

Honourable Minister of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism,
Jemma Nunu Kumba

Distinguished government officials;
Members of the diplomatic community;

Dear UN colleagues;

Fellow peacekeepers,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to UN House on this International Day of UN peacekeepers.

Today we pay tribute to the women and men who serve and have served under the UN flag to protect and promote peace.

In the words of Secretary-General Guterres: “Their efforts on behalf of the international community are one of the most concrete expressions of the UN Charter’s determination ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.’”

Today, **113 000** military, police and civilian peacekeepers serve in **16 peace operations** around the world.

They deploy in some of the most difficult operating environments. seemingly asked to do impossible jobs. Yet today’s peacekeeping budget is less than **one-half of one percent** of global military spending.

The demand for UN peacekeepers has steadily grown and peacekeeping mandates are increasingly complex. Recently missions have successfully completed and closed in **Timor L’Este, Cote d’Ivoire** and **Liberia** is closing.

Peacekeeping operations have evolved from simply monitoring ceasefires to protecting civilians, to supporting peace processes and to addressing the root causes of conflict.

These are hugely complex tasks. They present enormous challenges – no longer is peacekeeping just ‘boots on the ground’.

It has become a political tool, and has the most lasting impact when it supports inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

Today in UNMISS, **12 000** military, **1500** police, and **2500** civilians – including nearly **400 UN Volunteers** – serve with dedication and professionalism.

The uniformed staff alone come from **55 different countries** – with a variety of different languages and cultures.

That can be frustrating but our diversity gives us enormous strength when harnessed under the ideals of the UN flag.

I’m very pleased to see that nearly a quarter of the uniformed personnel on parade today are women. We need to encourage contributing countries to increase the number of women in uniform. You, women members of the contingents, are crucial in South Sudan to more easily access the most vulnerable: women, girls and elderly.

Operationally our mission is complex – perhaps the most complex – UN peacekeeping operation in the world.

But we ultimately have two tasks.

To protect civilians

To build a durable peace

Our military and police protect **230,000 civilians in six POC sites** and beyond.

Our military enable human rights to be monitored.

They help provide a safe environment for humanitarian assistance. Where they can, they proactively reach areas affected by fighting.

Much of their work in UNMISS is unsung. It can be as simple as walking for hours alongside women who are collecting firewood for their families so they are not raped;

It can mean spending hours – and often nights – at checkpoints refusing to turn back when they are blocked from achieving their mission.

Or it can mean standing up to a military force – as our Mongolian battalion did recently – to successfully rescue young boys from being abducted as recruits.

These are difficult situations.

But the **expectation on our troops here is to be robust.**

To stand up to those who try to stop us fulfilling our mandate to help South Sudanese civilians.

So our approach *must be* robust.

But it also needs to be **calm** and **appropriate** to the situation.

We also need to be **nimble**. A focus of this past month has been supporting 20,000 civilians who fled to Aburoc in Upper Nile, after being displaced by SPLA and Opposition fighting. Most arrived in a weak state – the perfect conditions for cholera to tear through the population.

UNMISS helicoptered in a detachment of Rwandan peacekeepers to Aburoc in for a short-term deployment.

A strong humanitarian presence deployed immediately after. As one humanitarian partner told us: **“We are here because you are here.”**

Cholera has indeed broken out. So far about **three people have died** and up to **400 being treated**. But improved water supplies and the presence of a strong medical response from agencies contained its spread.

Without a doubt, hundreds of lives have been saved.

This more **nimble approach** of our peacekeepers working alongside our partners is a formula we can – and will – replicate.

Since my arrival in January, I have travelled throughout the country and met ordinary South Sudanese, government officials and UN colleagues in the field.

I have seen the struggles of South Sudanese women and men, especially in the villages. One-third of the country is displaced.

People don't leave their homes lightly. They do so in fear. In fear for what the warring parties on all sides will do to them.

And I have also seen our staff working in very tough conditions, far from their family and their homes, giving reassurance and protection.

So, to our peacekeepers, I wish to express my immense gratitude to you for your professionalism, your commitment and sacrifice in the service of the people of South Sudan.

You can be rightly proud of your contribution. And, as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, I am proud to represent you and the UN family in South Sudan.

On a daily basis, blue helmets, UNPOL officers, and UNMISS civilian staff – international and national staff alike – place themselves in harms' way to help others.

Sadly, some of our colleagues have paid the ultimate price in the line of duty.

Last year we lost two Chinese soldiers in the July fighting. I acknowledge them and their families for their sacrifice.

Since 2011 when UNMISS was established, **49** staff members have lost their lives while serving the Mission.

In 2016, **eight** UNMISS staff members died in the service of peace.

Today, we honour their memory.

The people of South Sudan fought for decades for their independence and their sovereignty. But as all governments know, with sovereignty comes responsibility. Responsibility to enable the citizens of South Sudan to be able to live in their homes in peace, for their children to go to school and look forward to a brighter future.

It is my profound hope that 2017 will be the year peace prevails for the people of South Sudan. UNMISS stands ready to be a partner in this endeavour.

Thank you.