

London 29 May 2012

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator,
Valerie Amos**

**EXTRACTS from remarks to the Royal United Services Institute for
Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) on the theme of:**

“Soldier, Peacebuilder and Aid-giver: Can the UN be all?”

Sir Paul, Mr. Benn,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning. It's a pleasure to be here today to deliver this lecture in memory of Folke Bernadotte, a great humanitarian who negotiated the release of thousands of prisoners and saved tens of thousands of lives working for the Swedish Red Cross during the Second World War. He is one of many working for the UN who paid with his life in pursuit of UN ideals, when as the UN Security Council's mediator in the Arab-Israeli conflict, he was assassinated in 1948. Bernadotte's story is one which is particularly important for us to remember today, the International Day of UN Peacekeeping, as we remember the thousands of people involved in peacekeeping operations around the world and pause to reflect on the cost of securing peace in war-torn countries – with millions of lives lost and peacekeepers themselves coming under attack.

Last year 113 peacekeepers died through targeted attacks, violence, banditry, natural disasters, plane crashes, safety accidents and illness. UN personnel were specifically targeted in, for example, Nigeria and Afghanistan. And the UN has of course increasingly been targeted by extremists, despite the blue helmets.

There have been 67 UN Peacekeeping missions since 1948 – currently there are 17 peace operations, directed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping with over 120,000 personnel from 117 countries. A huge undertaking. And in countries where the final steps of securing peace remain elusive – for example in Sudan and South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Syria.

Today, we are all following with horror the events in Syria just two days ago and the responsibility placed on the shoulders of just 300 UN ceasefire monitors – they carry the expectations of the world.

This is of course one of the major dilemmas of the United Nations. Peacekeeping is a global partnership between uniformed and civilian staff, the UN Security Council and Member States. It brings together countries large and small, rich and poor.

UN Peacekeeping helps countries torn by conflict to create the conditions for sustainable peace, offering a common platform that combines political, justice, human rights, gender, child protection and other civilian expertise with military, police and protection experts and myriad logistical and operational capabilities. The global membership of the UN provides

peacekeeping with a universal legitimacy and a global reach, while specific Security Council mandates lend political weight to interventions.

But this legitimacy and global perspective has increasingly been challenged – not only in the UN's political priorities and focus, but also increasingly in peacekeeping operations and humanitarian work.

As the 'old order', characterized by the Cold War, and in particular, its proxy wars, has been replaced by more complex global dynamics with a shift in power relations and increasingly questions being asked about the UN and its role, the UN and its constituent parts have seen some of that change reflected in the way in which it perceived – it is no longer always seen as neutral and impartial. And it is in that context that integration has become such an important issue for discussion.

Thank you, Victoria, for your introduction to the report, which clearly outlines the difficulties of taking a coherent approach to integration.

Because it is not just a debate about structure. It is a debate which is at the heart of what the UN is about: its purpose and the contradictions at the heart of the way the organisation has evolved.

It's not just about peacekeeping and the title of this session – UN peacekeepers as soldiers, peace builders and givers – it's also about a United Nations with political, humanitarian, and development arms, often with overlapping mandates which do not always sit easily with each other.

Of course the fact that the UN is so large with so many (some would say too many) organizations under one umbrella is deliberate. It is partly to enable focus on particular issues, but it can lead to confusion with organisations with different philosophies and mandates. Peacekeeping, for example, covers a wide spectrum of activities, conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peacebuilding.

But, it is not linear or tidy in the way these elements intertwine on the ground. There are three core principles which underpin peacekeeping: consent of parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. The principles underpinning humanitarian action are impartiality, independence and neutrality. This overlap – but also difference – in the focus of mandates between peacekeeping and humanitarian operations has led to many challenges in the way we manage humanitarian action, particularly in areas of conflict where there is widespread humanitarian need, but where the UN may be seen to be supporting the government. As humanitarian workers, we need to be able to talk to and work with everyone we can to get access to people who need help and support.

There is fierce debate in the UN and elsewhere, about where it is appropriate for peacekeepers and humanitarians to work together. It is relatively straightforward where there are major humanitarian needs when natural disasters strike. We need armies, navies and air forces – not only to deliver life-saving aid as quickly as possible, but to repair infrastructure and offer logistical support. Using military assets can make the difference between life and death.

Relations between humanitarian workers and military forces range between cooperation, normally found in these natural disaster response operations, to coexistence, which is usually employed for emergencies where there is conflict. We, on the humanitarian side, are very clear that even where there is cooperation, it generally should not encompass the delivery of aid to people in need by military forces – what we call direct assistance. Cooperation should focus on indirect assistance, which means transporting aid and humanitarian workers, or infrastructure support, which includes repairing roads and bridges.

In Haiti after the earthquake, for example, foreign military assets were used not only to get help to people in need, but also to repair port facilities, to operate the airport, to clear roads and to establish field hospitals.

But Haiti, as tragic and chaotic as it was, presented a relatively straightforward environment for humanitarian work. Many of the places where we operate are far more complicated.

In Pakistan, for example, ongoing conflict had forced people from their homes in parts of the country when the flood emergency hit in 2010. Because we already had a presence in Pakistan, OCHA had established effective coordination and dialogue with the military before the emergency. One of our staff members helped to develop very detailed civil-military guidelines that specified exactly which military assets humanitarian workers would use. OCHA actually rejected an offer from NATO to establish an air bridge to Islamabad, because we found a commercial alternative.

Libya was also an extremely complex operating environment, as we tried to get help to people who had fled fighting and violence during the conflict. But here too, we established very effective coordination with NATO and shared information from the start of humanitarian operations. We established what was called a “deconfliction” mechanism that fed information on humanitarian movements and locations into NATO headquarters to influence targeting. I was personally grateful for that when I went to Tripoli and Benghazi last year. We dealt with access issues by talking to everyone who was involved in the fighting.

In Libya, humanitarian workers did not use military assets, and did not ask for military escorts or support for our security. Our assessment was that this would compromise access, particularly if it came from countries that were espousing regime change or enforcing the Security Council resolutions that authorized military action. We decided that we would only use military assets as a last resort. Even in the most difficult days, when Misrata was under fierce attack, we managed to get aid in without using these assets.

We stood by one of our most important operating principles: if we can operate through purely civilian means, we do so. We only use military assets if they can achieve life-saving results which can not be achieved in any other way. This can be a difficult decision to make. Public perception can be that we are not doing enough.

The humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality in delivering aid are often put to the test, as they were in Libya and now in Syria. But they are our only protection and our best defence in the dangerous places where we work. These principles do not gain their force through constant repetition, but through constant practice.

If we are seen to be completely independent, impartial and neutral, we gain credibility; we gain more space to fulfil our mandate. And we can use these examples to defend ourselves when we are accused, attacked or prevented from delivering aid, by non-state actors, armed groups and Governments alike. There are plenty of place where this is constantly put to the test – Somalia, Sudan and Afghanistan, for example.

If we work too closely with military partners, our principles are questioned and misperceptions arise about our motives and intentions. This is dangerous for humanitarian workers, and it impairs our ability to do our jobs.

And if we compromise our principles for the sake of operational expediency, a ripple effect can start that affects our work much further afield. Perceptions count, and they spread quickly. Humanitarian workers as a whole are viewed as intervening in domestic political affairs or – worse – as participating in a western intervention in non-western societies. It affects the credibility of principled humanitarian action not just in the country concerned, but elsewhere.

This is the background to the challenges that UN integration poses for humanitarian work.

I believe that where it can, the UN needs to operate as one. The concept of UN integration came about for excellent reasons. After the perceived failures of UN peacekeeping in the 1990s, particularly in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan, commissioned a report, which recognised that different parts of the UN had been working towards different goals. It recommended that UN missions should be integrated, with every department working together for the same goals, with one strategy, under one UN flag.

This clearly makes a lot of sense, and integration has been widely implemented. Eighteen out of OCHA's 32 offices are located in countries that host integrated UN missions.

The success stories include complementary but mutually supportive advocacy efforts by the mission and humanitarian leadership in Cote d'Ivoire, logistical support to NGOs in Haiti, and work to protect civilians in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As the report recognizes, some NGOs and UN humanitarian agencies believe that integration poses such a risk to humanitarian space where there is conflict that they have begun withdrawing from UN humanitarian coordination mechanisms in Afghanistan, and have threatened to do so in Somalia. In both countries, NGOs are the major implementers; we cannot operate without them.

In my role as the Emergency Relief Coordinator, I stand for the interests of the entire humanitarian community at the UN, not only the UN's humanitarian agencies. I am keenly aware of the problems integration poses for our colleagues on the ground.

The threats to humanitarian workers are real and present; we are increasingly in the firing line. Over the past decade, violent attacks against humanitarian workers have tripled. Last year, more than 100 were killed, and many more kidnapped or otherwise attacked. And it is our national staff who bear the brunt of these attacks.

Many humanitarian workers both inside and outside the UN believe that UN integration is valuable and necessary – as long as it does not compromise humanitarian principles.

We need to continue the search for balance between defending these principles, and finding ways to work with a wide range of actors, including military organizations and peacekeepers, that make positive contributions to our work. Integration is a UN-mandated policy; withdrawing from it is not an option, nor would we want it to be. But at the same time, we need to make it work for us.

This report raises important questions that we must address.

I believe the starting point is a clear definition of roles and responsibilities.

The primary expectation humanitarian workers have of military forces, and especially peacekeeping forces, is that they provide a secure environment in which humanitarian organizations can operate. There should be a clear distinction between humanitarian work and the UN's other activities. This can be done at a strategic level.

Second, the integration agenda and mechanisms must always be suitable to context. Flexibility is key. Every part of an integrated mission must understand the objectives of that mission.

We at OCHA, together with our UN humanitarian partners and NGOs, are reviewing our own policies and structures in operating environments that put our work and staff at greatest risk.

As the report points out, we must enhance understanding on all sides of what integration is, how it should operate, its limitations and what is at stake for humanitarian organizations and those we seek to help. We continue to work with our colleagues in Political Affairs and Peacekeeping to improve guidelines and training, to gain a better understanding of our working methods and principles, and to find constructive ways of dealing with disagreements.

We will undertake more advocacy with members of the Security Council so that political, peacekeeping and humanitarian objectives are not conflated when the mandates for integrated missions are written.

Some seventy per cent of OCHA's work is connected with the effects of conflict. Our operating environment will remain dangerous and complicated for the foreseeable future. If we do not address difficult questions now, they will have an impact on our work for many years.

The objective of many of our peacekeeping operations is to create the political space for political solutions to take root – without that our work will never end. I am sure that you all share my concern that in countries like DRC, Afghanistan and Sudan – which have the biggest humanitarian operations – we have been there so long, too long.

Peacekeeping operations are multi-dimensional, including responsibilities such as ceasefire monitoring, implementation of peace accords, protection of civilians, facilitation of humanitarian assistance, support to electoral processes and strengthening national capacities in the areas of rule of law and security.

These responsibilities make peacekeeping a valuable tool in the international community's efforts to both respond to threats to international peace and security and prevent the recurrence of conflict. It also highlights the need to identify diverse capacities and build the necessary global partnerships vital for successful peacekeeping operations.

We want our peacekeepers to do more and more – to be soldier, peace builder and aid giver. To be protector. But they can't be all of these things in all settings.

The best way to deal with this is to keep communication channels open. It is vital to understand the context in which we are working, to understand the way stakeholders will use or seek to manipulate mandate differences.

We need to be smart and flexible, but above all, we need to stand by our principles. Peacekeeping operations and humanitarian action cannot be divorced from each other, but it is important that where there is connectedness, that that connectedness is not exploited.

We must remain constantly vigilant. We must give peacekeepers and our humanitarian workers the support they need.

I agree with Victoria that it requires leadership and trust, and crucially, it is about accountability.

This is a challenge, but not an impossible one. We cannot let them down.