



UNITED NATIONS

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UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE

(UNAMSIL)

## **FACT SHEET 1:**

### **Background Information on UNAMSIL**

The conflict in Sierra Leone dates from March 1991 when fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) launched a war from the east of the country near the border with Liberia to overthrow the government. With the support of the Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Sierra Leone's army tried at first to defend the government, but the following year, the army itself overthrew the government.

Despite the change of power, the RUF continued its attacks. In February 1995, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a Special Envoy, Mr. Berhanu Dinka (Ethiopia). He worked in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and ECOWAS to try to negotiate a settlement to the conflict and return the country to civilian rule.

Parliamentary and presidential elections were held in February 1996, and the army relinquished power to the winner, Alhaji Dr. Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. The RUF, however, did not participate in the elections and would not recognize the results. The conflict continued.

Special Envoy Dinka assisted in negotiating a peace agreement, in November 1996, between the Government and RUF, known as the Abidjan Accord. The agreement was derailed by another military coup d'état in May 1997. This time the army joined forces with the RUF and formed a ruling junta. President Kabbah and his government went into exile in neighbouring Guinea.

A new Special Envoy, Mr. Francis G. Okelo (Uganda), and other representatives of the international community tried, but failed, to persuade the junta to step down. The Security Council imposed an oil and arms embargo on 8 October 1997 and authorized ECOWAS to ensure its implementation using ECOMOG

troops.

On 23 October, the ECOWAS Committee of Five on Sierra Leone and a delegation representing the chairman of the junta held talks at Conakry and signed a peace plan which, among other things, called for a ceasefire to be monitored by ECOMOG and – if approved by the UN Security Council – assisted by UN military observers. On 5 November, President Kabbah issued a statement indicating his acceptance of the agreement, and stated his Government's willingness to cooperate with ECOWAS, ECOMOG, the United Nations and UNHCR in the implementation of their respective roles. Although the junta publicly committed itself to implementing the agreement, it subsequently criticized key provisions and raised a number of issues, with the result that the agreement was never implemented.

In February 1998, ECOMOG, responding to an attack by rebel/army junta forces, launched a military attack that led to the collapse of the junta and its expulsion from Freetown. On 10 March, President Kabbah was returned to office. The Security Council terminated the oil and arms embargo and strengthened the office of the Special Envoy to include UN military liaison officers and security advisory personnel.

On June 1998, the Security Council established the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) for an initial period of six months. The Secretary-General named Special Envoy Okelo as his Special Representative and Chief of Mission. The mission monitored and advised efforts to disarm combatants and restructure the nation's security forces. Unarmed UNOMSIL teams, under the protection of ECOMOG, documented reports of ongoing atrocities and human rights abuses committed against civilians.

Fighting continued with the rebel alliance gaining control of more than half the country. In December 1998 the alliance began an offensive to retake Freetown and in January overran most of the city. All UNOMSIL personnel were evacuated. The Special Representative and the Chief Military Observer continued performing their duties, maintaining close contact with all parties to the conflict and monitoring the situation. Later the same month, ECOMOG troops retook the capital and again installed the civilian government, although thousands of rebels were still reportedly hiding out in the surrounding countryside.

In the aftermath of the rebel attack, Special Representative Okelo, in consultation with West African states, initiated a series of diplomatic efforts aimed at opening up dialogue with the rebels. Negotiations between the Government and the rebels began in May 1999 and on 7 July all parties to the conflict signed an agreement in Lomé to end hostilities and form a government of national unity. The parties to the conflict also requested an expanded role for UNOMSIL. On 20 August the UN Security Council authorized an increase in the number of military observers to 210.

On 22 October 1999, the Security Council authorized the establishment of UNAMSIL, a new and much larger mission with a maximum of 6,000 military personnel, including 260 military observers, to assist the Government and the parties in carrying out provisions of the Lomé peace agreement. At the same time, the Council decided to terminate UNOMSIL.

To head the new mission, the Secretary-General appointed Mr. Oluyemi Adeniji (Nigeria) as his Special Representative in Sierra Leone. Mr. Adeniji assumed his functions on 11 December 1999.

On 7 February 2000, the Security Council, by its resolution 1289, decided to revise the mandate of UNAMSIL to include a number of additional tasks. It decided to expand the military component to a maximum of 11,100 military personnel, including the 260 military observers already deployed. The Council also authorized increases in the civil affairs, civilian police, administrative and technical components of UNAMSIL, as proposed by the Secretary-General.

The Security Council again increased the authorized strength of UNAMSIL, to 13,000 military personnel, including the 260 military observers, by its resolution 1299 of 19 May 2000. On 30 March 2001, a further increase was authorized to 17,500 military personnel, including the 260 military observers. The Council took this decision by its resolution 1346, and, by the same resolution, approved a revised concept of operations.

By its resolution 1389 of 16 January 2002, the Security Council gave UNAMSIL wide-ranging security tasks for the 14 May elections, stressing that holding them freely, fairly and transparently was vital to long-term stability. It authorized UNAMSIL to undertake, within its existing mandate, capabilities and areas of deployment and in the light of conditions on the ground, election-related tasks

as set out in the Secretary-General's report of 13 December 2001 (S/2001/1195).