

Under-Secretary-General Hervé Ladsous
Remarks at Dag Hammarskjöld Medal Awards Ceremony on the International Day of
United Nations Peacekeepers
New York, 19 May 2016

Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Friends,

Thank you all for being present here today, as we honour our fallen brothers and sisters and pay tribute to their courage and sacrifice with the Dag Hammarskjöld medal recognising those that have made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of peace.

This year's theme is "Honouring our Heroes", and today we pay tribute not just to those 129 peacekeepers – military, police, and civilians heroes -- who have lost their lives in 2015 in the service of peace and humanity, but we also honour the memories of those who perished in the previous years and whose dedication and achievements we continue to build upon. We also remember the 37 colleagues, who have sadly died this year while serving the UN in peace operations.

On behalf of the entire United Nations Peacekeeping family – more than 124,000 of us - I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families of our fallen colleagues. It is the families – the spouses, the children, the parents – of our peacekeepers who go through the daily anxieties and stress of having a loved one deployed in a distant place for months, and I thank them profusely for their sacrifices in the name of peace.

Excellencies,

Today, is also a stark reminder of the dangers we continue to confront as we deploy in some of the most hostile and austere environments in the world. Just yesterday we tragically lost five of our colleagues in Mali when our convoy came under attack in Aguelhok. Our peacekeepers continue to find themselves bearing the brunt of daily attacks and confronting extremist groups, who are determined to undermine the peace process. While we spare no effort towards enhancing security and deploying preventive measures, there is no escaping the reality of dangers that our peacekeepers face each day.

And our peacekeepers continue to make a real difference, every day on the ground in other parts of the world. In the Central African Republic, our uniformed and civilian personnel have promoted peace and stability and supported the national authorities in two back-to-back elections which represents a significant milestone in the country's political transition.

In South Sudan, our peacekeepers are supporting the implementation of the peace agreement as well as continuing their protection of civilians' efforts, including by providing physical protection to over 170,000 civilians in camps across the country.

Excellencies,

As the demand for our Blue Helmets continues to remain high, we have undertaken several initiatives in the past year towards shaping the current context for UN Peacekeeping to enable

us to remain relevant, effective and a step ahead of this changing environment.

We continue to seek new technologies, which, when applied appropriately, are critical for improving mobility, increasing situation awareness, strengthening our efficient use of resources and taking better care of the environment.

Our focus must also remain on addressing critical gaps both at the Mission and Headquarters level and on improving our performance. While a vast majority of our peacekeepers serve with honour, courage and integrity, there are cases where those entrusted to protect exploit the most vulnerable. I condemn the actions of these individuals and I remain fully committed to working with our member state partners to prevent and address misconduct by our personnel.

Peacekeeping is a partnership and we depend on the continued cooperation and goodwill of Member States, host governments, and regional and local actors for us to succeed.

Excellencies,

These medals that you accept today on behalf of the families of our Peacekeepers are a solid symbol of our gratitude for their sacrifice and our commemoration of their service.

I once again express my heartfelt thanks to our heroes in the field – our men and women – for their courage and tireless service.

Thank you.