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LETTER DATED 17 AUGUST 1998 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

In view of the key role that the United Nations continues to play in providing support to the Government of Sierra Leone in its efforts to restore peace and stability throughout the country, I am writing to inform you of the Special Conference on Sierra Leone that I convened in New York on 30 July 1998.

The meeting was organized in close consultation with the Government of Sierra Leone, whose delegation was led by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and also the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It was attended by representatives of 55 countries, including those of ECOWAS, the European Union and the Security Council, the Secretaries-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Commonwealth and the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, as well as representatives of the European Commission, the Bretton Woods institutions and relevant United Nations departments, programmes and agencies. Representatives of several non-governmental organizations operating assistance programmes in Sierra Leone participated as observers.

The purpose of the meeting was to focus international attention on the situation in Sierra Leone and the Government's initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict, restoring secure conditions and effective administration country-wide and implementing a rehabilitation and recovery programme. Priority was given to consideration of the following issues: the Government's programme for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants and its peace-building initiatives; the role of the Monitoring Group of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOMOG) in re-establishing basic security; the actions necessary to help ECOMOG meet its manpower and logistical needs; the humanitarian situation and refugees; and further steps to be taken by the international community in mobilizing and coordinating support for Sierra Leone.

In my opening statement, I noted that President Kabbah's Government had taken a number of steps to combat the effects of nine months of junta misrule and sought to lay a lasting foundation for national reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation. Many obstacles needed to be overcome, and the Special Conference would ensure that the problems would be attacked by the Government and international community with a collective unity of purpose. President Kabbah said that the Conference was an act of solidarity with the people of Sierra Leone, where remnants of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

(AFRC) junta and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were continuing to perpetrate atrocities against civilians. Despite those gruesome actions, the rebel forces had recently been granted a two-week amnesty by the Government. He outlined the emergency needs of the country, including funding for the Government's disarmament and demobilization programme, logistical support for ECOMOG, repatriation of refugees, emergency humanitarian aid and resources for the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure. The Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, on behalf of the Chairman of ECOWAS, and the Secretaries-General of OAU and the Commonwealth also addressed the opening session.

Peace and security

The Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, Mr. Sama Banya, provided an update of political and security developments. Normal conditions had returned to Freetown and the provincial and district headquarters towns except Kailahun, Kono and Kabala. Parliament was functioning and a multi-party Cabinet had been appointed. Trials for members of the illegal junta and their collaborators were being carried out with due process in the presence of international monitors. My Special Representative briefed the meeting on the role of the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) and the status of its deployment. Following those presentations, general statements were made by representatives of 16 Member States, as well as the European Union and the European Commission.

Major-General Timothy Shelpidi, ECOMOG Force Commander, outlined the role of ECOMOG in reinstating the legitimate Government and restoring basic security in Sierra Leone, indicating that 80 per cent of the country was now free from rebel activity. He noted with appreciation contributions for the provision of logistical assistance to ECOMOG made by the United States of America and pledged by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the Conference and appealed for further aid to meet the force's needs, as listed in a document that he made available to interested donors. He noted that there were currently about 10,000 ECOMOG troops in Sierra Leone, mainly from Nigeria and Guinea, and that an additional 5,000 were needed to enable the force to carry out its mandate effectively. Several ECOWAS countries were prepared to contribute additional troops but were unable to deploy or sustain them owing to financial constraints, and Major-General Shelpidi appealed for donor assistance to overcome those problems.

Mr. James Jonah, Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Sierra Leone, gave an overview of the Government's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plan for an estimated 33,000 former combatants, which was developed in close consultation with major donors. He appealed for funding for the programme, which will run for three years and cost approximately \$33.6 million. The initial phase, under which 5,000 members of the former army and RUF who have already surrendered to ECOMOG will be demobilized, was already under way. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict noted that one of the most pressing challenges facing the Government of Sierra Leone was the "crisis of the young", including child soldiers. He recommended that Sierra Leone be adopted as a pilot case to which the international community would give concerted political attention and resources to meet the needs of children and women affected by armed conflict. The Executive Director of the United Nations

Children's Fund also noted that the important task of reintegrating the estimated 4,000 child soldiers into society would require an intensive and long-term commitment of resources.

Promoting recovery

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs briefed the meeting on the enormous humanitarian needs that the country continues to face, as access by humanitarian organizations to some areas of the country remained restricted as a result of continuing rebel activities. Displacement and security problems have also limited the access of farmers to their fields, and a serious food shortage is expected. He urged donors to fund the 1998 consolidated inter-agency appeal for humanitarian assistance, which calls for \$20.2 million in donations but has received only \$1 million. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicated that the Sierra Leone refugee crisis had been the largest in Africa in 1998. Since the beginning of the year there had been an outflow of 209,000 Sierra Leonean refugees to Guinea, bringing the total to 401,000, and an outflow of 57,000 to Liberia, bringing the number to 184,000. The total number of Sierra Leonean refugees was now 595,000. She called upon donors to contribute to the appeal launched by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for \$7.2 million for Sierra Leonean refugees, in which \$3 million had so far been received.

Mr. Jonah also briefed the meeting on the Government's peace-building efforts and stressed the need for a revitalization of the economy, job creation schemes, particularly for youth, and strengthening of the judiciary. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs noted that the Government's programme for rehabilitation and recovery was aimed at addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and consolidating peace and should not be allowed to falter because of a lack of resources.

Conclusions and follow-up action

The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, in his capacity as Chairman of the meeting, summarized the main points made by participants during the proceedings. He noted that the Conference had been welcomed as a timely initiative and that the degree of interest shown was reflected in the high level of attendance and the participation of ministers and delegations sent from the home Governments of various countries. The restoration of President Kabbah and his Government on 10 March 1998 was warmly welcomed, and the steps taken since then to restore security, re-establish constitutional order and begin the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation were commended.

The continued resistance of remnants of AFRC and RUF, and especially their perpetration of appalling atrocities, was strongly condemned, and they were called upon to lay down their arms and surrender to the Government. The meetings between President Kabbah and President Taylor of Liberia, held in Abuja on 1 July and in Monrovia on 20 July, were welcomed, and the two leaders were urged to continue to work towards improving relations between their two countries and improving regional security. The importance of stopping the entry of illegal supplies of weapons into Sierra Leone and ending direct or indirect support of neighbouring countries to the rebels was stressed.

The need for the Government to pursue policies directed at promoting national reconciliation while at the same time ensuring that those responsible for crimes and atrocities against the civilian population are brought to justice was acknowledged. All those accused had to be given fair trials with full respect for due process. In this regard, the Government's invitation to the United Nations and human rights groups to monitor the trials was welcomed.

The achievements of ECOWAS and the efforts of ECOMOG in the restoration of the legitimate Government and basic security in many areas of the country were commended. Re-establishing secure conditions was a top priority, and the provision of technical assistance to ECOMOG to enable the force to meet its manpower and logistical requirements was urgently needed. ECOWAS countries that had yet to contribute troops to ECOMOG in Sierra Leone were urged to do so. The deployment of UNOMSIL was strongly supported, and the need for good coordination and cooperation between ECOMOG and UNOMSIL was stressed. Several countries indicated their willingness to provide military observers and police advisers for UNOMSIL.

The Government's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plan was welcomed as a critical element in ensuring durable peace, and the importance of providing adequate resources for it was stressed. Programmes aimed at meeting the needs of youth and women affected by the conflict were of particular importance. The humanitarian situation and the plight of the large number of refugees remained a serious cause for concern for which donor assistance was urgently needed. Appreciation was expressed to those countries providing sanctuary for the refugees, particularly Guinea and Liberia. Finally, the general view was that, while the political, military, humanitarian and social challenges faced in Sierra Leone were daunting, they were not insurmountable. A well-coordinated international response involving the United Nations and other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector was urgently needed.

It was encouraging that several countries and organizations expressed their readiness to support the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country, in some cases by restarting their bilateral assistance programmes that had been suspended following the military coup in May 1997.

At the end of the meeting, participants expressed their support for the establishment of an international contact group to mobilize and coordinate further support for Sierra Leone and noted that discussions should be held by interested Member States in the near future to consider its composition and *modus operandi*.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN
