



To mark United Nations Day (24 October) and as part of the 70th anniversary celebrations of UN Peacekeeping, the Belgian Ministry of Defence, in partnership with the United Nations, organised an event in Heverlee (Belgium) to highlight the importance of peacekeeping and its actors of peace for our common future.

Returning from a successful mission in support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), a Belgian Air Component NH90 helicopter provided the backdrop for the live demonstration of a medical evacuation of an injured crewman. The exercise was supported by troops and vehicles from the ISTAR battalion, which itself is preparing to depart for Mali in the next few days, as part of MINUSMA operations.

Part of the demonstration and ensuing press conference outlined the challenges of getting helicopters into the field and the enormous task of operating in a country over 40 times the size of Belgium. Too big for ordinary air freight, the two NH90 helicopters were first disassembled before being flown from Brussels to Bamako aboard a Russian leased Antonov military cargo plane. Once on the ground the helicopters were reassembled and deployed to Gao in north-eastern Mali. The 50-strong Belgian contingent operated the NH90s for medical evacuations as well as in a defensive role during joint operations with German NH90s.

Following the exercise participants were invited to ask questions and listen to a short presentation by military personnel involved in the recent peacekeeping operations, including former MINUSMA Force Commander, Jean-Paul Deconinck, who led the UN mission from April 2017 until October 2018. In his presentation Mr De Coninck, underlined that UN Peacekeeping Missions remain relevant today and elaborated on the challenges MINUSMA faces in light of the increasingly challenging environment in which it operates. “We are here to bring peace and security but are sometimes operating in arduous combat conditions.” The United Nations Peacekeeping Office was represented by Annick Hiensch from the Brussels Liaison Office (UNLOPS) who reiterated the UN’s strong support for the Belgian contingent, congratulating it on the work done, as well as Belgium’s recent election to the United Nations Security Council.

Over seventy years of UN peacekeeping, with its expanding role and operations in some of the world’s most challenging environments, peacekeepers face considerable risks. More than 3,500 personnel have lost their lives serving in UN peace operations. As of August 2018, the MINUSMA mission has cost the lives of 104 Blue Helmets, making it one of the most dangerous missions. On [#UNDAY](#), we honour both the fallen as well as the more than 1 million men and women who have served with @UNPeacekeeping over the last seventy years and the more than 100,000 peacekeepers who are currently supporting the UN’s mandate across our 14 active peacekeeping missions today.

\* [Follow this link to view pictures from the day's event](#) .