

UNITED NATIONS



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*UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
(UNAMSIL)*

PRESS RELEASE

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**STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS MISSION IN SIERRA LEONE
ON EVENTS OF 18 JULY 2002**

Freetown – Following the events in Freetown on 18 July 2002, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) set up a fact-finding committee comprising military, civilian police and civilian staff of the Mission.

The committee has since submitted its findings. The findings are as follows:

On 18 July at 0930 hours, at a meeting of the Joint Coordination Centre of the Regional Commissioner of Police, Western Region, participants were advised to be on the alert for possible disturbances relating to the death of a well-known money-changer. Later in the day, the body of the money-changer was taken from the morgue by a crowd and paraded in the streets. Some groups within the crowd then began looting shops and attacking Nigerian nationals.

To deal with the situation, UNAMSIL troops were deployed to key areas in central Freetown in order to ensure the general safety and security of people and property. The deployment was in accordance with standard operating procedures and the UNAMSIL mandate contained in Security Council Resolution 1289, which states, inter alia, that “...in the discharge of its mandate, UNAMSIL may take the necessary action to ensure the security and freedom of movement of its personnel and, within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, taking into account the responsibilities of the Government of Sierra Leone.”

At some point in time, the crowd became more aggressive, as a result of which UNAMSIL troops employed a combination of persuasion, crowd dispersal tactics and firing of warning shots in the air. The situation was brought under control by a combination of the efforts of UNAMSIL troops and the Sierra Leone Police.

The facts available to UNAMSIL indicate that at no time was firing directed at the crowd. Of course, UNAMSIL deeply regrets any loss of life or injury, whatever may be the cause. However, at this time, there is no conclusive evidence as to how individuals were killed or injured on that day.

The efforts of various organizations and groups, which, since the events of 18 July, have worked to re-establish harmonious relationships within the communities, are deeply appreciated.

The 18 July incident underscores the point consistently made by the Sierra Leone authorities that no segment of the society should take the law into its own hands. The security apparatus has the responsibility and the duty to handle such situations.