

7 November 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
at the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of United Nations Peacekeeping
Operations**

Excellencies,
Madame Deputy Secretary-General,
Friends All,

I am pleased to open this commemorative meeting of the General Assembly marking the peacekeeping work of the United Nations over the past 60 years. I wish to join representatives of Regional Groups and the Host Country by highlighting the remarkable history of peacekeeping operations and celebrating the partnership with the UN system that has evolved over the decades.

Today's peacekeeping operations – all 20 of them, requiring more than 110,000 personnel – are characterized by their unprecedented scale and complexity. They remain a key measure of the UN's ability to meet its Charter mandate and the expectations of the world's peoples.

But we should keep in mind the astonishing – and I would say shameful – fact that the current annual budget for United Nations peacekeeping is approximately \$5.6 billion, which represents one half of one per cent of global military spending. This mad asymmetry dooms our best intentions.

As I speak, our Peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) is in crisis. The reports of violence against civilians in the conflict zones highlight a terrifying campaign of sexual attacks against girls and women that may be unprecedented in its scale and brutality. It is estimated that MONUC has one peacekeeper for each 10,000 civilians in the conflict areas. This makes MONUC's mandate impossible to achieve.

This glaring example serves to remind us that despite our best intentions, the bitter reality of the conflicts in many countries dwarf the ability of peacekeepers to fulfill their mandates. The DRC conflicts points to the enormous importance of finding political solutions to these large-scale conflicts and the need to redouble efforts to resolve them through broadly orchestrated diplomatic means.

There are other peacekeeping operations that are of smaller scale but must be resolved. In Western Sahara, for example, the decolonization process has been stalled since the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was deployed to monitor the ceasefire and organize a referendum in 1991. Despite the best efforts of the diplomatic community, the territory remains occupied, and I am personally concerned about the human rights abuses taking place and have requested that the High Commissioner for Human Rights release his report that was completed 2006.

In this regard, I offer to make myself available to assist all parties in any way I can to help resolve this longstanding issue, which risks being forgotten by the international community.

Because a peacekeeping mandate is not specifically spelled out in the Charter, this essential work has had to evolve as innovative partnership nurtured by different organs of the United Nations. The interaction among these different areas of responsibilities of the United Nations is a dynamic that I have chosen to highlight during the 63rd session of the General Assembly.

In this regard, the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat enjoy a close partnership that has grown and responded to ever-changing circumstances over the decades. This partnership remains central to whatever successes and failures we have encountered and to the improvements that we wish to make in our peacekeeping efforts.

We celebrate the broad participation of troop-donating countries by industrialized and developing countries alike. This broad-based participation helps to assure the credibility of each intervention. The principles of neutrality, transparency and universality lend them their legitimacy and must be treasured and defended by all of us. The slightest abuse of these principles is immediately noted and the damage to the legitimacy and credibility of our efforts is difficult to repair.

The restructuring of peacekeeping operations, arising from catastrophic failures in the 1990s and highlighted in the ground-breaking Brahimi Report of 2000, should enhance our ability to identify, coordinate and sustain increasingly complex operations.

The General Assembly has the responsibility to ensure that operations are equipped with the tools needed to fulfill their mandates. But, almost without exception, they are still being sent into harm's way with insufficient resources at their commands. It makes sense that troop-contributing countries have more of a say in determining the resources required to minimize the risk and maximize the chances of success of the operations their troops are committed to.

Indeed, the troop-contributing countries should be involved at the earliest stage when the Security Council mandates an operation and later be involved in any changes in the mandate as they are required. This closer involvement will create more reality checks to ensure that operations are well conceived and administered from the outset.

Let us reaffirm our determination to strengthen this very special UN partnership so that it can maintain that delicate and dynamic interplay of military, political and financial realities to make our peacekeeping operations effective. But just as importantly, let us always focus on ways to bring nations together to solve problems that will make these operations the rare exception in the years to come.

Thank you.