

CHALLENGES SEMINAR DINNER
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL
28TH APRIL 2010

THE AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPING MEMORIAL PROJECT
BY
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Thank you for that introduction. Might I begin by acknowledging our host for this evening, Senator The Honorable John Faulkner, Australian Minister for Defence, Our Guest Speaker, HRH Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Hussein, Ambassador of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United States, and those people representing the Challenges Partners and Coordinators - especially the Folke – Benadotte Academy and the Asia Pacific Civil Military Centre of Excellence. I thank them for the splendid work they have done in bringing us all together for this vital forum.

Let me also add my personal welcome to those many international visitors to Australia who have joined in addressing this subject of fundamental importance to our humanity, that of protecting civilians in regions of conflict. To my great pleasure, I note that many of you have been colleagues in past peacekeeping endeavours, and that we have shared many experiences and concerns over the last two decades as we have struggled to find better ways to reconcile people in conflict and to protect them from the deprivation of war - for that is what we are talking about – whether it be civil war or war over boundaries between emerging states. There is no need for me to point out to this audience that this is a subject that has had international attention since the flowering of the liberal nation state back in the 19th Century and the beginning of the Geneva Conventions.

Although peacekeeping as an international endeavour has been around since the Second World War and the advent of the United Nations in 1945, it wasn't until the end of the Cold War in 1989 that we could comprehend the international community engaging inside national boundaries. This began the need for the UN to share with what were often fragile sovereign bodies of questionable legitimacy the responsibility for the rights and wellbeing of their civilian populations.

Let me remind you that only 50 nations signed the Charter in 1945, the majority of what are now member nations being colonies or vassal states of large, essentially European empires at the time. Indeed, I think you would all agree that the most significant characteristic of the second half of the 20th Century was the growth of nation states – the membership of the United Nations growing from 50 to nearly 200 over that time.

I believe this is a staggering fact - 150 new nations taking on sovereign status and becoming members of the international community of nations in just half a century. While we have had many conflicts over this period, I am sure you will agree with me that the fact that we have not had a major and absolute conflict over this time of great and emerging complexity represents a

great triumph of the United Nations and its members. I remind you all that it is not over. There is more to come and the complexity is likely to increase in magnitude rather than diminish.

Having commanded one of the first of these complex post Cold War missions in Cambodia, I can assure you that I am starkly aware that many people have suffered throughout this transition and the struggle that goes on within it between criminal and progressive forces to determine who will exercise which prerogatives in these new nations. I have participated in many discussions about who is responsible for what in these confused jurisdictions and agreed on many occasions that it is a question of clear mandates and strong leadership from the Security Council – particularly its inner core of the Permanent Five.

That has been the state of the game for many years now and, although there have been a number of regional initiatives to protect civil populations in conflict zones, primarily because of the potential for ethnic and cultural migration of the issues that inflame hostilities, it remains the prerogative of the Permanent Five to negotiate the conditions that make this possible. We are all in the business therefore of arousing the humanitarian conscience of these global leaders in a way that provides a proper balance between national self interest and the stated commitment of the international community to the rights of individual human beings.

As you all know, these are very fine arguments for us all to be having in strategic forums far from the grizzly, day by day reality that faces the young men and women who perform peacekeeping duties on the ground and who are often the brunt of criticism for what are, when it is all said and done, the failures of the international community. We ask a great deal of our peacekeepers. They are the very essence of the moral authority of the United Nations. Without their eyes and ears, and their physical presence on the ground you could go so far as to say that the United Nations has no moral authority.

What do I mean by this? It is simply that without a physical presence all the expressions of concern and resolutions of the international community have no meaning whatsoever to those people who are directly affected by the deprivations of conflict and with whom the international community has to build an alliance in order to achieve its aims.

This need often means spreading forces and observers thinly across the terrain in vulnerable dispositions and asking them to stay there with the people in the face of threats to their mutual survival. How often in my command of the United Nations Force in Cambodia, for example, did I have cause to reflect on this fact? Taking risks with the lives of those you command, many from different cultures and not armed for conflict, is a very salutary command experience. You come to realize very quickly how dependant you are on their professionalism, their integrity, their courage and their capacity to identify with the people whose security depends on their presence. This is what I mean when I say that the moral authority of the international community is totally dependent on the way they, military and civilians, perform their tasks

You know there is a price to pay for this. Peacekeepers do die at their post or are wounded in the performance of those duties in very dangerous terrain. Many carry deep psychological scars back to their countries of origin – particularly when they are confronted with the consequences

of failure and the deaths in large numbers of their fellow human beings, such as we have seen in places like Rwanda, Somalia, the Sudan and the former Yugoslavia.

This has been a part of the price of peace over that half century I have spoken of earlier. It will be the price of peace for the next half century, which is potentially more tumultuous and dangerous than anything we have experienced so far. Helping people to solve population and resource problems of great magnitude without resorting to the uncontrollable dimensions of absolute war will be the great challenge. It is important therefore that we recognize how dependent we have been and will be in the future, on the sacrifices of our peacekeepers.

In this country, Australia, as you have seen over the last weekend, we have a powerful commitment to remembering those who have died in war – often wars of long ago on behalf of different international constructs. I am very happy to say that we are now beginning to recognize our peacekeepers in the same way. Major General Tim Ford and his committee of dedicated former peacekeepers of the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project have gone a long way towards establishing a peacekeepers memorial along Anzac Parade in an honoured place among all those memorials to the men and women who have taken part in conflicts since Australia became a nation at the beginning of the 20th Century.

What we are talking about here is a national memorial that recognizes the sacrifices and service of the over 60,000 Australian men and women, civilian, military and police, who have served in nearly 60 different international peace operations over the last 60 years. Together with my fellow patrons, Tony Negus and Geraldine Doogue and our Patron in Chief, the Governor General of Australia, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce, I am delighted that Australia has taken this initiative to give prominence to the service of peacekeepers, past, present and future. I hope that similar recognition will be given to peacekeepers the world over. It would be a valuable contribution to the spirit of international engagement that we are all talking about.

I am pleased to tell you that the Memorial site on ANZAC parade has been approved by the Canberra National Memorials Committee and that an outstanding design that will be a high quality, enduring landmark has been selected after international competition. This has been fully developed to works approval stage. It is "shovel ready" for construction.

The winning design features two polished monoliths separated by a golden passage of light leading to a courtyard for individual reflection and commemorative activities in which the story of Australian Peacekeeping will be portrayed. This will be both a powerful Memorial to Australian Peacekeeping and an appropriate reminder of the importance of peacekeeping to our mutual futures.

The Memorial will be used for national ceremonies as well as provide a place for group and individual reflection on days such as the international day of peacekeepers (29 May), UN day (24 Oct) and Australian Peacekeepers Day (14 Sep). In fact, it is planned to be opened on one of those days marking the 65th Anniversary of Australian Peacekeeping – the 14th of September 2012. I recommend you look at the concept on the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project website.

I hope you will agree that this memorial can be an inspiration to those who have and will contribute to peace operations. It will send a message to our own community and the world about Australia's commitment to international peace and security and to the United Nations.

As I have said, the project is ready to go but it still needs further support from Australians to complete the project. There can be no question of building an inferior product, one that will not capture the story of the last 60 years, nor inspire the commitment to peacekeeping as a calling of high honour. While some support has already come from Government and Industry, significantly more is required to make sure that this memorial captures those aims and stands powerfully alongside those other memorials in our nation's capital. The Australian Peacekeeping Memorial Project team is dedicated to ensuring that this is so and I ask all Australians to support them.