



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)

PRESS RELEASE

2 October 2002

NIGERIAN PEACEKEEPERS RECEIVE UN MEDALS OF HONOUR

Freetown - The Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Mr. Behrooz Sadry, yesterday decorated Nigerian peacekeepers with medals of honour at a colourful ceremony held in the western district town of Port Loko. The award of the medals coincided with Nigeria's 42nd Independence Anniversary.

Speaking at the ceremony where he presented UN medals of honour to 12 officers and 148 soldiers from Nigerian battalions 9, 10, 11 and 12 and from the Force Headquarters, the Acting Special Representative praised the Nigerian contingent for its active participation in the Sierra Leone peace process. UN medals are awarded to peacekeepers who complete three months of service without committing an offense.

Mr. Sadry said that Nigeria's contribution to peacekeeping did not start in Sierra Leone but dates as far back as 40 years ago with its participation in peacekeeping in Congo, underscoring that the medals just awarded were an indication of the peacekeepers' dedication.

Congratulating the contingent for its outstanding performance, Mr. Sadry highlighted that Nigerian troops have always been in the forefront of UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) deployments, noting that it was a Nigerian battalion that first deployed in the northern district town of Makeni, in what was then a stronghold of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The Acting Special Representative reminded the officers and men who were receiving medals that the medals were UN's token of appreciation for their hard work.

In decorating the peacekeepers, Mr. Sadry was assisted by UNAMSIL Force Commander Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Opande, and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Martin Agwai, the Chief Military Observer, Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, as well as the Nigerian High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Ambassador Polycarp Azige.

Also present were Nigerian Contingent Commander, Brig. Gen. Steve Guar, UNAMSIL Sector 2 Commander Brig. Gen. Emiliano Tonui, and Sector 5 Commander Brig. Gen. Ijaz Awan.

The ceremony was climaxed by performances of a variety of Nigerian cultural dances, a Bundoo Cultural dance from Sierra Leone and a performance by the Masaboni Drama Group in Port Loko.

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