

Speech by Jonas Alberoth, Chairperson of the ZIF International Advisory Board, 23 June 2022



Madam Federal Foreign Minister (Baerbock)!

Madam Secretary-General (Schmid)!

Madame Executive Director – Almut...

Excellences!

Dear ZIF colleagues!

Fellow crisis managers and peacekeepers!

Today is a big and busy day for international conflict management in Germany.

We are gathered here to celebrate ZIF's 20th anniversary.

It is also the German Annual Day of Military, Police and Civilian Peacekeepers.

In addition, an important report is launched on the state of international peace operations, co-authored by five think-tanks.

And – believe it or not – there is a simultaneous parliamentary debate on the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

All this – under the overall heading of peace operations – is happening today.

And during this period of the year, crisis managers and peacekeepers are being recognised and payed tribute to, all over the world.

The original initiative to establish the International Day of UN Peacekeepers on the 29th of May was taken by... I pause... the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian Peacekeepers Association in 2002.

The date marks the anniversary of the creation of the first UN peace operation, and the appointment the UN's first official mediator, i.e. Folke Bernadotte of Sweden.

When the UN Security Council took its historic decision in 1948... I pause... both Ukraine and Syria was on the council. Two proud and responsible member states contributing actively to international peace and security.

Today, both of them are fighting – with their backs against the wall – for their existence as states. So much for trying to predict an unpredictable future.

We – as crisis managers and peacekeepers – are living in difficult times. Not to speak of the poor peoples in conflict-affected countries.

The pandemic has in many ways significantly hampered conflict management.

Increased ecological risks and threats on several continents are already affecting the daily lives of many people.

Entrenched conflicts seem to be insolvable in several countries on the African continent.

The situation in the Middle East, including in Syria and Yemen, is both tragic and shameful.

The collapse of the international peace effort in Afghanistan will cast a long and dark shadow over the international community's willingness to contribute to peace and crisis management operations – in spite of the necessities that underpinned the intervention.

The war in Ukraine, finally, is beyond comprehension. A permanent member of the UN Security Council has attacked and invaded a peaceful neighbour. A permanent protector of the values enshrined in the UN charter uses premeditated violence on the civilian population, cluster bombs and other forbidden weapons, as well as boastful and threatening rhetoric on nuclear weapons. Against this backdrop it feels particularly important and comforting to be here with so many dedicated peacekeepers.

And being one small component of such a rich, experienced and inspiring network makes me think of one of the biggest and most transformative privileges of working with crisis management... and that is all the people you get to meet, know and be close to – people in host states and war-plagued countries, and colleagues in international, regional and national organisations.

We keep discovering – if we did not fully realise it before – how alike we are. Almost all people share more or less the same experiences in their lives – regardless of the flow of images in social media. People in conflict-affected countries are often as surprised and frustrated as we are, that there is a war going on in their country. A war that they did not want, did not see coming and refuse to be part of. The vast majority of people in a country at war do not actively take part in the fighting. Crisis management is ultimately about people.

There is a small wooden board, with an inscription, in a restaurant in Stockholm, where I sometimes have lunch.

It reads: "Remember this, that very little is needed to make a happy life."

At first I barely noticed it, but the words grew on me. The sentence is short and not particularly eloquent, but in this lies its humble strength and simple beauty.

"Very little is needed to make a happy life."

The same applies to international crisis management and its primary beneficiary's in conflict-affected countries all over the world – very little is actually needed to make crisis management more effective, and to make many peoples' lives more happy.

In spite of this, less than little is often done.

So what could be done, that is neither too demanding nor too inopportune for countries and governments?

1. Accept crisis management for what it is.

There are no shortcuts to peace, security and development.

One of the Swedish UN diplomat Jan Eliasson's favourite quotes coins this in a convincing and obliging way.

In the words of the Irish writer Samuel Beckett: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. again. Fail better."

In the face of adversity we need to persevere. When confronted with challenges, we need to remain true to our purpose.

With every failure, with every iteration, we will fail a little less, and we will become gradually more and more successful.

To give up is not an option in crisis management.

2. Ensure that crisis management policies are sustainable.

Peace operations policies are vulnerable and difficult to sustain.

We are naturally deterred by serious setbacks, but we must try to resist this reflex. It is a short-sighted and irresponsible inclination.

As soon as we turn our backs on armed conflicts, and all their related problems, they only grow and become even more difficult and costly to resolve.

The challenges to international peace and security, that we use peace operations to mitigate, will not go away, and therefore it makes much more sense to prepare and operate on the basis of this insight. If we turn our backs on others, others will eventually turn their backs on us.

3. Avoid the either-or trap.

There should be no contradiction nor competition between national peace and security and international peace and security.

Especially not in today's globalised and interdependent world. Reoccurring waves of polarisation do not change this.

In many countries the pendulum unfortunately swings cyclically between quite extreme points. We need to be able to do both – with varied priorities and approaches over time.

4. Develop lasting and mutually supportive partnerships.

No one contributes in isolation. No country, no institution, and no individual.

Peace and crisis management operations are a collective effort.

The overall objectives can only be achieved together.

In addition, missions are never-ending team-building efforts, with colleagues continuously leaving and arriving – rebuilding relations with the host state.

This can only be constructively dealt with through close and genuine institutional partnerships. Having spoken about the possible future of crisis management, please allow me to say a few words on the future of ZIF.

I hope that Germany will continue to lead by example, inspire others, and co-develop much-needed capabilities.

It is not enough to have the right policies.

In order to succeed and reach the desired outcomes, a country also needs tailor made institutions for the implementation of its policies.

And these institutions need to work with all the critical and mutually interdependent aspects management:

- Deployment of mission personnel and election observers.
- Training and support to missions.
- Analysis and research. Assumption is the mother – and father – of failure.
- Common capacity development and alignment of efforts.
- Multilateral cooperation and partnerships.

Thanks to its institutions for crisis management policy implementation, e.g. ZIF and the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management, Germany achieves many advantages: better goal fulfilment, a higher degree of effectiveness, increased knowledge and understanding, greater potential for positive influence, a stronger position as an international crisis manager, and a substantive return on investment – just to name a few, ~~from the perspective of a near-sighted outsider~~. It makes me happy to see both ZIF's first director, Dr. Winrich Kühne, and the first director of the new Centre of Excellence, Dr. Volker Jacoby, here tonight – knowing that the latter also has a background with ZIF.

They both constitute important links to the deep institutional knowledge that ZIF has meticulously built up over the years.

And soon a new link will be added, when Dr. Almut Wieland Karimi leaves office in August, after having served as ZIF's executive director for 13 successful years. In her case 13 is a lucky number.

Dear Almut, you have an unprecedented ability to see people, bring people together and bring out the best in people.

This evening, this impressive gathering, this national and international echo system of ZIF, is a powerful embodiment of this rare ability that has served ZIF so well over the years.

To achieve what you and your colleagues have achieved also requires operational and administrative courage. And it is indeed appropriate that your name is Almut, as in All...mut, i.e. all courage or full of courage.

It makes me really happy to know that your country wants to use your eminent and proven leadership qualities also in future international roles.

Dr. Astrid Irrgang will ensure operational performance and continuity, by serving as interim executive director during the systematic recruitment process. Within brackets, I hope that she will be one of many qualified applicants.

For a Swede it feels reassuring to be surrounded by so many competent doctors – it is a bit like being in a premium hospital for civilian crisis management.

In conclusion, and as a representative of ZIF's International Advisory Board, I hope that you will allow me to share three pieces of humble advice and wishes concerning the rest of the evening:

1. If you are here as a ZIF colleague, feel especially proud of what you represent.

And if you are here as a ZIF partner or guest, please take the opportunity to tell our ZIF colleagues how proud we are of them.

2. Let us try – together – to make this evening both rewarding, memorable and meaningful, and to give ZIF plenty of return on investment for having us all here.

3. Please try not to leave without having danced with at least one other guest. There are no here tonight, only friends that have not met yet.

Dear ZIF colleagues!

We salute you as peers and peacekeepers!

We thank you for your partnership and friendship!

And we congratulate you on your first 20 successful years of commitment to peace!

Tonight we will mingle and dance with determination, under the orange ZIF banner!

And this – dear warm and thirsty friends – concludes the last speech of the evening!