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**SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE VISITS SIERRA LEONE-LIBERIA
BORDER AREAS**

Freetown – The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji, accompanied by the Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Lt. Gen. Daniel Opande, and other senior UNAMSIL officials, yesterday visited the border towns of Gendema and Zimmi in Pujehun district to assess the refugee and returnee situation in the area. The officials also crossed the Mano River Bridge to Bo Waterside in Liberia, and traveled to Kenema as well.

At the Bo Waterside border post in Liberia, the SRSG said the purpose of his visit was to seek assurances from the Liberians that refugees and returnees were being allowed to cross freely into Sierra Leone, and that appropriate reception arrangements were being made at the border. “It is an irony of fate,” the Special Representative said, that the inflow of refugees is in the opposite direction than in the past – now from Liberia to Sierra Leone.

Lt. Col. Moses Ziah, Armed Forces of Liberia commander in the area, pledged his government’s commitment to protect the refugees and returnees. At Gendema, the first reception point on the Sierra Leone side of the border for returnees and refugees, the UNAMSIL officials witnessed the ongoing inflow of persons crossing from Liberia. The head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees sub-office, Mr. Karl Steinacker, indicated that the way station in Zimmi, which was initially targeted to house 800 persons, now was saturated with new inflows of refugees and returnees, hence the need to build new camps.

At the Zimmi way station, Ms. Aminata Thorllie, the UNHCR protection officer, told the SRSG and his delegation, that upwards of 4,000 refugees and returnees were awaiting transport to camps in Kenema and beyond.

Ambassador Adeniji and his team then traveled to Kenema for a meeting with district authorities, where he was informed that almost all government functionaries had returned to the district and resumed their duties. The SRSG appealed to the district authorities to exercise patience and restraint to resolve ongoing disagreements in Tongo Fields regarding illegal occupation of houses by ex-combatants.

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The SRSB then addressed students and teachers at the Eastern Polytechnic in Kenema, a one-year-old tertiary institution designed to cater for the educational and training needs of the Eastern province of the country. The UNAMSIL Trust Fund is supporting the construction of five new classrooms at the Polytechnic, which includes 150 ex-combatants among its student body.

Ambassador Adeniji told the assembly that peace was more than the absence of war. “In making peace, we have to address what caused the conflict – the frustration of the youth.” The youth, he said, had to be given the hope to earn a decent living through sound training at institutions of this kind. He pledged UNAMSIL’s assistance in finding solutions to the problems the school faced with equipment and manpower.