

**Title:** Regarding Indian Peace keeping force in Sierra Leone.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Mr. Speaker, Sir, for the last few days we have been listening to reports in the print and electronic media about the incidents that are going in Sierra Leone. I thought the Government, on its own, would make a *suo motu* statement about these incidents. Since the Government have not come forward with the statement, I am compelled to raise this matter in the 'Zero Hour'.

India is a member of the United Nations and we have certain obligations. We are all for peace. I am grateful to the Government for having responded to the call of United Nations to bring peace in Sierra Leone. The Indian Peace Keeping Force is doing its job with great conviction and courage, maintaining the best tradition of India insofar as the international peace and amity are concerned. For the last few days, we have been receiving disturbing reports in the print and electronic media that several of our soldiers have been kidnapped and abducted. Fierce fighting is going on between the RUF and the Government forces. Our soldiers are doing a commendable job to restore the confidence of the people under the guidance of United Nations.

Since the Parliament Session is coming to an end by tomorrow, it is very important that Government should make a statement explaining the latest position about the role of our Peace Keeping Force and about the fate of those *jawans* who are said to have been kidnapped or abducted. This will give a clear picture to the family members of the *jawans* and to the nation as well. The statement should take the House into confidence on the following aspects. First, about our role in this delegation; secondly, the fate of those soldiers who are said to have been kidnapped or abducted; and thirdly as to how long will this commitment continue, how long our Peace Keeping Force should be there and when are they coming back.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I am glad that this opportunity has arisen to set at rest some observations and doubts that the hon. Member has raised.

Under the normal circumstances, both the Houses of Parliament would have had a full-fledged discussion on the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of External Affairs. As the discussion did not take place, the Government, on every important issue, has volunteered to come forward with *suo motu* statements.

The UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established by Security Council Resolution 1270 of 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1999. Its present mandate is based on UNSC Resolution 1289 (2000).

Currently the Indian Army has roughly 1667 soldiers in Sierra Leone out of a total strength of the UN Peacekeeping Mission which has 9512 men. This is the second largest contingent after Nigeria, a neighboring country of Sierra Leone who have a total of 3200 plus soldiers in Sierra Leone.

The Indian contingent is mostly deployed in the Eastern Provinces of Daru, Kailahun, Kenema and Mile 91 with some additional elements at forces headquarters in Freetown. Currently, the exercise of deploying an additional battalion from India and support elements committed earlier totalling 1500 men is underway. Already, 150 men have been airlifted by a Canadian Air Force plane last night. The full deployment along with ammunitions and equipment will involve around 25 aircraft, and the exercise will cover the period from 15<sup>th</sup> May to 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2000.

So far as the ground situation is concerned, I wish to just advise the hon. Member about some of the adjectives which the hon. Member has used about Indian soldiers having been kidnapped or taken hostage. No one from the Indian Peace Keeping Force has been kidnapped. The question simply does not arise. It is a fighting force and the fighting forces are not kidnapped.

Rebels of the Revolutionary United Front, RUF faction, had taken a number of detainees in the Kailahun area which included 12 Indian soldiers. Some of these detainees were released earlier. All remaining detainees, including all Indian officers and other ranks were released unconditionally on the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2000. They are all in good health and have rejoined the main Indian contingent at Kailahun. Another group of 23 Indian soldiers are currently surrounded by RUF elements but our men and soldiers are in full possession of all their equipment and weapons and there is no immediate danger to their lives. Lines of communications between the Commanding Officer and this contingent, as also with the local RUF leadership and indeed also the village elders, are open and efforts are underway not only to ensure their safety but to lift the present situation.

I have, personally been in touch with our permanent Representative to United Nations. We have pressed upon the United Nations and the Secretary-General the need for augmenting force level and for re-grouping of forces so that the UN mission there can be more effectively implemented. We have also stressed the need to preserve UN command and control over all forces operating in Sierra Leone. The Government is constantly monitoring the situation and they are in touch with the United Nations as well as all other Member States concerned.

I find it necessary here only to read out a reference that has been made in a report to the Security Council by the Under Secretary-General DPKO, Bernard Miyet, is on 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2000. I find it necessary to read out the references that he has made to our soldiers. It would not take me a minute but I think it is necessary for all the hon. Members to know it. He says, I am quoting from the statement made in the Security Council.:

"I would like to first of all underline the extreme courage and dignity of Kenyan and Indian soldiers which were in the frontlines and which have paid the highest price. "

He then goes on to speak about some other details and says:

"I would like to remind, with stress, that the Indian and Kenyan troops remained in possession of their arms in Makeni, Magburaka and Kailahun and that they remained determined to fight till the finish. "

Finally, Sir:

"I would also like to show appreciation for the intelligence , professionalism, the determination and the will of Gen. Jetley – who is the force commandant there – in particularly trying circumstances and I would like to render public homage to him. I have equally appreciated the courage and the determination of all those which day and night have held their heads high in the tempest. "

This is the translation, Sir, the original having been made in French. I trust this satisfies the curiosity of the hon. Members. Thank you.

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