

The Secretary-General

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Remarks at Memorial Service for Fallen Staff

New York, 19 April 2018

[As delivered]

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Dear families of our colleagues who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we honour our fallen colleagues. But allow me, before we begin, to say how I deeply saddened I was to learn last night of the sudden passing of our colleague Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoué, Permanent Representative of Côte d' Ivoire.

I have a clear recollection of our conversation during the presentation of his credentials last September.

I expressed my satisfaction at seeing Côte d'Ivoire prepare itself for a Security Council mandate with renewed confidence, in light of the auspicious developments made by the country in restoring peace, stability and development.

Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoué was well liked and respected and will be missed by all of us.

I offer heartfelt condolences to his family and colleagues, as well as to the Government and people of Côte d'Ivoire.

My dear Colleagues,

We are meeting here on this solemn occasion to honour those United Nations personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty between July 2016 and the end of last year.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my personal condolences to all the family members of the deceased who are here today with us and to pay tribute to their resilience, to their generosity, to express my very deep solidarity.

I wish we never had to mourn the loss of colleagues.

But the sad fact is that people do lose their lives while serving the United Nations, and it is our duty to honour their service and sacrifice.

Despite all our efforts to ensure the safety and security of our personnel, the United Nations has become a target of those who oppose our commitment to peace.

I remember in my ten years as High Commissioner for Refugees seeing this maddening evolution. I remember in the beginning, when symbols like the Red Cross and Red Crescent or the UN were symbols that were respected even by militant groups and armed militias that were creating havoc in several parts of the world. Then progressively, I saw how this respect was being lost and in the end, I was starting to see situations in which our staff was targeted exactly

because they were our staff, either in peacekeeping missions or in humanitarian work or in any other form of support to populations that would be seen by these groups as contrary to their objectives - in a way that is absolutely unacceptable for all of us.

Now during this period in question, 140 of our dear colleagues were killed. They came from 42 nations, highlighting again the richness of our diversity.

One hundred and twenty-three were military personnel; three were police; and 14 were civilians. Today, we remember these fallen colleagues and recognize their generosity and their contributions.

We express our solidarity with their families, who we try to continue to support in the best possible way, even if we recognize that we are doing much less than what would be necessary.

And we rededicate ourselves to the noble mission for which they paid the ultimate price.

I would like to ask you all to join me in a moment of silence.

Thank you.

Dear colleagues,

All around the world, the blue flag of the United Nations represents the hopes of some of the world's most vulnerable people for peace, security and an opportunity for a better future.

Those people depend on the women and men who dedicate themselves to serving the United Nations – uniformed personnel, international civil servants, national staff and UN Volunteers.

It grieves me that anyone should perish doing this essential work.

And it angers me that there is so little accountability for attacks on us, which in some cases constitute a war crime.

I am committed to calling for attackers to be held to account and I am committed to improving safety.

Without the courage and commitment of our peacekeepers and humanitarians and all our other colleagues, we could not accomplish what we do -- every day -- in some of the most difficult and dangerous environments.

We should not forget that those who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty were supporting populations where the amount of suffering is absolutely horrendous. And so we have sometimes this very terrible choice to allow our staff to go and work in dangerous circumstances, because we believe that if they do not do so, the people we care for will suffer even more, facing even more dangerous situations and circumstances. This is a terrible dilemma for those that have to take decisions about where and when to send staff into the most difficult areas in the world and in the most dangerous moments that we face.

So, today, let us mourn our lost colleagues, and let us join together in solidarity as one United Nations family, committed to serve the greater good of humanity.

Thank you very much.