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International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers

In 2002, the General Assembly called on all Member States to pay “appropriate” tribute to United Nations peacekeepers each year on May 29. For the United States, paying its peacekeeping bill would be the most appropriate way to mark the occasion.

United Nations Peacekeepers Day was established in 2002, when the General Assembly adopted Resolution 57/129 which selected May 29 (the day the first UN peacekeeping operation was established in 1948) as the day to pay tribute to all past and present UN peacekeepers, and to honor the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace. In recent years UN peacekeeping operations have expanded considerably and there are now approximately 83,000 military and police personnel deployed in 18 UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. United States support to UN peacekeeping is a cost effective investment in global stability. The U.S. must move quickly to pay up its current arrears, which may soon reach one billion dollars.

Since 1948, UN peacekeepers have undertaken 61 field missions, negotiated 172 peaceful settlements that have ended regional conflicts, and enabled people in more than 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections. Today’s UN peacekeepers have difficult and often complex missions in some of the world’s most dangerous places: Sudan, Lebanon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti. In The DRC alone, according to a recent International Rescue Committee survey, nearly four million people have been killed from war-related causes since 1998. Civilians continue to be killed, injured and displaced by conflict in the eastern part of the country. But the toll would be far worse were it not for the UN mission and the dedication of the peacekeepers.

It is mainly through participation in and support for UN peacekeeping that Member States can begin to live up to their responsibility to protect civilians afflicted by armed conflict. In addition to civilian protection tasks

and maintaining peace and security, peacekeepers are increasingly mandated to reform and professionalize security services and justice systems, and to help improve the performance of local government officials during transitions from war to peace. From Namibia in 1989 to Liberia at present, the UN has become quite experienced in post-conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding and state-building through operations that are increasingly designed to stay the course way beyond the initial emergency response.

While 112 Member States contribute to the total of 83,000 police and military personnel, a handful of developing countries provide the bulk of the UN forces. The top three contributors --- Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India --- are each providing well over 9,000 troops and police to ongoing operations.

As of May 1, 2007, the UN has recorded 2,355 peacekeeper fatalities in 58 years. India has paid the heaviest toll, with 123 fatalities. Sixty-two US personnel have died on UN operations, 30 of these in Somalia, the mission that led to the termination of deployment of American soldiers under the UN flag.

While the United States no longer provides units of troops to UN peacekeeping, it pays --- or should pay --- more than a quarter of the peacekeeping bill. The approved UN peacekeeping budget for the period from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007 is about \$5.28 billion. This represents only 0.5% of global military spending. Although peacekeeping is paid for by all Member States, the agreed formula that correlates roughly with countries’ relative economic wealth means that the top three

financial contributors are assessed to provide 45% of the money: United States (27 per cent), Japan (19 per cent), and Germany (9 per cent). Last year, the assessed UN peacekeeping dues of the U.S. amounted to a little more than one billion dollars. The Government Accountability Office estimates that this is at least eight times cheaper than the cost of the U.S. undertaking unilateral peace operations.

The UN has been extremely serious about implementing a number of critical reforms since the issuance of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (the “Brahimi report”) in 2000. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon seems intent on maintaining the peacekeeping reform momentum generated by Kofi Annan, and is leading efforts to restructure the Department of Peacekeeping Operations so that it can better manage the surge in demand for complex UN peacekeeping operations and provide more effective, coherent and responsive support to field operations.

The GAO has already determined that the UN is a comparatively efficient and cost-effective force provider. The UN and its various agencies also possess the broad array of civil capabilities needed for nation building and the organization enjoys the greatest degree of international legitimacy in fulfilling this role. Yet extant and future UN missions are in jeopardy because several Member States are reneging on their commitments to support UN peacekeeping, with the U.S. being the most serious defaulter.

No UN peace operation is possible without U.S. consent and U.S. financial contributions; the U.S. Congress is indeed a de facto 16th member of the UN Security Council. The existing U.S. peacekeeping debt is already preventing the UN from reimbursing some of the top troop contributing countries, including firm U.S. allies in the Global War on Terror. If the situation persists, these countries may be unwilling to volunteer personnel and equipment for future missions, or decide to withdraw from ongoing missions. Premature troop withdrawal by one or more contingent contributors has had a devastating effect on the viability of past UN missions.

Despite U.S. reliance on and support for expanded multi-lateral burden-sharing in promoting peace and stability, the U.S. may soon be more than one billion dollars behind in meeting its peacekeeping obligations. This is reminiscent of the situation in September 2001, when the U.S. was \$1.7 billion in arrears. Soon after 9/11, the U.S. decided to make good its debt, with the Congress unanimously approving a first tranche of \$582 million towards payment of arrears.

REFUGEES INTERNATIONAL JOINS THE BETTER WORLD CAMPAIGN AND THE PRICE OF PEACE PETITIONERS IN RECOMMENDING THAT:

- ❑ The U.S. Congress take urgent action to fulfill U.S. commitments to UN peacekeeping by increasing funding to the Contributions to International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) account by \$500 million in the fiscal year 2008 budget;
- ❑ The U.S. take concrete steps towards paying off prior U.S. peacekeeping arrears.

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