



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

*UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE  
(UNAMSIL)*

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

**MASIMBA TAFIRENYIKA  
ACTING UNAMSIL SPOKESMAN**

Ladies and gentlemen, I have the pleasure to introduce to you today the new Chief of Public Information, Mr. Yousef Hamdan. I am also joined by Patrice Vahard from the Human Rights Section. He is going to brief you this afternoon on the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence. But before we do that, we will go into our usual press highlights.

**Highlights from UN Headquarters**

**SEEKING TO FOSTER HOPE, UN LAUNCHES \$3 BILLION APPEAL TO HELP  
50 MILLION PEOPLE IN CRISIS**

Seeking to foster hope among people affected by conflicts, natural disasters and other crises, the United Nations on 19 November launched a \$3 billion appeal aimed at funding relief programmes covering 50 million people in 30 different countries and regions.

"We are here to ask for help in providing food, shelter, medicine and other life-saving assistance," UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette said at the appeal's official launch in Bern, Switzerland. Stressing the need to address the root causes of humanitarian emergencies, she added, "humanitarian assistance is not an end in itself, but must be accompanied by efforts to build a bridge from disaster to development."

Ms. Fréchette appealed to donors to increase their contributions, noting that last year, the UN received just over half of what was requested. Overall levels of humanitarian funding have remained the same for the past decade, despite increasing levels of need.

She also called for States to fund all emergency responses, not just those in the media spotlight. Donors, she pointed out, "have demonstrated a real capacity to help roll back human suffering" where the cameras are - most recently in Afghanistan, and before that in Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Rwanda. "But the international community has been far less forthcoming in

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other cases where there is equal need, but less publicity," she said, citing the civil conflict in Burundi as an example of a "forgotten emergency" that has elicited scant attention despite having claimed the lives of as many as 300,000 civilians.

The appeals cover assistance to hungry, displaced and otherwise vulnerable people living in Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Chechnya and neighbouring republics in the Russian Federation, Cote d'Ivoire and its region, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Other countries and regions slated to receive aid include Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Great Lakes Region of Africa, Guinea, Indonesia, Liberia, the occupied Palestinian territory, the Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Southern Africa, the Sudan, Tajikistan and Uganda.

The launch of the "consolidated appeals" - so named because they cover the combined requirements of all concerned UN agencies - was also held on 19 and 20 November in seven other cities around the world: Washington, D.C., Brussels, Luxembourg, New York, the Hague, Tokyo and Canberra.

In New York today, Carolyn McAskie, the UN Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, noted that although the appeals cover chronic, long-term emergencies, like that unfolding in the Sudan, the UN was also finding cause for hope that in some cases - such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Angola - the relief effort could move from the emergency to the development and reconstruction phase.

"These appeals are the lifeline for millions of people around the world," she said, echoing the Deputy Secretary-General's call for funding to countries and regions that are not receiving media attention.

Because humanitarian crises are by nature volatile, the UN reviews and updates its appeals throughout the year, adjusting requirements in response to changing needs and launching new requests in response to sudden disasters.

### **UN SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN URGES AFRICAN COUNTRIES TO JOIN DIGITAL REVOLUTION**

Underscoring the rising importance of communications technologies, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 20 November encouraged the world's poorest countries to embrace the digital revolution in a message marking Africa Industrialization Day.

"Information technologies are a fundamental part of industrial development," said Mr. Annan, in emphasizing this year's theme, "The Industrialization of Africa and the New Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)." ICT, he said, can increase productivity and bring distant locations together by reducing communications and transportation costs.

In addition, ICTs can simultaneously make valuable market information available to African producers and improve the ability of Africans to market their products by “linking African industrial and trade centres with their counterparts in the rest of the world,” said Mr. Annan.

He urged African governments to do their utmost to help their peoples to seize opportunities offered by the digital revolution and assured that the “UN system and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) will likewise do their part to ensure that ICTs serve the continent’s efforts towards industrial development and the wider quest for progress and peace.”

For his part, the President of the General Assembly, Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, said that since by the year 2025 it is expected that more than half of the African population will be living in cities, new ICT is the key to rapid sustainable development.

“ICT would facilitate human development, accelerate intra-African trade and improve access to the markets of developed countries,” Mr. Kavan said, calling for a renewal of the commitments by all parties –including the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the Conference of African Ministers for Industry and specific public and private partnerships – to the sustainable development of the continent.

### **Highlights from UNAMSIL**

#### **ACTING SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE DECORATES NEPALESE PEACEKEEPERS WITH UN MEDALS OF HONOUR**

The Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Mr. Behrooz Sadry, on 19 November decorated 797 Nepalese peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) with UN medals of honour at a ceremony held in the southern district of Moyamba. The colorful ceremony was also attended by UNAMSIL Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Opande.

Speaking at the occasion, Mr. Sadry congratulated the peacekeepers for having served UNAMSIL with distinction for more than 90 days and thus qualifying for the prestigious UN Service Medal. He told the gathering that the medal award “adds to the brilliant history of successes of the battalion” since it was established in 1951 as a Royal Battalion. He added that, apart from its distinguished record of services for the Nepalese armed forces, this is the fourth time that the battalion is participating in a UN peacekeeping mission. In addition to its present participation in UNAMSIL, it has served twice with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 1977 and 1985 and once with the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Yugoslavia in 1995.

The Acting Special Representative commended the peacekeepers for their contributions to the success of the peace process in Sierra Leone and congratulated them on their commitment and devotion to the objectives of UNAMSIL.

Mr. Sadry also expressed his appreciation of NEPBATT II's services towards community and social work, in particular, the battalion's regular provision of free medical services to the local population and its assistance to the local authorities in repairing the town's roads and its drainage system.

"You are keeping up the good tradition set by NEPBATT I that included, among other things, the establishment of an orphanage," he said. "This community service has earned you the respect and admiration of the local population."

The highlights of the day's activities included performances of Nepalese cultural dances and folk songs by the newly decorated peacekeepers.

### **UNAMSIL'S NEW DEPUTY FORCE COMMANDER CONDUCTS FAMILIARIZATION TOUR IN FREETOWN**

The newly appointed Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, has been touring the country to familiarize himself with UNAMSIL peacekeepers in their areas of deployment.

Maj. Gen. Athar, who also serves as the Chief Military Observer, started his tour with a visit to UNAMSIL Sector 2 Headquarters in Freetown where he held discussions with Sector Commander Brig. Gen. Emmiliano Tonui on the security situation in the area. This was followed by visit to the Nigerian Battalion (NIBATT) 14 Headquarters based on Spur Road in Freetown. NIBATT 14 has just joined the Mission following the departure of its predecessor, NIBATT 10, whose members recently completed their tour of duty.

Addressing the peacekeepers, Maj. Gen. Athar urged them to work as hard as their predecessors in consolidating peace in Sierra Leone, particularly in Freetown. He called on the troops to work closely with the Sierra Leone Police in maintaining peace and security within their areas of deployment.

During his visit today to NIBATT 13 peacekeepers deployed in Goderich just outside Freetown, the Deputy Force Commander commended the Nigerian Army for its contribution to the attainment of peace in the country. He told the peacekeepers, who were also recently inducted following the departure of NIBATT 9, that Nigerian troops were not new in Sierra Leone since, in addition to serving with UNAMSIL, they also served with the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG).

The Deputy Force Commander, urged the peacekeepers to observe strictly the rules of engagement in their execution of duty as the dynamics of Freetown demand extra skills and caution due to presence of large numbers of ex-combatants and the youth groups coming into the city.

**Patrice Vahard:** The theme for this year's 16 Days Activism against Gender Violence is creating a culture that says no to violence against women. Let me put it into context. I think it's a good opportunity to take advantage of your various media to reach out to the population.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is the first time in the history of Sierra Leone that it's being organized here. Before I give you the highlights of the activities that are organized, I must underline not by UNAMSIL alone but UNAMSIL facilitating the process organized by women organizations, other UN agencies, also the participation of the Government of Sierra Leone. Why 16 days of activism? The initial idea of having an annual day of having 16 days activism against gender violence from 15 November to 10 December, has been an organizing strategy by individuals and groups from around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women. The date that participants chose for the campaign symbolically make links to November 25<sup>th</sup> which marks the International Day against Violence against Women and December 10<sup>th</sup> which is International Human Rights Day. The 16-day period also highlights the significance of other activities, for example, December 1st International World AIDS Day, December 6th anniversary of the Montreal massacre.

Let me give you the highlights of what's being planned here in Sierra Leone. On Sunday the 24th, Radio UNAMSIL will be hosting two call-in radio programmes, one on rural and disabled women to give them the possibility of echoing their concern about gender-based violence; the other one is on uprooted women. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, Monday, there will be a march from Youyi Building to Victoria park, followed by statements from the Government, UN agencies, women NGOs and human rights NGOs. On Tuesday, the 26<sup>th</sup>, a workshop will be organized on CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, organized by human rights organizations precisely to look into how to use CEDAW as an instrument to promote women's rights in Sierra Leone. On the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, a workshop will be organized specifically for the family support unit of the Sierra Leone Police, to look closely from the legal point of view how the protection of fighting gender-based violence can be undertaken by the law enforcement agencies.

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, World AIDS Day, there will be an activity by human rights organizations not in central town but in Kalaba Town with some displaced women organizing the event to match with the World AIDS Day. On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, World Disabled Day, it would be an opportunity to throw light to the plight of disabled women. There will an event at the Miata Conference Centre to launch the centre for the right of people with disability. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, there will be two memorial services planned at the central mosque and at a church to be named later in commemoration of the Montreal Massacre where 14 feminists died because they advocated for the rights of women.

On December 10th, International Human Rights Day, the closing of these 16 days of advocacy, there will a radio programme again on Radio UNAMSIL with statements from the UN Secretary-General, the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and a panel

discussion. There will be a round-table discussion to engage various sectors, e.g. religious leaders, and also people from the grassroots to discuss and reflect on those topics. In the afternoon, we envisage to reach down to the grassroots with an open-air concert in Victoria Park where many more people will be offered the opportunity to share their views. It is not just a celebration, it is also to raise people's awareness and we can only do that with the support and participation of the media.

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS:**

*Q: How far have you gone with the payment of this bill of charges with the Sierra Leone Airport Authority? Secondly, what is it about 16 days of activism against gender violence.*

**Mr. Masimba Tafirenyika:** As you are aware, there was a briefing by the legal officer of UNAMSIL in this room two weeks ago, 8 November to be precise on the issue. The issue is now under active discussion between UNAMSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone. We hope it will be settled very soon. If you want more details about the briefing by the legal officer, we have the transcript.

**Mr. Patrice Vahard:** I think it's an open secret that women fall short on all forms of institutionalized or legalized discrimination. Before the war, during the armed conflict, domestic violence was one of the core issues. It's not only UNAMSIL that establishes that, a range of civil society organizations have identified it. The Government also sees violence against women as a priority to be addressed. It's a common issue.

*Q: Since this is the first time the celebration is going to take place here, have you limited the activities to Freetown?*

**Mr. Vahard:** We're targeting the masses, not only women. We're also targeting the men. Gender violence unfortunately involves men and women, and is largely perpetrated by men. It's not happening only in Freetown. Our UNAMSIL offices in the region, in Kenema, Makeni, Port Loko, have also lined up programmes. Not only the rural population but the elite in Freetown are the targets. Gender violence is not only women's business, it is a development issue. It's an issue that should concern everybody. To people to realize that we can build a culture that says no to violence against women but also to promote equal participation, it can be done. I think it will be good for the betterness of the country.

*Q: What is the present strength of UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone? How are you going about the issue of TRC?*

**Mr. Tafirenyika:** As you are aware, the first phase of the UNAMSIL's withdrawal has been completed successfully. We're now working on the second phase of the plan, which will start

officially on 1 January 2003. The current strength of troops is about 16,830 peacekeepers serving with UNAMSIL.

**Mr. Vahard:** How are we dealing with the issue of the TRC? What do you mean, what issue?

*Q: TRC has entered its operational stage. It's presently engaged in staffing and sensitizing. We are made to understand that this process should have started 4 October. Up to now it has not started. It's only now that it has re-advertised the positions for proper staffing. UNAMSIL being one of the moral guarantors, that's why I'm asking.*

**Mr. Vahard:** We are the guarantors but the TRC is an independent body that has been established under the legal premises that you are all aware of. We are still committed to ensuring the independence of the TRC. Issues of this kind, the commissioners will be very happy to answer them. Yesterday at the human rights committee meeting, Professor Shabas who is one of the international commissioners was here to answer questions and I think they are very open to that. I would advise that you get back to them.

*Q: As you rightly said, women in Sierra Leone are subject to all sorts of discrimination. Now you go into organizing the 16-day activism against gender violence. Is this going to be a yearly programme? Secondly, how are you going to make sure that the women themselves try to say no to this violence that they themselves are undergoing?*

**Mr. Vahard:** It started in 1991. We hope that now that we've returned to normalcy, it will become an annual event. I want to reverse your question to say that these are 16 days offered to a country to make sure progress is made towards ending gender violence. How are the people of the country going to take advantage of that? Is UNAMSIL going to make sure how are the women, and the men getting ready to transform their disposition vis-à-vis gender violence? Because it is affecting the whole community. If they find an answer to that then probably external actors like the UN will be able to help because there are specific programmes to support that. I'm reversing this because I think it is very crucial that the people who are concerned themselves, man and woman, are part of this, that they don't leave it to others to establish how it is going to end gender violence. We are raising their awareness but is up them to do it.

*Q: In your 16 days of campaign to create this non-violence against women, is this going to include the issue of rape, because we are in post-war Sierra Leone. The issue of rape is on the increase.*

**Mr. Vahard:** What are we going to do is the question. Rape is not only a violence against women; it is also a crime. I think we all know that. The training that we have planned for the Sierra Leone Police, that is the family support unit, would seek to address that. The training that is being planned for the human rights organization on how to utilize CEDAW, the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, is also meant to address that issue.

But beyond that, the fact that I can be in front of you today to call on your support to raise people's awareness is part of the solution to finding an end to rape because it is not a way of living.

*Q: Can we hear a few words from the new chief?*

**Mr. Yousef Hamdan:** Thank you very much for your invitation. That's very kind of you. I'm also intended to introduce myself and to welcome you. To give you a few words about my role before I came here. I have been working for 21 years in the Department of Public Information in New York. I was based in New York, however in fact, my service was spread throughout the world through the UN information centres. I'm sure you all are aware of the global network of United Nations Information Centres where we have 77 offices. We don't have one in every country. Welcome and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

**Mr. Tafirenyika:** Thank you and I hope to see you next week.

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