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(UNAMSIL)*

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**SIERRA LEONEAN CHILDREN CELEBRATE PEACE DAY WITH  
VIDEOCONFERENCE**

*Freetown* - The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) yesterday capped its commemoration of the International Day of Peace with participation in a global videoconference that linked children in New York, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kosovo and Bosnia/Herzegovina.

Close to 200 fifth and sixth grade students and their teachers were invited to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium at the UN Headquarters in New York to listen to children in conflict situations share their experiences on what they lost in war and what they gained in peace.

In Sierra Leone, children drawn from the Children's Forum Network, SOS Village, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), the Family Homes Movement, Milton Margai School for the Blind and refugee camps participated in the videoconference held at UNAMSIL headquarters in Freetown.

One of the six children who participated from Sierra Leone, a 14-year-old girl, talked about her experiences during the war, including her abduction and rape by the rebels. She said she now has a child and lamented how she lost her childhood and education. With peace now in the country, the girl said she was back in school. Another said she lost her eyesight and education. "Even though I cannot now see, I am back in school and I am happy."

From New York, a child asked his Sierra Leonean counterparts what they intended doing now that the war was over. Cherner Bah, the 17-year-old president of the Children's Forum Network of Sierra Leone, replied that peace was now firmly in place in the country and that the atrocities committed by a few did not represent the attitude of all Sierra Leoneans. "We are concerned now with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court so that those who bear the greatest responsibility can be punished."

At exactly 12 noon, the peace bell was rung simultaneously in New York and by the Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General in Bosnia/Herzegovina, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kosovo and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, the Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Behrooz Sadry, rang the peace bell.

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The ringing of the peace bell was followed by a flag ceremony. The children in New York and at video sites acted as ambassadors as they raised the flags of all UN Member States, after which together they sang, "May peace prevail on earth."

The wife of the UN Secretary-General, Mrs. Nane Annan, who also participated at the ceremony in New York, said the world must work harder to ensure a better future for the children.

Earlier, Mr. Sadry said the day was very important for Sierra Leone because of what the country had gone through in the recent past. He said the day gave Sierra Leonean children the opportunity to interact with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Mr. Sadry assured Sierra Leoneans that UNAMSIL would continue to work for peace in the country.

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Programme Co-ordinator in Sierra Leone, Mr. Keith Wright, said it was important children got an opportunity to speak their minds about their situation, adding that the event would let the Sierra Leonean children know that there were other children in other places who cared about them.

The ceremony at UNAMSIL Headquarters included songs and drama presented by children from the Tinatex Cultural Group.