

## **Welcome Speech by the President of the Blue Helmet Forum,**

General Günther G. GREINDL, Austrian Armed Forces  
(Ret.)

As President of the Austrian Blue Helmet Association I would like to welcome you to the Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2005 in the beautiful Castle Rothschild in Reichenau. The castle is located about 100 km south of Vienna in the southern part of the state of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich). The purpose of this international forum is to deal with the general topic of “peace soldiering” and to enable and information exchange about experiences regarding specific military aspects of peace operations.

The invitation for participation in the Blue Helmet Forum was directed towards experts from the military field and high-ranking personalities from politics, business, media, science and diplomacy, for whom a detailed knowledge of the military aspects of “peace soldiering” is of relevance.

I am particularly happy that we have such a prominent group of people assembled here. Due to the number of rooms available in this castle we can only accommodate a limited number of persons. However I believe that the size of this group is just about right to allow for fruitful and lively discussions. I would like to particularly welcome our speakers coming either directly from

missions in the field or from their desks in national and international institutions involved in peace operations. We are bringing together representatives from the United Nations, the European Union and national decision makers from Africa and Europe. We're looking forward to your presentations.

This forum has been organized by the Austrian Blue Helmet Association with the support of the Austrian Ministry of Defense, the Austrian National Defense Academy and the Austrian International Peace Operations Command.

The Austrian Blue Helmet Association was founded in 1995 and serves the interest of persons who have served and are serving in international peace operations either with the United Nations or in missions mandated by the United Nations and led by the EU or NATO as well as in missions of the OSCE. The Austrian Blue Helmet Association promotes the contacts between Austrian and international peacekeepers. Additionally the association fosters contacts with governmental agencies and other association dealing with peacekeeping matters. In connection with international peace operations the Association lends its support to the respective Federal Ministries and offices. The Association also represents the interests of Austrian peacekeepers in public as well as towards the national assembly the federal government and other authorities.

Forty five years ago in 1960 the first Austrian peacekeepers were deployed to provide medical support to the UN-mission in the Congo. Since then Austria has

participated continuously in UN-operations and became a reliable supporter of the United Nations peacekeeping efforts. We have seen many changes ever since. Every so often the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping forces has been in question. At times the credibility of the concept as a whole was at stake when peacekeeping forces failed to prevent the outbreak of hostilities or to provide adequate protection. It would be naïve in the extreme to assume that peacekeeping forces would always work. There are far too many incalculable circumstances to provide absolute assurance. I do believe, however, that in spite of some failures and a number of shortcomings the concept of peacekeeping will remain a most valuable instrument of conflict control for the United Nations.

Having commanded three peacekeeping operations in the United Nations I had the opportunity to get to know various types of interventions. Although the mandate of these missions, their composition and armament were markedly different they were all more or less interventions of a multinational force under international direction with the consent the parties limiting the use of force to self defense only. Every mission had its own set of circumstances which made it unique. Planners and executors of peacekeeping operations must therefore retain creativity and flexibility in order to be in a position to react adequately to unforeseen circumstances. This I believe is essential in shaping the future of peacekeeping. Having said this it would be remiss not to draw on past experience or to take into account lessons previously learned.

The Blue Helmet Forum 2005 should provide an opportunity to precisely do that. Our resource persons together with the participants represent a very experienced group. You can all bring this experience to the table. Peacekeeping needs constant scrutiny in order not to become a thing of the past. I am looking forward to the various presentations and to our discussions and I hope that at the end we will all have a better idea of the peacekeeping forces today and tomorrow.

Finally let me mention another aspect which I consider important. Outside our academic sessions we will have ample opportunities to socialize. It is up to us to reach out and to make new friends. I am sure the atmosphere of this castle will be of great help in this respect. I wish you an enjoyable stay and interesting discussions