

SOLDIERS OF PEACE

When Canadians were sent to the Suez region in 1956 to take part in the United Nations' first peacekeeping force, UNEF I, little did they know that they would represent the beginning of a long and distinguished Canadian tradition. Over the 35-year period, an estimated 85 000 Canadians have served with the UN peacekeeping forces, and peacekeeping has become a source of national pride and a significant consideration in Canada's overall defence policy.

Peacekeeping has also made Canada a world leader in what promises to be a growth industry. In 1990, Canada had more

troops involved in international peacekeeping than did any other country. With planning under way for new peacekeeping missions in the Western Sahara, Cambodia, El Salvador and, possibly, Yugoslavia, it is likely that many more Canadians will don the UN's emblematic blue berets in the coming years.

Canada is the only country that can claim to have participated in every mission to restore, monitor and maintain peace ever held under the auspices of the United Nations. It has also contributed to non-UN missions aimed at restoring peace in Indochina,

Nigeria and, more recently, with a European Community-led monitoring mission, in Yugoslavia.

For a short period, it appeared that Canada's record had fallen by the wayside, because of its non-participation in the modest, 60-person first phase of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM). With the June 1991 announcement of Canada's contribution of military observers to the second phase, however, Canada's record was restored.

UNOGIL, UNIPOM, UNEF, UNGOMAP, UNIIMOG, UNTCOK, ONUC, UNTEA — the alphabet soup of UN missions has spanned the globe. Canadians have served in the Sinai, Zaïre, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, West New Guinea and the Dominican Republic, as well as on the Indian-Pakistani Border. In addition to UNAVEM, Canadians sporting the blue beret can still be found with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights and with UN Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO). They are long-standing members of UNFICYP, the UN Force in Cyprus. Canadian military engineers form an essential part of UNIKOM, stationed in the demilitarized zone on the Iraq-Kuwait border. Canadians were indispensable in designing and participating in ONUCA, the UN observer force in Central America.

A Model for Other Missions

The UN's presence in Namibia through the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in 1989 has probably changed the face of UN peacekeeping operations — and subsequently Canada's involvement in such projects — forever. The UN Transition Assistance Group was far more than a military operation. In addition to observing the withdrawal of South African forces from Namibia and restricting warring forces to designated areas, UNTAG organized, conducted and monitored the first free democratic elections in the former South West Africa. The task required armed forces, civilian police, electoral supervisors, enumerators and scrutineers. About 250 Canadians participated in the 7 000-person operation, which has become a model for other missions.

Canadians have already been assigned to technical missions that are laying the groundwork for a proposed UN operation in the Western Sahara. The UN Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara (MINURSO) will undertake the difficult task of enumerating the largely nomadic population in the sparsely populated desert region, in preparation for an independence referendum. While numbers have not been announced, it's expected that Canadian expertise will play a significant role in the make-up of the MINURSO mission.

It is highly likely that Canadians will find themselves playing important roles in a planned UN operation in El Salvador (ONUSAL) and in what may become the largest peacekeeping and elections operation to date in Cambodia.

■ Keeping the peace

