

FROM THE UN UN PEACEKEEPING AND PEACE BUILDING

The United Nations was founded in 1945, after the horrors of World War 2. One of the all important primary purposes of the United Nations is the maintenance of international peace and security. Over the years the UN has helped end numerous conflicts, many in politically explosive situations, often through action of the UN security Council, the main body dealing with peace and security.

When diplomacy fails and conflicts break out the UN mediates. If a peace agreement, or a cease fire, is arranged the UN often organizes a peacekeeping force to monitor the agreement.

The UN is not a world government does not have its own military force and depends on contributions from member states. The UN's Security Council creates and defines the details and clear rules of engagement of the peacekeeping mission. Peacekeeping troops, known as blue helmets, participate under terms carefully negotiated by their governments and remain under overall authority of these governments while serving under UN operational command.

The authority to deploy peacekeepers remains with the Security Council and the governments that volunteer them as does responsibility for pay, discipline and personnel matters.

Because of the Cold War, in the first 40 years of the UN's history, only 13 peacekeeping missions were organized. During the 1990's after the end of the Cold War, the focus was more on internal civil wars rather than on inter-state conflicts.

There has been a rapid increase in the demand for peacekeeping missions as well as a greater willingness to use them. For example, since 1995, 28 new peacekeeping missions were established. Since 1945 when the UN was founded there have been 63 operations, some still active. They do everything from patrolling area of recent violence, clearing landmines, delivering aid, helping refugees and supporting free and fair elections. In 1988, the Noble Peace Prize was awarded to the UN Peacekeeper forces.

There have been successes and of course failures.

Many countries are today peaceful and stable because of peacekeeping efforts, including Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia and Mozambique and many others. Notorious failures are the slaughter in Rwanda and Bosnia. These tragic failures have occurred mostly when the Security Council, which mandates these operations, cannot agree and the operations are underfunded or limited as in Rwanda and in Darfur.

Currently there are more than 124,000 peacekeepers from 115 countries serving 15 missions around the world.

The UN is often effective as shown by a Rand Corporation study, a not particularly liberal think tank. They studied eight UN led missions and found that seven brought sustained peace.

Peacekeeping is increasingly dangerous. The International Day of Peacekeepers is annually observed on May 29. This year's wreath laying ceremony remembered the heavy loss of life of peacekeepers in the tragic earthquake in Haiti and attacks in Darfur and in Kabul, Afghanistan. In the course of 2009 and in the first few months of 2010, 218 peacekeepers lost their lives. Since 1948 the number of fatalities in peace operations was 2700.

SOME OBSERVATION AND COMMENTS

-- There is increasing interest in the creation of a standing UN force that can respond quickly to an unfolding crisis. Currently, the time lag between deciding to send troops and deploying troops can take months, involving negotiations among UN member states, getting equipment and soldiers. Kofi Annan, the previous Secretary General, compared it to that of a fire chief who is forced to raise money, find volunteers and a fire truck for each new fire. Some member states however are suspicious that it may erode their sovereignty.

--In 2000 the UN security Council passed a resolution promoting the use of women in peacekeeping operations. Since then there are an increasing number of women and they are often more effective in working with local populations.

--The UN has a volunteer program (UNV). In 2009 more than 2500 people participated in peacekeeping missions.

--Why is the world interested in Peacekeeping? The answer is that chaos is a travelling epidemic for crime,

disease and general instability crossing borders. Recent examples are Darfur and the Congo where the struggle between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda has spread, with disastrous results, to the Congo.

--Recently there have been allegations of abuse and sexual scandals among peacekeepers in the Congo and elsewhere. The UN is very concerned and is implementing serious zero tolerance procedures to cope with this terrible situation.

--Sometimes, after a period of time a peace agreement or cease fire agreement can fall apart. Then, there is no peace for the peacekeepers to monitor. To address this situation the UN has established a Peace building Commission to devise strategies for strengthening programs supporting the , sometimes difficult, transition from war to peace.

The world is a smaller place and more people are aware of conflicts and atrocities in previously unknown corners of the world and are increasingly less willing to accept them. This rise of consciousness is exciting and is to be nourished.

The UN is the main institution that is ready and can mobilize the essential cooperation needed .

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