

The Netherlands and UN peacekeeping: Helping countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace

From air transport in the Congo to truce observation in the Golan and assistance in the transition to independence in Namibia, the Netherlands has a long history with United Nations peacekeeping.

As of January 2018, there are 240 Dutch peacekeepers serving with five UN missions. The majority of them are in the West African nation of Mali, where they play a vital role in obtaining high quality intelligence that allows the UN peacekeeping mission there to operate more effectively.

In December 2017, the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) conducted its first all-female foot patrol with ten female peacekeepers from six troop-contributing countries – Ghana, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Korea, Malaysia and the Netherlands. In the photo above, Lt. Colonel Ella Van Den Heuvel of the Netherlands interacting with a local resident while patrolling in Rmeish, South Lebanon.



UN Photo/JH

A Radio Communications Officer, W. Mayer of the Netherlands, at work at the airport in Elisabethville, in the Katanga province of what was then the Republic of the Congo (and is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Nearly 14,500 soldiers from 10 countries were part of the UN Operation in the

Congo, known by its French acronym ONUC, helping to restore order and calm in the country. These countries assisted with technical and medical personnel, air transport, heavy materials, food and various supplies. (17 August 1960)



UN Photo/Yutaka Nagata

In the wake of the hostilities that erupted in May 1948 between the newly-proclaimed State of Israel and its Arab neighbours and the subsequent Armistice Agreements that followed, the Security Council established the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Seen here is Major Arnold Wouters of the Netherlands observing at Observation Post ROMEO, in the Golan Heights, Syria. (26 April 1973)



UN Photo/M. Grant

The Netherlands sent 60 police monitors to Namibia, such as the one seen here speaking to a resident in Windhoek, to serve with the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG). The mission was set up in 1989 to help ensure the early independence of Namibia from South Africa through free and fair elections, among other tasks. A total of 980 UNTAG police monitors from 23 countries were charged with overseeing the Southwest African Police, who were responsible for maintaining law and order in the territory during the transition period. (1 April 1989)



UN Photo/Jorge Aramburu

An armoured personnel carrier from the Netherlands and Canadian Battalion (NECBAT), part of the UN Mission in Eritrea and Ethiopia (UNMEE) patrols the Temporary Security Zone, a buffer area along the countries' common border. The Zone was set up following the two-year border war that ended in 2000. A Boundary Commission, jointly set up by both countries, was tasked with demarcating the border and making final decisions on contested areas. (1 June 2001)



UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Peacekeepers from the Netherlands serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) keep watch from their guard station on the rooftop of an abandoned building, at the site of their military camp in Gao. At the time the Dutch contingent consisted of 380 troops (including Special Forces and a logistics team) and they also contributed several helicopters. (26 February 2014)

[Guterres urges donors to generously support UN agency for Palestine](#)

refugees, 'as a matter of human solidarity'

Secretary-General António Guterres on Thursday called on the international community to generously support the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is facing "the worst financial crisis in its history."

Addressing the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference Preserving Dignity and Sharing Responsibility: Mobilizing Collective Action for [UNRWA](#), Mr. Guterres noted that the Agency is facing a \$446 million shortfall in 2018, asking donors to respond to the Palestinian people's plight and "[translate their dreams](#) into tangible improvements in their lives."

"That is precisely what UNRWA does every day with such steadfastness, not only in Gaza but in the camps, communities and countries across the region that host Palestinian refugees," he stressed, emphasizing the urgency to support and protect the vulnerable.

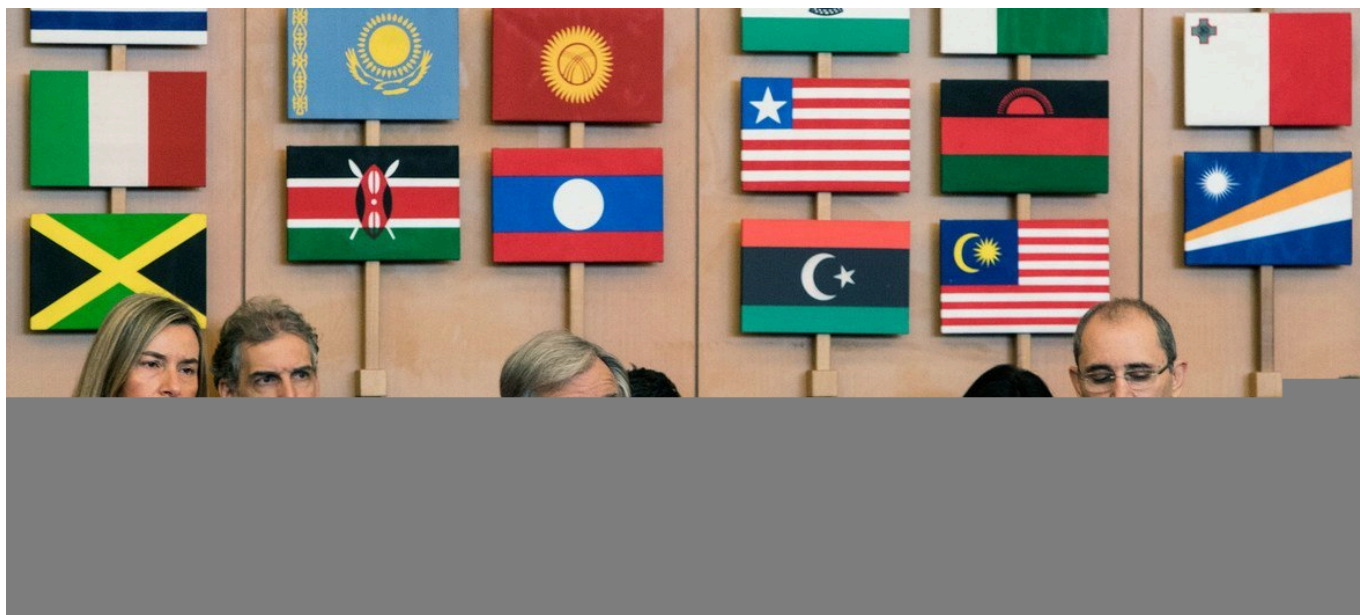
He warned that if the response is not met, "critical services could be reduced or eliminated entirely – from schools to sanitation, from medicine to microfinance to food security for some 1.7 million refugees in abject poverty or affected by conflict."

The UN chief pointed out that until a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is achieved, the work of UNRWA remains "just as crucial as it was sixty-eight years ago."

Mr. Guterres painted a detailed picture of UNRWA providing life-saving humanitarian relief and health care; building the future of Palestinian society through education; and ensuring human security, rights and dignity for over five million Palestine refugees.

"By keeping half a million children in school and millions of people healthy and nourished," he said, "UNRWA is contributing to stability in the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon – and has undertaken extraordinary efforts to support Palestinians who have suffered as a result of the tragedy in Syria."

"UNRWA is an asset to the international community that we must protect and support," he told the donors.



FAO/Pier Paolo Cito

Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) addresses the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference Preserving Dignity and Sharing Responsibility: Mobilizing Collective Action for UNRWA.

Without a collective solution Mr. Guterres affirmed that UNRWA would soon run out of money. He argued against this, drawing attention to the need for high-level action in the form of cash.

“It is far more grave, and threatens to cut programmes far more savagely,” he said, adding that this could push the suffering in disastrous and unpredictable directions.

Mr. Guterres appealed for increased support now and in the years ahead to ensure schooling, health care and food assistance.

“Such spending is an investment with wide-ranging dividends – in the human development of the Palestinian people, in stability today and in a peaceful future in and beyond Palestine,” he explained, adding that it could also address some of the despair and other factors that lead to radicalization.

Moreover, according to the UN chief, meeting the appeal would send a strong message to Palestine refugees that the international community is committed to their rights, their well-being, and meeting their daily needs.

“To those who may question the expense, let me echo UNRWA’s fundraising campaign: Dignity is priceless,” he pressed.

“As a matter of human solidarity, and as a matter of smart steps for peace, let us give UNRWA our full and generous support,” concluded the Secretary-General.

Four countries on track to graduate from UN list of least developed countries

Four countries could soon “graduate” from the ranks of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable nations, a United Nations expert committee [announced](#) on Thursday

Bhutan, Kiribati, Sao Tome and Principe and the Solomon Islands have increased national earning power and improved access to health care and education, making them eligible to exit the group of least developed countries ([LDCs](#)).

“This is an historic occasion,” said Jose Antonio Ocampo, chair of the Committee for Development Policy ([CDP](#)), noting that only five countries have graduated since the UN established the LDC category in 1971.

LDCs are assessed using three criteria: health and education targets; economic vulnerability and gross national income per capita.

Countries must meet two of the three criteria at two consecutive triennial reviews of the CDP to be considered for graduation.

The Committee will send its recommendations to the UN Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) for endorsement, which will then refer its decision to the [UN General Assembly](#).

For CDP member Diane Elson, a professor at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, Thursday’s announcement was good news for millions of women in rural areas.

She pointed out that the latest session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women ([CSW](#)), currently under way in New York, is discussing the challenges facing this population.

“The success of the countries that are graduating reflects things like the improvement of the health and the education of the population, which extends to rural women, and the increase in incomes in the country, which extends to rural women,” she said.

However, Ms. Elson stressed that the countries will need continued international support because they remain vulnerable to external shocks, including the impact of climate change.

Mr. Ocampo said this vulnerability is particularly evident in Pacific Island states such as Kiribati.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

José Antonio Ocampo (centre), Chair of the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), along with Committee member Diane Elson (right), briefs journalists as guests at the noon briefing. On the left is Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesperson for the Secretary-General.

Globally, there are [47 LDCs](#), according to the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

The majority, 33, are in Africa, while 13 can be found in the Asia-Pacific region, and one is in Latin America.

In the 47 years of the LDC category's existence, only five countries have graduated (Botswana, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Maldives and Samoa)

The CDP said two more countries, Vanuatu and Angola, are scheduled for graduation over the next three years.

Nepal and Timor-Leste also met the criteria but were not recommended for graduation at this time, due to economic and political challenges.

That decision will be deferred to the next CDP triennial review in 2021, according to Mr. Ocampo.

Bangladesh, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar met the graduation criteria for the first time but would need to do so for a second time to be eligible for consideration.

Security Council renews UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan

The United Nations Security Council on Thursday renewed the mandate of UN peacekeeping mission in South Sudan for another year and demanded that all parties immediately end the fighting countrywide.

With the unanimous adoption of a resolution on the mandate extension until 15 March 2019, the UN Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)) is charged with performing such tasks as protecting civilians, creating the conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, monitoring and investigating human rights violations, and supporting the peace process.

The Council decided to maintain the overall force levels of UNMISS with a troop ceiling of 17,000 troops, which includes a Regional Protection Force at levels to be set by the Secretary-General but not exceeding 4,000, and maintaining the ceiling of 2,101 police personnel, including individual police officers, formed police units and 78 corrections officers.

The 15-member body also demanded that all parties immediately end the fighting across the country, and further demanded that national leaders abide by the ceasefires agreed on 11 July 2016 and 22 May 2017, as well as the truce signed on 21 December 2017.

South Sudan attained independence from Sudan in July 2011 after a referendum, becoming the world's newest country. The Security Council established UNMISS to support the transition, having determined that the situation faced by South Sudan continued to constitute a threat to international peace and security in the region.

The country has since faced ongoing challenges due to a political face-off between two rival factions that erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013. The crisis has produced one of the world's worst displacement situations with immense suffering for civilians.

Mexico: UN report points to torture, cover-ups in probe into disappearance of 43 students

The United Nations human rights wing said Thursday that it has strong grounds to believe that the investigation into the disappearance of 43 students from

a rural Mexican college in 2014 was marred by torture and cover-ups.

By reviewing the cases of 63 individuals prosecuted in connection with the students' disappearance from Ayotzinapa Teachers' College in Guerrero, the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) shed light on some of the flaws of the early stages of the investigation, rather than addressing who were responsible for the crime.

In the report, titled *Double Injustice – Human rights violations in the investigation of the Ayotzinapa case*, OHCHR said it has solid grounds to conclude that at least 34 of these individuals were tortured, based on the judicial files, including medical records of multiple physical injuries, and on interviews with authorities, detainees and witnesses.

Ayotzinapa is a test case of the Mexican authorities' willingness and ability to tackle serious human rights violations.

"The [findings](#) of the report point to a pattern of committing, tolerating and covering up torture in the investigation of the Ayotzinapa case," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein.

"This not only violates the rights of the detainees, but also the right to justice and to truth for the victims of the events of September 2014, their families, and for society as a whole," he added.

The report highlights how people were arbitrarily detained and tortured to extract information or confessions, and the significant delays in bringing them before a public prosecutor, often placing them outside the protection of the law.

The report states that the internal oversight unit of the Office of the Attorney-General of the Republic (OAG) appeared to have made a genuine effort in 2016 to address some of alleged torture or other human rights violations, but this internal investigation was subsequently thwarted by the replacement of the officials in the unit. To date, there has been no prosecution and sanction for the acts of torture or other human rights violations, the report says.

"Ayotzinapa is a test case of the Mexican authorities' willingness and ability to tackle serious human rights violations," Mr. Zeid said, urging the Mexican authorities to ensure that the search for truth and justice continues, and those responsible for torture and other human rights violations during the investigation are held accountable.

Click here for the report's [executive summary](#).