



UNITED NATIONS

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*UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)*

**PRESS BRIEFING
15 NOVEMBER 2002
(Near Verbatim)**

**MASIMBA TAFIRENYIKA
ACTING UNAMSIL SPOKESMAN**

**GAINS IN SIERRA LEONE VULNERABLE UNLESS GOVERNMENT
ASSERTS ROLE IN SECURITY, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL WARNS**

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, on 13 November warned that stability in Sierra Leone would remain vulnerable unless the Government extends its authority throughout the country, restores control over national resources, and begins to assume responsibility for security.

"The people of Sierra Leone and the international community have accomplished a great deal together in helping the country to recover from a long and devastating conflict," Mr. Annan said in a message to the Consultative Group Meeting for Sierra Leone in Paris, delivered on his behalf by UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hedi Annabi. "But the newly laid foundations for peace and development will remain fragile unless potential sources of renewed instability are addressed."

The recently approved proposal for a gradual downsizing of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) over the next two years has given the country and its international partners a "window of opportunity" to tackle critical issues of post-conflict peace building, the Secretary-General noted. The move will also enable the country to lay the foundations for sustainable development while the security umbrella provided by the UN peacekeepers is still present.

"The gradual draw down of UNAMSIL will be carefully synchronized with efforts to build up the capacity of Sierra Leone's security sector," he stressed.

The Secretary-General also acknowledged that with the assistance of the United Kingdom, remarkable progress had been made in training and restructuring the army, as the rehabilitation of the penal system and judiciary was continuing. "Additional assistance is now needed so that the national police force has the training, infrastructure, vehicles and communications equipment it needs to take on primary responsibility for internal security as UNAMSIL departs," said Mr. Annan.

Meanwhile, 32,000 ex-combatants have been reabsorbed into society, and another 24,000 were awaiting reintegration opportunities, the Secretary-General said. "Despite generous contributions, the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for this process faces a shortfall of approximately \$10 million," he said.

In addition, the country's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which has a vital role to play in promoting national unity, also faces a major funding shortfall, the Secretary-General added, urging governments to respond to the appeal for additional resources made by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights.

ACTING SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE DECORATES ZAMBIAN PEACEKEEPERS WITH UN MEDALS

The Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Mr. Behrooz Sadry, yesterday decorated 830 Zambian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) with UN medals of honour at a ceremony held in the diamond-town of Tongo Fields in Kenema District.

Addressing Zambian Battalion (ZAMBATT) 4 troops and local residents who had gathered to witness the occasion, Mr. Sadry congratulated the peacekeepers for serving the Mission with distinction and thus earning them the coveted and prestigious UN Service Medals. "You have earned it and you deserve it," he told the peacekeepers who included 53 officers, two of them women, and 19 other female soldiers.

UNAMSIL Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Opande and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, assisted the Acting Special Representative in decorating the peacekeepers with medals. Others who also participated in the exercise were the Commander of Sector 3, Brig. Gen. George Ayi Bonte and his Sector 5 counterpart, Brig. Gen. Ijaz Awan. UN medals are awarded to peacekeepers who complete three months of service without committing an offense.

The Acting Special Representative said it was a matter of "deep satisfaction for all of us that the decade-long conflict that left the country in ruins has finally come to an end through the determination of the Sierra Leoneans and the assistance of the international community." He praised the Zambian peacekeepers for their "most valuable contributions" while also paying special tribute to all those who paid the supreme sacrifice of their lives in an effort to attain peace in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Sadry also paid tribute to ZAMBATT 4 predecessors for their “key role” in the successful conclusion of the disarmament and demobilization process as well as presidential and parliamentary elections held in May this year. Noting its role in providing humanitarian assistance to local communities, the Acting Special Representative said: “It is a matter of great satisfaction that ZAMBATT 4 is now carrying forward UNAMSIL’s task with the same commitment and zeal.”

Mr. Sadry urged the Zambian contingent to maintain close cooperation with Sierra Leonean authorities, particularly the police in order to achieve the gradual handover of security matters to local security forces as UNAMSIL continues with its gradual drawdown process.
