

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of the latest local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Press and Public Affairs Office as of:

Thursday, December 29, 2005

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
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Peacekeeping troops to protect war crimes trial

27/12/2005 - 21:00:07

Irish peacekeeping troops in Liberia today began drills to protect a war crimes court set up in Sierra Leone.

A 140-man armoured patrol, which also included Swedish Armed Forces, crossed the border into the capital, Freetown on the reconnaissance mission.

The troops will be providing security for UN personnel and justice officials at the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

The Court was set up in 2002 to prosecute warlords from the West African country's bloody civil war during the 1990s.

The patrol, which is also aided by reconnaissance, logistics and engineering specialists, is expected to remain in Sierra Leone for four days.

The deployment has already been approved by the Irish Government and the Dáil.

A Defence Forces spokesman said: "In the event of a security threat to the Special Court, the Irish and Swedish troops in Sierra Leone have been tasked with securing a helicopter-landing site in Freetown from which the evacuees could be transported to a safe location outside the country.

"The Quick Reaction Force is also planning for a possible deployment to Freetown by both air and sea."

The Special Court of Sierra Leone was set up by the Government of Sierra Leone and the UN in January 2002.

"The Court is mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since November 1996," the spokesman added.



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Charles Taku At International Criminal Court

The Post (Buea)

NEWS

December 22, 2005

Posted to the web December 22, 2005

By Pegue Manga

Cameroon's legal luminary, Barrister Charles Achaleke Taku, has been appointed defence counsel at the International Criminal Court, ICC in The Hague, Holland. Taku, who has worked as lead defence counsel at the United Nations International Tribunal for Rwanda, sitting in Arusha, Tanzania, for six years now, was also recently appointed one of the lead counsels for the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone.

His recent appointment to the ICC marks another milestone in his professional trajectory.

The lawyer, during one of his stops in Cameroon, told The Post that the first indictment for the ICC are from Africa: Sudan, Uganda and very soon the DR Congo will be unsealed.

"I felt that it would be necessary for African lawyers to be very involved in the process because, whatever happened in these countries could as well happen in our own country," Taku explained. Taku, who applied for the job, said he would be appearing for the defence and also for the victims.

"The ICC now has a provision in which the victims could be represented so that justice is seen to be done to both sides," he said. "I really prefer to be defence counsel," Taku said, "because of human rights concerns, especially in Africa where the rule of law is not respected, where the people who have the machinery of government tend to abuse the institutions under them."

He was sure that immediately the indictment of DR Congo is unsealed, he would be the first lawyer at the ICC. "We also think that victims should, at least, be heard, failing which justice cannot be done." He said there are no fundamental differences between the Rwandan Tribunal and the International Criminal Court.

"The international humanitarian law has evolved and most of the judges are now in the international criminal court. The jurisprudence and procedures are evolving because they have to take into consideration the procedure in the different respective countries of the world. It is not only common law, you have to know the civil law, the Russian system and many more."

He said there is a provision, which states that where there is a conflict of the law and there is no statute or rules, they would apply that which is best to determine the matter in the interest of justice.

The international lawyer said the court in Arusha handles extremely difficult cases and the process is very slow. He said so far, only one case has been closed. Taku said the process in the Special Court for Sierra Leone is being run somehow fairly, even though no judgements have been passed.

"The judges are taking their time and giving more room for cross-examination. All the parties in the war in Sierra Leone have been indicted inside the country," Taku stated.

However, he said in the Tribunal for Rwandan, there is a perceived injustice because it is considered a victors' court. "Only one party to the conflict has been indicted, not a single Tutsi has been indicted. You cannot talk about justice where only one party is being tried," he griped.

The lawyer said he sees the files of DR Congo as essentially a continuation of the Rwandan files because, "most of the 263 complainants were victims of widespread systematic attacks from the Rwandan Patriotic Front, RPF.

Taku spends most of his time criss-crossing the globe investigating cases. How does he manage his time? "It takes a lot of discipline and sacrifice. Secondly, I work with a team of lawyers and we try to organise ourselves properly," said the lawyer. He said he believes in the sanctity of human life and human freedom and the respect of the human being.

"I feel that no sacrifice is too great in order to ensure that the basic tenets of human rights are respected. So, I am always on the road, whether in Sierra Leone or Arusha.

On whether he is not worried about his security, given that he is defending people accused of orchestrating mass murder, Taku said, "the UN system has given us a kind of immunity.

They have told all the states and governments to give us support, wherever we find ourselves. When we are in the national territory where the trials are being conducted, we have UN special security placed at our disposal. But at the end of the day, God is our ultimate protector," he said.

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MICHAEL P. SCHARF

The Boston Globe

Order in the court, Iraqi style

By Michael P. Scharf | December 25, 2005

THE TREND in press and broadcast commentary about the Iraqi High Tribunal has been to describe the proceedings as a judicial train wreck, presided over by a weak judge who has lost control of the courtroom. But this characterization is based on several glaring misconceptions about the tribunal. As an expert in war crimes trials who trained the Saddam Hussein trial judges and heads up the tribunal's Academic Consortium, I want to take this opportunity to clear the record before the myths become set in stone.

Americans viewing the gavel-to-gavel broadcasts of the Hussein trial must recognize that this is an Iraqi tribunal, though it employs the definitions of crimes and the due-process rights developed by the international criminal tribunals. In the Iraqi legal tradition, lawyers employ a far more boisterous courtroom demeanor than we are used to, often shouting at opposing counsel, the witnesses, and the judges. In addition, under the Iraqi Civil Law Inquisitorial system, the defendants as well as their lawyers are permitted to address the court and the witnesses. Therefore, presiding Judge Rizgar Mohammed Amin is not losing control of his courtroom when he permits this conduct; rather he is conducting the trial in accordance with the system under which he has worked as a judge for 30 years.

Far from a train wreck, in just five trial days, the prosecutor has completed an opening statement and the judges have taken testimony from nine witnesses, a very efficient pace even by American judicial standards. With 40 witnesses still to go, the prosecution has already proven the scale of the atrocities, the direct involvement of several of Hussein's co-defendants, and the command hierarchy, all the elements necessary for a conviction in this case.

It was a terrible tragedy that two of the defense attorneys (who had refused the government's offer of security) were killed just after the trial began. But Amin succeeded in crafting a compromise under which the defense counsel have been assigned personal body guards of their choosing, and their families have been moved out of the country for their protection, which should ensure their safety for the remainder of the trial.

As to who is winning the battle of wills between Hussein and Amin, the public needs to know that Hussein's disruptive and disrespectful conduct is a common defense tactic, not just in international trials or Iraqi trials, but also in high-profile domestic trials even in the United States. Perhaps the most notable example was the infamous Chicago Seven Trial, in which Abbie Hoffman, Bobby Seale, and other leaders of the antiwar movement employed every gimmick imaginable to disrupt their trial for conspiring to cause riots during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. It is no coincidence that Hussein's American lawyer, Ramsey Clark, had been an adviser to the defense team in the Chicago Seven trial.

It is also noteworthy that Hussein's most outrageous outbursts followed the emotionally compelling testimony of the first female witness to recount Hussein's atrocities. Hussein knew that her tearful presentation could be extremely damaging to his standing among Iraqi Sunnis unless he could find a way to quickly distract media and public attention from it. So he told the judge to "go to hell," and announced that he was boycotting the remainder of the trial.

Consistent with international standards of due process, Amin could have Hussein hauled into the courtroom and placed in a glass booth, as Adolf Eichmann was at his trial in Israel, to prevent him from interrupting the trial with outbursts. But that would only add to the appearance of injustice, which Amin is trying to avoid. So when Hussein chooses to "boycott" the trial, Amin has arranged for Hussein to follow the proceedings by video link from the detention center, an approach consistent with international standards that the Rwanda tribunal and special court for Sierra Leone have employed. Not surprisingly, Hussein's boycott was shortlived, as he realized he could score more points from within the courtroom.

Amin may be portrayed in the Western media as an ineffectual judge, but in Iraq he is getting high marks for

the conduct of the trial, especially for his judicial temperament.

Michael Scharf is professor of law and director of the International Law Center at Case Western Reserve University School of Law. ■

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Date: 20 Dec 2005

Security Council commends peacekeeping mission's contribution to Sierra Leone's recovery as it approaches 31 December exit

Presidential Statement also Reiterates Appreciation for Special Court

SC/8592

Security Council
5334th Meeting* (AM)

With the work of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) coming to an end on 31 December, the Security Council today commended its valuable contribution to Sierra Leone's recovery from conflict over the last six years and to its progress towards peace, democracy and prosperity.

In a statement read out by Paul Johnston of the United Kingdom, which holds the Council Presidency for December, the Council also encouraged Sierra Leone's development partners to continue their support for the Government of Sierra Leone in addressing difficult but essential issues like security-sector reform and corruption.

The Council reiterated its appreciation for the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and its contribution to reconciliation and the rule of law in the country and the subregion. It encouraged all States, particularly those in the subregion, to cooperate with the Court and provide it with the necessary financial resources. The Council also emphasized the importance of a regional approach to the countries of West Africa.

At the Council's request, Secretary-General Kofi Annan established the new United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) to provide continued support -- beginning on 1 January 2006 -- to the Government as it tackled the many challenges ahead, including good governance, sustainable economic development, job creation and public-service delivery.

Briefing the Council, Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, noted that the country had risen from the ruins of a devastating decade-long conflict and undergone a remarkable turnaround that now was leading towards a future filled with hope and the promise of a better life for its population. The Council was to be thanked for its guidance and support over the past six years in directing the effort that had succeeded in hauling Sierra Leone back from the brink of collapse.

The Mission, he reported, had completed most of the tasks that the Council had assigned to it, prominent among which were the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of more than 72,000 combatants; the return of over half a million refugees and internally displaced persons; the restoration of Government authority throughout the country; the organization of national and local elections; and the retraining and restructuring of the national security apparatus.

While Sierra Leone was certainly on an immutable course towards peace and development, he cautioned that the country was still fragile. Sustained stability would depend on the Government's ability successfully to carry through the security-sector reform programme and reinforce good governance.

Sierra Leone's representative, noting that today's meeting marked an important milestone in the history of United Nations peacekeeping, said that notwithstanding the challenges that UNAMSIL had faced in its early days, the Mission was a testimony to the "triangular partnership" -- regional organizations, troop contributors, and the United Nations -- which must be at the centre. The UNAMSIL had succeeded because the people of Sierra Leone had made it possible for it to do so. With some assistance, the country was capable of fulfilling its responsibilities.

Hailing UNAMSIL as one of the Organization's success stories, Council members said that the Mission's

experiences offered a wealth of lessons for making other United Nations peacekeeping operations more effective and efficient, including an exit strategy based on specific benchmarks for drawdown, as well as substantial, regular cooperation and coordination with other United Nations peace operations and offices in the region.

France's representative said that the drawdown of UNAMSIL had been progressive, with clear-cut deadlines, and should be seen as a model for the downsizing of other peacekeeping operations. The definition and implementation of an exit strategy were essential at a time when deployment of the Blue Helmets had reached record levels.

Indeed, said Romania's representative, the transformation of UNAMSIL from the vulnerable Mission of 2000 to the robust operation that had subsequently conducted disarmament and demobilization and facilitated the 2002 elections was remarkable. The strengthening of UNAMSIL had demonstrated the ability of the United Nations to learn from past mistakes.

Also making statements today were the representatives of Algeria, Brazil, China, Russian Federation, Denmark, Philippines, United Republic of Tanzania, Greece, United States, Japan, Argentina, Benin and the United Kingdom (on behalf of the European Union and associated States).

The meeting began at 11:05 a.m. and suspended at 11:30 a.m. It then resumed at 11:42 a.m. and ended at 1:05 p.m.

Presidential Statement

The full text of the presidential statement, to be issued as document S/PRST/2005/63, reads as follows:

"The Security Council commends the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for its invaluable contribution over the last six years to Sierra Leone's recovery from conflict and its progress towards peace, democracy and prosperity. The Council is grateful to the Secretary-General, his Special Representatives, and all the individuals from the United Nations and from troop- and police-contributing countries who have made UNAMSIL a success, especially those who helped UNAMSIL recover from the crisis it faced in May 2000. The Council also deeply appreciates the cooperation extended by the Government and the people of Sierra Leone to UNAMSIL and the members of the United Nations family operating in the country.

"The Security Council notes with satisfaction the innovations in UNAMSIL's methods of operation that may prove useful best practice in making other United Nations peacekeeping operations more effective and efficient, including an exit strategy based on specific benchmarks for drawdown; an integrated mission with a Deputy Special Representative managing governance, developmental and humanitarian elements; and substantial, regular cooperation and coordination with other United Nations peacekeeping operations and offices in the region.

"At the request of the Security Council, the Secretary-General has established the new United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone in order to provide continued support to the Government as it tackles the many challenges ahead, including good governance, sustainable economic development, job creation and delivery of public services. The Government will need the sustained help of donors and development partners, particularly in addressing difficult but essential issues like security sector reform, fighting corruption, the reinforcement of governance mechanisms including the judiciary, and equal rights for women and girls. The Council, therefore, encourages Sierra Leone's development partners to continue their support in all these areas, and notes with satisfaction the outcome of the recent Donors' Consultative Group meeting on Sierra Leone in London.

"With Sierra Leone now stable and at peace, the Security Council sees a great opportunity for the development of a mature and vibrant political culture. Achieving this will require tolerance, cooperation from all sides and a shared commitment to act responsibly and avoid inflammatory rhetoric. To that end, government and political leaders should reaffirm their commitment to the basic principles of democratic governance. This will pave the way for fair, transparent and peaceful elections in 2007.

“The Security Council reiterates its appreciation for the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and its vital contribution to reconciliation and the rule of law in the country and the subregion, and encourages all States, particularly States in the subregion, to cooperate fully with the Court and to provide it with the necessary financial resources.

“The Security Council continues to emphasise the importance of a regional approach to the countries of West Africa. The Council hopes that Sierra Leone’s neighbours will intensify their cooperation, not least through the Mano River Union and the Economic Community of West African States, especially in the area of peace and security, and with the continued support of the United Nations and development partners.”

Background

When the Security Council met this morning to consider the situation in Sierra Leone, it had before it the twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), which states that as the Mission departs from Sierra Leone, it leaves behind a country that has great potential to achieve lasting stability, democracy and prosperity.

The report (document S/2005/777) says that over the six years of its operations in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL forged an effective partnership with the United Nations country team, countries of the subregion, the donor community, humanitarian organizations, Sierra Leone civil society and the Government, which has placed Sierra Leone “on a firm path to post-conflict recovery”. As a result of this collaborative effort, a stable security environment has been established throughout the country and substantial progress has been made in rebuilding the security sector. State authority has been restored throughout Sierra Leone and significant strides have been made towards re-establishing the Government’s control over the country’s diamond-mining sector.

According to the report, the human rights situation is also improving, while the efforts to promote national cohesion, reconciliation and tolerance are making progress. In addition, Sierra Leone has achieved sustained economic recovery over the past three years, and has also started building peaceful and mutually beneficial relations with its neighbours. The Mission has, therefore, successfully completed its peacekeeping mandate.

The completion of the peacekeeping phase of the United Nations engagement is another turning point for Sierra Leone, the report notes. The tasks facing the country as it pursues the post-conflict peacebuilding agenda are as challenging as those it had to tackle during the peacekeeping and emergency relief phases. The socio-economic situation, in particular, presents formidable challenges and has the potential to undermine the political stability Sierra Leone currently enjoys. It is, therefore, imperative for the country, supported by its development partners, to redouble efforts to address the problem of pervasive corruption, and to continue to pursue policies that will ensure sustained economic growth, so as to create employment and reduce poverty.

Government capacity to deliver services to the population, particularly in the areas of education, health and sanitation, needs sustained attention, the report says. It is through progress in these critical areas that the population, which has been deprived by a brutal conflict, can begin to see and feel tangible peace dividends. Sustained stability will also depend on the Government’s ability successfully to carry through the security sector reform programme to its completion. Continued donor support for these critical reform programmes will be essential.

Despite the challenges described, the prospects for Sierra Leone are promising, the report states. The international community has demonstrated its determination to secure the gains made since the deployment of UNAMSIL by establishing the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), which has a strong mandate to support the Government’s post-conflict peacebuilding efforts in order to ensure peace and security, consolidate State authority and promote good governance and human rights, address cross-border issues, and advance national recovery, and economic and social development.

According to the report, the Secretary-General is also encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by Sierra Leone’s political parties as they start preparing for the elections to be held in 2007. The elections will constitute a major

test not only of the country's ability to sustain democratic governance but also of the capacity of its security sector to sustain law and order, and a stable security environment in the delicate political environment which the elections will inevitably create.

The trials and tribulations faced by the Mission during the crisis of 2000, the measures taken to reverse its fortunes, and its achievements between 2001 and today, are indeed remarkable, the report notes. The Mission's recovery from the 2000 ordeal offers a wealth of lessons for current and future peacekeeping operations. The Secretariat has already started extracting the best practices from those lessons. The UNAMSIL is also a Mission that has broken new ground in a number of significant areas. It was the first United Nations peacekeeping operation to "re-hat" a parallel subregional peacekeeping force. It was also the first to enter into an "over-the-horizon" backstopping arrangement with a Member State, in this case the United Kingdom, which also simultaneously launched a security sector reform programme to complement the Mission's efforts.

The report notes that the Mission's exit strategy, which was based on a carefully calibrated gradual drawdown of its military component and guided by specific benchmarks, was also an innovative approach by the Council. This approach gave Sierra Leone the requisite security space to consolidate peace over the past three years. The establishment of UNIOSIL, too, with its integrated nature and a comprehensive peacebuilding mandate, is a groundbreaking initiative. The regional approach to peacekeeping operations was, moreover, tested for the first time through inter-mission cooperation between UNAMSIL and other United Nations presences in the subregion. United Nations missions in the subregion took cooperation to higher levels, beyond information-sharing, to mounting coordinated operations in border areas, sharing logistical assets and, recently, placing a military unit deployed in Sierra Leone under the command of the peacekeeping operation in Liberia.

However, the reports says, the Secretary-General remains concerned about the volatile security and political situation in Sierra Leone's immediate neighbourhood, which can be expected to continue to present serious security challenges for the country. Nonetheless, the presence of both UNAMSIL and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has enabled the countries of the Mano River basin to begin rebuilding peaceful and mutually beneficial relations, which will help to enhance their individual security. It is hoped that continued peacekeeping engagement in Liberia in the post-election period will remain a key stabilizing factor for both Sierra Leone and the wider Mano River basin. Concerted efforts to resolve the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire will also be important for Sierra Leone, as the presence of armed combatants in any country in the West Africa subregion does not bode well for the stability of all.

Statements

DAUDI NGELAUTWA MWAKAWAGO, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sierra Leone, said that today would close the final chapter about a country that had gradually risen from the ruins of a devastating decade-long conflict and undergone a remarkable turnaround, and that now was heading towards a future filled with hope and the promise of a better life for its population. The Council was to be thanked for its guidance and support over the past six years in directing the effort that had succeeded in hauling Sierra Leone back from the brink of collapse.

He said that various landmarks -- including the official end of the war in 2002 and the subsequent elections held in May of that year, the local elections in 2004, and the transfer of the primacy of security from UNAMSIL in 2004 -- all served to demonstrate the growing sense of stability the country had enjoyed so far. That was also reflected in the improvement in delivery of services. The setting up of a comprehensive security network, known as the Office of National Security, over the past few years had created a framework for coordination between the security agencies at all levels. However, international support would continue to be needed to assist with capacity-building in the country's security structures. There was no major threat on the horizon to internal security, nor to external security. Nonetheless, border security patrols had continued to guard against any unforeseen mishaps that might occur.

The Secretary-General's initiative aimed at mobilizing support to strengthen the capacity of Sierra Leone's armed

forces had elicited positive responses from several countries, he said. However, there were still large funding gaps in meeting security-sector running costs and in the acquisition of transport assets, especially support services, communications equipment and adequate accommodation. The restructuring of the armed forces to reduce their troop strength had continued, although behind schedule. One of the most satisfying achievements had been the realization of the benchmark to strengthen the manpower capacity of the Sierra Leone police to reach its pre-war target level of 9,500 personnel.

He said the UNAMSIL's troop withdrawal was on course and would be completed today, while the present 33 UNPOL details were to be scaled down to 10 by the end of December. A smaller team chosen from that group of officers would be temporarily retained in Freetown to facilitate a seamless transition to UNIOSIL. The majority of the international civilian side were in the process of being reassigned to other missions, while some were being absorbed by UNIOSIL.

Following the local government elections in 2004, the Government had begun implementing the devolution of some public services to local councils, he said. While the process was generally on track, challenges pertaining to limited capacity and paucity of resources remained. In the past two years, revenue from diamonds had increased dramatically as a result of reforms and the overhaul of the sector.

As the 2007 elections drew near, he said, it was very likely that both inter-and intra-party rivalry would intensify. However, the mere fact that there was vibrant political interaction among Sierra Leoneans was a welcome change. The holding of a free and credible poll in 2007 would constitute a key benchmark in the achievement of long-term stability in Sierra Leone. Against that background, UNAMSIL had initiated a series of programmes designed to promote inter-party dialogue, as well as reconciliation and tolerance among the political parties.

With regard to access to justice, he reported that efforts were being made to ease the backlog in court trials and support training and capacity-building for court personnel, as well as the rehabilitation of prisons. More efforts were required, however, to address challenges in those areas. The Mission had also joined forces with other local and external stakeholders in efforts intended to strengthen the Anti-Corruption Commission, which had experienced structural and operational problems in the recent past.

Despite registering considerable progress in the past few years, economic growth needed to be sustained over a longer period so as to make a significant impact on productivity and human development, he said. That would be particularly significant with regard to job creation and tackling poverty, which remained the main threat to stability. With an unemployment rate of 70 per cent, especially among youth, the challenges to security were quite evident. Therefore, more local savings, private sector development and foreign direct investment would be needed to offset the major decline in donor funding that was anticipated in light of competing demand for resources worldwide.

In the area of human rights, he stressed that UNAMSIL left behind improved human rights conditions in fundamental freedoms, especially in the area of civil and political rights. Preparations for the establishment of a national human rights commission were now at an advanced stage. Regrettably, progress in building a reformed and effective judicial system had been slow and improvement of prison conditions was outstanding as the Mission departed. That had retarded efforts for the effective delivery of justice.

He said the Mission had completed most of the tasks the Council had assigned to it, prominent among them the disarming, demobilization and reintegration of over 72,000 combatants; the return of over half a million refugees and internally displaced persons; the restoration of Government authority throughout the country; organizing national and local elections; and the retraining and restructuring of the country's security apparatus. The Mission had provided a model for successful peacekeeping missions in the future and the regional approach, which had gained currency in the West African subregion, was one that must be encouraged.

Sierra Leone was certainly on an immutable course towards peace and development, he said. However, the country was still fragile. Sustained stability would depend on the ability of the Government successfully to carry through the security-sector reform programme and reinforce good governance, particularly reform of the judicial

sector. Such efforts were beyond the capacity of Sierra Leone to provide on its own and required continued donor support for the completion of critical reform programmes. The funds pledged at the Consultative Group meeting, held recently in London, should provide reasonable support to the Government in its effort to create an enabling environment for the consolidation of peace.

Lastly, he drew the Council's attention to the significance of the regional factors in Sierra Leone's peace process. The progress of peacekeeping in Liberia in the post-elections period and efforts to resolve the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire would remain crucial to the stabilization of Sierra Leone and the wider Mano River Union basin. The ultimate objective would be to enhance stability through curbing the presence of armed combatants and floating mischievous youths in the entire West Africa region.

The meeting was then suspended at 11:05 a.m. and resumed at 11:42 a.m.

MIHNEA MOTOC (Romania) said Sierra Leone represented a major test case for the Council's approach to peacekeeping operations. The transformation of UNAMSIL from the vulnerable mission of 2000 to the robust operation that subsequently conducted disarmament and demobilization and facilitated the 2002 elections was remarkable. The strengthening of UNAMSIL had demonstrated the ability of the United Nations to learn from past mistakes. The prospects for Sierra Leone seemed promising. Significant progress had been achieved in restoring the State's authority throughout the country, rebuilding the security sector and promoting national cohesion and reconciliation.

Sierra Leone was now at peace but many chronic problems were still to be addressed, he said. They required a cohesive and long-term action plan involving national actors, the United Nations and other relevant partners. Potential threats to national stability should no longer be perceived in security-related terms but rather within socio-economic parameters. The main challenges in the peacebuilding phase related to issues such as job creation, improvement in the quality of public service delivery and fighting corruption. The continued engagement of the international community should be matched by a renewed commitment by the national political parties to the principles of reform and democratic governance. Human rights, the rule of law and an effective judiciary must remain top priorities in the new phase.

ABDALLAH BAALI (Algeria) said UNAMSIL had done everything it could to turn the situation in Sierra Leone around and allow its population to live in peace and security. The country had increased its capacity to meet internal crises, the police were now able to manage and ensure public order, and the State's authority had been strengthened. However, although there were also positive signs in the political and security areas, the country remained vulnerable on many fronts, and urgent responses were needed. Sierra Leone still suffered from extreme poverty and high unemployment, which threatened stability, and its army could not ensure security on its own. Improved relations were needed in the subregion to ensure security in border areas, and the role of the peace mission would be vital.

Sierra Leone's continuing success would depend to a great extent on the capacity of the international community to assist it during the peacebuilding phase so as to prevent conflicts and ensure economic viability, he said. The 2007 elections would be a test for the country's young institutions, its people, and its emerging democracy. They would also be a test for the international community's management strategies, and determine whether they could be transferred to other, similar situations.

RONALDO MOTA SARDENBERG (Brazil) said that with UNAMSIL's withdrawal, Sierra Leone was entering a new phase in the path of stabilization, and remarkable achievements had been attained by its Government and people. International partners must sustain their attention to the country, in accordance with its priorities. The decision to establish the UNIOSIL was a positive one and set a precedent by the Council in sustaining attention for post-conflict peacebuilding. Brazil welcomed the appointment of the new head of that Office.

As the Secretary-General had stated, it was critical that the population began seeing tangible peace dividends, he noted. While the rule of law and security needed sustained attention, the human rights situation had shown improvements, and welcomed the positive developments towards the 2007 elections. Regarding the subregion,

Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau might pose risks for Sierra Leone, and Brazil welcomed the cooperation and coordination in the region among the various United Nations bodies, leading to a focused approach to the difficulties facing those countries. As UNAMSIL completed its exit strategy in December, the Council should start reviewing the sanctions regime imposed relating to that country.

ZHANG YISHAN (China) noted that basic stability had been achieved in Sierra Leone, and that significant steps had been taken to strengthen the national authorities, as well as economic recovery. An exit strategy based on benchmarks had also been set up. The approaches used would provide useful lessons for other peacekeeping operations. However, reconstruction still faced numerous challenges and the international community should continue to provide assistance for the country's future integrated development. The joint efforts of the Sierra Leone Government and the international community should ensure a bright future.

KONSTANTIN DOLGOV (Russian Federation) said that on 31 December, the mandate of the Mission in Sierra Leone would come to an end. The UNAMSIL had set a good example for other United Nations peacekeeping missions. The Government of Sierra Leone had achieved significant success in post-conflict recovery, including the constitution of functioning armed forces and police, the holding of elections, and the establishment of control over the diamond industry. An important benchmark would be the holding of the 2007 elections.

The long-term prosperity of the people of Sierra Leone would depend on the Government's ability to resolve socio-economic challenges, including job creation and the reintegration of former combatants, he said. The implementation of such programmes would require the further support of the international community. The UNAMSIL was a pioneer in a number of important areas of United Nations peacekeeping. Among other things, it had established coordination among the United Nations presences in West Africa. The creation of UNIOSIL, which would take over on 1 January 2006, was an important precedent in post-conflict peacebuilding.

LARS FAABORG-ANDERSEN (Denmark) said UNAMSIL had created conditions for stability in Sierra Leone, assisting the country in tackling the consequences of war. The lessons learned there would assist in future peace operations, and the new integrated Office would provide much-needed support to the Government and its development partners. The country's continued successful transition would depend on its commitment to good governance and zero tolerance of cronyism and corruption.

The Special Court in Sierra Leone was a special reason for optimism, as justice would now be served on those who had previously been untouchable, he said. Given that the country's imminent prospects would also depend on its neighbours, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as nearby United Nations agencies must be strengthened. Despite challenges still facing the country, it had shown what a determined international community could do when a State broke down. The UNAMSIL's cost had been considerable, but the cost of doing nothing would have been much higher.

BAYANI S. MERCADO (Philippines) said that as the UNAMSIL chapter closed and the UNIOSIL chapter opened, all those involved in achieving viable progress in the establishment of peace were to be commended. The success achieved was attributable to several factors, including the alignment of political will and resources, the deployment of a robust Mission, and the implementation of properly designed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. The next step was to translate the peacekeeping success into peacebuilding. The international community, the United Nations and others must continue their engagement in Sierra Leone. The first priority was to bring about economic growth, which would include maximizing income-generating resources and creating jobs. It was vital to improve the business climate for investors.

The UNIOSIL should assist the Government with the remaining challenges, he said. Its integrated structure would contribute positively to consolidating peace and creating lasting national capacity for conflict prevention. The Council and the Assembly had just adopted resolutions on the Peacebuilding Commission, for which Sierra Leone would be an ideal first candidate. Regional efforts would continue to be needed to maintain peace and security for Sierra Leone and the subregion. Continued inter-mission cooperation would also reinforce peace and security.

TUBVAKO NATHANIEL MANONGI (United Republic of Tanzania) said he was particularly happy to have received the last report of UNAMSIL because of its significance, namely the progress of Sierra Leone and its people, made with the help of the United Nations and the international community, and especially the United Kingdom. While the Mission's initial setbacks had called into question the viability of United Nations peacekeeping worldwide, there was no doubt that the Secretary-General's last report was a clear testimony to the fact that Sierra Leone was one of the Organization's success stories. The country was now at peace and the political situation remained calm and stable since the last report in September. The overall security situation had remained stable and the national security agencies continued to operate satisfactorily since the Mission had transferred security responsibility to them last year.

He said he was pleased that the drawdown of all categories of the Mission were on schedule and that administration preparations to establish UNIOSIL were in their final stages. The country still faced potential threats to its security and political stability, including youth unemployment, corruption of witnesses in the judicial process and resource constraints. There were problems that Sierra Leone must now confront with renewed dedication. While the country still faced those challenges, it was important to appreciate how far it had come. Socio-economic recovery remained a crucial prerequisite for the country's political and security stability. The United Republic of Tanzania was pleased that the Government was continuing to implement measures to reassert control over its natural resources. The international community should continue to help the country face up to future political, security, social and economic challenges.

ALEXANDRA PAPADOPOULOU (Greece) joined others in commending the innovative methods and practices that UNAMSIL had introduced over the past six years, bringing together the efforts and resources of the United Nations family and humanitarian organizations in working towards that common goal. Sierra Leone had already embarked on a serious effort towards economic and democratic reform. The progress made so far could not easily be sustained, however, without considerable effort by the Government to address the root causes of the problems that had led to the civil war in the first place. Emphasis should be given to fighting corruption, improving the economy and living standards, dealing with unemployment, and improving public services, as well as continuing security-sector reform and strengthening the judiciary and the administration of justice. With regard to the last task, civil unrest and a culture of impunity were major threats to peace.

She said that the newly established UNIOSIL should work to ensure that the country would achieve sustainable development and break out of the vicious cycle of successive internal conflicts and economic crises. It was to be hoped that the Office would draft a strategy to support the Government in enhancing its capacity to pursue policies aimed at social and economic development. That would help to address the remaining challenges and eliminate the possibility of a relapse into conflict. The poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) could also be helpful. No approach was comprehensive, however, without adequate attention to development. Overall, only a close and coordinated partnership with all involved, including civil society, would reconcile immediate requirements with long-term goals and rally the necessary resources to consolidate peace, stability, security and prosperity.

WILLIAM T. BRENCICK (United States) said that the successful end of any peace operation, especially one which, a few years ago, had been the largest United Nations peacekeeping operation in the world, was truly a momentous occasion. It had been an extremely long and exceedingly difficult mission, but thanks to UNAMSIL, Sierra Leone was a different and far more hopeful place than it had been in the war-torn decade of the 1990s. While the time for peacekeeping was over, the time for peacebuilding was at hand. It was highly appropriate to have that discussion today upon the creation of the new Peacebuilding Commission. With the establishment of the UNIOSIL, the international community had underscored that it would remain part of that rebuilding process.

He said, however, that a myriad challenges remained, including the consolidation of democratic institutions and economic transformation. Better governance and more inclusive policies would be especially important. The United States looked forward to working with the United Nations and Sierra Leone to help it during that important phase, and welcomed the focus on closer cooperation among regional peacekeeping operations, as well as

other fresh approaches to peacekeeping. Innovation would be part of UNAMSIL's proud legacy. The United States was also pleased that the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) would continue to provide security for the Special Court in Sierra Leone.

SHINICHI KITAOKA (Japan) said that despite some difficulties at the beginning of its deployment and delays in its scheduled withdrawal, UNAMSIL had proved a successful peacekeeping operation. Several factors had contributed to its success, the first of which was the high quality of leadership provided at the top by the Secretary-General's Special Representatives. Secondly, efforts to restore peace had been made in a manner that respected to the fullest the ownership of the host country, Sierra Leone. The designation of specific benchmarks to provide direction and to measure future progress had also proved particularly useful. Third, UNAMSIL had worked in close collaboration with the other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the donor community on the ground and last, but not least, in addition to being equipped with the necessary resources, UNAMSIL had been successful because member countries of ECOWAS, particularly Nigeria and Ghana, had been positively involved in Sierra Leone's peace process.

The UNIOSIL should be able to consolidate the gains of UNAMSIL and go on to play a key role in the transition to the development process in Sierra Leone, he said. In that context, two things were relevant and essential. First, as stability in the neighbouring countries was essential, it was vital to tackle the task of peacebuilding in a broader perspective, taking into account the regional dimension. Second, the importance of local ownership could not be overemphasized in the next phase into which Sierra Leone was moving under UNIOSIL.

MARTIN GARCIA-MORITAN (Argentina) joined other speakers in commending the Mission for being very innovative in many ways, including through cooperation with other missions in the subregion. Both the report and today's briefing had been a source of optimism about the country's future. The effective completion of UNAMSIL had shown that, after six years of involvement and with the upcoming completion of the withdrawal at the end of the month, Sierra Leone was now ready for post-conflict recovery. Security conditions were stable and State authority had been restored. There had also been progress in restoring State control over the diamond industry. The human rights situation had improved, and there had been sustained economic growth and stable relationships with the country's neighbours. The gradual exit strategy with specific benchmarks had been effective and successful. Post-conflict peacebuilding had begun under UNIOSIL, which would help to create a sustainable national capacity for resolving conflicts, among other tasks.

He called for a coordinated approach in meeting the specific needs of countries emerging from conflict Situations. The objective should be integration, reintegration and efforts to ensure sustainable development. The new Peacebuilding Commission would have a key role to play, and hopefully, it would assist the Support Office in its task. Sierra Leone was now at a crossroads as it began to implement post-conflict peacebuilding. That process would be as difficult as the earlier conflict situation, as the country would face serious socio-economic problems and have to deal with the question of generalized corruption. The Government would also have to ensure the health and welfare of its people, as well as sustained economic growth. Careful follow-up should be ensured in preparing for the 2007 elections. The international community should renew its commitment to ensuring the achievement of those objectives, so that the Government could meet the challenges for the benefit of its people.

JEAN-FRANCIS REGIS ZINSOU (Benin) said that the withdrawal of UNAMSIL marked the end of peacekeeping in that country. Sierra Leone was definitely a success story for peacekeeping and a typical example of cooperation between the United Nations and African regional organizations. The Secretary-General had highlighted some innovations that marked the Mission's disengagement such as the guidelines for the exit strategy. In particular, Benin welcomed the regional approach, which showed efforts to control the external factors affecting the country. The UNAMSIL had done its job.

However, he said he had been struck by the political situation in the country. Security and stability were different from the threats besetting the future, which had to do with the underlying causes of the conflict. Such a situation should prompt the rethinking of peacekeeping mandates and the reassessing of exit strategies. Peacekeeping

operations should be deployed with clear mandates to tackle and eradicate the roots of conflict, as well as to set a solid basis for peaceful development. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission would make it possible to deal equally with the roots of conflict and the conflicts themselves. It was to be hoped that it would spare no effort to help Sierra Leone remain on the path to peace. Benin called on Sierra Leone's politicians to shoulder their responsibilities and overcome the difficulties relating to the upcoming elections, and urged the international community to strengthen its support for Sierra Leone, particularly by increasing the resources available to the country.

JEAN-MARC DE LA SABLIERE (France) said that thanks to UNAMSIL, Sierra Leone had gained stability and peace. The United Nations needed such success stories. Just as it recognized its achievements in Burundi, so should it recognize similar gains in Sierra Leone. At a time when UNAMSIL's last contingents were about to depart, it was a good idea to assess the success of involvement by the international community and the United Nations in resolving that crisis. The main factors leading to its successful resolution related to the characteristics of the Mission itself. The Mission had been strong, with some 17,500 military staff, and it had covered the country's entire territory, as well as one quarter of the territory of Côte d'Ivoire. Deployment of a Pakistan-led mechanized brigade had been key to UNAMSIL's success, as had the involvement of the United Kingdom on two fronts -- with UNAMSIL in restoring stability, and in training the Sierra Leonean police and security forces.

He said that the exit strategy should also be seen as model for other peace operations. The definition and implementation of an exit strategy were essential at a time when deployment of Blue Helmets had reached record levels. The drawdown of UNAMSIL had been progressive, with clear-cut deadlines, and should be seen as a model for the downsizing of other peacekeeping operations. To combat impunity, a special tribunal had been set up in Freetown, and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had also played an important role in guaranteeing a return to peace and security. Combating impunity had been part of the strategy to resolve the crisis in Sierra Leone, but that was true for many other countries as well. The world community must continue to support Sierra Leone in its efforts to consolidate peace. The United Nations would do so with the establishment of UNIOSIL and the integrated role played by the UNMIL.

Council President EMYR JONES PARRY (United Kingdom), speaking in his national capacity and on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said that as the last peacekeeping troops left Sierra Leone, the Mission was to be commended for its contribution to peace and stability in that country. The drawdown of UNAMSIL demonstrated to the people of Sierra Leone that the conflict lay behind them. The Mission had shown innovative ways to cooperate with local actors and the international community, and the use of benchmarks for the drawdown had been successful.

The European Union was committed to working with the Government of Sierra Leone to demonstrate to the people that the benefits of peace were tangible, he said. It was dedicated to ensuring that economic and social development was enhanced and continued to invest in infrastructure and programmes to ensure that. It also looked forward to the support of UNMIL in providing security for the Sierra Leone Special Court.

The regional aspect of conflict was important, he said, adding that cooperation with the Mano River Union and ECOWAS would be key in building on the peace achieved. The European Union expected that UNIOSIL would continue to support the Government as it faced up to its many challenges, including improvements in infrastructure and tackling corruption. The European Union looked forward to credible elections in 2007 and a tolerant attitude to campaigning by all candidates and parties. It was to be hoped that the withdrawal marked the end of the conflict phase. The European Union looked forward to cooperation in building a durable peace.

JOE ROBERT PEMAGBI (Sierra Leone) said that today's meeting marked an important milestone in the history of United Nations peacekeeping. The UNAMSIL had every reason to be proud of what it had accomplished in Sierra Leone over the past six years. It had turned out to be one of the most successful operations of the last three decades. Notwithstanding the challenges it faced, which the Secretary-General had described as "trials and tribulations" in the early days of the peace operation, the Mission was a testimony to the "triangular partnership" -- regional organizations, troop contributors, and the United Nations -- which must be at the centre.

As the Secretary-General had observed in his final report, UNAMSIL had been the first peace operation to have recruited a parallel subregional peacekeeping force. In that connection, Sierra Leone paid special tribute to ECOWAS and the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), for their vital and timely contribution. The ECOMOG troops had exchanged their hats for blue berets to serve under the United Nations flag. Another symbol of partnership had been the parallel contribution of the United Kingdom.

He said UNAMSIL had also forged partnerships with the United Nations country team, the countries of the subregion, the donor community, civil society, the Government and the people, without which the Mission would not have accomplished its task. The UNAMSIL had succeeded because the people of Sierra Leone had made it possible for it to do so. With some assistance, Sierra Leone was capable of fulfilling its responsibilities. The Mission's departure was a clear indication that the Government had resumed full responsibility for the country's security. The people were determined to muster the same resistance that had carried them through dark days to prevent an outbreak of another fratricidal war. They had pledged never again to give anyone cause to bring troops into their country to end a civil conflict.

Sierra Leone remained concerned about the situation in the West African subregion, but hoped that the Council and the international community would remain engaged in efforts to stabilize that situation.

He thanked all those countries that had contributed military, police and civilian personnel, as well as other forms of support, to United Nations operations in Sierra Leone, and promised that their efforts and sacrifice would "never go in vain". He also thanked the Secretary-General's Special Representative and his team. Sierra Leone looked forward to the operationalization of the new UNIOSIL, as well as to the work of the new Peacebuilding Commission. He also thanked Council members for having asked the international community to continue to support Sierra Leone in the long term. Such support was far less expensive than a relapse into conflict.

** The 5333rd Meeting was closed.*

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