

International Day of UN Peacekeepers

23 May 2019

Statement by Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Loej

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am deeply honored that I have been invited to deliver the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Lecture at this year's annual conference on UN peacekeeping activities and I look forward to sharing some of my experiences with you.

But before doing so, I would like to pay tribute to each and every one of the peacekeepers, who lost their life or were injured over the last year in the service of the United Nations and in the service of peace. Unfortunately, the number continues to be high – and much too high. The international community must continue to focus on how this trend can be reversed.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you know I have both represented my country on the Security Council and served as Special Representative of the Secretary General and head of two very different UN peacekeeping missions – UNMIL in Liberia and UNMISS in South Sudan.

After a horrific civil war in Liberia a peace agreement -through the facilitation of ECOWAS -was agreed in 2003 and UNMIL was established. The main tasks for the mission was broadly to support the implementation of the peace agreement, to protect civilians, to support humanitarian and human rights activities to assist in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military, and to maintain external as well as internal security until a new national army and the national police was trained sufficiently to perform these tasks. In short to “keep the peace while the peace was being built”.

UNMIL completed its mandate at the end of March 2018 after the third presidential elections - since the signing of the peace agreement - let to a new president being inaugurated. I visited Liberia in March this year for the first time in over 7 years. And there is peace in Liberia. But it is also clear that the economic and political tensions in the country are still very challenging. On that background, my advice to the international community and international development actors is clearly to continue

to monitor and engage with the Liberian actors to ensure that the progress achieved during the last 15 years is not jeopardized. There is peace but the peace has not been fully built or consolidated.

The mission in South Sudan – UNMISS is a different story. UNMISS was established when South Sudan – after a long war for independence – became independent in July 2011. The original mandate for the mission was to consolidate peace and security and help establish conditions for development of South Sudan with the view of strengthening the capacity of the Government to govern effectively and democratically. In other words, a capacity building or peace-building mandate.

But in December 2013 fighting erupted in the capital and quickly spread to other parts of the country. This led to not only a strengthening of the size of the mission but also to a totally different mandate. A mandate with priority on the protection of civilians, human rights and contributing to the security conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. And with a strong emphasis on the mission's impartiality. In short, a mandate that reflected that there no longer was "a peace to keep". A peace agreement was agreed in 2015 – facilitated by the regional organization IGAD – but implementation was very slow and in July 2016 it broke down and fighting spread to the whole country. Another peace agreement was entered into in 2018 but also the implementation of this agreement has been slow, and timelines delayed. However, fighting has reduced across the country, but it is yet not possible to say that there is "a peace to keep" in South Sudan.

So, the mission in South Sudan is still, like the missions in countries like Mali, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, facing serious challenges due to the lack of – or at least the implementation of – a political solution.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In my own country, as in others, there is often a discussion of the success and failures of UN peacekeeping – and we clearly have examples of both. But it should not be

forgotten that many changes have been made in improving the functioning of UN peacekeeping over the years. Let me just mention the Brahimi report, the HIPPO report and the Secretary General's "Action for Peacekeeping". However, many of these changes or proposals require the support of Member States to be implemented – and that support is not always forthcoming.

When I was appointed SRSG for UNMIL in 2008, I remember that many of my colleagues noted that in my role of SRSG, it would be an advantage to have served on the Security Council. But I quickly learned, as I jokingly said, that it would have been an even bigger advantage to have headed a mission before serving on the Security Council! By that I mean that during my involvement with UN peacekeeping I feel the distance between the field and New York have grown bigger and bigger.

One challenge is the mandates. For bigger missions they are often 13-18 pages long – just to make sure everything is covered! And if you compare mandates you often get the feeling that the "copy and paste" bottoms have been used. In my view there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each and every conflict and peacekeeping challenge has to be reviewed and the solutions adjusted to the specific challenges characterizing the country or conflict. There is no recipe that can be applied across the board. Let me just illustrate with the ultimate goal of any peacekeeping mission – "protection of civilians". Protection of civilians must be addressed differently in a mission, where the threat to civilians comes from other civilians compared to a mission where the threat to civilians comes from armed groups. Therefore country-specific challenges and capacities must be considered from the outset and measures need to be decided and applied accordingly. And priorities need to be set – everything, be it in Liberia or in South Sudan, cannot be achieved at the same time.

A second challenge is the unity of the Security Council. Unfortunately, we have over the last years seen the lack of unity increase in the Council when adopting mandates for UN peacekeeping missions. UNMISS being one of them. I think everyone will understand that this hampers the ability of the mission to interact with the various parties to the conflict and thus implement the mandate.

On that background the Secretary General's words when he launched his proposal for "Action for Peacekeeping", in March last year, was "music in my ears"!

He urged "Security Council members to sharpen and streamline mandates. Please put an end to mandates that look like Christmas trees. Christmas is over."

He called “on Member States to sustain your political engagement and push for political solutions and inclusive peace processes”. And he added “A peacekeeping operation is not an army, or a counter-terrorist force, or a humanitarian agency. It is a tool to create the space for a nationally owned political solution.”

After consultations with member states over last summer the Secretary General’s A4P initiative lead to the development of the so called “Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations” – which has been signed by 151 member states. It focuses on seven key areas:

- 1) Enhancing the political impact of peacekeeping
- 2) Strengthening protection provided by peacekeeping
- 3) Safety and security
- 4) Performance and accountability
- 5) Peacekeeping impact on sustaining peace
- 6) Partnerships
- 7) The conduct of peacekeeping operations and of personnel

Let me make a few comments on each of these areas and where we are today.

1) “Enhancing the political impact of peacekeeping” is basically an affirmation of the Secretary General’s view about the primacy of politics in the resolution of conflict and a commitment to pursue “clear, focused, sequenced, prioritized and achievable mandates”.

Where are we? It remains to be seen! It is yet to be seen if these – non binding - principles will be transformed into a reality in future mandates adopted by the Security Council.

At the end of last year, the Netherlands and Ivory Coast tried to transform the principles about mandates into a Security Council resolution- but without success!

In relation to the primacy of politics in the resolution of conflicts, I should also mention that the Secretary General’s reform proposal in relation to the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Peacebuilding Support Office has been implemented as of the beginning of this year. Seen from a mission perspective this basically means, for instance for South Sudan, that the division in Headquarters deals both with the political issues and the mission specific peacekeeping – or peace operation – issues. Furthermore, the Secretary General’s management reform proposals are under implementation. In relation to peacekeeping

missions it entails the delegation of more administrative authority to the field. A delegation of authority that is accompanied by greater accountability!

This part of the declaration also contains a commitment to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda and to increase the number of women in peacekeeping—uniformed as well as civilians. On that subject I can only say – yes of course! Peace is for the benefit of the whole population and around half the population in any country are women. So, peace is for men as well as women!

2) Under the headline “Strengthening the protection provided by peacekeeping operations” the declaration supports the “tailored, context-specific peacekeeping approaches to protecting civilians”. As you will understand from my previous comments, I think this has to be welcomed and one important way of doing so will be for all missions to develop context-specific strategic plans for POC and to ensure that all units are trained to act within their mission's strategic plan.

3) The third area underlines the importance of continued focus on improving the safety and security of peacekeepers. Inspired by the so-called “Santos Cruz report” from 2017 the UN Secretariat developed an Action Plan to improve Security of UN peacekeepers. This plan is being updated regularly in light of the experience gained both in general and in light of the specific experience from the increased attention individual missions have been tasked to give this issue. For instance, by strengthening training, reviewing medical support and addressing performance issues.

4) Performance and accountability. This part focuses on the need for increased cooperation between the secretariat and the TCC/PCC’s in order to ensure that uniformed personnel are as well-trained and as well-equipped before deployment as possible. And it supports the Secretary-General's proposal of developing a Comprehensive Performance Assessment System. Finally, it stresses the importance of avoiding caveats and at least to ensure a clear, comprehensive and transparent procedure on caveats. Let me in this connection add that in my view avoiding caveats is of utmost importance – but if they cannot be avoided, they should at least be known before deployment. Thus, they could be taking into account when planning operations and thereby ensuring that there are no surprises in the middle of an operation.

5) The point “Peacekeeping impact on sustaining peace” is about increasing the cooperation between the missions and the Peacebuilding Commission and the UN humanitarian and development actors. In my view this is of crucial importance. As the Secretary General has said many times a UN peacekeeping mission is neither a humanitarian agency nor a development agency. A peacekeeping mission should

support and facilitate– but not compete with or substitute – the humanitarian and development actors.

Unfortunately, we have under the heading “winning hearts and minds” seen too many examples of this not being respected. It not only creates confusion in the mind of the local population about the role of a peacekeeping mission, but it is also unsustainable.

Furthermore, a peacekeeping mission should right from the start be thinking about the exit strategy and cooperate with those actors that will remain on the ground long after the mission has left. Let me illustrate. In a country coming out of conflict experts say it can take up to thirty years to get a well-functioning rule of law sector up and running. So, while a peacekeeping mission with a rule of law mandate can contribute to this process, it is important that it is done in close cooperation and coordination with other UN actors from the outset. UN actors that will remain on the ground after the mission has left. Otherwise all the best efforts and hard work will not be sustainable.

6) Partnerships. It is about collaboration with regional and sub- regional actors with a special emphasis on collaboration with the African Union. I would add, that such collaboration should be with all international actors. If the messaging to the parties in a conflict country with a UN peacekeeping mission is not, so to speak, “on the same page”, it makes it very difficult for the mission to achieve its goals. In Liberia I clearly saw the importance of working closely with especially ECOWAS and the main bilateral donors. But in South Sudan I saw at times, differences in the messaging from the neighboring countries, the sub-regional organization IGAD, the AU, the Troika and the many special envoys. But I also note that this joint messaging has improved in relation to the importance of implementation of the latest peace agreement in South Sudan.

7) The last point in the declaration is about the conduct of UN peacekeepers. And I cannot add much. Sexual exploitation and abuse are simply unacceptable! And that regardless of whether such abuse is committed by military troops, police officers or civilian personal.

Ladies and Gentlemen

As you will understand a lot is going on in order to improve UN peacekeeping taking into consideration the increasingly hostile environment missions are working in. But we are not there yet. So, I hope that the focus on implementing the Action for Peacekeeping agenda will continue – both within the Secretariat and among Member States.

And in doing so we should never ignore that a peacekeeping mission is not to be compared with a NATO operation or the previous international operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A United Nations peacekeeping operation is not only multinational and multicultural -it is also multidimensional and civilian lead.

That diversity should be utilized to better implement the mission mandate – instead of pointing fingers at one another.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Some of you might right now be wondering – why have I not been talking about the costs of UN peacekeeping?

So, let me in conclusion just say that the present budget of 6,8 billion USD sounds huge. But remember it finances 14 mission and in total over 100.000 peacekeepers deployed. And remember - it is less than one half percent of the world's military expenses. And for those who are still not convinced that UN peacekeeping costs are not excessive – just compare it with the costs of the previous international operations in Iraq and Afghanistan!

Ladies and Gentlemen

I thank you for your attention. I am sure that there are many issues I have left out. But I will be happy to take your questions – and try my best to answer.

Thank you.

