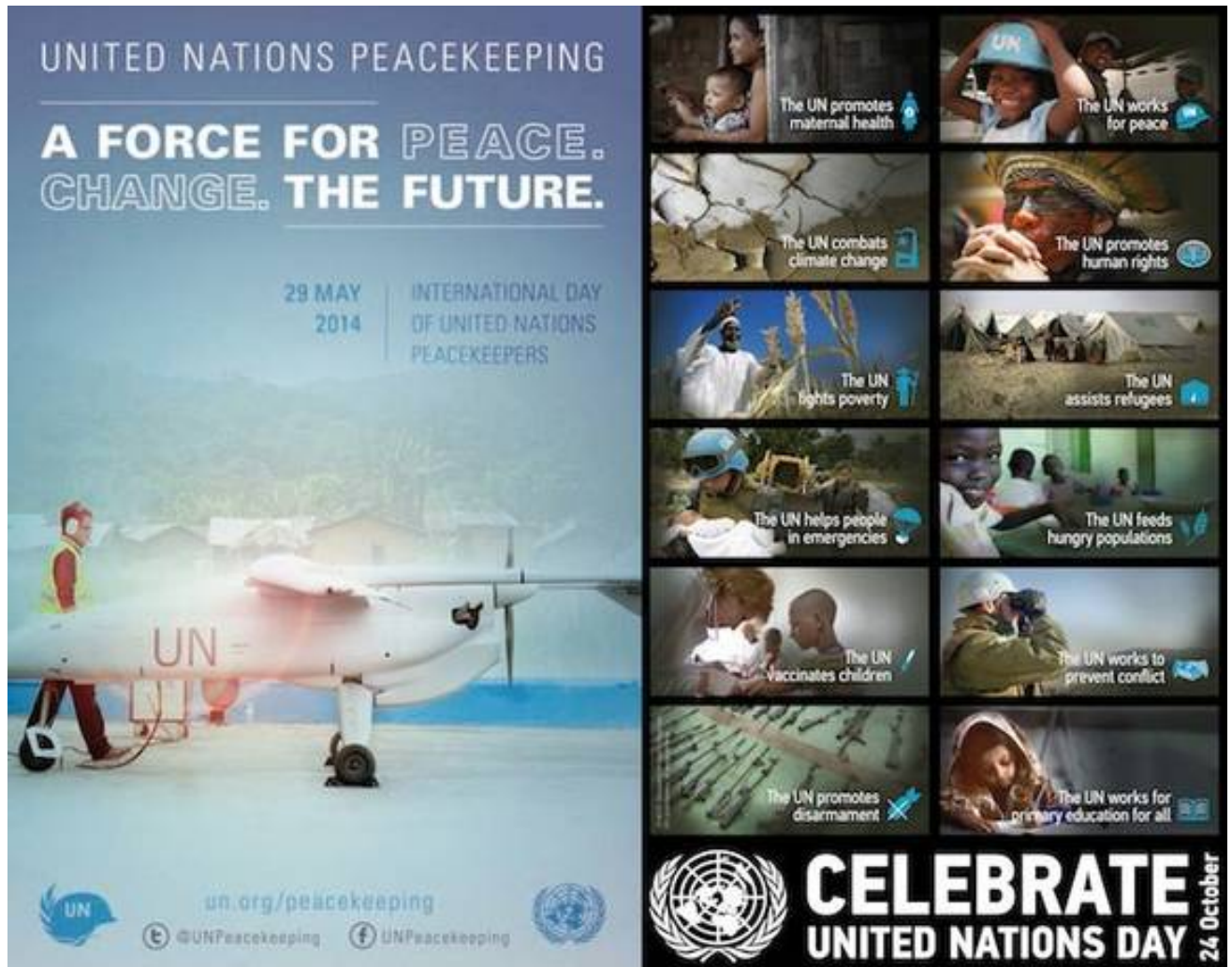




Peacekeeping: Italy's Role and Commitment

Sebastiano Cardi* (November 20, 2014)



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The United Nations Charter, signed on June 26, 1945 defines the purposes of the Organization in Article 1:

To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the



principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace.

The Charter's opening paragraph therefore lays the foundation for the work of [UN](#) [2] peacekeeping: there have been 69 operations from 1948 to today, 56 in the past 25 years alone. The very first operation was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization ([UNTSO](#) [3]), authorized by the [Security Council](#) [4] to monitor the truce between Israel and the Arab States.

Since then, hundreds of thousands of peacekeepers, in addition to tens of thousands of police officers and civilian workers from more than 120 Countries, have been deployed to serve the cause of peace and the ideals of the United Nations. More than 3,270 of them have lost their lives: a toll that sadly continues to rise even in the latest news.

Peacekeeping Today

Today the activity of UN peacekeeping has reached an unprecedented level: sixteen missions underway, more than 120 thousand women and men in military and civilian service, and a current budget of more than \$ 8 billion. In the past ten years, the cost of peacekeeping operations and the number of blue helmets has practically decupled. This is due to the multiplication of crisis hotbeds – especially but not only in Africa and the Middle East – and to the growing expectations posited in blue helmets, whose duties and mandates have increased in complexity. For example, the protection of civilians. After the tragedies of Srebrenica and Rwanda, many people blamed the UN peacekeepers for not doing enough to prevent the massacre of civilians. The Security Council then started to equip the missions with specific mandates to protect civilians: the first time was in 1999, with the operation in Sierra Leone.

Today, more peace operations than ever undertake this critical commitment: one that, in general terms, the Security Council has come to recognize explicitly as one of the main tasks of peacekeeping. There have been some recent examples of the successful implementation of this undertaking. In the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) [5], the blue helmets were able to successfully confront the M23 armed militias that were terrorizing the civilian population. In South Sudan, after the outbreak of hostilities at the end of 2013, tens of thousands of fleeing civilians found shelter in UN bases.

The changing nature of peacekeeping operations, which are now called on to be not solely a force of interposition between opposing forces but rather active agents of peace, has convinced the Secretary-General to schedule a review of peacekeeping for 2015. New regulations and tools are needed. The blue helmets need to be equipped with more technologically-advanced instruments and receive the proper training.

The Role of Italy

In this framework, I am proud to say that Italy and its Armed Forces are doing their part. The first participation of an Italian contingent in a UN mission dates back to 1960, when Italy joined the United Nations Operation in Congo ([ONUC](#) [6]), established by Security Council Resolution 143.

During the mission thirteen Italian aviators -- the crew of two C-119s, twin-engine transport aircraft of the 46th Aerobrigata based at Pisa airfield – were brutally beaten to death.

The first peacekeeping mission in which the Italian Armed Forces played an active role was ITALCON (commanded by [General Franco Angioni](#) [7]), from 1982 to 1984, in Lebanon.

The Mission was initially born as a UN effort, but a veto nullified the international aegis while the contingent was en route to Lebanon, thereby transforming ITALCON into an eminently national effort, alongside the United States and France. Italy's intervention into Lebanon, characterized by respect for the local culture, impartiality, credibility, and closeness to the civilian population, was a success story to which later peacekeeping operations, Italian and otherwise, would refer.



Today Italy is the top Western contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping operations as well as the seventh top contributor to the peacekeeping budget. The [UNIFIL](#) [8] mission, which operates in southern Lebanon to maintain a fragile peace in a region torn by conflicts, is commanded by an Italian, [General Luciano Portolano](#) [9]. Significantly, the UN Secretary- General has again chosen an Italian to lead this mission, following the positive experience with [General Claudio Graziano](#) [10] and [General Paolo Serra](#) [11].

Rarely has the United Nations entrusted the successive leadership of a mission to officers from the same country. The Center of Excellence for Stability Peace United ([COESPU](#) [12]) of Vicenza is another Italian initiative: a training center based on the model tested by the Carabinieri in peacekeeping missions abroad, which prepares police officers from all over the world who are destined to serve on peacekeeping missions. In the same spirit, the courses for civilian and military officials on UN operations held at the UN Staff College in Turin find the logistical and substantial support of the local Post Conflict Department of the Institute for Superior Studies of the Italian Army.

Last but not least, I would like to mention that the first major experiment in high technology on a peacekeeping mission bears an Italian imprint: the Unmanned Unarmed Aerial Systems assigned to the [MONUSCO](#) [13] mission (in the Democratic Republic of Congo), which make a major contribution to the difficult tasks of blue helmets in the Country and, in particular, to their mandate to protect civilians by preventing attacks.

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