

Speech on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the 2021 UN Seoul Peacekeeping Ministerial

Speech | 08-12-2021

Speech on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial in Seoul, 8 December 2021.

UN Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre Lacroix,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great honour to speak at this conference on behalf of minister Knapen, who unfortunately is not able to be here today.

Seven decades ago brave Koreans fought for peace alongside troops from all over the world.

Among them were Dutch volunteers, who came together in the Netherlands Detachment United Nations.

Their camaraderie helped shape the special bond between the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea.

This year we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of our bilateral relationship.

Or Hwangap, as you say in Korean.

What happened seven decades ago has shaped us in another way too.

The Korean War reminded us once again of a harsh yet valuable insight:

That the road to peace is rarely without casualties.

The Dutch Commander Marinus den Ouden, for example, who was ambushed and killed in an attack on the command post in Hoengsong, together with seventeen other Dutch soldiers.

Due to a blind spot in their intelligence, they thought that the troops approaching them were South Korean troops in retreat.

Seventy years later, we know that keeping the peace also comes with risks. And that protecting civilians is difficult, at times even impossible.

But we also know that through joint planning and action, we can more effectively protect civilians and maintain the safety and security of our peacekeepers.

At least, that was the view shared by the more than 250 experts who took part in the Preparatory Conference organised by Pakistan and the Netherlands.

That conference resulted in valuable insights and tangible actions.

First and foremost, that the protection of civilians requires a consistent approach aimed at closing all gaps and preventing blind spots. With clear strategies and standards at every level, from the New York Headquarters to the missions in the field.

Such strategies can only work if peacekeepers receive adequate training, geared towards the context in which they will be working.

And to maximise effectiveness, we need to support peacekeepers with up-to-date technology. Telemedicine, for example, which we can use to diagnose and treat people remotely. Or connected and closed networks, which enable us to share information and react rapidly to early warning indicators.

Here too, we cannot afford to have any blind spots in our knowledge. We must integrate new technologies in our missions and train peacekeepers to use them effectively.

Besides training and technology, adequate working conditions are fundamental to guarantee the safety and security of peacekeepers. When we deploy peacekeepers who will be risking their lives in the world's most dangerous places, it's our responsibility to offer them the best possible medical support. Through a reliable system that can respond to incidents in any mission, at any time. This support must include proper first aid, hospital care and medical evacuation. And it must encompass the full spectrum of health issues, including mental health and psychosocial support.

Lastly, we can only protect civilians in host countries if we engage with them. And I mean truly engage with them. For example by communicating effectively with them, deploying diverse community engagement teams, and collecting and recording communities' valuable insights.

Together, these tangible actions constitute a sound plan for more effectively protecting civilians and maintaining the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Yet even a sound plan can only succeed with commitment.

The Netherlands wants to demonstrate its commitment in ways that enable us to make a real difference. By filling some of the existing gaps in peacekeeping efforts.

I'll be saying more about some of them today.

For example, we recently deployed a C-130 aircraft to MINUSMA to contribute to transport capability over the next six months.

And the Netherlands is committing experience and knowledge: last month, Lieutenant General Kees Matthijssen was appointed as the new Force Commander of MINUSMA.

We are also contributing to the more effective use of peacekeeping intelligence and training.

For example by strengthening our partnership with Kenya's International Peace Support Training Centre and integrating the UN Military Peacekeeping-Intelligence training course into its curriculum.

By providing a digital Early Warning & Critical Indicators training course to military, police and civilian analysts who work together in UN peacekeeping operations.

And by financing and further developing data analysis capabilities in Mali, together with our partner Germany, to improve MINUSMA's situational awareness and to enable us to respond faster.

And lastly, the Netherlands will continue to invest in the A4P agenda and in A4P+. Because ultimately that agenda is the compass that will guide us towards better protection, safety and security.

That is also why the Netherlands supports the Seoul Initiative, which was introduced by the Republic of Korea.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For people in war-torn countries, peacekeepers sometimes are the last resort. And when that last resort fails, there might be no further backup or shelter.

In 1995, for example, when the UN proved unable to protect the population of a designated 'safe area'.

As a result approximately 8000 Muslim men were killed.

A modern day genocide took place in the heart of Europe.

This will always be a black page in the history of our Kingdom and also in the history of UN Peacekeeping.

We will never forget. And it must never happen again.

Where we protect civilians, we must do so with a strong mandate, clear command structures and robust military assets.

Let me finish on a more positive note.

Let me return to that beautiful word that I mentioned earlier.

Hwangap

It's a word used for the unique occasion of turning sixty. For celebrating a completed phase of your life, and starting a new one. Afresh. But with the benefit of accumulated wisdom.

In a way, the word also applies to our conference today. While there's no birthday party, we *are* embarking on a new phase together. With new initiatives, commitment and energy, based on accumulated wisdom and lessons learned...

Lessons that will enable us to do a better job of protecting civilians, while maintaining the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Thank you.