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PRESIDENT AHMAD TEJAN KABBAH JOINS UNAMSIL ACTING SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE IN CELEBRATING UN DAY

Freetown – Sierra Leone’s President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and Vice President Solomon Berewa today joined the Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Sierra Leone, Mr. Behrooz Sadry, in celebrating the United Nations Day at UNAMSIL Headquarters in Freetown.

During the day’s activities, which included a flag-raising ceremony, a military parade and guard of honour as well as cultural performances, Mr. Sadry read UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s statement to mark the day. In the statement, Mr. Annan observed that “never has the human family needed the United Nations more than it does today.” He cautioned that there were so few things that any nation could control relying purely on its own resources. Mr. Annan called on nations to work together to fulfill pledges made two years ago at the Millennium summit at which leader pledged to reduce poverty, halt the spread of AIDS, and to provide access to safe drinking water.

The Secretary-General admitted the lack of progress made in these strides, warning, “If we don’t do better in the next 12 years than in the last 10, we shall miss most of those Goals.” He called on all countries to make greater efforts to meet the Millennium Goals.

Reading from his own statement, the Acting Special Representative stated that the celebration of the UN Day gave UNAMSIL an opportunity to reflect on its mission and also an opportunity “to reflect on the indispensable role that our UN sister agencies have been playing and continue to play, both in support of the peace process and in fulfilling their own independent mandates.”

Mr. Sadry noted with satisfaction UNAMSIL’s efforts in reestablishing security throughout Sierra Leone after having traversed, from a purely observer mission, the “long and arduous path” to peacekeeping. “We are now at a stage where we talk about post-conflict recovery, reconstruction, and the inevitable but necessary draw down of the peacekeeping element,” he said.

He told the audience that UN pride is also built on the work and accomplishment of our sister agencies” who have not only been with us all the way,” but will remain much longer on the ground, taking care of refugees and returnees, assisting the population’s health and educational requirements, taking care of children and the disadvantaged, rehabilitating infrastructure, and dealing with emergency food and shelter needs.

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In his statement, President Kabbah said the anniversary day and the UN itself have “a special significance for us,” given the role the UN has played and continues to play in bringing about “the peace we are currently enjoying.” He said the sub-region has also benefited immensely from the work the UN has done to uplift the quality of human life.

President Kabbah said that the UN continued to play a pivotal role in enhancing peace and stability within the Mano River Union and in West Africa at large. He pointed out that although the UN is currently faced with so many great challenges, coupled with its success - its preoccupation with the maintenance of peace and security, while appropriate and commendable, should “not overshadow the very basic human needs of food, shelter, education, health and especially the fight against HIV/AIDS.”

Dignitaries who also witnessed the occasion included the British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone, Mr. Alan Jones, the Ghanaian High Commissioner, Mr. Kabral Blay-Ahihere, the Guinean Ambassador, Mr. Mohammed Lamin and the Egyptian Ambassador, Mr. Tarek A. M. Ghoneim.

Others included Mr. Alan Doss, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Governance and Stabilization and UN Resident Coordinator, the Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Opande and his deputy, Maj. Gen. Martin Luther Agwai, and the Chief Military Observer, Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, as well as Heads of UN Agencies, senior Government officials and UNAMSIL civilian and military personnel.

Before delivering his statement, the Acting Special Representative requested the audience to observe a moment of silence in memory of UN personnel who had “made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace and humanity, as well as for the innocent victims of war and terrorism.”