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**Press Briefing by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General**  
**Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji**  
**Tuesday, 14 May 2002**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the press. It is nice to see a number of faces I have not seen since the crisis of 2000 and the aftermath. I am happy we are meeting in happier circumstances today.

Today is the culmination of the efforts of several actors, marking the second major step in the Sierra Leone peace process which is the election we have today. If I may recall, the first major step in the peace process was the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, which UNAMSIL in collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF, as it was then known, completed on 17 January of this year. The day after that, the president declared that the war was at an end. And so it was possible that the commencement of the decision which has been tentatively taken by the people of Sierra Leone in the conference they had held in November of 2001 to have elections this year. Subsequently, today's date was fixed for the elections.

Our mission here was authorized by the Security Council to provide assistance to the National Electoral Commission. There is a major difference between the mission here in UNAMSIL, even if it is the largest UN peacekeeping operation in the world, it is still not in charge of Sierra Leone. All along there has been and continues to be a Government in Sierra Leone, and so UNAMSIL can only play a supporting role. In that context, it was the Government that appointed the National Electoral Commission which was, and is, charged with organizing the elections. Then it was clear that without the vital assistance of UNAMSIL it might be difficult for the National Electoral Commission to organize the elections within the short time frame which it had. Our assistance had consisted of providing security, and given the assurance of security without which no election would be possible. And with a complement of 17,500 troops, we have been able by and large to do that. But we also provided logistical assistance to the NEC in terms of helping it to distribute, first of all, the heavy electoral materials, and in the last few days, by way of distributing the sensitive electoral papers, particularly the ballot papers which were used today. Today we have found ourselves, in UNAMSIL, throughout the country to keep an eye on what was going on, more by way of monitoring than by way of observation. Because the UN have taken a decision in principle, that there will be no United Nations observers for this election. The reason for that is the deep involvement of UNAMSIL in the preparation of the elections.

you cannot be judge and jury at the same time. We have left that with others, because they are a little more distant, be a little more credible when they pronounce themselves on the conduct of the elections.

What I can assure is that from standpoint of UNAMSIL, we have monitored the process from the beginning, particularly from the point of registration of voters. We have monitored it. We have been in close touch with the National Electoral Commission. I have been constantly on the line with Chairman of the NEC to point out where and when we failed, that things were not going on well with respect to registration, and we had suggested and this had been accepted invariably, ways of ameliorating the situation immediately.

For the election proper, our role had consisted mainly of assuring the Electoral Commission that we had to distribute all their materials. Beyond that, in order to give confidence to all political parties, we had also given them the assurance, that where there is any doubt, we will be the partner of the National Electoral Commission in assuring that those doubts are removed. A case in point was the decision to allow the military and the police who will be on duty today. It would have been extremely difficult for them to provide first-line security to the polling situation and, at the same time, be able to discharge their own civic obligation. That is why the Commission decided to set apart an earlier day of this month for the military and the policemen to vote. There was a lot of doubt from that by the political parties thinking that that might give room for all kinds of electoral fraud. We have to give them an assurance that we will ensure that whatever votes are cast on that day, we will guard it to the point where no nobody will be able to tamper with them. The agreement is that we would keep to one of the keys to each of the ballot boxes while the NEC will keep the other. But all the ballot boxes, particularly in areas outside of Freetown where we are deployed would be kept in containers within the perimeters of our deployment areas.

Today, we in UNAMSIL, in order to monitor, not to observe what was going on, I had left very early morning to visit four districts, Konadugu, Tongkolili, Bombali and Port Loko. One of my two deputies had gone to Kailahun, Kono, and Kenema. My second deputy had taken charge of the western area and had visited about 50 polling stations with some of our collaborators within the Freetown area just to monitor. The consensus we reached—those of us who went outside and and those who went around Freetown--is that the organization of election has been extremely well done in all the areas.

The comportment of the voters of the people of Sierra Leone has been exemplary, practically in every place we visited. And I am sure that some of you who have gone around yourselves, at least in Freetown, would have noticed that as well. People came very early in the morning. By the time I left my house to come and take the helicopter, I have seen long queues and I was even afraid that all of them may not be able to vote by the time I came back in the late afternoon. But I was pleasantly surprised that most of the queues have already disappeared by the afternoon. It was the same thing all over the country. Wherever we went to, we found very few people still queueing and when we looked at their books, quite a substantial number of people had voted. Maybe it is a combination of enthusiasm, that they were voting in a free atmosphere, unlike in 1996, where there was this threat that

you were given amputation for your pains. we noticed that people had turned out very very early, and by afternoon most of them had voted and had gone back home.

The rate of turnout as from what we observed is quite high. We cannot put a figure on it; that would depend on the final figures coming in. The turnout even in places that neither myself or my deputies had visited, but where we have electoral officers, our military observers deployed throughout the country, has been quite substantial as well. This is the general impression that we have come back with.

In terms of the logistics in the polling stations, I can confirm that inside outside Freetown, all the materials were in place by the time people started voting, by 7 o'clock when they were supposed to start, even in some very inaccessible places where up till 10 pm, some of our helicopters were still delivering materials. Those materials were in place, they were adequate, and so we did not come against any complaints of people wanting to vote and being told that the materials are no longer available. They were available. There were a couple of, perhaps, grumblings related part to people who wanted to vote not where they were registered, but way outside the registration centers. These are not people moving from one part of town to the other, these are people moving from one district to another district, and insisting on their right to vote. Most of these involved people who have moved out of Kono and have moved to Bombali and some to Tongkolili. Their argument is that they had been threatened in Kono, by the indigenes of Kono; they did not feel they were safe particularly after the election. Without obtaining any transfer papers from NEC, they had just moved down themselves and wanted to vote. Fortunately, we got information in advance, and yesterday I was able to negotiate that with the chairman of NEC, who kindly agreed that arrangements will be made for them so they will be able to vote. I saw that on the ground myself today. By the time arrived in Makeni, I noticed that one polling station alone, almost 600 of these people who had transferred from Kono had been able to vote. And I think as a result of the pressure of those who had moved from other areas as well, arrangements had been made later in the day for them to be able to vote. So by and large, what could have caused a hitch has been amicably resolved and everybody seemed to have been happy with that .

We are waiting now for the results. Our expectation is that as the political parties have agreed on the code of conduct which they have signed, and in the declaration they had made jointly with NEC on Saturday, that this election is one they want to be exemplary, free of violence. So we are expecting that as just as the election had been free of violence today, so will the aftermath of the election when the results are announced.

### **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**

*(Salone Times): We heard the announcement for the Commissioners for the TRC. I have a problem with the timing. Why is it coming out only now at polling today . It was on Radio UNAMSIL quoting the President.*

**Ambassador Oluyemi Adeniji:** I wouldn't know. The decision of the President to announce something like that is entirely his own. I am not in a position to question the rationale behind it. It might well be just a matter of convenience. Perhaps, I'm guessing, and my guess is as good as yours, since he had been involved in consultation with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who is the coordinator of for the election of the commissioners for the TRC, at the same time had been in consultation with me. I am the coordinator for the elections of the four national leaders. We have jointly made recommendations with him, as to our own recommendations for appointment Perhaps it's a question of wanting to complete that process and not leaving it to whoever gets elected as a result of today.

*Christo Johnson (Reuters): You said here that you appreciate comportment of Sierra Leoneans with regards to the elections, even describing it as exemplary. Are you not saying to us here that this comportment is a success for UNAMSIL also?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** I don't know why you should want to give credit to UNAMSIL for what the voters of Sierra Leone did on the line. If it had been otherwise, I wouldn't want to take the blame.

*Josephine Hazeley (BBC): Can you confirm or deny reports filtering through from the east one of the presiding officers arrested allegedly for voting for registered voters. There are also reports that we can't confirm, if you have heard or know anything about, underage voting in the Kenema area. Perhaps you know or heard something.*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** Let me take the second question first, the Kenema incident. My deputy was there. Everywhere I went to we I noticed on the line those whom we thought may be underage. When you go to them, they have their voter registration card. And when you ask them how old they were, invariably they say they're 19 years old. The voting age is 18, so anybody who's 19 cannot be disqualified. But I'm told that specifically, these are very few, in Kabala, we saw maybe about two or three whom my my child protection adviser who went with me who said these could be underage and who wanted to talk, they both admitted to be 19. But I'm told that in Kenema, the presiding officer in one of polling stations, he himself noticed that some of those in the queue were underage. So he confiscated their voter cards and chased them away.

Now the first question of the presiding officer. We also got the report. Actually, the story is that he was palm printing voters cards with a view to stuffing them. One of the party agents discovered, made a report. As a result of that, voting in that particular polling station was cancelled and they had to start all over again. There was also a report I got when I was on the road that one party agent who was trying to get some of his party supporters who had transferred, people who had really registered, had wanted to vote where they're not registered, and of course, they were refused. He thought he could devise transfer letters from NEC to assist them in voting. Again, another party agent tipped off the polling officer and had him reported to the police.

*Usman Sankon (Kono Times): Your mission has been successful with the disarmament process. Now that today you've conducted the election, is that the end of the road for UNAMSIL?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** We have not really conducted elections. We have assisted in having the elections conducted. The elections is not over until it's over. Until the results are announced and everybody accepts the results with the same spirit they had promised they would accept. We've been told by quite a number of the political parties that they would be happy with any result. If they win, well and good. If they lose, they go back to the drawing board. If that takes place, then we can all congratulate each other for having conducted a free, fair and peaceful elections. But the UN has lessons from the past operations. Elections themselves do not mean the end or consolidation of peace, it may well be the beginning for the consolidation of peace. I'd like to assure you that UNAMSIL is not taking the successful completion or conclusion of the election at this point.

*Josephine Kamara (VOA): I met up with you today in Makeni where group of young people stormed at our vehicle. They wanted to vote. You mentioned voters who moved to Kono. I'm sure you've heard of 150 or 200 boys who were denied access to the polling stations there. Were they eventually granted voting rights before you left?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** Don't confuse two things, those who were asking to vote who moved to a number of places outside Kono. They were not underage. They moved from all kind of places. Some of them who've moved to Port Loko, from Port Loko to Bo, and they wanted to vote in Makeni. After you left me, I saw a group of them in the park. Apparently they were moving from one polling station to another. Apparently they were not registered there, they ultimately congregated at the park. I went to see the district commissioner for a totally different problem which was brought to my attention. And here when they saw me, they raised a song, 'We wont vot, we wont vot, we no gri(?)'. I calmed them down and explained to them that if they have moved from one place to another, they should have obtained transfer papers. And it was a very simple thing to do but since they didn't do that, the district commissioner cannot take it upon himself but he would get in touch with Freetown. Before the end of the day their problem was resolved, and they voted.

*Kamara (VOA): Because they were threatening to do something?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** Well not because of the threat. As I told you, they would have been on the wrong side of the stick.

*(Sierra Leone News Agency): You said just now that the presiding officers were thumb printing for the voters and you said they cancelled the votes. Were all the votes nullified and it started all over again? What's the possibility that people who had voted in other stations had come back to that station to vote?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** I was not on the ground. That was the report I got. Since this was

an electoral officer, no one really knew how far back he had been doing that, stirring that box. With the consensus of all the party agents who were there, they might as well start on a clean slate. Then what about those who had voted and who had gone home. How would they recall them to come and vote. It might well be that the solution I was told was really not applied as drastically as that. I don't know.

*Q: Do you have any message for the people of Sierra Leone?*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** At this point, my message is a reiteration of what the Secretary-General issued yesterday on the eve of election day, the hope that the Sierra Leone people would go the polls with the same spirit of tolerance and reconciliation which we have noticed since the end of the formal declaration of the end of war, and that they would take the result as the will of the people. And therefore accept it as such. What one can say that as far as humanly possible, the organization of this election has been transparent. That has not been easy to achieve, I must confess. But at the end of the day, even the leadership of the political parties agreed that NEC has been extremely transparent with them, since I called all of them here on 19 March. Prior to that date, there was a lot of suspicion among the various parties themselves, but also between those who consider themselves the opposition political parties and NEC, which by and large, they did not trust. But after that meeting here, and the organization of regular meetings between them, and the chairman of some members and NEC, they have confessed to me that things have improved, they have built confidence, until the eve of the elections, until Saturday they still had a meeting with the chairman of NEC. They have come out with a joint statement, all the political parties and the chairman of NEC. That shows the level of confidence that had been built between the political parties and the NEC. This is not unusual in the third world, where the national electoral commissions are appointed by the incumbent government. It's normal that the opposition may be a little wary. But since that provision of the constitution, there's nothing anybody can do. The important thing is that whoever is appointed would and should realize that it's a national assignment, not a partisan assignment. And if he approaches it from that point of view, then he's likely to gain the confidence of all those who are involved in the electoral process. And I think Walter Nicol has been able to do that.

*Q: You said you were the coordinator for the TRC locally. I want to know the time frame of the candidates between which you gave your ratification of the candidates or the nominees for TRC and the announcement made by President Kabbah. Secondly I was only curious, you are saying the UNAMSIL is going to stay up until November. The amputees I spoke to in the amputees camp yesterday said they were not going to attend the special court or the TRC because they were not sure of the security. They were saying that some of the people who cut their hands are now soldiers in the army. They cannot give evidence for such people who are in the regular army. What guarantee can you give to the security of those war victims now that you are spending so much money appeasing the perpetrators more than on the victims.*

**Ambassador Adeniji:** First of all, I don't know where you got the impression that I said UNAMSIL will stay until November. I said the elections is not going to be the exit strategy,

the exit point, that's all I said. I didn't put any date on the exit. As far as the issue of the TRC and the Special Court is concerned. You raised two points, one is the timing of the announcement which you've come back. In relation to when I made my recommendation. What is important and determinant in the announcement of the membership is not when I made my recommendation or Mrs. Robinson made hers to the president, it's in compliance with the TRC act passed by your parliament. Once you announced the membership of the TRC, then you're assured that the process has started, and the sitting of commissioner will commence at specific time frame. It may well be what might have operated in the mind of the President in the timing of his announcement. In other words, the executive secretary of the TRC was only recently appointed, and it was only after that appointment that the secretariat can start functioning. And it's only after that that the question of having the commissioners assemble in Freetown to start work, the clock can begin to tick. And that might have been responsible for the time. That's not the most important aspect of the TRC. The most important aspect is something in the Lome agreement. Nobody has raised any objection to the TRC. That Lome Agreement has been signed by the Government and the RUF. They never said a word that they're no longer accept the TRC.

For the Special Court and the guarantee of witnesses, one of the first issues that the Court will address is the responsibility of the Court to guarantee the safety and security of witnesses that will come before it and that will be done.

*Pasco Temple (Pana Press): Where exactly did the electoral fraud take place today, and where is the alleged culprit. In terms of the Special Court, have you got funding to begin the TRC?*

**Ambassador Adeniji.** Your first question as to the electoral fraud, it was somewhere in Kabala, quite frankly I don't know the exact location in Kabala. On the funding of the TRC, it's the high commissioner for humanrights who's responsible for the collection of the funds. I must say that your information as to the status of funding is correct. There hasn't been a great deal of funds that have been placed for the TRC, but then the former launching was done a couple of weeks ago in New York. Mrs. Robison has tried her hands in Geneva, in connection with the meeting of the Human Rights Commission, but another sensitization of donors was undertaken in New York about two weeks ago, a few countries did expressed interest. So it is a hope that in the next few weeks they can actually come up with the funds. Interest has been generally expressed in the operation of the TRC. It's our hope that the donors will put their money where their heart is.