

Representing the Organization at its best



The celebration of World Peacekeepers Day, 29 May comes at a time of record breaking activities by the United Nations in peacekeeping. 120,000 military, police and civilians (see fact box) are serving worldwide under the blue flag. 15 peace operations are currently directed and supported by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

The UN General Assembly decided in 2002 to observe the International Day of World Peacekeepers on 29 May which marks the anniversary of the creation of the first peacekeeping mission in 1948 when the [United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation](#) (UNTSO) was established to monitor the ceasefire after the [1948 Arab-Israeli War](#)

Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General highlights the “heavy sacrifices” of UN staff in his message on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers: “The tragedies that have befallen United Nations peacekeepers already this year are a sobering reminder of the risks entailed in their important work for peace.”

In recent months, the United Nations has suffered a series of tragedies in rapid succession. In early April, seven personnel were murdered in an attack on a UN compound in Afghanistan. Just a few days later, 32 lives, many of them UN staff, were lost in the crash of a plane serving the United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Last year 173 peacekeepers lost their lives due to natural disasters, violence, accidents and disease, including more than 100 in the single, terrible blow of the January earthquake in Haiti. Since the first UN Peacekeeping mission was established in 1948, [more than 2,900 military, police and civilian personnel have lost their lives](#) in the service of peace as a result of acts of violence, accidents and disease.

The observance of the International Day has two purposes, which are to honour the memory of the UN peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the cause of peace; and to pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in UN Peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage.

On 29 May, UN offices, alongside Member States and non-governmental organizations, hold solemn events to honour fallen peacekeepers.

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

In addition, the [Dag Hammarskjöld Medal](#) is awarded posthumously to the peacekeepers who have fallen while serving in the cause of peace, during the preceding year. “As we remember the heavy sacrifices of our staff, we also hail their accomplishments,” Mr. Ban said in his message on the International Day citing current activities from supporting the Southern Sudan referendum to helping resolve the post-electoral crisis in Côte d’Ivoire; and from the training, capacity-building and institutional development of police in Timor-Leste to patrolling the hills of southern Lebanon. “The United Nations blue helmets have represented the Organization at its best: restoring stability, fostering reconciliation and nurturing hope for a better future.”