

Reforming UN peacekeeping to best respond to global challenges

Mr President, let me just say that I want to thank, first of all, the Force Commanders for addressing us today and in particular, through you, thank your troops for the work they they're doing to help protect civilians and support stability in some of the toughest environments in the world. And I want to join my colleagues in paying tribute to the 25 peacekeepers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the field this year, including those who lost their lives recently in MINUSMA because of COVID-19.

COVID-19 has, of course, posed a range of additional challenges in every mission setting. And I very much welcomed your comments in the briefing on how the missions are rising to meet these new challenges and how we as individual Member States and the Security Council, as well as, of course, through our UN Headquarters, can best support you. The crucial challenge is how to continue supporting the safety and security of our peacekeepers while ensuring they can fulfill their important work and the mandate giving them their important work to protect civilians and provide stability in conflict-torn environments. We can't afford to let up on either imperative.

While we address these pressing challenges, we mustn't lose sight of the longer term commitments we've all made as part of the Secretary-General's Action for Peacekeeping initiative, reforming peacekeeping to make it fit for the 21st century. A4P can continue to provide a solid basis for ensuring our UN peacekeeping missions can and do fulfill all that we ask, even now, in these challenging circumstances.

Firstly, a central priority when it comes to those reforms must be enhancing planning, improving the collection and use of data across the board in order to support evidence-based decision making, both here at HQ and throughout the mission settings. This will help improve the analysis and recommendations provided to members.

Connected with this is the issue of performance and the provision of better data on both outstanding performance and underperformance. We look forward to the promised rollout of the UN's new integrated performance policy framework later this year to address the performance of uniformed and civilian peacekeepers and overall mission performance, as well as to enhance transparency and accountability.

Particularly in this 20th anniversary year of Resolution 1325, we should also continue pursuing measures to increase the numbers of uniformed women peacekeepers and ensure their full effective, meaningful participation at every level.

And as the Council heard recently in our annual debate on the protection of civilians, civilians continue to bear the brunt of conflict worldwide. And so we should keep strengthening delivery of protection of civilians mandates.

This should include full implementation of the Peacekeeping-Intelligence policy, as well as the revised DPO PoC policy. And we should continue to implement the latest iteration on the action plan on the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Finally, we should keep working to smooth the transition from peacekeeping to peace building in settings such as Sudan, increasing our support for the Peacebuilding Fund and ensuring a joined-up approach across the UN system, donors, and other stakeholders.

Like others, Mr President, I've got a few questions. May I, first of all, and I think this is relevant to all missions, but I address it, if I might, to the UNMISS Force Commander. Of course, we want to ensure that everything possible is done to ensure the safety and security of all peacekeepers in the field, particularly with respect to illness and injury, but we're concerned the impact COVID-19 is having on Medevac pathways. Do you have confidence, Force Commanders, that the clinical pathways in place provide an adequate level of assurance? And if not, what can any of us do to help unblock issues or support?

Secondly, we have noted the impact of COVID-19 on rotations with potential consequences on mission effectiveness and welfare. Bearing in mind that in several mission environments, the virus may reach a peak in the coming months, what are your expectations for the period following the 30th of June when the freeze on rotations is due to be lifted? What are the implications for mandate delivery in the second half of the year?

Thirdly, a question again for the UNMISS Force Commander, but it's relevant to all: We have continuing concerns about sexual and gender-based violence in several missions' area of operation, including, for instance, recent violence in South Sudan. I know my Indonesian colleague asked about this, but I was wondering if you could comment on how situational awareness and intelligence can be used in the field, both to prevent and deter SGBV and to respond to emergencies.

And finally, again, the UNMISS Force Commander: I would just like to ask for your assessment of the impact the COVID-19 is likely to have on rates of voluntary departures of civilians from PoC sites and whether do you expect a significant impact of COVID-19 on how the force divides its resources between static and mobile protection tasks?

Let me just say that the UK is very much looking forward to the deployment of our 250-strong long-range reconnaissance forces, of course, under MINUSMA command, late this year.

Thank you very much.