

Marking International Day, UN honours dedication and service of peacekeepers

24 May 2017 – While the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is 29 May, the Organization today held ceremonies to pay tribute to the more than 3,500 people who have died on duty since 1948 and acknowledge the dedication and courage of those serving on the ground.

“Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world,” UN [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres said in his message for the Day, also underscoring the sacrifices made by the more than 3,500 peacekeepers who have given their lives in the service of peace since 1948.

“Their sacrifice only strengthens our commitment to ensuring that United Nations peacekeepers continue protecting civilians in harm’s way, promoting human rights and the rule of law, removing landmines, advancing negotiations and securing a better future in the places they are deployed,” he said. “Now, more than ever, it is essential that we continue investing in peace around the world.”

On 29 May in 1948, the first UN peacekeeping mission began operations in Palestine. In 2002, the UN General Assembly designated 29 May as the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers.

At the UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General presided over a wreath-laying ceremony in honour of all peacekeepers who lost their lives while serving under the UN flag.

Mr. Guterres led a moment of silence to remember the fallen peacekeepers, including 117 military, police and civilian peacekeepers from 43 countries who died in service in 2016.

He expressed his “deepest condolences and appreciation” to the family members and friends of those who died, as well as his “deepest sorrow and greatest appreciation” to the countries that contributed the troops and police officers.

The UN chief warned that peacekeepers continue to come under attack from armed groups, spoilers and increasingly by terrorists, including incidents in Mali, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

“But the closure of our operations in Cote d’Ivoire and Liberia over the coming months reminds us that the contributions, investments and sacrifices of our United Nations peacekeepers have contributed to the transformation of these countries from battlefields to peaceful states,” he stressed.

“And the greatest tribute we can pay to those who have died is to rededicate ourselves to continuing their work to build and maintain peace,” he said.

The [Dag Hammarskjöld Medal](#) was awarded posthumously to the peacekeepers who

have fallen while serving in the cause of peace, during the preceding year.

UN peacekeeping operations use the Day to strengthen bonds with the local populations that they have been deployed to serve. For example by holding sporting events, school and orphanage visits, art and essay competitions, photo exhibits, neighbourhood clean ups, tree plantings, concerts, and conferences and workshops on peace issues.

DR Congo: 400,000 children in Greater Kasai at risk of severe acute malnutrition, UNICEF warns

24 May 2017 – Deteriorating security conditions have severely disrupted life-saving interventions for children in Greater Kasai in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in recent months, putting an estimated 400,000 children at risk of severe acute malnutrition, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has said.

“These children are among the most vulnerable in the country, and now they face a looming crisis if access to basic services is not restored quickly,” said Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF’s Regional Director for West and Central Africa, in a press release.

“Without adequate health care, without access to food and clean water, the lives of hundreds of thousands of children are at risk,” she added.

Across the five provinces of Greater Kasai, critical health infrastructures are no longer operational due to the conflict. In Central Kasai Province alone, more than one-third of health centers have been forced to close following looting, due to security concerns for staff or lack of medical supplies, depriving children of vital services and medicine.

Supplies of food and basic necessities are dwindling, and displacement has forced families to live in conditions with inadequate hygiene or sanitation.

“Our priority over the next few weeks is to reach thousands of severely malnourished children that can no longer be cared for in the health centers that have been destroyed,” said Tajudeen Oyewale, acting UNICEF Representative in the Democratic Republic of Congo. “But insecurity in these remote areas is making our work very challenging.”

Even before the latest wave of violence, the Kasai Provinces were among the poorest in the country. More than one in ten children die before the age of five due to lack of adequate health care. Half the children suffer from chronic malnutrition or stunting.

UNICEF needs \$40.2 million for its emergency response in Greater Kasai.

[Samples from alleged chemical attacks in Syria reveal evidence of sulfur mustard, sarin – UN official](#)

23 May 2017 – A fact-finding mission in Syria has found evidence of sulfur mustard in samples taken from an alleged attack on 16 September 2016, while samples from a 4 April incident have revealed exposure to sarin or a sarin-like substance, the United Nations disarmament chief told the Security Council today.

“We must not allow ourselves to become inured to the ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons. This is an issue about which the United Nations cannot be neutral,” Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, said in her [first briefing](#) to the Security Council since her appointment.

Citing initial findings from the fact-finding mission by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)), she emphasized that the use of chemical weapons by any actor – whether Government forces, terrorist factions or armed opposition groups – could never be justified, regardless of provocation or circumstance.

“Their re-emergence is indefensible and cannot be viewed as anything other than a violation of the most basic international law and a serious deviation from the internationally agreed broader path towards the goal of a world free of chemical weapons,” she said. “As such, this is not an issue to be politicized.”

She said OPCW has deployed a fact-finding mission on two occasions following allegations of chemical weapons use on that date in the area of Um Hosh, in the Aleppo countryside. Members of the mission have conducted interviews, collected testimonies and reviewed documents, as well as information provided by the Syrian authorities, she added.

While the prevailing security situation has prevented the team from visiting the site of the alleged incident, she continued, it has been able to review analyses of blood samples from two female casualties reported to have been involved in the attack.

They were found to have suffered exposure to sulfur mustard, as was a mortar handed over to the team by the Russian Federation’s Chemical, Biological, Nuclear and Radiological Team.

RELATED: [As US responds militarily to chemical attack, UN urges restraint to avoid escalation](#)

Regarding the reported incident in Khan Shaykhoun on [4 April](#) – she said that, after a preliminary assessment, a fact-finding mission was deployed to a neighbouring country, where it conducted interviews and witnessed the collection of biomedical samples from the alleged incident.

It has also received biological-environmental samples from dead animals reported to have been close to the suspected impact point, attended the autopsies of three alleged victims, and witnessed the extraction of biomedical samples from their bodies.

She, however, emphasized that all materials and information collected were currently being analyzed, thus not final.

On the situation relating to the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons production facilities remained unchanged, she said that OPCW has verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 declared facilities, but the prevailing security situation continues to preclude safe access to the three remaining sites.

[New secure Internet app aids UN peacekeeping maintain and share statistics](#)

23 May 2017 – The United Nations peacekeeping office today announced a new software application that is enhancing efficiency and situational awareness in the field.

The app, created as a result of collaboration with the Government of Singapore, alerts everyone necessary in the event of an emergency and is expected to be fully operational this year.

“We hope this will serve as a model for similar projects with Member States,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the new Under-Secretary-General for UN Peacekeeping Operations.

Mr. Lacroix accepted the software in a ceremony today in New York, alongside Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Atul Khare.

“This software will help keep all entities updated in the unfortunate situation when our colleagues in the field are killed, injured or fall ill, enabling Headquarters to respond with [speed and efficiency](#),” Mr. Khare said.

According to information from the peacekeeping department, the software is

compatible with other UN systems, stores information in a central location and provides secure access to permitted users only.

It is expected to “significantly improve the information processing time” as compared with the current manual process of casualty notification.

The app is in line with recommendations made to the peacekeeping office to deploy more information management and analysis tools to strengthen our operations. Those suggestions were made in the reports of the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping and the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO).

FEATURE: “We invest in peace”

23 May 2017 – More than 100,000 UN peacekeepers serving around the world will be honoured this month as the United Nations celebrates the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, observed annually on 29 May.

Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres

This year’s theme – “Investing in peace around the globe” – resonates powerfully and personally with the military, police and civilian UN staff deployed in the field, often in places where peace has yet to be found.

“Every day, peacekeepers help bring peace and stability to war-torn societies around the world,” Secretary-General António Guterres said in a [video message](#) for the Day, outlining various tasks such as protecting civilians in harm’s way, promoting human rights and the rule of law, removing landmines, advancing negotiations and securing a better future in the places they are deployed.

“Now, more than ever, it is essential that we continue investing in peace around the world,” he stressed.

The communities in which UN peacekeepers serve can count on people such as Lt. Ramirez, liaison officer in South Sudan, to ensure that security is guaranteed to go about their duty:

VIDEO: Lt. Eduardo Francia Ramirez explains how his work as a liaison officer in the UN Mission in South Sudan is an investment for peace.

Over 120 Member States contribute uniformed personnel to 16 UN missions worldwide, which operate on a budget that is less than 0.5 per cent of global

military spending. Every mission aims to save lives, prevent mass atrocities, set the stage for peace and then close.

While attention is often focused on the role of the military within UN peace operations, the part played by political, civil affairs, police, human rights and community-focused initiatives, as explained by some of the staff themselves, are equally vital.

Anna Innocenti is a human rights officer with the UN mission in Haiti:

VIDEO: Human rights officer in Haiti, Anna Innocenti describes the life in a peacekeeping mission and how it is an investment for peace.

To date, 54 missions have already completed their mandates and closed; two more will do so in the months ahead.

Ben Zakour Man, a child protection officer with the UN mission in the Central African Republic, discusses why peacekeeping works.

VIDEO: Child protection officer in the Central African Republic, Ben Zakour Man tells us how peacekeeping is an investment for peace

Peacekeeping is a partnership between the UN, Member States and regional organizations that support each other. In Somalia, for example, there is a peacekeeping mission run by the African Union, with UN support and European funding.

VIDEO: Alain-Pierre works for UN Support mission in Somalia. He explains why partnership is an investment for peace.

Their personal stories

Since the first UN deployment in 1948, more than one million men and women have served under the UN flag with distinction and courage. During that period, over 3,500 of them have lost their lives in the service of peace.

Several current peacekeepers share their personal stories on why they chose to serve this noble mission.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[INTERVIEW: 'Our peacekeepers are saving lives every day' – new UN peacekeeping chief](#)