UNHQ lays wreaths and awards medals to honour fallen UN peacekeepers

The UN held a wreath-laying ceremony at its headquarters on 19 May to mark the 2016 International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presided over the commemoration and he awarded the Dag Hammarskjöld medal to UN peacekeepers who had fallen during 2015 as well as the first "Captain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Courage".

The UN held a wreath-laying ceremony at its headquarters on 19 May to mark the 2016 International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. May 29 is set aside by the General Assembly as the day to honour fallen UN peacekeepers as well as the men and women who served and continue to serve in UN peacekeeping operations. This year the theme is "Honouring Our Heroes".

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presided over the commemoration
which included the laying of wreaths to honour all peacekeepers who have lost their lives while serving under the UN flag. Since the first UN peacekeepers were deployed in 1948, more than one million men and women have served peacekeeping operations and more than 3,400 peacekeepers have lost their lives while serving the cause of peace.

After the laying of the wreaths, the Dag Hammarskjöld medal was awarded posthumously to the 129 peacekeepers who fell during 2015 while serving the cause of peace as a result of acts of violence, accidents and disease. Six UN Volunteers were among this year’s Dag Hammarskjöld medal recipients.

UNV Movcon Assistant Gagan Punjabi, from India, served with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and was among 15 people shot and killed during an armed robbery in Aru, DR Congo. The five other UN Volunteer peacekeepers succumbed to natural causes due to illness. They included: UNV Transport Officer Louis Meya Kiziaba, from Congo, and UNV Electoral Adviser Mamiharison Solofo Rakotoson, from Madagascar, both of whom served with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); UNV Pharmacist Salisu Olawale, from Nigeria, who served with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); and UNV Facilities Management Assistant Leticia Mattei, a citizen of Germany and Tanzania, and UNV Project Surveyor Emmanuel Onyait, from Uganda, both of whom served with the United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS).

The Dag Hammarskjöld medal is named for its first recipient, former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld who lost his life with fifteen others in a plane crash in Africa in 1961, while on a peace mission. In addition, Mr. Ban led an inaugural ceremony to award the "Captain Mbaye Diagne Medal for Exceptional Courage". The UN Security Council established the medal in 2014 to honour those who "demonstrate exceptional courage in the face of extreme danger", naming it after a Senegalese military officer who lost his life while serving with the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) in 1994. Mr. Ban presented the first such medal to the family of the late Captain Diagne, who saved hundreds of lives in 1994 while serving as a peacekeeper in Rwanda before succumbing to fatal injury incurred while on duty. Today, more than 105,000 uniformed personnel from 124 troop- and police-contributing countries serve under the UN flag.

Some 2,000 UN Volunteers are among the 18,000 international and national civilian personnel who tirelessly work with people and communities living at and behind the frontlines.
• UN peacekeepers • peace

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