

**ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 67TH ANNIVERSARY OF
AUSTRALIAN PEACEKEEPING
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UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING MEMORIAL SITE
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, fellow peacekeepers and peace builders

Let me add my welcome to this 67th Anniversary service to commemorate the involvement and sacrifice of Australians in the service of world peace over the years since 1947. This month of September in that year of 1947 was also the time at which the Australian Regular Army was raised by legislation - after the Second World War and the signing of the United Nations Charter in 1945. The beginning of Australian peacekeeping and the beginning of the Australian Regular Army are therefore synonymous events.

Few people make this connection between our nation's hope for a better and more peaceful world and these two historic outcomes of World War Two – the international commitment to the UN Charter and the raising for the first time of a regular army in Australia. The Australian Armed Services have been involved in many conflicts since 1947 but the one constant that has brought them together with the nation's police forces and engaged civilians over that time has been peacekeeping and peace building.

Almost instantly, of course, Australian military observers were engaged in the field helping as observers under the UN banner to resolve the problems of a global paradigm shift in the emerging post colonial era – UN peacekeeping emerged from this. At the same time Regular Army, Navy and Air Force units became engaged in a UN enforcement operation in Korea, helping to stabilize a conflict that could have rolled into World War Three. This was not peacekeeping, although an unstable truce emerged from this stalemate.

It wasn't very long until Australian police became engaged in one of the early forms of peacekeeping in Cyprus, helping to stabilize a problem between the Greeks and the Turks on the southern flank of NATO. In many ways this ongoing problem symbolized the emerging international challenge of the contemporary times as ancient and underlying cultural and geographic conflicts have to be addressed at the end of the era of European ascendancy.

How to resolve these conflicts peacefully without engaging in the process of reciprocating violence that war and enforcement entails is the main question of the day. Whatever happens, peace will not come from violence. It will only come through reconciliation through negotiation and dialogue, combined with a real commitment to justice and wellbeing on all sides of the conflict.

The problem is now, as it has always been, how to create the circumstances in which a negotiated peace becomes a tangible thing, where people can have a sense that a better life for them and their families becomes possible through compromise. This is what peacekeeping is all about – helping to create those circumstances and that hope.

For the forty odd years of the Cold War from 1947 to 1989 such compromises were truly difficult because of the ideological differences that plagued the Security Council and the contending factions in the wars of national liberation. Everyone except a few radicals on the fringes had a powerful vested interest in preventing a plunge into absolute war. The horror of that was too fresh in their minds. Therefore, peacekeeping, with few exceptions, focused on the task of observation and negotiation, with neutral Blue Beret observers along international fault lines, reporting to high level negotiating bodies in a way that allowed control of potentially explosive situations.

This demanded a very high level of military professionalism among observers to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of their observations and reports. It was very dangerous work where an error of judgment could have fatal outcomes for everyone, including the observers themselves.

Australian Defence Force people excelled in this work, bringing professionalism to the task in a way that established for them and our nation a strong reputation as a provider of reliable and trusted peacekeepers. By the same token, we have to admit that most of those fault lines exist to this day. While the peacekeepers remain, in many instances their circumstances are much more volatile and dangerous.

After the end the end of the Cold War in 1989 it became possible to consider a different form of peacekeeping – a more complex form where military peacekeepers could combine with civilian administrators and police to reach into a conflict in a disrupted state and help the people to address the deeper sources of the divisions within their countries and institutions. Almost immediately after 1989, the conflicts in Nicaragua, South West Africa and Cambodia offered up this possibility. Australians became involved in all of these, and particularly in Namibia and Cambodia, put forward military units and individuals, police teams and a broad spectrum of civilian advisors and administrators to contribute to the efforts of a reinvigorated and optimistic United Nations.

I commanded the Military Component of the United Nations Transition Authority in Cambodia – a revolutionary attempt to take control of a war torn, dysfunctional state and bring it and its people back into the community of nations. This was an idea conceived in the United States and developed by Gareth Evans and his team at Foreign Affairs. Never before had the UN assumed to insert itself so deep in the structure and culture of a country. Some say it was an idea whose time had come – that the Cambodian people, after a quarter of a century of war, were both desperate and ready to place their hopes and faith in a group of foreigners brought together by the realization of an idea about the renewed moral authority and high ideals of the United Nations.

While it is true that this moral authority was the key to our success in Cambodia, it is equally true that the professionalism, dedication and courage of our peacekeepers and peace builders, military and civilian, was the magic and spiritual ingredient that made it work. Don't doubt me in this. As Commander I was totally dependent on the quality of all the troops I had under command from the 34 nations that contributed to UNTAC, but it would not have been possible were it not for the teamwork and sacrifice shared among all Australians in the UN mission, the diplomatic support and NGOs and aid workers in the field. To be frank about this I was truly humbled by what I saw going on around me.

Courage and compassion are the key characteristics of effective peacekeepers and Australians displayed this in abundance. Importantly, from an Australian Defence Force perspective, this was the first operation in which Australian servicewomen played such a significant role on the ground, taking their place alongside, and sometimes commanding servicemen in the Cambodian countryside. It was a consummate international performance in many ways and laid the foundation for the deployment of Australian servicewomen in later ADF deployments worldwide.

Unusually for the United Nations, I think you will agree, we completed our mission on time and under budget and sense of achievement for everyone on account of this fact was a reward in itself. But, like all such things there is a price for success. These were long deployments, twelve months for many and two years for some. The stress induced by the fighting and death around those who served along the borders and conflict lines of Cambodia was grinding and debilitating. Land mines and disease provided a constant background to the work in the field. As always the stress on families of coping with the worry of having loved ones in circumstances that are dangerous and an ongoing source of speculation by the Media was little recognized at the time.

Next week I will join others to recognize the UNTAC Force Communication Unit with the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation. The fact that it has taken 21 years to gain that recognition is disappointing, but it has at last been achieved and all those who served in this unique and strategically significant ANZAC unit will be able to wear the citation with pride for all time, knowing that it has been thoroughly deserved.

Since the United Nations Transition Authority completed its mission in Cambodia many other young Australians have engaged in peacekeeping and peace building around the world, some under United Nations auspices and some under other authorities. Many missions, such as East Timor and the Solomon Islands have been much closer to home.

There is no reason to believe that the demand for peacekeeping will diminish. Everything points to the fact that, as the world becomes less stable, the demand will grow. More and more of our people will be asked to place themselves in situations such as I have described.

I certainly pray that this is so for, as I look up and down this Avenue at these great national memorials, I see the enduring reminder that war, or the absence of peace, moves young people everywhere to a different plane of existence where their sacrifice in turn leaves their nations with the despair of mourning and the building of monuments. Our nation will have to recognize that building the peace is always likely to bear more fruit than stoking the fires of conflict.

This peacekeeping memorial that Major General Tim Ford and his team are dedicated to building will therefore become an organic living thing – a constant reminder to all that Australians have been out there making a difference in conflict situations and will be doing so as we sit here in times ahead and remember them on this day that we have chosen to commemorate the sacrifice and commitment of all Australian peacekeepers. I congratulate everyone for the results of their work so far to bring this memorial to fruition and encourage all of you to join the team and help make it an early reality.

We must not forget.