High-Level Open Debate of the UN Security Council on
“PEACE OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS”

July 7, 2020 at 10:00 a.m.
Convened by the Federal Republic of Germany

Concept Note


“Human rights are intrinsically linked to peace and security, and their inclusion in the deliberations and decisions of the Security Council is of great importance” (United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, 2017).

As the world continues to witness armed conflicts and human rights violations, stressing the universality of human rights and including them in discussions about international peace and security is more critical than ever. Human rights deserve our respect at any time and are not negotiable, in particular in times of crisis such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Human rights violations constitute an immediate driver for armed conflicts and they are invariably a feature of violent conflict as such. With that in mind, Germany together with France presided an Arria-formula UN Security Council meeting on Human Rights in Peace Operations on 17 April 2019, co-sponsored by Kuwait, Cote D’Ivoire and Peru.

UN Peace Operations, as one of the international community’s key instruments for conflict management, have a critical role in the promotion and protection of human rights: Based on their mandates from the UN Security Council they monitor, report and, if necessary, intervene when faced with human rights violations, thus contributing to the successful promotion of peace processes. To name selected instruments, Peace Operations may engage in casualty reporting, capacity-building programs and public reporting on human rights violations and abuses.
One example from the field illustrates this critical work: The Human Rights Division of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) monitors, investigates, verifies and reports on violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law, including abuses of children and women. The Peacekeeping Operation thus supports and enhances civil society’s ability to monitor and report on human rights, while engaging in human rights and democracy dialogue with the Government of a country emerging from years of civil war and violence and transitioning to independence.

UN Peace Operations are rightly expected to prevent or end human rights violations as well as to protect civilians. They draw on both their civilian and uniformed components for that purpose, for instance through Joint Protection Teams. Furthermore, mixed gender engagement teams have proven to be successful in building relationships with vulnerable groups during patrols and outreach activities. This underlines the importance of increasing the number of women peacekeepers.

Human rights have developed into an innovative catalyst for UN Peace Operations. Several ongoing Peacekeeping Operations (MONUSCO, MINUSCA, MINUSMA, UNAMID, UNMISS, UNMIK) as well as Special Political Missions (UNAMI, UNSMIL, UNIOGBIS, UNSOM, UNAMA, UNITAMS, BINUH) have integrated human rights components. They serve as enablers across a wide spectrum of mission actions to strengthen the mission’s strategic position and credibility.

Applying a gender lens to human rights work is critical to address the full spectrum of human rights abuses. In seven missions, women protection advisers are responsible for monitoring, analyzing and reporting on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Nine Peacekeeping Operations have gender units within the leadership team to ensure that women’s rights and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda are mainstreamed into all mission activities. Peace operations also monitor and report on violations in the framework of the Children and Armed Conflict dossier.

The vast majority of UN peacekeepers are also deployed under a Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate. When faced with human rights violations, peace operations need to decide how to react and how to intervene, what instruments to use and whether follow-on activities are necessary. There is a direct link between the results of upholding, promoting and protecting human rights and the credibility of UN operations. Protecting the civil population and upholding human rights will determine how the United Nations is viewed publicly and how it will be remembered.

2. **Objective and Scope**

The aim of the Open Debate is to discuss in-depth how Peace Operations can contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights more effectively.

Participants are invited to share examples and best practices on human rights integration at the national and pre-UN-deployment level as well as on in-mission collaboration with human rights components.
Moreover, Member States are invited to discuss concrete challenges that persist with regard to better promotion and protection of human rights through UN Peace Operations, and how the United Nations Security Council as well as specific Peace Operations should address those challenges.

Member States are encouraged to focus on the following questions:

- How can Peace Operations promote and protect human rights more effectively? Where does untapped potential exist?
- Which trends and developments influence human rights work in UN Peace Operations? To what extent and in which areas do challenges persist?
- How can partnerships within Peace Operations (between the uniformed and civilian parts of an operation) and with host governments be enhanced?
- What impact does the integration of human rights have on overall mandate implementation?
- Which best practices can be shared with regard to child and women protection?
- What needs to be improved when Peace Operations collaborate with civil society organizations on the ground, for example to monitor human rights violations and to address human rights related grievances?
- What are the key challenges for the promotion and protection of human rights posed by COVID-19?
- What is the future role of the UN Security Council in promoting and protecting human rights through UN Peace Operations? How can the UN Security Council and its Member States ensure well-defined PoC and Human Rights mandates as well as sufficient resources for UN Peace Operations?

3. Format

The (virtual) Open Debate will be chaired by H.E. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Federal Minister of Defence. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for South Sudan and Head of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, David Shearer, and a civil society representative will brief the Council.

The working methods for the month of July have not yet been adopted. Not prejudging the decision by the members of the Security Council on these working methods, Germany intends to hold the Open Debate in the format of an Open VTC meeting. Members States and Observer States that are not members of the Security Council will, if according to the same working methods applied in the current month, be invited to participate in the Open VTC within the principles of Rule 37 and can participate upon decision through written statements. In that case, they will be invited to send their written statements to the President of the Council (dppa-scsb3@un.org) ahead of the meeting.