the Acting Nigerian High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Mr. Abubakar Yerima and UNAMSIL Director of Administration, Steinar B Bjornsson were also present at the occasion.

The Force Commander of ECOMIL, Brig. Gen. Festus Okonkwo, is also expected to depart for Liberia today. “We are going in-between the fighting forces and we expect them to cooperate,” he told journalists at UNAMSIL Headquarters in Freetown yesterday, adding that although fighting was still continuing in Liberia, “we do not expect them to shoot over our heads. We are a peacekeeping mission.”

The Force Commander said that the first task would be to secure the airport. “For this task I can assure you we are prepared.”

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