



Multilateralism in Action

Marking the 76th International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers with Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix

Jean-Pierre Lacroix¹

Every day, peacekeepers protect countless lives, both through their immediate presence and by contributing to building the conditions for a sustainable peace. I've witnessed this remarkable effect first hand myself every time I travel to the field. During a recent visit to a camp for displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Ituri province, I saw our peacekeepers protecting some 100,000 civilians displaced as a result of ongoing fighting. The dedication and commitment of our peacekeepers can mean the difference between life and death for these vulnerable communities. At the same time, what I've seen on the ground reinforces my determination to ensure we do everything we can to live up to these considerable challenges.

The fragility of a hard-won peace and continued stability is also evident in southern Lebanon. There, UN peacekeepers continue to serve under the daily threat of escalating violence. Regular exchanges of fire across the blue line have resulted in significant destruction and displacement and casualties including among the civilian population. Many of the UN peacekeeping mission's positions have also been hit; with several peacekeepers sustaining injuries. Nonetheless, our blue helmets continue to play a critical role in mitigating the risk of further escalation. They continue to patrol day and night and they remain the only means through which communication can be ensured between the Israeli Defense Forces and the

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Lebanese Armed Forces. Absence of this deconfliction channel could easily lead to an unintentional misunderstanding or a tragic miscalculation. In Lebanon, in Ituri and wherever the blue helmets are deployed, the challenges are large and the risks larger.

These are just two examples of what UN peacekeepers can do. Not only can their direct presence provide security, but their other activities such as monitoring of ceasefires and facilitation of communication between parties—by sustaining or creating conditions for political dialogue— also help protect lives.

We cannot ignore the fact, however, that many places in the world today, especially where peacekeepers serve, are facing acute deterioration of the security and political environment. Peacekeeping must continue to evolve and adapt to challenging conditions, particularly through greater efforts to keep peacekeepers and the communities we serve safe and secure. We must reap the benefits of the new tools and technologies available today while preventing and mitigating their weaponization against us wherever possible. This includes for threats such as unmanned aerial vehicles and misinformation and disinformation.

We are also striving to increase the role of women in peacekeeping. More women in peacekeeping means a more effective peacekeeping. While we have made progress in the numbers of women serving, we still need to do more, especially in senior military positions. Our peacekeepers are also taking action to empower women in the communities they serve, by promoting their participation in political processes and their empowerment as voters, candidates, elected officials, and community leaders.

Recent examples of the important contributions that women make to peacekeeping is the service of Major Ahlem Douzi. A Tunisian peacekeeper deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Major Douzi has supported the Congolese authorities in the investigation of crimes against civilians and peacekeepers. In recognition of her work, she is this year's recipient of the United Nations Trailblazer Award for Women Justice and Corrections Officers. Major Radhika Sen of India, also serving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who was awarded the Military Gender Advocate of the Year in 2023, made tremendous efforts to ensure women in conflict zones were supported and protected. Both Major Sen and Major Douzi are role models not just for women—whether in peacekeeping or beyond—but also

for all peacekeepers, who can draw inspiration from their dedication and commitment to their important work with the UN and positively impacting the communities in which they serve.

Despite all our efforts to continuously improve peacekeeping as a tool, we also need greater political unity among Member States, in particular in the Security Council to support our ongoing efforts. The council provides the mandates upon which peacekeeping relies and Peacekeeping can only be as strong as our Member States' unity, commitment, and dedication. Today's divisions among Member States, are detrimental to the cause of peace and hinder those who work for it every day.

A renewed commitment to multilateral approaches to addressing crises, based on mutual trust and solidarity would help to reinvigorate the UN's critical role in peace and security for millions of people in conflict-affected areas. In the interim, peacekeepers continue their important lifesaving work preserving ceasefires, protecting civilians, removing landmines and explosive remnants of war, standing up security sector institutions, advance political processes and offer a suite of options and new models depending on the needs of the populations we serve and the mandates we are given.

As I look towards future possibilities, I draw encouragement in the present from the strong and indeed expanding support that peacekeeping enjoys amongst Member States and in particular the troop and police contributing communities. At the 2023 Ghana Peacekeeping Ministerial we saw strong support for our work, including in the form of new pledges for more uniformed personnel and capabilities. More than 120 countries currently contribute troops and police to our missions. Many of them are involved in more than one situation where peacekeeping missions are deployed. There is widespread recognition that peacekeeping is a tangible manifestation of networked multilateralism in action through the visible presence of our blue helmets on the ground. This is an important asset to the UN and the international community as a whole.

But those who wear the blue helmet often do so at great cost. Since 1948, UN peacekeeping's women and men working day in and day out to build and nurture a fragile peace and help protect civilians have often fallen victim to violence—over 4,300 peacekeepers have given their lives serving under the blue flag, while many others have been injured. We honour their service by ensuring that peacekeeping today is ready for tomorrow's challenges.

Peacekeeping contexts also pose dangers for others who serve the same communities. Many humanitarian staff have lost their lives or been injured in places where UN peacekeepers are deployed. In fact, this underscores a crucial point: peacekeeping is not alone in representing multilateralism in action but instead relies heavily on partnerships. It cannot and has never been the one and only solution to crises. Meeting today's challenges will depend not only on Member State unity but on strong partnerships with humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organizations and the regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations that are particularly well positioned to contribute to ongoing peace efforts.

I believe that by drawing upon the individual strengths of a wide range of partners, the United Nations can continue to offer a central pathway to resolving crises. Peacekeeping can truly be a tool for peace in a world where conflicts are multiplying. Redoubled efforts towards multilateral unity, as well heightened attention to the challenging contexts of individual missions and greater collective engagement with political initiatives and processes are the most sustainable routes to a lasting peace.

About the Author

Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix

Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix is the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations. Mr. Lacroix brings to the position over 25 years of political and diplomatic experience, with a focus on multilateral organizations, and on United Nations activities and programmes. Mr. Lacroix served from 2014 to 2017 as Director for United Nations, International Organizations, Human Rights and Francophonie at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His previous appointments include Ambassador of France to Sweden, Chief of Protocol of France, Deputy Permanent Representative at the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, Deputy Chief of Mission at the French Embassy in Prague and First Secretary then Second Counsellor at the French Embassy in Washington. He also served as Advisor at the Cabinet of the French Prime Minister. Born on 2 May 1960, Mr. Lacroix holds BAs from the Institute of Economic and Commercial Sciences (ESSEC), the Institute for Political Studies - Sciences Po Paris and the National School of Administration (ENA), as a graduate of the Class "Michel de Montaigne."