

For Immediate Release



Head of UN's Mideast peacekeeping operation: Dialogue and education keys to permanent peace in the region

Beirut, Lebanon- 24/01/2011 - Dialogue and education are more powerful than military forces in peacekeeping operations, said the head of the UN's peacekeeping operation in the Middle East during a seminar held recently at AUB.

"The way to sustainable peace and development goes through the brains, hearts, and stomachs of children," said General Robert Mood, in reference to the role of education in the peace process. Referring to AUB, he added: "[Sustainable peace] is created through educational institutions like this one."

Organized by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI), the seminar was entitled "Supervising a Temporary Truce, Working for a Permanent Peace: UNTSO's Ongoing Mission in the Middle East."

Serving as the Head of Mission and Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervising Organization (UNTSO) since February 2009, Mood has had more than 33 years of expertise in the military. Before his engagement with UNTSO, he was the Chief of Staff of the Norwegian Army.

Despite his military training, Mood is reserved about the military's ability for solving conflicts. "I submit that military means are very limited options and rarely produce the desired political context," he said.

"The military is one [tool], but it is not the only tool in the political box," Moore said, accentuating the role of "humanistic tools" and "dialogue" as more successful ways to solve conflicts.

The seminar, which was introduced by Karim Makdisi, IFI associate director and assistant professor of political studies at AUB, was attended by students, faculty, and diplomats, including Marta Hladíková, the deputy head of mission at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Beirut, and Lieutenant Zhang Hui, the secretary to the military attaché at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Lebanon.

Mood had started his presentation by overviewing the history of UNTSO since 1947. He referred to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the main cause for the deployment of UNTSO in June 1948 following the UN Security Council Resolution 50 (UNSC 50).

Since that time, UNTSO has been engaged in peacekeeping efforts in the region. Today, UNTSO's 153 observers from 22 different nations monitor ceasefires and assist the different parties in applying armistice agreements in each of Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

While traditional military success depends on how many persons a soldier kills, or how many villages he liberates, with the UN, it is quite the opposite, Mood explained. "With the UN, you do not impose anything. You keep the diplomatic process going. You consent to assist and contribute to the stability whether it takes one week, one month or 62 years," he said.

Mood, who had engaged the audience for an hour, was bombarded with dozens of challenging questions concerning the role of UNTSO in peacekeeping efforts in the region. For instance, IFI Director Rami Khouri asked Mood about what he called the UN's "different faces" in the region, and how the UN relates to different parties in different ways. "The UN could be criticized for its role," Mood responded. "But we are becoming better. I meet young and senior dedicated UN employees, and they make a difference every day."

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 600 full-time faculty members and a student body of more than 7,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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