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Regional Organisations Co-Operation with the United Nations in the area of Crisis Management, Peace Support and Peace Enforcement Operations Dublin Castle - 1 February, 2013

Opening Address by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Alan Shatter TD

Excellencies, Secretaries General, Chief of Staff, distinguished speakers and moderators, ladies and gentlemen:

I am honoured to open this seminar today which will address “Regional Organisations Co-Operation with the United Nations in the area of Crisis Management, Peace Support and Peace Enforcement Operations”.

On a personal basis, I would particularly like to thank our distinguished speakers and moderators for agreeing to participate and present at this high level seminar.

Ireland has always been a strong supporter of the UN and of UN Peacekeeping. In 2004, during Ireland’s last EU presidency, we hosted a seminar on EU/UN Cooperation. Last year Ireland promoted and championed a new impetus in UN Cooperation at EU level which resulted in the Action Plan to enhance EU CSDP Support to UN Peacekeeping.

This Action Plan has reinvigorated cooperation between the UN and the EU, including the role of the UN-EU Steering Committee on Crisis Management, originally established to advance the goals of the 2003 Joint Declaration on EU-UN co-operation in Crisis Management, which celebrates its tenth anniversary this year.

In today’s rapidly changing world our values and interests are being continually challenged. Transnational terrorism, organised crime, cyber-crime, proliferation in weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, failing States, climate change, energy insecurity, unregulated population migration, trafficking in drugs and people, in particular women and children, and piracy, are real and substantial threats to our communities and to international peace and security.

Our ongoing search for sustainable international peace and security poses one of the greatest challenges to human development. It is striking that, in our globalised world, these threats have become more difficult to address and are more interrelated. Also, in this era of increasing globalisation the gains made by those with the means to access the global economy are often being undermined by ethnic and religious divisions and through the unequal distribution of economic wealth between and within countries. The result of this is a rise in the number of armed conflicts, which have, in turn, unleashed untold levels of violence and human suffering in the lives of innocent civilians.

In order to address these complex challenges, over the past decade, the peacekeeping environment has changed extensively. Peacekeeping operations have grown in number, complexity and robustness. While military contributions remain the backbone of many peacekeeping operations, the many faces of peacekeeping now include civilians, police officers, administrators, economists, legal experts, electoral observers and human rights monitors to name but a few.

In addition, the “Regionalisation” of peace operations is also a very significant trend of recent years. We are seeing an increasingly prominent role being assumed by organisations such as the EU, NATO, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Arab League in leading or supporting peacekeeping operations authorised by the UN Security Council.

The deployment of multiple UN authorised missions, involving multiple regional organisations and international partners, present in the same theatre of operation, for example Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, is a significant challenge, impacting on the UN’s role in maintaining international peace and security. In that regard, the EU, NATO and the African Union are now major players in UN mandated peace support and peace enforcement operations. Ongoing and emerging conflicts and tensions in the Middle East, Africa, Central America and elsewhere ensure a continuing demand for UN peacekeepers.

The changing and evolving nature of peacekeeping operations brings with it new challenges, requiring new capabilities and skills. As we endeavour to tackle or indeed overcome these many challenges, some of which I have mentioned earlier, such as failing States and regional conflicts, this will require us to strengthen the United Nations and the international response to these crises.

In an increasingly globalised world, the impact of destabilisation and conflict in one part of the globe, can have very significant effects elsewhere. No community or State is immune to this, as we have seen to our cost. As part of the international community of nation States, we all have a stake in ensuring international peace and security, human rights and the rule of law, and, in turn, a responsibility to support multilateral efforts to this end, including through the commitment of peacekeepers to UN operations.

Support for and an agreement to make forces available for UN peacekeeping operations is a fundamental commitment made by all Member States of the UN. Since the foundation of the UN, EU member States have traditionally been strong supporters and participants in UN peacekeeping operations’ both bilaterally and, more recently, through international organisations such as the EU and NATO and in providing support to the African Union. However, in recent times we have seen a considerable reduction in the participation in UN peacekeeping operations by the forces of EU Member States, particularly in Africa.

For example, of the top 20 contributors of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping operations as of 31 May 2012 only one was from an EU Member State, which contributed some 1,159 personnel. In 2008, four EU Member States were listed in the top 20 contributors – contributing some 7,300 personnel. While the contribution of EU Member States uniformed personnel has been steadily declining over the years, it is of note that eleven EU Member States are listed in the top 20 providers of assessed contributors to the UN Peacekeeping budget in 2012.

If we go back to the 1950s, most of the peacekeepers provided to UN operations were from EU countries. However, this trend changed in the 1990s. The statistics show that this trend has continued into the 21st Century, with the largest troop contributors now coming from South Asian countries - such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal - and Africa (Ghana, Nigeria). Also, there is a significant contribution of troops to UN led Operations from Arab and Latin American countries.

The statistics demonstrate a significant lack of balance in how the burden of peacekeeping is shared among the UN Member States, most evidenced in terms of the level of participation by the EU in UN missions in Africa. While the EU, US and Japan fund 80% of the UN peacekeeping budget, they provide a tiny proportion of uniformed personnel to peacekeeping operations.

This issue is further exemplified within the EU when we look at UN peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa, where the EU funds a huge proportion of the bill and only contributes 0.5% of the troops. With standing forces currently amounting to about 1.7 million personnel, the Union contributes only 383 personnel to UN sub-Saharan African peacekeeping operations.

So, notwithstanding the EU's financial commitment and our principled statements in relation to UN peacekeeping and the EU's Africa Strategy, the reality is that the major financial contributors, who have at their disposal the most effective military capabilities and the capacity to support such operations, contribute little to the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping on the ground.

The founding principles of the UN dictate that a threat to international peace and security is a threat to all of the international community and that we all have an obligation to respond to that threat including an undertaking to provide armed forces in response to a call from the Security Council. Article 43 of the United Nations Charter provides that:

“All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.”

Obviously we are all facing significant financial constraints and major cuts in Defence budgets. That said, I am very interested to explore the other reasons why EU Member States are reticent to contribute military forces to UN Peacekeeping and Crisis Management Operations.

I am of the view that, notwithstanding the financial situation the EU faces today in contributing to UN peacekeeping, and in peacekeeping and crisis management generally, it is not primarily a lack of financial resources, nor is it a lack of personnel, nor a lack of capabilities. I think the issue we face today is a **lack of political will** and the commitment to use the resources, the personnel and the capabilities we have, for a common good.

To address this we need to create among our politicians, our administrators and our publics, the concept of UN peacekeeping as a common good which contributes to all of our security. As we have seen in the recent past, security failures, in particular in our neighbourhood, including sub-Saharan Africa, pose a very real and immediate threat to the safety and security of our peoples. A threat to international peace and security wherever it arises, is a threat to the security of all of the international community. We all have an obligation to respond to that threat including an undertaking to provide effective, professional and capable armed forces in response to a call from the Security Council.

Within the EU we have a range of capabilities which can enhance the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations. For example, Transport helicopters to move troops rapidly in theatre, highly mobile units which can be utilised as quick reaction forces, air and land base surveillance assets, attack helicopters, well armed and highly trained troops and special forces.

We need only look at the recent intervention of French Forces in Mali to see how a highly trained and well equipped force of 2,500 personnel has reversed the downward spiral in that country. The protagonists may not have gone away but the malaise has been stopped and a space created to restore the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Malian State. We need to look at how we can now do more in this way in support of UN peacekeeping operations.

While our Seminar today is focused on finding practical ways of getting the UN and regional organisations to work together, there is a more fundamental dilemma facing the international community. Before we address the challenges of mounting a mission, we must first have a consensus among States to grant a mandate to intervene. As things stand, the major impediment to action is not the practical difficulty of finding the resources – difficult as that challenge can be. Too often, there is simply no political consensus to act.

On other occasions, there may be a widespread consensus among nations to take action. However, an objection by a single permanent member of the UN Security Council can override the general consensus. Too often, the international response to

conflict and human suffering appears locked in circular negotiations, in hand wringing, in mutual denunciation between States and, ultimately, nothing of value happens due to a political paralysis.

We have only to look at the international response to the current tragedy in Syria for the latest example unfolding while the world looks on. To date it is estimated that there have been in excess of 60,000 deaths, a substantially greater number injured and an unaccountable number of atrocities and gross violations of human rights. It is estimated that there are in excess of 600,000 Syrian refugees and it is estimated that should the conflict continue for another six months the numbers of refugees could exceed one million.

It is without doubt the case that the conditions necessary for a successful intervention may not presently exist and that there may not be at present practical action that can be taken to end this tragic conflict. It is also true that in the face of suffering, our natural inclination to intervene must be tempered by cool judgment. An ill timed intrusion before the parties are ready to co-operate may make matters worse, not better and may result in those deployed by way of a peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission becoming the targets of one or more warring factions. Sometimes in international conflict management, with hindsight, it may even be the case that the minority view that opposed intervention is vindicated.

There is however no way of knowing this with certainty and the unfortunate reality is that as the world looks on, many thousands more will die and there may be hundreds of thousands more refugees. An interesting question is whether the decision making structure of the UN Security Council simply reflects the harsh realities of the world we live in or whether we can do better and, if so, how should that architecture change?

Strictly speaking, these fundamental questions might be regarded as lying outside our remit today. However, it would be remiss of me as Minister for Defence not to acknowledge that these issues that form part of the backdrop to any discussion about international peace support operations.

Clearly, Ireland will continue to be a very strong supporter of the UN as the sole guarantor of legitimacy in peace support operations. UN peace support operations have proved outstandingly successful in so many crisis situations. When the members agree, the UN can act. The challenge is for the international community, and perhaps most especially the permanent members of the Security Council, to rise above national interest, to be mindful of the greater good and give the UN the chance it deserves.

That said, I believe that this seminar on European Union, NATO and African Union co-operation with the United Nations in the area of Crisis Management and Peacekeeping Operations will afford us the opportunity to examine how we can foster more effective co-operation and build partnerships both across regional organisations and between these organisations and the UN, in order to enhance the effectiveness of UN mandated peacekeeping operations. I am also very interested in hearing the views of today's

speakers as to the issues that have given rise to the reduction in the contribution of uniformed personnel from EU Member States and the potential and future opportunities for a reengagement by forces from EU member States in UN peacekeeping operations.

I wish you the best in your deliberations.

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