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**ACTING FORCE COMMANDER BIDS FAREWELL
TO PAKISTANI PEACEKEEPERS**

Freetown - The Acting Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), Maj. Gen. Syed Athar Ali, yesterday bade farewell to Pakistani peacekeepers as they prepared to return home after successfully completing their tour of duty with the Mission, as part of a normal rotation of troops. The rotation is being carried out over a period of two weeks, as new troops arrive to replace the departing forces.

In his farewell address in the town of Koidu in the eastern district of Kono, the Acting Force Commander, who is also UNAMSIL's Chief Military Observer, said that the Pakistani contingent had performed its duties in "a splendid manner." He said the deployment of Pakistani troops in Koidu, Kailahun and Daru came during the most crucial phase of UNAMSIL operations and they shouldered the responsibility remarkably well.

He noted that Pakistani contingent, being the biggest force in UNAMSIL, was deployed in the most sensitive and volatile areas of Sierra Leone, adding that the successful deployment and splendid services rendered by the troops had been praised at all levels within UNAMSIL, the UN and even among the community of nations.

Maj. Gen. Athar Ali said that Pakistani troops kept the flags of the UN and their country high in all stages of UNAMSIL operations, displaying a high standard of professional knowledge, discipline and commitment. He said that their role in the disarmament process and the holding of free and fair elections was a major achievement for the contingent.

He paid tribute to the peacekeepers' continued role in providing humanitarian assistance that had won them the hearts and minds of local communities. These included repairing roads in the districts of Kono and Kailahun, renovating schools, mosques and churches, and distributing food, textbooks and other educational materials among schoolchildren.

Maj. Gen. Athar also commended the Pakistani contingent Commander, Brig. Gen. Ahmed Shuja Pasha, saying that his professional commitment and guidance enabled the contingent to achieve its objectives.

Later, the Acting Force Commander unveiled the "Islamabad Chowk" monument constructed by Pakistani Battalion (PAKBATT) 1. Addressing a gathering at the ceremony, Maj. Gen. Athar Ali commended the people of Kono for working hand-in-hand

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with the Pakistani troops. He implored them to resist any action that would destroy the current peace, particularly given the critical security situation in neighbouring Liberia.

Addressing the same audience, the Commanding Officer of PAKBATT 1, Lt. Col. Javed Tariq, said that the monument was a reflection of the true friendship and confidence between Pakistani troops and the people of Kono, who are now living in peace.

Later, the Acting Force Commander visited the towns of Kailahun and Daru to bid farewell to the other Pakistani troops. He thanked all personnel for their efforts in peacekeeping and peace-building and wished them a safe journey back home.