

Open Debate on International Peacekeeping Operations
26th of August, 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Mr. Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations

The Secretary-General: I thank the Government of India and Ambassador Puri for their leadership and initiative in scheduling this debate on peacekeeping.

But let me begin with this morning's most immediate developments. As members of the Council know, United Nations House in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, was struck by a car bomb around 11 a.m. local time this morning. These buildings house 26 humanitarian and development agencies of the United Nations family. I met with our staff in Abuja during a visit just two months ago. In a statement to the media, I described this terrible act as an attack on those who devote their lives to helping others.

We condemn it utterly. We do not yet have precise casualty figures, but they are likely to be considerable. Many people are dead; many more are wounded. Nigerian and international search and rescue teams have mobilized and are moving the injured to hospitals and providing emergency aid. I have asked the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, to go Nigeria immediately, and I am mobilizing the United Nations system to respond to this emergency. The Deputy Secretary-General will be accompanied by the United Nations security chief, Under-Secretary-General Gregory Starr, and will meet with Nigerian authorities upon arrival in Abuja.

On this very sad occasion, I extend my deepest sympathies to the victims and their families. The United Nations will undertake every possible effort to assist them during this difficult time. Let me say clearly: These acts of terrorism are unacceptable. They will not deter us from our vital work for the people of Nigeria and the world.

This outrageous and shocking attack is evidence that United Nations premises are increasingly being viewed as soft targets by extremist elements around the world. Peacekeeping is one of the most visible, difficult and critical roles played by the United Nations. It is also a role that only the United Nations can play in a truly global sense. Peacekeeping is an essential tool for overcoming threats to international peace and security and supporting complex transitions from conflict to stability. It requires a variety of approaches to respond to various local needs and a wide range of political realities.

To be successful, peacekeeping operations must have a clear and achievable mandate, unified political support from the Security Council, and adequate, predictable human, material and financial resources. Where this has occurred, we have seen considerable success, such as in Liberia and Timor-Leste, or with the referendum in the Sudan. Where we have struggled, we have also learned.

Since 2001, the number of uniformed personnel has doubled, reaching a high point of more than 101,000 early last year. Although the rate of growth slowed in 2010, the complexity of missions remains high, requiring ever more flexible and adaptable uniformed and civilian personnel. Indeed, we may be entering a new phase, with diverse and multifaceted situations where peacekeeping may play a role. Peacekeeping will need to evolve to meet specific demands in a variety of environments and to flexibly and nimbly bring together multiple capabilities in a coherent and effective manner. Notwithstanding the responsibility of host Governments, peacekeepers are increasingly tasked to take on the protection of civilians — placing higher demands on their work, greater scrutiny on their performance, and a growing need for sufficient resources to properly carry out such mandates.

With these shifts in mind, the New Horizon initiative of 2009 set out an agenda for strengthening peacekeeping. This has served to build a common vision and stronger partnership linking the resources of the Secretariat, the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries and the wider membership of the Organization. Unfortunately, some aspects of this partnership are under increasing pressure. The current financial climate, differing perspectives on mandated tasks, and, in some instances, the loss of host Government consent have all created tensions in our relationships.

Achieving a collective response is also complicated when key stakeholders — such as those who mandate missions, those who contribute uniformed personnel and those who are major funders — are separate groups. If these groups remain distinct even as mandates become more demanding, tensions and divisions are inevitable, with potentially negative impacts on our operations. We must continue to improve the peacekeeping partnership. We have a common responsibility to make sure that our peacekeepers are up to the task, which means ensuring both adequate support and equipment.

One way forward is outlined in the draft presidential statement to be adopted today, in which the Council requests that the Secretariat ensure that troop and police contributors are engaged early, with appropriate information, to enable effective consultations between the Council and the Secretariat. I agree with this approach and look forward to working with the Council to implement it.

We also recognize the restrictive context in which we operate, such as that presented by the global financial situation. The impact on Member States is well understood. The Secretariat will continue to seek ways to yield efficiencies. The global field support strategy is a central part of this picture. The strategy is designed to optimize efficiencies in the management of resources entrusted to the Organization by Member States through a global approach. This is a comprehensive response to key logistical and administrative challenges, and is aimed at enabling timely mission start-up and drawdown, improved provision of support, and increased transparency and accountability for resources.

The enormous role of civilian peacekeepers is also critical. Close to 20,000 civilians within peacekeeping operations are currently implementing activities in support of peace processes, encompassing security sector reform, rule of law and local governance development, human rights monitoring, disarmament, demining and the provision of complex mission support. The implementation of the findings of the recent civilian capacity review will increase our capabilities in this regard, and we look forward to the Council's support for this effort.

Early peacebuilding tasks have also become an integral part of many operations and should be implemented in an integrated manner. Partnership is the cornerstone of peacekeeping. Let us build on the relationships that now exist, and overcome potential frictions that could hinder our work. Through increased engagement, extensive dialogue and a shared understanding of our common goals, we can uphold the aims of the Charter and live up to the expectations of the people who look to us in their time of need.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the sacrifice of the thousands of colleagues and friends who have given their lives in the line of duty, and to pay tribute to all those working in peacekeeping today for their commitment to this noble cause.