

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)

PRESS RELEASE

25 June 2002

**SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS SIERRA LEONE HAS GOOD PROSPECTS FOR
PEACE BUT MUST CONSOLIDATE PROGRESS**

Freetown – United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that Sierra Leone’s prospects for peace are “encouraging,” but the country – with international assistance – must consolidate progress and tackle the challenges ahead.

In his latest report on Sierra Leone released in New York yesterday, the Secretary-General congratulates the country on its successful elections last month, calling them “a remarkable step towards lasting peace in Sierra Leone.” He adds, however, that without well-established government structures throughout the country and a security apparatus capable of protecting Sierra Leone from both internal and external threats, the stability achieved so far would remain tenuous.

“The prospects for strengthening the fragile peace in Sierra Leone are promising, provided the Government, UNAMSIL [the UN Mission in Sierra Leone] and other international partners act quickly and effectively” to tackle key priorities, he says.

The report calls on the international community to “stay the course” in Sierra Leone, adding that the country’s authorities “must deliver the peace dividend to the people and address not only the consequences of the war, but also its root causes, including corruption, human rights abuses, highly centralized government structures and neglect of the developmental needs of the population in the provinces.”

At the same time, Mr. Annan voices concern about threats to stability in Sierra Leone, including the escalating conflict in neighbouring Liberia. “The increasing incursions by armed elements into Sierra Leone portend a worrying trend,” he says, warning of “a real risk” that the two West African states could be trapped in a vicious cycle, with civil war continuously swinging back and forth between them. He calls for urgent action aimed to promote a ceasefire and reconciliation among the Liberian parties, and to build confidence among the leaders of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The report also underscores the need for the army and police in Sierra Leone to effectively assume responsibility for the country’s security after the eventual departure of UNAMSIL. The Secretary-General emphasizes that a gradual draw-down of UNAMSIL should be

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commensurate with the prevailing security conditions and the Government's capacity to match them.