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UNAMSIL CHIEF MILITARY OBSERVER TOURS
TEAM SITES IN WESTERN AREAS

Freetown – The Chief Military Observer (CMO) of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, yesterday toured military observers' team sites in the western towns of Port Loko, Moyamba and Mile 91 to assess the general security situation in the area.

In Port Loko, Capt. Mark Aucoin briefed the CMO on the current security situation in the area, which he described as calm and stable. The attitude of the people in the northern border with Guinea is positive and trading activities have returned to normal. Demobilized ex-combatants are actively engaged in farming and fishing activities.

As part of their duties, the Military Observers (MILOBs) conduct mining assessment patrols in Port Loko and so far they have found no significant signs of large-scale mining, although there are four mining sites in the region.

Capt. Aucoin reported that much progress has been made in extending government authority in the area. The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the police have been deployed and currently maintain good working relationships with the local population and also participate in community-based projects in Kambia District.

The CMO was also informed of the various re-integration programmes being conducted by several implementing partners of the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR). More than 6,000 ex-combatants were registered for reintegration in the area, about 4,000 of them have already benefited from reintegration projects and a further 1,300 are undergoing training in various fields.

In Moyamba, Maj. Gen. Athar received a similar briefing from Lt. Commander Terry Byrne. He said that the economic activity in the area is the Sierra Rutile Mine, which contributed about 90 percent of Sierra Leone's export revenues between 1990 and 1995. He said that plans are under way to reactivate the mine. Before it was closed as a result of the war, the mine employed more than 1,800 Sierra Leoneans.

Before flying back to Freetown, the CMO visited the team site in Mile 91, where he commended the MILOBs for their dedication to duty. He emphasized that the focus of the Mission has now shifted from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and implored them to work with all the stakeholders and foster cooperation with all the organizations in the area.

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