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FORENSIC TEAM VISITS SIERRA LEONE

Freetown – The Argentinian Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), a non-governmental organization dedicated to applying forensic anthropology to the investigation of human rights violations, is visiting Sierra Leone to carry out preliminary investigations into mass graves of people killed during the country's 10-year civil conflict.

The team, whose visit is being facilitated by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) Human Rights Section and funded by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is expected to map the sites of mass graves, assess the amount of the forensic expertise needed for further investigations, and give advice on preserving evidence. It will also advise the Government and the human rights community on the application of forensic anthropology to the Sierra Leone context.

The three-member team, which arrived on 17 June, is expected to complete its work within four weeks. Its report will propose guidelines for carrying out future investigations in support of the activities of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

According to team members, forensic anthropology involves using methods and techniques from traditional archaeology, physical anthropology and medicine to solve legal cases. EAAF was founded in 1984 to investigate human rights violations in Argentina. It has also carried out work in many other countries, including Philippines, Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Venezuela, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama, Croatia, Bosnia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The team's visit was organized following preliminary information gathered by UNAMSIL's Human Rights Section on grave sites in different parts of the country and subsequent discussions with the office the Attorney-General and the Ministry of Justice, which expressed the need to seek professional expertise on mapping grave sites and preserving evidence.

At a briefing held yesterday at UNAMSIL Headquarters in Freetown, the Chief of the Human Rights Section, Mr. Rodolfo Mattarollo, said the team would spend the first week holding consultations with officials from Government of Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL and

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non-governmental organizations. The next two weeks will be devoted to fieldwork and a workshop will be organized during the team's fourth and final week in Sierra Leone.