

Second 'Day of United Nations Peacekeepers' - 29 May 2004

The 'International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers' is an excellent opportunity to highlight the values defended by our soldiers during United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions.

The UN was established after the Second World War as the global authority responsible for the maintenance of peace and security in the world. The four pillars of the United Nations are:

- the maintenance of international peace and security, to settle disputes by peaceful means and refrain from threatening or using force against other States
- develop good neighbourship amongst States and facilitate social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom
- promote international cooperation to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small
- harmonize the efforts of States regarding international peace and security

In order to promote the efforts for world peace the UN can, in parallel with the initiation of diplomatic efforts and financial aid, launch peacekeeping operations. Consequently, the Member States will be invited to contribute some peacekeeping troops. The soldiers under command and control of the UN are called: "Blue Helmets".

Belgium, as a founding member of the UN, belonging to the first group of representatives of 50 countries signing the UN Charter on 26 June 1945, has always actively contributed to UN peacekeeping operations. The four above mentioned pillars of the UN Charter are nowadays at least as relevant as they were in 1945 and continue to justify the Belgian participation in four UN peacekeeping operations: UNTSO (Lebanon, Israel and Syria), UNMOGIP (India and Pakistan), UNMIK (Kosovo) and MONUC (Democratic Republic of Congo).

Currently, there are 14 UN peacekeeping operations, requiring 51000 troops on a permanent basis. Our Belgian 'Blue Helmets' contribute this way to the work commenced by their predecessors, tragically from which 21 lost their lives in UN peacekeeping operations. Over-the-horizon missions in Burundi, Haiti and Sudan will possibly further increase the total required number of UN peacekeepers till 78000.

Besides the Belgian contribution to UN directed peacekeeping operations, Belgium equally supports peace operations mandated by the UN Security Council, nowadays directed by regional organizations or coalitions promoting peace and security, as this is the case in Afghanistan and the Balkan. Belgium remains definitely a frontrunner regarding the prerequisite that a peace support operation can take place only after approval by the UN Security Council.

However, after a UN resolution, stipulating a peacekeeping mandate, there need to be sufficient support by the 191 Member States, as much through troop contributions as financial support, in order to provide the means to execute the mandate.

Our 'Blue Helmets' who contribute to world peace confirm the Belgian support of the UN principles and ideals, being at the same time Peace Ambassadors for our country in conflict-torn regions.