



United Nations
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What is UN Peacekeeping?

The Need for Peacekeeping

The United Nations was established on 24 October 1945 in the aftermath of two World Wars and was dedicated to “*save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.*” Since its creation, the UN has been called upon to prevent disputes from escalating into war by persuading opposing parties to use dialogue rather than violence to bring about a peaceful solution to conflict. Over the decades, the UN has played a role in containing or ending many conflicts, in some cases through peacekeeping operations.



UN Photo: Marie Frechon (Congo)

UN peacekeeping operations are a crucial instrument at the disposal of the international community to advance international peace and security. The role of peacekeeping was internationally recognized in 1988, when UN peacekeeping forces received the Nobel Peace Prize.

United Nations operations, because of their universality, offer unique advantages as a means to address conflicts. Their universality adds to their legitimacy and limits the implications for the host country’s sovereignty. Peacekeepers from outside a conflict can foster discussion among warring parties while focusing global attention upon local concerns, opening doors that would otherwise remain closed for collective peace efforts.

Pioneering Peacekeeping: A Canadian Initiative



UN Photo: John Isaac (Lebanon)

While not specifically envisaged in the United Nations Charter, the UN pioneered military observation and supervision in 1948 with the establishment of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East. However, it was not until 1956 that a Canadian, Lester B. Pearson, proposed the formation and deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force to “*secure and supervise the cessation of hostilities.*” A Canadian General, E.L.M. Burns, was named commander of the first United Nations peacekeeping force. Pearson was awarded the 1957 Nobel Peace Prize for his innovative thinking and long-term commitment to peace. Since 1948 over

825,000 military, police and civilian personnel from some 120 countries have served in these operations; more than 3,017 of them have lost their lives.

Establishing a UN Peacekeeping Mission

Peacekeeping operations and their deployment are authorized by the Security Council, with the consent of the host government and usually of the other parties involved. The military personnel of peacekeeping operations are voluntarily provided by Member States and are financed by the international community. Participating countries are compensated at a standard rate from a special

peacekeeping budget. The budget and troops come from many countries: this “burden-sharing” can offer extraordinary efficiency in human, financial and political terms.

Certain prerequisites for the success of an operation have become increasingly clear. These include a genuine desire on the part of combatants to resolve their differences peacefully; a clear mandate; strong political support by the international community; and the provision of the resources necessary to achieve the operation’s objectives.

The degree of UN involvement depends upon factors such as the requests received from governments, provisions of peace agreements, or mandates from the Security Council.

The Evolution of Peacekeeping

Initially developed to deal with conflicts between two countries, today conflicts are a complex mix: their roots may be essentially internal, but they are complicated by cross-border involvement, either by states or by economic interests and other non-state actors. As a result, the structure of peacekeeping missions has also changed.

Operations can take many forms, and are constantly evolving in the light of changing circumstances. Operations may include military and police personnel, together with civilian staff, and may involve military observer missions, peacekeeping forces or a combination of both. Among the tasks discharged by peacekeeping operations over the years are: maintenance of ceasefires and separation of forces; preventive deployment; protection of humanitarian operations; and implementation of a comprehensive peace settlement. Increasingly, UN peacekeeping operations are multidimensional, including military, civilian police, political, civil affairs, rule of law and elections monitoring, human rights, humanitarian, reconstruction, public information and gender affairs. Some of these UN operations do not have a military component but carry out their mandates alongside a non-UN regional or multinational peacekeeping force.

The roles for peacekeepers are not set in stone, and can change depending on the situation. Future conflicts are likely to continue to present complex challenges to the international community. An effective response will require courageous and imaginative use of the tools for peace. There is no “one-size-fits-all” model.

The Scope of UN Peacekeeping

Since 1956, the number and scope of peacekeeping operations have increased exponentially. As of July 31, 2012:

- 96,537 military troops and civilian police from around the world, as well as thousands more civilians, are serving as peacekeepers.
- UN peacekeepers have undertaken 67 field missions and negotiated 172 peaceful settlements that have ended regional conflicts, and enabled people in more than 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections.
- Currently, 15 peace operations are directed and supported by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

Peace is a way of being, doing and living in society that can be taught, developed, and best of all, improved upon. Join our movement of “*We the Peoples...*” and help us to transform lives and build hopeful futures. A better world starts with YOU.

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