

## Closing Remarks for Peacekeeper's Day

Your excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be with you all today for the 16<sup>th</sup> annual conference for International Day of UN Peacekeepers. As peacekeeping marks its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is time to look beyond the problems we all recognise, and instead look to create a constructive dialogue between key stakeholders and partners to make UN peacekeeping great again.

I know too well the challenges that the peacekeeping operations face in today's times. As a former peacekeeper and only woman of my draft during deployment, I have witnessed UN peacekeeping at its best and its worse.

But first, I want to talk about today's conference.

I would firstly like to thank the staff at the Royal United Services Institute for their hard work in putting the event together. You have been year-long partners of UNA-UK and for that I want to thank you greatly. I had personally the privilege to work with Mrs von Hippel and RUSI, and I do think that their academic excellence is remarkable and should also be more supported by us all.

Moving on, I would also like to thank the dedicated volunteers of UNA-Westminster. Volunteers are a vital component of every great institution and charity. From me personally, I do value your time and know that your time commitments and tireless efforts to UNA-UK will not be forgotten. I want to thank in particular David Wardrop, who organised the very moving memorial service we held at lunch.

Also grateful to everyone at UNA-UK, in particular Maria Villatoro, for their support in putting on what was a joint event by all three organisations.

Of course, this event would not have been possible without generous contributions. Therefore, I want to highlight the generous contribution from the High Commission of Canada and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. UNA-UK runs on donations and sponsorships by institutions and people's support such as yourself. Thank you all for your everlasting supporting.

Last but definitely not least, thank you Ian for your insightful and inspiring keynote speech, to the minister Mark Lancaster MP for his message of introduction. And, of course, a warm thank you to all our other speakers and chairs.

Today's event has given us a lot to think about. I would like to compliment today's discussions with some key thoughts and take-aways on how to keep UN peacekeeping going strong in its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year.

I would like to briefly acknowledge three key areas where improvement is needed in order to make UN peacekeeping relevant and glorious again as it once was.

As you could read on the UNA-UK website: 'the UK has a commendable track record of UN peacekeeping': financially, historically and through its renewal commitments in Somalia and South Sudan. These are timely investments, as only on May 21<sup>st</sup>, News24 reported that there have been recent clashes in Sudan's western war torn region with devastation been witnessed, such as new displacements and burning of villages.

This recent event show us that UN peacekeeping remains relevant as it creates a vital tool for dialogue and protection for and between civilians in conflict areas.

The issue with the up rise of new conflicts is that peacekeepers are there to uphold peace and protect civilians, but should not take active part in the conflict itself as combatants.

However, due to the nature of conflict from its core, UN peacekeepers have recurrently been targets of ambushes, killings and violence. UN peacekeeping bears the burden for over 3000 deaths since its creation in 1948. According to RUSI, 'fatalities in 2017 was at its highest level since 1994'.

These losses, the commitment and hard work of the remaining 90,905 uniformed active personnel from all around the world needs to be acknowledged and supported.

Therefore, due to the unpredictable environment that UN peacekeepers are often deployed to, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has launched on March 28<sup>th</sup> the 'Action for Peacekeeping' initiative, which aims at 'refocusing peacekeeping with realistic expectations; making peacekeeping missions stronger and safer and mobilizing greater support for political solutions and for well structured, well-equipped and well trained forces'. Violent incident such as the one that occurred in Juba two years ago and in Semuliki in December have triggered the creation of this initiative and show that the UN is able to reform where needed. However, this gives us no time to sit and rest as much is still to be done.

Another topic which makes Action for Peacekeepers a new fresh breath of air within the dusty bureaucracy of the UN is the topic of women in UN peacekeeping.

This topic is definitely a topic close to my heart. As mentioned before, a former peacekeeper myself, I want to emphasise the importance of the involvement and inclusion of women in peacekeeping. Women are able to do the same tasks as men and yet they have very particular skills that complement the world of male soldiers on the ground, such as the approach of local women and communities which welcome women more than men due to the violence these communities and women face from the hands of local men.

Sadly, according to the Council on Foreign Relations, less than 4% of soldiers and 10% of police deployed to UN missions are females. This is not of a big difference if one goes back and compares these numbers to the numbers ten years ago. Therefore, one of the ever-lasting legacies of UN peacekeeping is and remains the slow bureaucracy.

At such a pace, by the time we reach the right solutions many other issues will have already replaced this solution. This is the new normality and the environment we all live and work in. It is time to invest restricted funds that address concretely the UN and UN peacekeeping's bureaucratic framework in order to help it cope with the fast-moving environment of today and the future.

To close off, I want to talk a bit about UNA-UK and why I have joined their ranks as patron a year and a half ago.

The organisation of which I am a patron, UNA-UK, is committed to improving and supporting peacekeeping. We are the only charity in the UK dedicated to making the case for an effective UN.

UNA-UK is working hard to make peacekeeping fit for purpose, through policy debates such as the one you have heard today, through its lobbying and advocacy and evidence to Parliamentary Select Committees, and through our 'mission justice' campaign which fights to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping by demanding that criminal acts are met with a criminal justice-based responses.

As an organisation, we strongly believe in UN peacekeeping, and we were delighted when – two years ago – the UK decided to double its troop commitment. That commitment lasts until 2020. We hope, and

expect, that it will be at least continued at that same level, but perhaps today could be the start of something bigger.

I very much hope that the minister and other relevant officials will come away from today enthused and ready to think big when it comes to the UK's future contribution.

Please visit our website at [una.org.uk](http://una.org.uk) to find out more about our campaigns, and how you can best support us in our activities.

And thank you all for coming and participating and paying your respects.

*This transcript of remarks presented at the conference was provided by Her Royal Highness Princess Tessy of Luxembourg. The views expressed in these remarks are her's alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of RUSI or any other institution.*