

PEACEKEEPERS DAY 2016: *A Tribute to the UN Peacekeepers and Recognizing Their Contribution in Global Peace and Development*

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1. Introduction

United Nations peacekeepers have played an important role in establishing and maintaining peace and security in many conflict-affected communities around the world since 1948. Originally the primary goal of peacekeeping missions was focused on observing and monitoring cease-fire and peace agreements between warring parties. However, since the end of the Cold War, UN peacekeeping has evolved to encompass a whole new range of tasks. It has moved from maintaining peace in interstate conflicts to intrastate conflicts. New mandated tasks for UN peacekeeping in this period have included disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), protection of civilians, restoring state services, security sector reform (SSR), rebuilding and improving infrastructure, and ensuring economic development in a stable and peaceful environment.

Bangladesh began its extraordinary journey with UN peacekeeping in 1988 when the country sent 15 observers from the Bangladesh Army to the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIMOG). The goal of that mission was to verify, confirm and supervise the ceasefire and the withdrawal of all forces to the internationally recognized boundaries between Iran and Iraq.

In 1989 Bangladesh sent its first military contingent to the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia to monitor the peace process and elections. This was the first troop-contributing mission for Bangladesh. Sadly, Bangladesh also registered its first fatality in peacekeeping in the UNTAG mission. Lt. Col. Faizul Karim became the first Bangladeshi who lost his life in a peacekeeping mission.

Since UNTAG, Bangladesh has moved from a minor to a major player in UN peacekeeping. In fact, Bangladesh has emerged as one of the key contributors to UN peacekeeping and international security more broadly. The Bangladesh Armed Forces and its police services have rapidly earned a strong reputation for bravery, competency, dependability, leadership and professionalism over the last 28 years. Today, more than 125,000 military, police and civilian staff from diverse nations are serving in 16 peacekeeping operations around the world. As of March 2016, 7145 peacekeepers from Bangladesh are continuing to carry out their peacekeeping duties with courage and diligence under the UN flag and wearing the 'blue helmet' in a complex and at times dangerous world. On Peacekeepers Day, we recognize the important contributions that UN peacekeepers have been making for global peace and development for the last eight decades.

2. Background of the Peacekeepers Day

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers has been observed on 29 May since 2002 after the General Assembly adopted resolution 57/129 (2002). The day is commemorated by commending all the courageous, dedicated and professional men and women who have served, and are continuing to serve in UN peacekeeping operations, and honour the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.

The UN had fewer than 40,000 military and police personnel in peacekeeping missions 15 years ago. Today, more than 105,000 uniformed personnel from 124 troop and police contributing countries serve under the blue flag, along with 18,000 international and national civilian staff and UN Volunteers.

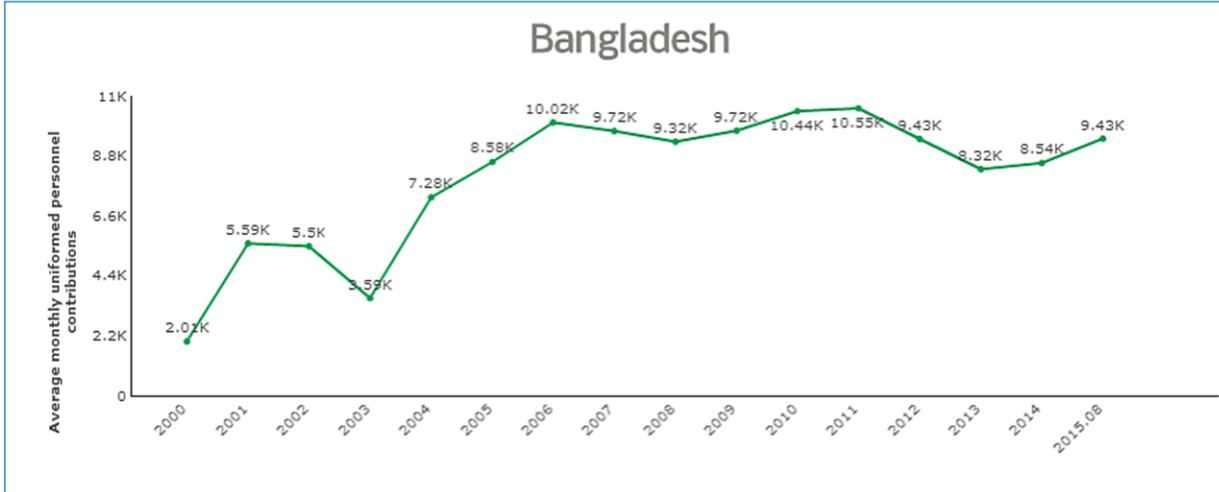
The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support are increasingly being asked to intervene in increasingly complex and varied operations. The peacekeeping mission of UNTAC (Cambodia 1992-93) is very different from MINUSMA in Mali in the present day. Yet the UN's relative success in peacekeeping means that it is being called upon more frequently. As such, there has been a massive growth in UN peacekeeping operations since the 1990s. Currently, the UN is having the largest deployment of peacekeepers in history that requires stronger engagement and support of the international community. The challenges of present day peacekeeping are increasingly dangerous. For example, in Mali where UN peacekeepers are protecting civilians from violence while risking their own lives, in the past two years 69 attacks have led to 61 peacekeepers being killed and 265 injured. In South Sudan, more than 200,000 civilians are currently seeking shelter at UN bases and as of March this year, more than 13,400 peacekeepers are serving in an insecure environment amidst a civil war.

UN Peacekeepers Day 2016 is dedicated to those men and women who place themselves in danger at the service of peace. The UN continues to recognize the ultimate sacrifices of peacekeepers and their persistent efforts to foster a peaceful and stable world, and have chosen the theme 'Honouring our Heroes' for this year. There are more than one million men and women who have served under the UN flag with pride, distinction and courage ever since the 'Blue Helmets' were first deployed. The UN pays its highest respects to more than 3,400 peacekeepers who have lost their lives while carrying out their duties.

3. A Tribute to UN Peacekeepers from Bangladesh

For the last decade Bangladesh has ranked as one of the top three contributors to UN peacekeeping missions. The following chart indicates average monthly contributions in total from Bangladesh between 2000 and August 2015. As of March 2016, Bangladesh is contributing 5930 troops, 1143 police and 72 UN Military Experts on Mission (UNMEM). Among them, 207 are female peacekeepers.

AVERAGE MONTHLY TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS OVER TIME



Disclaimer: The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or any area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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The contributions of Bangladeshi peacekeepers are immense; and not only because of the size of deployments. They are well-respected for their commitment, effectiveness and gallantry to accomplish their responsibilities. They also received encouraging press coverage several times – including this specific story by the BBC several years ago that labeled the peacekeepers from Bangladesh as the “cream of UN peacekeepers”.

The uniformed peacekeepers from Bangladesh have directly contributed in aiding vulnerable communities with medical assistance, clearing some of the most dangerous lands of mines and unexploded ordnance, and also building capacity of the national institutions. Sierra Leone's admiration towards Bangladeshi peacekeepers bloomed into a cultural bond when the government of Sierra Leone declared Bangla as an honorary official language of the nation.

Bangladesh also set another progressive example recently and received noteworthy coverage in the international media as the country deployed its first ever all-female police peacekeepers to the mission in Haiti last year, recognizing that women play a vital role in communities it is important that UN peacekeepers reflect the communities in which they serve. Additionally, female members of peacekeeping missions are working to tackle sexual exploitation and gender-based violence in host communities.

The UN and Bangladesh are working together to make greater efforts in peace and development. In this context, I have had a few opportunities to meet some of the members of the Armed Forces and the Police since I have arrived in Bangladesh. It is clearly apparent from these meetings that Bangladeshi men and women in uniform participate in peacekeeping missions with real pride, and an intention to improve their capabilities and make a contribution to international security at the same time. It is also obvious that Bangladesh takes abuse of power and disciplinary issues seriously and, like the UN, has a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual abuse.

Bangladesh has lost 125 peacekeepers since joining UN peacekeeping operations. This year in a solemn tribute, 129 UN peacekeepers who lost their lives in the missions in 2015 will be honored with the Dag Hammarskjöld medal. Among them, four are from Bangladesh:

Peacekeepers	Incident Date	Mission	Appointment Type
Lance Corporal Md Nazrul Islam	09 Apr 2015	MINUSCA	Military
Sainik (Private) Sree Nilkantho Hajong	25 May 2015	MINUSMA	Military
Lance Corporal Md Mozibor Rahman	12 Jul 2015	UNMIL	Military
Sub Inspector Moinul Ahasan Khan	29 Dec 2015	UNAMID	Police

It is fitting that the Bangladesh Armed Forces and Bangladesh Police have taken a joint initiative to dedicate this year's Peacekeepers' Day by paying special respect to the peacekeepers who have perished in the line of duty and those that were wounded. The UN also remembers and honors these fallen heroes. To uphold the sacrifices and legacy of the fallen and wounded peacekeepers, it is necessary that peacekeepers and peacekeeping operations continue to take advanced and innovative measures to ensure a peaceful and sustainable world.

4. Peacekeeping and Sustainable Development

At the historic United Nations Summit in September 2015, world leaders adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years with an ambition to leave no one behind. The goals are universally applicable to all nations, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which set targets for developing countries primarily. The SDG goals will connect every nation, city, town, and village to act with a common primary objective which is to ensure that inclusive economic growth and social development are taking place along with environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development is closely interconnected with peace and security. Our combined experience since the advent of UN peacekeeping is that security and development are two sides of the same coin. It is for this reason that UN peacekeeping plays a vital role in the pursuit of the SDGs in countries and territories suffering from conflict. By way of example, peacekeeping contributes to a number of SDGs such as:

- Goal 1 and 2 to end all forms of poverty and hunger;
- Goal 5 to advance gender equality and empowerment;
- Goal 9 to develop sustainable industries and infrastructure through innovations;
- Goal 11 to build sustainable cities and communities; and
- Goal 17 to develop partnerships to achieve the goals.

Peacekeeping is particularly strongly connected to Goal 16 that promotes peace, justice and strong institutions.

Partnerships in peacekeeping are imperative. Effective peacekeeping depends on local, regional and international partnerships. For enhanced and efficient peacekeeping in an increasingly challenging, intricate and dangerous world, a greater focus on technological advancement and innovation in peacekeeping is needed. Sustained political and operational engagement, joint planning, information sharing and lessons learned exercises are key to the success of peacekeeping operations.

For this reason, the Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Independent Panel in 2015 to review how UN peace operations can be strengthened to better meet the challenges of tomorrow. The Secretary-General believes that, "*fundamental changes are urgently required to adapt UN peace operations including the need to change the way we plan and conduct them to make them faster, more responsive and more accountable to countries and people in conflict.*"

The Secretary-General has also highlighted elements that are fundamental to the success of UN peacekeeping operations:

1. *Robust contributions: When the Security Council calls on us to deploy peacekeepers, the UN needs to be ready. This means competent, effective and well-equipped troops able to deploy rapidly and decisively. It also includes capabilities from developed countries with more technologically advanced militaries.*
2. *Peacekeeping deployments cannot succeed by themselves. The blue helmets need the political backing of key local actors, the region, the donors and the international community at large. We will always accompany but not substitute for a political process.*

5. Concluding Remarks

The UN has established 71 peacekeeping operations during its history – in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The UN peacekeepers from Bangladesh have participated in more than 50 of such missions. The number of people who have been UN peacekeepers, which is more than 1 million, is far more than the number of staff that have served the UN in all other capacities. The UN peacekeepers have expertly fulfilled many responsibilities in daunting situations, and in a number of cases, have delivered beyond expectations.

The UN peacekeepers have been helping countries gain independence, supporting historic elections, protecting civilians, disarming hundreds of thousands of ex-combatants, helping establish the rule of law, promoting and protecting human rights, and creating conditions refugees and displaced persons to return home. We can all be proud of these accomplishments. We must continue with greater efforts in partnerships, and with high moral duty to continue the extraordinary legacy of the valiant sacrifices of many peacekeepers.