On 23 January 2008, a system-wide memorial ceremony took place at UNOG in honour of 17 of our colleagues who were killed in the brutal attack on the United Nations Office in Algiers on 11 December 2007. The ceremony was attended by the Secretary-General, family members of the victims and survivors of the attack, and staff members. On display at the ceremony was the torn United Nations flag that was still flying at the scene right after the explosion, although only a small fraction of the blue field and an even smaller portion of the white olive branch and the globe remained. Now these framed remains are on display in the E-building at the Palais des Nations.

On 29 May 2008, UNOG commemorated the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, paying tribute to the bravery and dedication of peacekeepers worldwide and honouring the memories of those who have given their lives in the service of peace. This year’s commemoration marked the sixtieth anniversary of peacekeeping missions and saw several veteran Blue Helmets come to Geneva for the occasion, some travelling from as far as Africa and Australia.
On 1 September 2008, UNOG commemorated the fifth anniversary of the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003. Attending the ceremony were the Secretary-General, family members of the staff members and survivors. Twenty-two of our colleagues lost their lives in that horrific attack. Survivors, along with children of the victims, among whom was five-year-old Mathias Kanaan, whose father, Jean-Selim Kanaan, was killed when Mathias was only three weeks old, were led to the podium to lay flowers at the base of a burning flame.

The bombings of the United Nations Offices in Algiers and Baghdad are just two better-known incidents involving deaths of United Nations personnel in the course of performing their official duties. Ever since the death of Ole Helge Bakke, the first United Nations staff member who died in the line of duty (on 13 July 1948), more than 2,400 United Nations staff members have sacrificed their lives in the service of humanity.

The United Nations family has gathered too often to grieve the deaths of fellow staff members, who served the Organization to maintain peace, to relieve human suffering, and to promote human rights and sustainable development. “Each one is a hero”, as the Secretary-General remarked in his message on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping missions.

Our work advances in the face of threat and danger. We remember those enthusiastic men and women who served under the blue flag of the United Nations in the belief that their service would make the world a better place. Their sacrifice exemplified integrity, professionalism, commitment and courage.

We salute all of our heroes.

"No words can do justice to what they gave us. No acts can right the injustice of their deaths."

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s remarks on 1 September 2008 in Geneva at the ceremony to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003.