

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT THE DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD MEDAL CEREMONY AND THE MILITARY  
GENDER ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR AWARD**

**New York, 25 May 2023, 09:55 a.m.**

**[all-English]**

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Moments ago, I laid a wreath at the Peacekeepers Memorial to honour the women and men who have sacrificed their lives while serving under the UN flag in support of the most important cause of all — peace.

We mourn their loss and share our deepest sympathies with their families, friends and colleagues.

We will never forget their contributions.

Please join me in a moment of silence in their memory.

[PAUSE FOR SILENCE]

Thank you.

Every year, the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers provides an opportunity to honour the women and men who are pursuing peace on the front lines in some of the world's most dangerous places.

But this year is special, as we commemorate 75 years of UN Peacekeeping.

What began as a bold experiment with the deployment of a small number of military observers to the Middle East in 1948 is now a flagship enterprise of our Organization.

Today, for civilians caught in the hell of conflict, our Blue Helmets are a beacon of hope and protection.

They support security, stability and the rule of law in host countries.

They represent the beating heart of the United Nations' commitment to peace.

By bringing peacekeepers together from around the world, peacekeeping has also become an inspiring symbol of multilateralism in action.

Our more than 87,000 peacekeepers hail from 125 countries, and work across 12 operations.

Standing together, they face a daunting array of rising global tensions and divides.

Conflicts are becoming more complex.

Peace processes are stagnating.

Terrorism, armed groups, gang violence, and transnational crime are poisoning communities, countries and entire regions.

And the digital world has become a frightening frontier of tension, division, hate and mis and disinformation.

Sadly, our peacekeepers are increasingly working in places where there is no peace to keep.

We must seriously reflect on the need for a new generation of peace-enforcement missions and counter-terrorism operations, led by our partners with a UN Security Council mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, with guaranteed funding, namely through assessed contributions.

Despite all obstacles, our personnel persevere, risking their own lives in service of others.

Many have paid the ultimate price — with more than 4,200 killed in the cause of peace.

Sadly, 2022 added 103 more names to that honourable list.

Our fallen military, police and civilian personnel came from 39 different countries, with diverse backgrounds.

But all embodied our duty to peace.

I extend my deepest condolences and gratitude to their families, friends, colleagues and home countries represented here.

I pay tribute to their service and sacrifice, which inspire our work every day.

And I commit to doing everything we can to support our peacekeepers in their mission, including improving their safety and security and the effectiveness of peacekeeping through the Action for Peacekeeping Plus strategy.

We thank Member States and all partners for their commitment to this effort.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we also mark the critical role that women play in bringing to life our commitment to peace.

Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security is one of the most far-reaching the Council has ever passed.

This landmark resolution reminds us that there can be no lasting peace without involving women at every step.

But even today, many negotiating teams and peace processes are totally dominated by men.

It's up to all of us — governments, communities and local officials — to ensure that women play their full part, including as leaders, in building and maintaining peace.

Resolution 1325 reminds us that our women peacekeepers are not only supporting global peace and security.

They are leading the way.

By every measure, Captain Cecilia Erzuah of Ghana is one of those leaders.

Each year, we recognize the outstanding contribution of an individual military peacekeeper who goes above and beyond the call of duty to promote the principles of Resolution 1325.

Today, I proudly present the Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award to Captain Erzuah for her work in Abyei as the Commander of the Ghana Engagement Platoon since March 2022.

In Abyei, she saw first-hand the enormous toll of armed conflict on entire communities — especially women — and she spared no effort to ensure that their voices were heard and reflected.

The main function of the platoon she commands is to reach out to local communities to hear their concerns, explain the work of peacekeepers, and build trust.

Her engagement with local leadership, women's groups and young people has been critical to the mission's success.

She also hosted discussions on domestic violence and gender equality, which resulted in local women enlisting in Community Protection Committees that provide early warning on local security threats.

On every front, Captain Erzuah's work has set the standard for ensuring that the needs and concerns of women are reflected across our peacekeeping operations.

Dear friends,

As I've said many times before — and I will say many times again — the United Nations urgently needs more women peacekeepers and peacebuilders.

And so do the vulnerable people where our missions are deployed.

It's high time to significantly increase their numbers across every aspect of our work.

I thank Captain Erzuah and all women peacekeepers for their service and leadership.

And I thank you for joining us as we honour all peacekeepers for their vital work in serving humanity and building peace around the world.

Thank you.