

USG Lacroix's opening statement on behalf of the Secretary-General
UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Accra, Ghana
6 December 2023

1806 words

Mr. Vice President, Honorable Ministers, Excellencies,

it is a pleasure to be with you today.

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to the Republic of Ghana for hosting the 2023 United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial. Hosting such an event is a tremendous undertaking that requires strong political commitment, months of planning and no small amount of patience.

Ghana is the sixth largest contributor of UN troops and police as well as an elected member of the Security Council. Its peacekeepers have an exemplary track record, and it is one of the few troop-contributing countries that has met our uniformed gender parity targets for troops, police and staff officers. I applaud Ghana for playing such a significant role in maintaining international peace and security.

I would also like to thank the co-chairs of the Ministerial process who hosted important preparatory meetings in the run up to today's Ministerial.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

For 75 years, United Nations peacekeepers have saved and improved lives in the world's most fragile political and security situations. They are working in difficult and, often dangerous, conditions to achieve extraordinary outcomes for the communities they serve.

The contribution of the two million women and men who have served since the first peacekeeping mission was deployed in 1948 is immense.

They have helped many countries successfully navigate the difficult path from war to peace, from Liberia and Namibia, to Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Timor Leste and others.

Our operations have an exceptionally strong record of preventing and reducing violence as well as preventing repeat wars from recurring.

Peacekeeping operations also continue to preserve ceasefires, protect civilians, mediate local conflicts, and strengthen institutions, wherever possible. UNIFIL, for example, supports efforts

to de-escalate tensions along the Blue Line between Israel and Lebanon, including by liaising with both sides.

And every single day, peacekeepers protect hundreds of thousands of civilians, in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.

We are exceptionally proud of peacekeepers' personal sacrifice and achievements in extremely challenging conditions.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincerest thanks to all the troop and police contributors with us today. And I would like to pay tribute to the memory of all peacekeepers who have sacrificed their lives, particularly the 311 peacekeeping personnel who died in the service of peace in Mali, including 174 who died in hostile acts.

The ultimate objective of peacekeeping is to help resolve conflict by supporting parties to secure and implement peace agreements and related political processes.

Its success, in this regard, over its 75-year history should not be forgotten in the fog of war that continues to ravage the world's most fragile nations and populations.

But we must **recognize that peacekeeping is not a magic wand and it cannot** succeed alone.

Securing sustainable peace requires the political will and active engagement of United Nations member states.

At this Peacekeeping Ministerial, I look to all of you to provide a **political recommitment to UN Peacekeeping**. We are also grateful to Member States for demonstrating their commitment to through new pledges. They will help meet current and future challenges and needs as well as new or expanded partnerships on capacity-building, training, and equipping.

Today, more than 70,000 civilian, military and police personnel are deployed in 12 missions, with the mission in Mali about to complete its drawdown.

The challenges peacekeeping missions face are greater than ever. Increasing division among Member States has weakened our collective capacity to support political and peace processes. Conflict is more complex and multi-layered. Peacekeepers are facing terrorists, criminals, armed groups, and their allies who have access to powerful modern weapons, and a vested interest in perpetuating the chaos in which they thrive.

Missions are also facing a growing threat from the weaponization of digital tools, with hate speech, misinformation, and disinformation rife, undermining our efforts, and fueling violence against our personnel, partners, and communities.

Further complicating this is the fact that most peacekeeping operations, particularly our large, so-called multidimensional missions in Africa, have long been affected by a discrepancy between

their capacities and what is demanded of them by the Security Council and host countries. Financial resources are often inadequate for their mandated tasks. For example, the \$5.5 billion budget for peacekeeping operations worldwide is *less* than the New York Police Department's \$6.1 billion budget, even though we have 30,000 more personnel¹. Moreover, the UN Peacekeeping budget comprises just 0.3% of global military spending.

Our peacekeepers are saving countless lives for a relatively small investment, but for our missions to enable countries to reach a durable peace, we need your full support.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its inception, **peacekeeping has evolved to adapt to the changing needs on the ground. And we continue to do our utmost to do so.**

I welcome the opportunity of this Ministerial **to enable us to collectively take stock of what we have achieved in the five years since we started implementing** the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative.

Despite the challenges we are facing, we continue to do our utmost to strengthen the impact and effectiveness of our operations.

We continue to do what we can to **advance political solutions** and support sustainable peace, including through facilitating political settlements and supporting locally led conflict resolution. For example, the Central African Republic's peace process continues to benefit from MINUSCA's political engagement and robust security strategy to deter armed groups. In the DRC, MONUSCO is providing significant logistical support to the electoral process, at the request of the Congolese authorities, including transporting 128 tons of materials, in support of the Independent National Electoral Commission in North and South Kivu and Ituri provinces. The mission has also provided dedicated training and workshops for Congolese women to enable their full participation in elections, as voters and candidates alike.

Ensuring the **safety and security of peacekeepers** to enable them to implement their mandates is a top priority. Since we started to implement the Action Plan to Improve the Security of UN Peacekeepers, peacekeeper deaths due to malicious acts have dropped from a high of 57 in 2017 to seven so far this year.

But one peacekeeper lost remains one too many.

¹ Approved peacekeeping budget for 2023 excluding drawdown budget for Mali, Budget for NYPD for 2023.

The new and evolving threats we face, including from Improvised Explosive Devices, has required us to continuously adapt to mitigate the risk. We have improved the training and equipping of uniformed personnel, strengthened peacekeeping-intelligence and deployed the requisite Explosive Ordnance and IED Disposal Units. But, together, we have much more to do as we confront this threat which is becoming more sophisticated and deadly.

Improving safety and security and **performance and accountability** are two sides of the same coin. Progress in one area is dependent on progress on the other. We have made significant strides in reconfiguring our missions to become more flexible and agile, including in UNMISS, MONUSCO and MINSUCA.

We also continue to enhance our systems and tools for performance evaluation. We are assessing overall peacekeeping performance in line with A4P+, the performance of our missions against their mandates as well as the performance of civilian and uniformed personnel. We have no interest in conducting evaluations just for the sake of it. We use them to enable better informed decision-making and to tailor our remedial measures to specific needs.

Communicating strategically and proactively is critical to building the trust and support needed for missions to carry out their mandates. Too often, expectations outweigh the reality of mission mandates and their capacities to deliver. The priority for us is, therefore, to engage in an inclusive and interactive way with stakeholders to strengthen understanding of mission roles and responsibilities and demonstrate the tangible impact of our work.

This year, we have conducted a global campaign entitled Peace Begins with Me leveraging the 75th anniversary of peacekeeping to build support for missions. And it's been the most successful digital campaign that peacekeeping has delivered. We have also stepped up our efforts to build our strategic communications capabilities, including through more than 50 trainings and significant surge support to missions.

More must be done though to cut through the crowded, rapidly evolving communication landscape to convey stories of our success, and to confront rampant mis-disinformation and hate speech which is fueling hostility towards our missions and the communities we serve. To mitigate these sophisticated attacks, we are building strong systems to detect, analyze and respond in a whole-of-mission approach.

In addition to the myriad challenges currently before us, **United Nations peace operations are also at a critical juncture in preventing and addressing conduct and discipline** as an intrinsic element of performance. We must accept that there is an ever-present risk of misconduct in our peace operations. Most of our peacekeepers serve with honour, but every violation – whether by civilian or uniformed personnel - sets us back enormously, with the actions of a few damaging

the image and credibility of the entire UN, and adversely impacting mandate implementation. Most importantly, these acts cause immense harm to victims – which cannot and will not be tolerated. We must collectively do more, in partnership with Member States, to end sexual exploitation and abuse and we must all play our part, including through training, accountability, and support to victims.

In line with the Secretary-Generals New Agenda for Peace, we must continue to ensure that multilateral peace and security operations – including, but not limited to UN peacekeeping – remain viable tools to address crises and conflict.

For the foreseeable future, we will continue our efforts to strengthen peacekeeping through A4P and A4P+, while also looking for new ways to adapt.

I look forward to the discussions today as an opportunity to discuss innovative ideas for overcoming the challenges of today and the future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am heartened to see so many Member States here today. Peacekeeping is a partnership, and your presence is an expression of your commitment.

We need your support now more than ever.

Particularly, your strong and unified political support to encourage host countries and warring parties to reduce if not end hostilities. The United Nations does not have enough leverage to do so on its own.

We need your financial support to ensure that peacekeeping operations have the personnel and capacities to implement the mandates given to them by the Security Council.

And we need your support as troop and police contributors to ensure that missions have the right capabilities in the right place and at the right time, with the right mindsets.

Thank you for your presence here in Accra and thank you for the support that you will pledge today.