

## Peacekeeping

The United Nations has established a number of international days throughout the year, quite a few of which relate directly to issues of peace and reconciliation. This last Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> May, was devoted to UN Peacekeepers and the important role they play in many different parts of the world.

The theme this year is “UN Peacekeepers: 70 Years of Service and Sacrifice”, and celebrates their contribution to peace over that long period of time. The first UN peacekeeping mission was established on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1948, when the Security Council authorized the deployment of a small number of UN military observers to the Middle East to form the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization to monitor the Armistice Agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Since then UN peacekeepers have helped many countries to make the transition from war to peace.

To quote from the official website: “Over seven decades, more than one million men and women have served under the United Nations flag in 71 peacekeeping operations, directly impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people, protecting the world’s most vulnerable and saving countless lives. Our peacekeepers make immense sacrifices, often serving at great personal risk and under challenging conditions. The families of peacekeepers and their governments share this sacrifice.”

That is a remarkable statistic. More telling is the fact that 3,700 peacekeepers lost their lives since 1948, including 129 who died last year. Hence the theme not only of service but of sacrifice. For peacekeeping is not only difficult but also dangerous. In areas of conflict many desperately long for peace. Yet there are always those for whom peace is a threat to their ambitions and who thus seek to subvert efforts for peace.

The Bible does not have anything directly to say about peacekeeping. It is concerned rather with peacemaking. That is reflected in our Bible reading just now from the letter of James (James 3.13-18).

Yet surely there is much in common. For in a real sense peacemaking and peacekeeping belong together. Peace is as much an ongoing process as a one-off achievement. For peace can be very fragile, always under threat of being undermined or broken. Those who work to maintain peace perform an immensely valuable and essential task. We are all in their debt.

Frequently peacemakers are called to make difficult decisions which may or may not prove to have been the right ones. Hence the importance of wisdom to which James refers in our Bible passage just now. Yet we are all human and peacekeepers’ dedication to peace, justice and reconciliation is their paramount motive. They deserve and need our prayers and support. And so we give thanks for the difficult and perilous tasks that they undertake on behalf of humanity. We give thanks for their service and their sacrifice.