

Bulwagang Apolinario Mabini, Department of Foreign Affairs

30 May 2012

Ambassador Hilario G. Davide Jr.,

Acting UN Resident Coordinator and World Health Organization Country Representative Dr.
Soe Nyunt-U,

Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

General Jaime Delos Santos,

Director Rodolfo Tor,

Officers of the National Peace Operations Council,

Officers from the Armed Forces and the National Police,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

Today, we observe the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers to honor the memory of the fallen—the close to three thousand men and women from all over the world who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace.

I am deeply honored to lead this year's commemoration here in Manila of this important event and thank each and everyone of you for joining me in remembering the 2,990 peacekeepers who have given up their lives since the United Nations embarked on its first mission to help keep the peace 65 years ago.

Like most other troop- and police-contributing countries, the Philippines has also lost several of its own while fulfilling its obligation as a member of the United Nations to help in the maintenance of international peace and security. A total of 22 Filipino military, police and civilian personnel have perished over the years while helping the United Nations keep the peace in conflict areas as near as Cambodia and East Timor to as far as the Sudan and Haiti.

Today, we remember our 22 fallen heroes, most especially Joseph Ubaldo of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and Charles Uy of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), who are among the 112 men and women peacekeepers who died in the line of duty last year as a result of acts of violence, accidents and disease.

The International Day of UN Peacekeepers is not only about the fallen. It is also about those

who were left behind-the thousands of other men and women from 116 Member-States of the United Nations, including the Philippines, who served and continue to serve in the cause of peace.

On this day, we also pay tribute to the more than 120,000 peacekeepers currently serving in 17 UN mission areas who work selflessly with great courage and under the most difficult of conditions to help lay the foundations for peace and security in conflict areas of the globe.

Today, we also take this opportunity to salute our own peacekeepers from the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, both past and present, who brought pride and honor to the country and our people for serving under the blue and white standard of the United Nations.

Hundreds of men and women from the Armed Forces and the National Police have served in UN mission areas since the first Filipino peacekeepers were deployed 50 years ago. Manila's involvement in peacekeeping operations began in December 1962, when then UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold called on the Philippines to join other Member-States in supporting the ongoing UN operations in the Congo.

Then President Diosdado Macapagal heeded that call and immediately committed the 9th Tactical Fighter Squadron of the Philippine Air Force. The unit, popularly known as the Limbas Squadron, was made up of six Canadian-made F86-E Sabre jets and 44 men under Lt. Col. Jose Rancudo.

The Limbas Squadron spent four months in Katanga where it flew reconnaissance flights in support of Israeli peacekeepers on the ground. The Filipino squadron also flew persuasion flights alongside Iranian and Swedish air units that were also serving under the UN.

The Philippines has gone a long way since then, contributing hundreds of so-called Blue Helmets to help in our collective quest for global peace and security. After the initial stint in the Congo, Filipino peacekeepers proudly served alongside their counterparts from other troop- and police-contributing countries in areas such as Cambodia, Iraq, Haiti, Afghanistan, Burundi, Kosovo, Georgia and Nepal.

The Philippine commitment to UN peacekeeping is underscored by the presence of 922 military and police personnel serving as military observers, staff officers, police officers and members of formed contingents in Cote d'Ivoire, Darfur, the Golan Heights, Haiti, Kashmir, Liberia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste.

Our contribution to peacekeeping does not end there. The Philippines had also been given the honor to occupy leadership positions in UN operations. The Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights is a Filipino-Maj. Gen. Natalio Ecarma III of the Philippine Marine Corps.

Another Filipino, Gen. Jaime Delos Santos of the Philippine Army, had served as force commander of the UN Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET), earning him the distinction of being the first Filipino to head a UN peacekeeping force. Still another Filipino, Director Rodolfo Tor of the Philippine National Police, had served as UN Police Commissioner also in Timor-Leste. Several military and police officers have also been given the opportunity to serve with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Our peacekeepers have brought pride and honor to our country and our people. We commend their selfless efforts to carry out the mandate of their respective peacekeeping missions. Their service and contributions will never be forgotten for they have showed commitment beyond the call of duty, courage in the face of adversity, and endurance in the face of pain and death.

Our peacekeepers have proven themselves worthy of the respect and recognition not only of their fellow Filipinos but also by the members of the communities in the conflict areas where they have served whose lives they have touched.

Our commemoration of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers will not be complete without the renewed commitment of the National Council for United Nations Peace Operations to exert further efforts to strengthen the country's peacekeeping capacity to allow it to continue to meet existing and future UN requirements.

I am thankful to my predecessor, former Secretary Alberto G. Romulo, who set the vision for

Philippine peacekeeping during his watch as Chair. The Council shall continue charting the Philippine peacekeeping roadmap that will provide the strategic direction for our participation in UN operations.

Our resources may be limited but this should not prevent us from strengthening our peacekeeping partnership with the United Nations and other like-minded Member-States. Our vision is not only to expand our participation in UN peace operations by deploying more personnel but to also be effective in our participation by ensuring that the personnel we contribute are properly trained and equipped.

In closing and on behalf of the Philippine peacekeeping community, I wish to again express my appreciation to all of you for joining us in this morning's commemoration.

Maraming Salamat and Mabuhay!