

**ADDRESS BY C SANDF GENERAL RUDZANI MAPHWANYA DURING
THE COMMEMORATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
PEACEKEEPERS INTERNATIONAL DAY HOSTED AT THE DOD
MOBILASATION CENTRE IN BLOEMFOTEIN ON 29 MAY 2025**

(Salutation)

It is with deep respect and gratitude that I welcome you to this solemn commemoration of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. Before we proceed, let us rise and observe a moment of silence in remembrance of those brave individuals who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving on peacekeeping missions. May their courageous souls rest in eternal peace.

It is befitting that I start off by reflecting on what the UN SG said in his opening remarks at the UN Ministerial in Berlin: "In trouble spots around the world, Blue Helmets can mean the difference between life and death. Now more than ever, the world needs the United Nations. And the United Nations needs peacekeeping that is fully equipped for today's realities and tomorrow's challenges," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

Today, we gather to honour the thousands of United Nations peacekeepers, the Blue Helmets, who embody humanity's highest aspiration for peace. **This day serves as an opportunity to reaffirm the international community's commitment to peace, security, and international cooperation. The day is dedicated to highlighting the contributions of military, police, and civilian personnel who serve under the UN flag, often in challenging and dangerous conditions.**

Drawn from diverse backgrounds and nations, these dedicated men and women serve in challenging peace operations across conflict zones in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.

They risk their lives daily in some of the world's most dangerous and unstable regions, protecting civilians, upholding human rights, supporting elections, and strengthening institutions.

The South African National Defence Force and the entire nation, joins the international community in honouring those who have passed and those who continue to serve on missions worldwide.

In a message to mark the peacekeepers day, the UN Secretary General Guterres reiterated what he said when opening the UN Peacekeepers Ministerial in that: “Today, peacekeepers face increasingly complex situations in an increasingly complex world... Now more than ever, the world needs the UN — and the UN needs peacekeeping that is fully equipped for today’s realities and tomorrow’s challenges”. This is the reality which is premised on the theme under which this solemn occasion is celebrated.

Technology that is deployed in the contemporary battlefield has prompted the world to come to a realization that we cannot continue to fashion and design the peace keeping suite in the same old way. Thus this year's theme, “The Future of Peacekeeping,” reflects the evolving nature of peace operations in a complex and rapidly changing world.

The UN is responding positively and is actively working to modernize and adapt missions for the challenges of the future. The theme emphasises the “Pact for the Future”— which was adopted by the UN last year.

The practical expression of this desire includes a commitment to adapt peacekeeping to a changing world, as expressed member states’ pledges

to fill capability gaps and assist in adapting UN peacekeeping to emerging challenges and new realities at the recent Peacekeeping Ministerial in Berlin, which I attended with the Minister of Defence and Military Veteran, Mme Motshekga last week.

For over 70 years, the UN has upheld a tradition of supporting nations struggling with turmoil, helping them find peaceful solutions. This commitment comes at a great cost, with over 4,000 peacekeepers having paid the ultimate price under the UN flag. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten.

Peacekeepers play a vital role in conflict zones—maintaining ceasefires, protecting vulnerable populations, and supporting the rebuilding of societies ravaged by war. Their work often comes at great personal risk, with thousands having given their lives in service to peace since 1948.

This international day is not only a time for remembrance but also an opportunity to highlight the need for continued support, training, and reform in peacekeeping operations. It reminds us that sustainable peace requires international solidarity, accountability, and commitment.

South Africa began its peacekeeping contributions in 1999, joining the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). Almost 26 years later, South Africa remains a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, with its largest deployment to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), involving over 2,000 peacekeepers.

We have also contributed police personnel to the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), and participated in peace operations in Burundi, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Liberia, Nepal, and Darfur, Sudan.

Achieving peace comes at a high price, with casualties and setbacks. Yet, in honouring those we have lost, we reaffirm our determination to see peace, security, and stability become a reality for nations across our continent and the world.

We extend our deepest condolences to the families, friends, and comrades of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Their courage and selfless commitment to peace remain an inspiration. As the SANDF, we remain undeterred and committed to working with like-minded forces to ensure peace prevails in our continent.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed guests, and most importantly, our brave "blue helmets," As Commander of the SANDF, it is with a sense of both pride and solemn reflection that I address you today, particularly concerning the Democratic Republic of Congo. As announced earlier this month, we are busy with the phased withdrawal of our forces from the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or SAMIDRC. We are working around the clock with the SADC Secretariat to ensure that we get all our people and equipment back from the Eastern DRC. We are at a critical stage of the withdrawal of the Contingents equipment. I have, promised our media that as soon as we embark on the personnel phase of the withdrawal , I will invite the willing journalists to the SADC Assembly area to bear witness to that phase of withdrawal.

Let me reiterate that our objective: remains to foster peace and stability through mediation and political engagement.

We believe SAMIDRC has contributed significantly to this effort, paving the way for a future where peace can truly take root. Indeed, in every

external mission we undertake, peace remains our ultimate and unwavering goal.

Today, as we honour our peacekeepers, we also remember with reverence the fourteen heroes who tragically lost their lives in the DRC, fighting for the Congolese people's right to a peaceful and stable existence. I say with unwavering conviction that their sacrifice was not in vain.

Their toil, their blood, has watered the tree we see today, a tree bearing the nascent fruits of peace and stability in that nation. However, we are under no illusion that our work is complete. We recognize that we are still a long way from achieving our ultimate goal of lasting peace and stability. Our withdrawal does not diminish our responsibility to continue supporting peace-building efforts in the DRC. SADC, along with other international entities, will continue to seek peaceful resolutions in the Central African nation. Our departure is not a desertion of the Congolese people. As directed by our government, we remain prepared to support future peacekeeping missions in the DRC and elsewhere, whenever and wherever our expertise and dedication are required.

I must also address a critical aspect of the nature of modern conflict. It is often said that the first casualty of war is the truth. In times of conflict, accurate information is often deliberately suppressed, distorted, or manipulated to control public opinion and advance particular agendas. Cyber space has become the new battleground, a potent weapon of destruction.

Esteemed colleagues, members of the press, and fellow citizens, we stand at a critical juncture. We are engaged in the serious business of war, a reality that touches the lives of each and every one of us. Let us

not forget that behind the headlines and the statistics, there are real people – mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters – whose lives are profoundly impacted by the events unfolding around us. In times of conflict, information is a powerful weapon.

As such, I address myself directly to all South Africans and all peace loving people around the continent and the world, who in one way or another find themselves in the media space, be it mainstream or social media, we need to join hands and report objectively, without fear or favour but stick to the facts as they present themselves. Now, more than ever, let us resist the temptation to amplify rumours or unverified claims.

Misinformation and the spread of false narratives can have devastating consequences. It can incite panic, sow division, and undermine the very fabric of our society. Let us all commit to responsible ethical information sharing, and to the preservation of trust during this challenging period. The UN Ministerial echoed the need for innovative approaches to address complex conflicts, leverage emerging technologies, and address threats such as mis- and disinformation.

On this special day, I want to express my sincere gratitude to our dedicated members who continue to serve as credible peacekeepers in their various deployments.

Your nation stands behind you, we will continue to cherish your effort to strive every day to build a brighter future for the communities where you are deployed and for our own country. Do not despair in the face of challenges, let's not be the ones that peddle false demoralising video footages that do that borders on security breaches. Remember one thing that makes you different from others; you are destined for success after success because you subscribe to the most noble belief that: Discipline is

the Mother of Victory.” Continue to show high level of discipline in all spheres. Carry your code of conduct wherever you go!!

To our international colleagues, including the over 400 UN Volunteers who work far from their homes and families, often in difficult conditions, to support countries on their path to peace: your dedication is deeply appreciated. Indeed, the United Nations is a proven investment in global peace, security, and prosperity. Indeed “In an interconnected world, no nation can achieve peace and security for its citizens on its own.”

As force-contributing nations, we must recommit ourselves to carrying the responsibility for peacekeeping. We must also take decisive action to make our operations safer and more effective in today’s challenging environments. And, crucially, we must remain committed to reinforcing the vital role that our forces are playing in promoting human rights.

In closing, I leave you with this thought: War and peace are not opposites, but rather two sides of the same coin. While war is a brutal and destructive force, the pursuit of peace is a fundamental human desire that unites us all.

I thank you.