

**Speech by UN Resident Coordinator, Ms Renata Dessallien
International Day of UN Peacekeepers
(29 May 2009)**

Honourable Chief Guest, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Honourable State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Hasan Mahmud

Chief of Army Staff, General Moeen U Ahmed

Service Chiefs of the Bangladesh Navy, Rear Admiral Zahir Uddin Ahmed, &
the Bangladesh Air Force, Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman

PSO of the Armed Forces Division, Lt Gen. Md. Abdul Mubeen

Inspector General of Police, Nur Mohammad

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, former peacekeepers

Ladies and gentlemen

Assalamu Alaikum, and welcome to this commemorative event on the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

Today we celebrate the remarkable history of UN peacekeepers, from their very first mission in 1948, across 6 decades to the present day. Sixty-three missions have been organised over the years. Today, 113,000 men and women from 117 countries are deployed in UN peacekeeping operations on four continents. Taken together, they constitute the second largest actively deployed military force in the world. Carrying the signature blue helmets, they represent a flagship enterprise of the United Nations: a multinational force in the service of global peace and stability.

Peacekeeping has become quintessential to the UN, advancing the aspirations of our Charter more visibly than any of our other activities. Of course, there is much valuable work for peace that the UN does quietly, behind closed doors, and tangentially through the promotion of equity, justice and development for all. But there is no question that peacekeeping has become our signature endeavour for peace.

By promoting peace and stability, UN peacekeepers enable societies to realise their hopes and dreams of a better, safer world for themselves and their children. On this day, we honour the men and women serving in these UN missions around the world. They are the frontline of our quest for world peace.

This year's commemoration highlights the role of women in peacekeeping. In today's violent conflicts, time and again we see that women and girls are disproportionately affected. They constitute the majority of victims. Women therefore have an important role to play in conflicts, particularly in today's complex peacekeeping missions, where traditional military operations are only one part of the mission. While experience shows that women can serve successfully in all roles, they bring special advantages when dealing with victims of sexual violence, or working with women prisoners and female ex-combatants, etc.

This is why the UN Security Council passed a Resolution to include a gender perspective in UN peacekeeping. While it is heartening to see that women's participation has gone up since then, many more women are needed. The United Nations is therefore appealing to its member

states to contribute more women, at all levels and in all functions, as part of their peacekeeping contingents.

I am proud to say that Bangladesh has consistently been among the UN's top contributing countries to UN Peacekeeping. Currently, the country is fielding more than 9700 troops, officers, and military observers.

I am particularly pleased that Bangladesh not only contributes manpower and valuable technical skills, but also leadership. Bangladeshi nationals are now hold several senior positions, including Force Commander in Liberia. And I am also pleased that this country's female peacekeepers, although still small in number, are rising. May I warmly encourage you to continue this trend.

Bangladeshi blue helmets are known for their distinction and their professionalism. Over the years, the quality of their service has become an international hallmark for this country, recognized in capital cities around the world, not to mention in the simple villages and towns where they deploy.

Not only are they appreciated for their competencies and discipline, but also for their kindness, their human solidarity and their uncanny ability to reach out beyond language and cultural barriers to encourage the people they serve. The fact that people from many remote villages and towns around the world have learned Bangla phrases and given Bangla names to their streets, illustrates their deep appreciation for our Bangladeshi blue helmets.

Today, we pay tribute to these brave Bangladeshi men and women who have given so much in the service of peace. Some, tragically, made the ultimate sacrifice -- they gave their lives. We offer our most profound condolences to their family, friends and colleagues. Although their loss is beyond measure, we hope the nobility of their loved ones' service to peace offers them some solace. We also recognise today those who were injured in service. We are pleased that so many could join us at this gathering today.

Let me conclude by extending the United Nations' most profound gratitude to the people and Government of Bangladesh for making such an outstanding contribution to UN Peacekeeping over the years, and around the world. The United Nations and its Member States are deeply indebted to you, and deeply proud of you.

Thank you.