

## Sierra Leone

Closed at the end of 2005 after more than six years, the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) is now widely regarded as a success despite its troubled beginning. Yet while relative peace exists in the country, many sources of instability remain, which will take time and sustained investment to address. The year 2005 was one of transition, balancing a phased drawdown with increases in local capacity, while agreeing on the shape and mandate of a successor UN mission.

UNAMSIL was established in October 1999 to support the implementation of the Lomé Agreement, signed by the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) following eight years of war,

human rights atrocities, misrule, coups, and failed peace agreements. Originally designed to monitor a cease-fire and support peace-building in an environment secured by the more robust Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), UNAMSIL's mandate was hurriedly expanded in early 2000 as ECOMOG withdrew. The ensuing chaotic handover created a security vacuum that RUF fighters quickly exploited. This culminated in the crisis of May 2000, in which some 500 UN peacekeepers were taken hostage. Security was restored when UNAMSIL stood its ground and was reinforced by a small but potent United Kingdom force under national command, backed by an offshore naval presence. Shortly thereafter, the UN mission was expanded to 17,500 troops with a more robust mandate.

In May 2001, a new round of political talks produced the Abidjan Accords which put the peace process back on track. Disarmament proceeded as envisaged and successful elections were held in April 2002. UNAMSIL began a process of “gradual, phased and deliberate” drawdown, linked to five key benchmarks: capacity building for the army and police; reintegration of ex-combatants; restoration of government control over diamond mining; consolidation of state authority; and progress toward ending the conflict in Liberia. In June 2005, UNAMSIL's mandate was extended for a final six months to the end of the year.

Since the Sierra Leonean government assumed primary responsibility for security

### UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL)

• Resolution passage and start date	22 October 1999 (UNSC Res. 1270)
• SRS	Daudi Ngelautwa Mwakawago (Tanzania)
• Force commander	Major-General Sajjad Akram (Pakistan)
• Police commissioner	Commissioner Hudson Benzu (Zambia)
• Budget	\$107.54 million (1 July 2005–30 June 2006)
• Strength as of 31 October 2005	Troops: 1,396 Military observers: 78 Civilian police: 56 International civilian staff: 218 Local civilian staff: 399 UN volunteers: 83

across the country in September 2004, there have been no reported security incidents requiring UNAMSIL assistance. The army continues to receive training from a UK-led advisory team. Meanwhile, UNAMSIL civilian police supported development of the Sierra Leonean police force, which reached 9,500 by December 2005. Worrying concerns remain, however, about inadequate accommodation, transport, and equipment available to the national police and armed forces.

The official program for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants ended in June 2004. Reintegration efforts continue, however, and are now focused on employment opportunities not just for former fighters but for youth in general.

Progress has been made in extending government control over Sierra Leone's diamond resources, whose illegal exploitation funded much of the conflict. Implementation of the Kimberley Process contributed to a substantial increase in legal exports of diamonds in 2004, and a comprehensive minerals policy was launched in December of that year.

Consolidation of state authority remains a long-term challenge. The centerpiece of the government's strategy is to decentralize power to local councils. Local elections in May 2004 passed off peacefully, and in September 2005 the UN Secretary-General reported that formerly tense relations between local councils and tribal chiefdoms were "evolving satisfactorily." Concerns remain, however, about lack of capacity in the local councils, and particularly the absence of mechanisms to ensure financial accountability.

Security improvements in Liberia, culminating in the peaceful elections of October 2005, are grounds for optimism in Sierra Leone. The border with Guinea, however, remains tense. In March 2005, a group of UNAMSIL military observers were detained by Guinean forces and held for several hours near the disputed village of Yenga.

The human rights situation in Sierra Leone has improved and should progress further with the implementation of institutional reforms, including those recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose report was published in August 2005. Trials of those deemed most responsible for human rights violations during the war are under way at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. UNAMSIL forces responsible for the court's security were transferred to the command of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).<sup>1</sup>

These are remarkable developments. Yet as UNAMSIL prepares to withdraw, many potential sources of tension remain, including poverty, regional instability, corruption in the management of state revenues, youth unemployment, weaknesses in the rule of law, and low capacity for public service delivery. There are fears that progress may stagnate as international attention turns to other crises. Economic growth is expected to slow, and a public opinion survey found that around half the respondents feared some decline in security and accountability after the mission withdraws.

UNAMSIL's successor, the UN Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL), is intended to address these concerns and to ensure a cohesive approach among UN agencies. UNIOSIL is a first—a Security Council mandated follow-on mission that combines the features of a special political mission and an integrated country team. With an initial mandate of twelve months, it will work on governance, human rights and rule of law, police and military assistance, development, and public information. But the drawdown experience has already shown that it is hard to attract resources, human and financial, to yesterday's crisis. UNOSIL's primary challenge will be to sustain the international attention necessary to consolidate a peace that has been six years in the making.

#### Box 4.9.1 Public Perceptions of Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone

In January and February 2005, Jean Krasno conducted a public opinion survey in Sierra Leone to assess perceptions of UNAMSIL. Based on 872 questionnaire responses, the survey is intended to give “a glimpse of what the people of Sierra Leone are thinking at a given time.” Results included:

- Almost all respondents, 98 percent, believed that the security situation had improved since UNAMSIL’s deployment.
- Four-fifths rated the disarmament process as “good” or “very good.”
- Only half thought that UNAMSIL personnel “always” treated the local population with respect, although 45 percent believed that it “sometimes” did so.
- Four-fifths felt that UNAMSIL personnel had attempted to resolve communities’ problems. Of these, 65 percent found UNAMSIL personnel “very helpful” and only 6 percent found them unhelpful.
- While 73 percent were glad that ECOMOG had intervened in Sierra Leone, respondents were evenly divided on whether peacekeeping should be carried out solely by the UN, or also by other actors.
- Asked who should launch a mission in cases where the UN would not or could not, 36 percent preferred a West African force, and 48 percent preferred an all-African force. Three-quarters felt that African missions should “always” be

followed up by “full-blown” UN peacekeeping operations.

While 41 respondents did not have any complaints against UNAMSIL, 201 referred to sexual exploitation issues. While this represents only 23 percent of those surveyed, it is noted that critical respondents were concentrated in the capital, Freetown, and in the western town of Port Loko. Other negative issues concerning UNAMSIL raised by respondents included reckless driving, and fears for the employment prospects of local staff after the mission’s departure.

*Source:* Jean Krasno, *Public Opinion Survey of UNAMSIL’s Work in Sierra Leone* (New York: United Nations, DPKO Best Practices Unit, 2005).

#### Note

1. For a description of the cooperation among UN missions in West Africa, see the box in Mission Review 3.4 on Liberia.