

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

VIDEO MESSAGE ON THE DAY OF INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPERS

29 May, 2003

Friends and fellow peacekeepers,

I am delighted to greet you on the first Day of International Peacekeepers. This day commemorates the sacrifice and selfless commitment of peacekeepers serving throughout the world. It celebrates what UN peacekeepers have done, in so many countries, to relieve suffering and reconcile warring parties.

Fifty-five years ago, soldiers were sent on to the battlefield under a new flag and with a new mission: a mission of peace. That mission was without precedent in human history. It was an attempt to confront and defeat the worst in man with the best in man; to counter violence with tolerance, might with moderation, and war with peace.

Peacekeeping missions today are much more complex than they were then. The duties and responsibilities of peacekeepers have grown.

Of course, we still undertake the critically important task of building confidence through monitoring ceasefires and demilitarised zones.

But today's peacekeepers are also engaged in policing and training, serving as judges and prosecutors; administering health and education; ensuring that human rights and gender equality are observed. They have built administrations in Kosovo and East Timor. And in Afghanistan, they are helping the new authorities establish the rule of law.

Today, there are nearly 40,000 UN peacekeepers deployed in thirteen missions on three continents. They come from 89 countries. No figures, however, can do justice to the ultimate sacrifice that more than eighteen hundred peacekeepers have made over this half-century. On this day, we pay tribute to each one of them.

The mission of UN peacekeeping will continue. Peacekeeping by itself cannot end a war. But it can help prevent a recurrence of fighting. Above all, it gives time and space for conflict resolution. It gives peace a chance.

I am proud to salute the peacekeepers serving today, and to pay tribute to those who served in the past. Your sacrifice has made the world a safer place.

Thank you very much.