

**Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Susana  
Malcorra, to the UN Security Council,**

**23 January 2009**

Mr. President, distinguished members of the Security Council, invited guests

It gives me great pleasure to come before you today as the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support in the first of what I hope will be a series of discussions on the future of UN peacekeeping. In this context I welcome the opportunity to signal to you some of the challenges we are facing on the support side. Indeed, the cross-fertilization of ideas between the so called ‘support’ and ‘substantive’ sides of UN peacekeeping is absolutely critical.

My colleague and friend, Alain Le Roy, has clearly articulated that we, in the UN’s peacekeeping community, are at a new “watershed”, after a decade of unprecedented expansion. Structurally, Secretary-General Ban recognized this soon after he took office, when he proposed the creation of a new department specifically dedicated to staff and equip UN field-based peace operations. The UN’s newest department – the Department of Field Support – now supports 16 peacekeeping missions, 18 special political missions and administers 22,000 + international and local civilian staff. It operates and maintains more than 250 medical facilities, 300 aircraft, 18,000 vehicles, and 40,000 computers.

There is a growing recognition that field support issues are gaining in prominence and stature. The Department now sits at the table as an equal partner in crucial discussions at every stage of the mission life cycle –

planning, deployment, sustainment, reconfiguration and eventually liquidation. When problems are encountered, we are able to engage at the political level with Member States and partner organizations, to find solutions. As it happens, I have just returned, two days ago, from precisely such an engagement: a third round of discussions with the Sudanese Government and the African Union to facilitate the free flow of people and materials for our mission in Darfur. I am happy to report that as a result, we have been, thus far, able to meet the agreed-upon deployment targets.

The creation of the department has also led to greater clarity of purpose, an improved focus on delivery of service to the field – becoming “field-centric”, if you will. The political direction is determined by DPKO – in partnership with the Member States of course – and it is up to my team to focus “simply” on getting the right staff on board, securing sufficient financing and providing the necessary equipment and logistics for the operation. The beauty of having a narrow mandate is that it is easier to establish baselines and measure progress. One of our current challenges is how to calibrate that support to the increasingly varied size and nature of different field presences. I believe there is an opportunity for a more targeted, nuanced approach.

In addition, we are making good progress in developing capacities in the different support streams. For example, we will soon have a specialized in-house capacity advising both departments on how to manage and mitigate risk – a badly needed source of expertise. The establishment of a Conduct and Discipline Unit at Headquarters several years ago – now housed in DFS – and the related teams in the missions, is starting to pay dividends. We are

also developing the capacity to introduce “greening” aspects in all our operations.

The challenges laid out by Alain are indeed daunting – even intimidating, and no less important for DFS

- the rapid expansion in breadth, scope and complexity of missions;
- an increasingly hostile security landscape in a number of different locations;
- the gap between the scope of the mandates and the resources available to perform them.

From the support perspective, I would also add to this list the difficulties of working within a regulatory framework not designed for fast-paced operations deployed in high-risk environments. The resulting tension is simply unfair: either we comply with the existing rules, but face the ire of this body when we do not deliver services in a timely manner or we get the job done by testing the limits of the rules – risking censure from the oversight bodies. We must be able to find a way to reconcile results with compliance, getting things done with due process.

While I agree we are not in a crisis, we are nevertheless under great strain. We need to reflect, take stock and think deeply about the way forward.

I am the first to acknowledge that the new Department – DFS – is still finding its feet and that we have some ways to go. A more elaborate assessment of the restructuring exercise will be put before the General

Assembly this spring. But let me just say at this juncture that putting in place a new structure, new staff and new systems and properly embedding these changes takes time and perseverance under any circumstances. The fact that this process has taken place at the same time as peacekeeping has undergone a 30 percent increase in authorized strength of its personnel, has truly tested the limits of the new structure.

The new missions – UNAMID and MINURCAT – are two of the most complex and difficult operations ever contemplated by the UN. The task of moving materiel and people in these regions would challenge the most solid, stable and mature of structures. With a new and untried support concept emerging from the recent resolution on Somalia, a country even more challenged by security and infrastructure constraints, DFS has an even more daunting task ahead in the year to come.

Perhaps one of the advantages of having DFS at the table is that we can provide a “reality check” to discussions. In this spirit, I would like to offer some concrete illustrations which I hope demonstrate the magnitude of the “support challenges” before us:

- In Darfur – thousands of kilometers from the nearest seaport – we must move heavy equipment and supplies for the construction of 35 camps which are required to house almost 26,000 of our troops and police. The road networks are unreliable and unsafe; the existing airfield infrastructure is poor and the “wet” season halts movement and construction progress for anything up to four months a year. At a

certain point of the deployment we had 8000 containers making this journey.

- We face an even greater test in neighbouring Chad: Abéché is 2,400 kilometres from the nearest port – roughly the same distance as between London and Moscow. The sea-land route – known as the Douala Corridor - connecting the Cameroonian port of Douala to Abéché is approximately the same distance (of which 900 km are railroads). Aside from poor road conditions, the Douala corridor is, in relative terms, one of the world's most expensive commercial transportation routes.
- In Somalia, without prejudging the outcome of the Technical Assessment Mission, we can well imagine that supporting AMISOM will require logistics resources and efforts that surpass even those being made in Darfur and Chad. In addition to challenges posed by infrastructure, security, terrain and climate, and social fabric, for the first time, the UN has been requested to provide a logistical support package to a regional organization with significant level of resources attached to it.
- On a systemic level, we often struggle with the competing priorities of deploying troops, setting up the necessary infrastructure and negotiating with the host nation. Sometimes, troops are deployed prematurely because of mandate commencement pressures without having secured the necessary agreements for example on usage of land. At other times, sequencing questions arise over whether an engineering company

should deploy first to establish a battalion camp-site or whether security elements move in first to protect the engineers.

And the list of challenges goes on. I am, however, afraid that the magnitude of the operational challenges before us – “the urgent” - is often trumping a more thorough assessment of the “important”. By this I mean:

- finding a more strategic approach to doing our business;
- exploring new, more efficient and effective ways of working – “doing it right and fast”;
- achieving the kinds of “economies of scale” one would expect from a \$7+ billion global operation;
- partnering with member states, others in the UN family, regional organizations, civil society and others in meeting the support challenge; and
- finding a regulatory framework which is strong yet agile, prudent yet reasonable.

To address these concerns, we are making a concerted effort to develop the detail of this “support strategy”. The strategy, which we intend to share with Member States later this year, will explore a number of themes, including:

- (1) The notion of support “hubs” which could provide logistics and administrative support services from more secure location to missions in the region, rather than attempting to recreate a full support structure in each and every mission;

- (2) Greater delegation of managerial and administrative authority to managers in the field, while ensuring that appropriate training is provided in advance and that predefined monitoring and oversight mechanisms are in place;
- (3) A diversified approach to sourcing goods and services required for field missions from local and regional, as well as international sources – through greater use of partnerships and a broader set of suppliers and service-providers; and
- (4) A “smarter” approach to technology – with the use of different applications in the provision of aviation tasks, equipment usage, military support and rapid response. Technology must be a enabler of business particularly in the environments where we deploy.

These are, I believe, fully in line with the first track of issues Alain has mentioned where concrete, urgent action is required this year. In addition, we intend to move quickly in implementing the provisions of the recent General Assembly resolution which, we hope, will pave the way for a more flexible, mobile workforce and address the excessive vacancy and turnover rates we are experiencing in critical field positions. With the Department of Management, we are also working to develop a framework for “procurement governance” more suited to the supply needs of the field. Finally, I think we may want to pursue a more in-depth examination of the funding arrangements for peace operations, the use of trust funds, MOUs and partnership models.

On this last point, I would like to return to the idea of UN peacekeeping as a complex international partnership where many different actors play an important role. From my corporate background, I might call it a joint venture – a shared enterprise in which we all have equity and a share of the resources, direction and control. This joint venture as Alain has mentioned must be strengthened to better ready ourselves for challenges both today and tomorrow. Support is not an end in itself and DFS is not an island. The support concept works only as a key component in this wider partnership. Without strong working relations with Troop and Police Contributing Countries and the broader UN family, and without the full support of the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, the support lines to peacekeeping quickly crumble.

In the support business – perhaps more than anyone else in this equation – we will only ever be as effective as the common vision that guides this joint venture. If we are not clear on the nature of the enterprise we are supporting, the challenge of finding the most appropriate support models is compounded. If mandate makers, if policy setters, if budget developers and if troop and police contributors do not share a vision of what the joint endeavour is, then the mixed signals become extremely difficult to resource and organize around. And building a most effective and efficient support mechanism will probably remain as elusive as ever. The costs of a lack of common vision are high and efficiencies harder to find. As in all enterprises, support strategists and resource providers are at their most effective when treated as strategic enablers and brought into the dialogue

early. On top of this we must be able to agree on a contract of mutual trust in order to conduct our work together

Today's discussion should also be the start of a dialogue that is sustained across the various organs of the UN. The Secretariat of course meets each of the member states represented here today in different guises, in different chambers, at different times of the year. All too often though the messages received may be mixed, even inconsistent, depending on the forum. And of course the Secretariat is often chastised for exactly the same sin – different messages from different people in different fora. We can all improve our game on this front. My team and I are personally committed to improving the quality, frequency and form of exchanges with Member States in both formal and informal ways.

In conclusion, I join Alain in commending to you the notion that the different actors in the international partnership for peacekeeping are at a critical moment. Recent history has seen rapid and unrelenting growth. This is perhaps a vote of confidence in UN peacekeeping, but the challenges are gathering ever quicker. The magnitude of the peacekeeping enterprise requires an investment in strategy. It requires that we move together in concert, with a shared purpose and in full recognition of the challenges ahead.

