

REMARKS BY UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL JEAN-MARIE GUÉHENNO DURING THE DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD MEDAL AWARDS CEREMONY

31 May 2006, 11.00 a.m., Library Auditorium

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

During the course of the last year, more than 80,000 women and men from over 100 countries contributed their skills and expertise to the cause of UN peacekeeping. They worked tirelessly, courageously and, sometimes, under very difficult conditions, with one aim in mind: to help resolve conflict and pave the way to a lasting peace.

While their work is not in vain, we are all aware that the extraordinary efforts of these UN peacekeepers have come at great personal cost. I regret to say that during 2005, 125 of our colleagues and friends from 46 countries lost their lives while in the service of UN peace operations. 85 were soldiers, 13 police officers and 27 civilians.

It is important that today - in particular - we remind ourselves that the peacekeepers we honour were not just numbers; they were human beings, like all of us. They had personal lives; they had families, they had dreams and plans for when they returned to their home countries. They put their personal lives on hold and, instead, braved violent and difficult conditions, in countries thousands of miles away from their own, and eventually made the ultimate sacrifice: giving their life in the service of others.

I feel great sadness to stand here before you this year - as I did other years - to commemorate those colleagues and friends who we lost in 2005. This is the sad reality of sending peacekeepers to challenging and often dangerous parts of the world. As the Secretary-General mentioned at the beginning of this ceremony, 33 peacekeepers have already lost their lives in 2006. The different events this week in Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we lost a Nepalese peacekeeper this weekend, clearly demonstrate the fragility of the peace we are working to serve and secure, and the precarious environments in which we operate.

In order to carry out our tasks, we require the support and partnership of the Member States. I wish to thank the representatives of those Member States here with us today who continue to support UN peacekeeping despite the difficulties. The support your countries extend to peacekeeping operations of the United Nations bears witness to the great importance the international community attaches to this unique and vital endeavour. It is a reminder that United Nations peacekeeping remains a powerful expression of the extraordinary vision of international solidarity for peace and security which was enshrined in the United Nations Charter more than half a century ago.

The peacekeepers we remember here today, as well as the other 2,000 peacekeepers who have given their lives since the inception of UN peacekeeping, died for those ideals set out in the Charter. They did not die in vain. The UN, as well as those nations who have directly benefited from the presence of UN peacekeepers, profoundly understand the contribution made by these peacekeepers towards the securing of a lasting peace. We can do nothing less than be eternally grateful for their services. Their courage, their selflessness and their sacrifice is a lesson to us all.

Thank you.
