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Spike in attacks on 'blue helmets' means UN peace operations must adapt, says peacekeeping chief



An armored personnel carrier on patrol near Beni, where the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is supporting the Congolese National Forces (FARDC) in an operation against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) rebel militia. March 2014. UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

24 January – With United Nations 'blue helmets' facing increasingly grave threats, including armed groups with no interest in peace, the UN peacekeeping chief called on Wednesday for greater political engagement and leadership from the Security Council and the world body's Member countries to ensure UN troops – and the populations they serve – are better protected.

"We are being attacked by the armed groups who are looting, killing, raping and they have no interest in peaceful solution," Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told reporters in New York at a briefing on a new report on reducing casualties among UN peacekeepers.

"So, it is because we have these very different dangerous environments that we have to change," he said, calling specifically for deployment of troops that are well-trained, well-equipped and with the right mindset.

Doing so, Mr. Lacroix underlined, will not only help reduce fatalities, but will also facilitate the implementation of mandates assigned to UN missions and protect civilian populations.



In November 2017, Secretary-General António Guterres had appointed Lieutenant General (Retired) Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz of Brazil, who held senior positions at a number of UN peacekeeping missions, to lead a high-level review to identify why the UN has had so many casualties caused by acts of violence in recent years, and what should be done to reduce these casualties.

Made public on Tuesday, the report states that with the influx of armed groups, extremists, organized crime, and other criminal elements and threats, the ‘blue helmet’ and UN flag no longer offer “natural” protection to peacekeepers.

Describing the overall report a “very, very candid assessment” of the problems and what should be done to address them, Mr. Lacroix said that an action plan has been developed to implement it.

“The ‘Cruz report’ and the action plan that we will implement, are about the reducing fatalities in peacekeeping but they touch most issues that are relevant to performance. They address issues such as are we implementing our own rules even down to the basic levels – are we playing by our own book,” he added.

The plan focuses on three key areas – operational behaviour and mindset; capacity building and readiness; and support issues – and includes immediate UN Headquarters and field-level actions.

Since 1948, more than 3,500 personnel have lost their lives serving in UN peace operations with 943 due to acts of violence. Since 2013, casualties have spiked, with 195 deaths in violent attacks, more than during any other five-year period in history.

World's most vulnerable countries on track to achieve universal Internet access by 2020 – UN report



Two girls speak to a psychologist using a mobile phone in rural Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. In the background, a house lies in ruin, destroyed by the devastating 2015 earthquakes in country. Photo: UNICEF/Karki

24 January – The world’s least developed countries are narrowing ‘digital divide,’ and with millions of people now taking advantage of smart phones and other digital devices, keeping up this momentum can put their societies on the fast track to sustainable development, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

“It is vital that all stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector and UN system – continue to build momentum through collaboration and sharing of innovative solutions,” highlighted Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu, the top UN official for least developed and other vulnerable countries, launching a new report on universal and affordable Internet.

“Least developed countries with a strong government commitment, recognizing the importance of digital technologies for national development, and backed by enlightened policy and regulatory actions including steps to develop skills, can achieve universal and affordable access to the Internet,” added Houlin Zhao, the Secretary-General of the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report, *Achieving universal and affordable Internet in least developed countries*, also states that the progress augurs well for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the Istanbul Programme of Action, which charts a development course for least developed countries.

A key highlight of the progress is the launch of third generation (3G) mobile telephony and data services in all 47 countries in that category as well as over 60 per cent of the population there covered by a 3G network. Overall, four in five people in these countries have access to mobile-cellular network.

These improvements are already having a positive impact in areas including financial inclusion, poverty reduction and better health services.

Furthermore, the anticipation that these countries will achieve (on average) 97 per cent mobile broadband coverage, making Internet prices relatively affordable by 2020 can translate into strong, home-grown innovation; new business opportunities; and more improvements health and education services, added Ms. 'Utoikamanu, the UN High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

While the picture is largely positive, there are some gaps which need to be overcome, find the report, including address issues related to limited capacity in information and communication technology (ICT) skills and wider socio-economic matters such as education levels and gender equality.

Corrective action, according to report, can include fostering competition, infrastructure, taxation policies, education and developing ICT sector plans.

The 47 least developed countries represent the most vulnerable segment of the international community. They comprise more than 880 million people – about 12 per cent of world population – but account for less than two per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) and about one percent of global trade in goods.

The report, which also measures progress in these countries against Sustainable Development Goal target 9.C on universal and affordable access to the Internet is a joint undertaking by the Office of the Office of the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (OHRLLS); and ITU.

South Sudan: Ceasefire violations, hostile propaganda undercut regional peace push, Security Council told



Internally displaced persons (IDPs) line up early in the morning for a general food distribution at the UN Protection of Civilians Site, Malakal, South Sudan. Photo: IOM/Bannon

24 January – While the signing last month of a ceasefire accord among South Sudan's warring parties is a great stride forward, it is just a first step toward peace and stability, the United Nations peacekeeping chief said Wednesday, warning that the 21 December deal has already been violated numerous times.

"These violations by the parties and the continuing hostile propaganda undertaken against one another are worrisome, as they illustrate a lack of genuine commitment to honour their words, and de-facto undermine the regional and international efforts to revitalize the peace process," said Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix told a Security Council briefing.

full-blown war late in 2013.

The world's youngest country has spent much of its short life mired in conflict, as what began as a political face-off between President Salva Kiir and his then former Vice-President Riek Machar, erupted into

The Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access among the warring South Sudanese parties was brokered by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an eight-country trade bloc in Africa.

"The South Sudanese parties must realize that the international community and the region will not continue to tolerate Agreements being signed, only to be violated in total impunity," he said, urging 15 Council members to speak out very clearly against these violations, and to take the decisive actions necessary to impose real consequences for the violators.

IGAD's High-Level Revitalization Forum is expected to resume on 5 February in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to focus on governance, transitional security arrangements and the permanent ceasefire.

"It will be crucial for the South Sudanese parties to participate in the Forum in good faith and with a view to make the necessary compromises required for South Sudan to return on the path to a sustainable peace," Mr. Lacroix said.

On the security situation in and around Juba, he expressed concern over the attacks by unknown armed elements on Government security installations on 4 January. The same day, there were also shooting incidents between security forces and criminal elements near the 'protection of civilians' sites adjacent to the headquarters of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) in Juba.

UNMISS immediately reinforced those sites with additional uniformed personnel to prevent any entry.

During the reporting period, inter-communal violence also escalated in the Jonglei, Lakes and Warrap areas, causing roughly 160 fatalities, including at least 24 women. UNMISS reacted swiftly to these incidents by mobilizing community leaders and peace actors to de-escalate inter-communal tensions, and promote dialogue and reconciliation.

UNMISS will formally inaugurate a new base in Yei in Central Equatoria on Thursday. This base will allow the UNMISS force to project presence, to build confidence and restore stability to an area which has witnessed an exodus of the population to Uganda as a result of recent conflict.

Turning to human rights, he warned that the gravity of conflict-related sexual violence is deplorable and constitutes an emergency in its own right.

In 2017, there were 2,670 incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related incidents perpetrated by both State and non-State actors.

Unfortunately, these human rights violations are compounded by impunity, with perpetrators not being held to account, he said, calling on President Silva Kiir to end this impunity.

Also addressing the Council was Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, who noted that the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for South Sudan seeks to assist six million people, more than half the population, and requires \$1.7 billion.

Some 1.5 million people are in emergency-level food insecurity, just one step away from famine, and around 20,000 people are already in famine conditions, she said, warning that the next lean season, which begins in March, is likely to see food security worsen, and could see famine conditions spread to several new locations across the country.

Access challenges have continued to delay and interrupt the humanitarian response. Last month, in Unity state, truck drivers delivering humanitarian supplies by road from Juba reported a total of 66 checkpoints, she said.

In 2017, at least 28 aid workers were killed in the line of duty, and over 1,100 incidents were reported, the highest annual count since the conflict started in 2013.

At Davos forum, UN agency launches report spotlighting benefits of investing in better migration data



Migrants boarding the bus headed towards the processing center in Amman, Jordan. Photo: IOM/Muse Mohammed (file)

24 January – Investing in value-based migration data that squarely focuses on impact can benefit the world to the tune of \$35 billion dollars, according to a new report launched Wednesday in Davos, Switzerland, by the United Nations migration agency.

A study by the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), working with the McKinsey Centre for Government, found that better use of data will help turn human mobility into an asset worth tens of billions of dollars.

“Too often, data are seen as the abstract business of experts operating in backrooms,” IOM Director General William Lacy Swing told the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos, which draws thousands of top business and global political leaders to discuss the most pressing issues facing the world.

“Yet data are essential to produce real-life results, such as protecting migrants in vulnerable situations, fill labour market shortages and improve integration, manage asylum procedures, ensure the humane return of migrants ordered to leave or increase remittance flows,” he added.

The report, entitled *More than Numbers: How migration data can deliver real-life benefits* illuminates how investing in migration data can bring huge economic, social and humanitarian benefits.

Providing detailed calculations of benefits across a range of policy areas in both developed and developing countries, *More than Numbers* demonstrates clear examples of how better data can help manage migration more effectively.

The report also provides guidance to countries interested in realising these benefits and suggests ways in which they could develop their own strategies to improve data on migration.

For example, many European Union (EU) migrants have skills that do not match their jobs. The report calculates that using data to reduce over-qualification would increase their income by six billion Euro.

Better data can also save labour migrants \$6 billion in recruitment fees for jobs abroad, or increase the money that migrants send home by \$20 billion worldwide.

But it is not only about money.

Smart use of data can double the success rate of identifying human trafficking cases, speed up asylum applications or promote humane, voluntary returns.

“We are at a crucial moment,” said Mr. Swing.

UN Member States have started 2018 negotiations towards adopting a Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. Consultations leading up to them have highlighted the importance of improving evidence on migration.

UN countries have also committed to several migration-related targets linked to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Without better data, it will be hard to assess progress towards these common targets.

“The time to invest in better migration data is now,” Mr. Swing underscored.

“Just looking at the examples we have illustrated in the report would see a boost in \$35 billion towards the opportunities and challenges that migration presents,” he concluded.

UN chief condemns double bombing in Libyan city of Benghazi



A view of the old town of Benghazi, Libya. Photo: UNSMIL/Iason Athanasiadis

24 January – Condemning the double bombing in the Libyan city of Benghazi, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres underscored that there can be no military solution to the crisis plaguing the country.

According to reports, more than 20 people, including civilians and children were killed in the attack in the city’s Al-Salmani district and many others wounded.

In a statement attributable to his spokesperson, Mr. Guterres also expressed concerns over reports of summary executions being carried out in Benghazi in retaliation for the attack.

“The perpetrators of the attack in Al-Salmani, and of any criminal acts carried out in retaliation, must be brought to justice,” added the

statement.

In the statement, the Secretary-General also expressed his deepest condolences to the bereaved families and wished the injured swift recovery.

With new leadership committed to reforms, Somalis must make 2018 ‘year of implementation’ – UN envoy

24 January – Grappling with turbulent politics, persisting terrorism and the risk of famine, Somalia must make 2018 a year of carrying out reforms, a senior United Nations official said Wednesday, urging more international financial and technical support for the Horn of Africa country that underwent a peaceful transition of power to a new President a year ago.

“Like many new governments, his has been through a steep learning curve,” Michael Keating, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, told a Security Council briefing, referring to Somali President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed ‘Farmajo.’

Mr. Keating said the Somali leader has crafted a commendable national agenda embracing financial reform, job creation, inclusive politics, conflict resolution and reform of the security sector.

In implementing this multi-pronged agenda, the Federal Government faces several major challenges, including the mobilization of adequate technical and financial capacity, ensuring coherent and coordinated approaches by both national and international actors, and managing the powerful constituencies that need to be on side, such as federal member states, parliamentarians, clan power brokers, the private sector and international partners.

“I strongly encourage Somali stakeholders to unite to tackle these priorities and to make 2018 a year of implementation,” Mr. Keating said.



Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Loey Felipe

On the political front, he said that, in December, tensions were sharply raised in Mogadishu by the violent arrest of a prominent opposition politician by the national intelligence and security agency and the raid on the house of a leading parliamentarian. The recent replacement of the Mayor has also created waves.

These incidents have highlighted basic problems that need to be addressed, such as inadequate rules and safeguards governing the conduct of politics, including impeachment procedures; blurred roles and lines of accountability of the many security actors; and the perpetuation of corrupt practices and of untraceable money in the political marketplace.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, he said that the risk of famine still looms after four consecutive failed rainy seasons, and the 2018 relief aid plan calls for \$1.6 billion.

“Chronic poverty and persistent humanitarian needs cast an ominous shadow over Somalia,” he warned, noting that an estimated 6.2 million people are in need of assistance.

“Continued support will be needed to help Somalia break the cycle of recurrent crises that cause so much suffering and undermine the peacebuilding and state-building process,” he stressed.

Central to that process is gaining political agreement as to how power will be exercised, shared and accounted for. This requires progress in three key areas: review of the provisional federal constitution; preparation for elections in 2020-21; and conflict resolution and reconciliation, he said.

Regarding conflict resolution and reconciliation, the Federal Government plans to launch a national strategy in the coming months, recognising the multifaceted nature of the many disputes and grievances in the country.

A serious danger exists that long-standing disputes between Puntland and Somaliland, and in particular an armed stand-off in Sool, could erupt into violence in the coming days.

“With the support of international partners including many on this Council, I have urged the leaders of Puntland and Somaliland to declare a cessation of hostilities, withdraw their forces, restore the status quo ante, and open channels of communication,” he said.

Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat, despite or perhaps because it is on the back foot as a result of financial pressures, counter terrorism operations and air strikes, Mr. Keating said, noting that on 14 October, Mogadishu suffered the deadliest attack using improvised explosive devices, with an estimated 512 people killed, nearly all civilians.

Use of ‘sticks and carrots’ to defeat Al-Shabaab

“Defeating Al Shabaab requires both a military and political strategy, the use of both sticks and carrots, as well as sustained efforts to address deficits that lend extremists a degree of credibility,” he said.

These deficits include corruption, lack of education and job opportunities for young people, weak national justice and corrections capacity, and grievances arising from unresolved disputes.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) remains fundamental for security in the country, but this year will require dedicated effort by the Somali leadership, the African Union and international partners to build political acceptability and operational capability of the Somali security sector, which should enable AMISOM gradually to hand over responsibility to Somali security forces.

To that end, on 4 December, the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member States, agreed to develop a transition plan in the first quarter of this year, working closely with international partners, most importantly the African Union, troop and police contributing countries and major international investors in Somalia’s security, including the European Union.

“Premature drawdown of AMISOM forces will be a gift to Al Shabaab and risks undermining the gains that have been

made, at great human and financial cost, over the last decade,” he said.

Somalia is making definite progress, but continued progress is dependent not only on the strong political will and skill of the federal government, but also cooperation and partnership with federal member states, parliament, clan elders, business and international partners.

“When all of these constituencies cooperate, huge strides can be made,” he said.

Central African Republic: UN, partners seek \$515 million in humanitarian aid for 2018



Displaced women and children in at one of the spontaneous sites where internally displaced people have gathered in Paoua town, Central African Republic. Photo: Yaye Nabo Sène/OCHA

24 January – With more than half the population in the Central African Republic (CAR) projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2018, the United Nations, the Government and partners are seeking \$515.6 million in contributions to address the crisis.

“The situation requires greater attention more than ever,” said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Najat Rochdi, at the launch of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan on Wednesday.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) notes that due to violence perpetrated by armed groups, more than one in four Central Africans is either internally displaced or a refugee.

The number of internally displaced persons has increased by more than 70 per cent since the first quarter of 2017. This has prevented thousands of children from enjoying their basic right to education. The combination of these factors means that 2.5 million out of the total 4.6 million Central Africans will need humanitarian assistance in 2018.

Ms. Rochdi, however, called upon the international community to remain confident and optimistic, stressing that a synergy of national and international efforts would allow all to “accompany the country in its march towards the well-being of the population, peace and development.”

In 2017, thanks to the support of donors and the unwavering commitment of the humanitarian community, \$255 million has been mobilized to deliver food assistance to those in need.

Over 60,000 children benefited from assistance, particularly educational activities in displacement sites and host communities. Generous contributions have permitted “the return of smiles on the faces of these children,” she said.

Ms. Rochdi called on the international community to go an extra mile in their commitment to ensuring a better future for the children, women and men of the country.

Bring human rights to discussion tables and into decisions at Davos, UN experts urge



Preparing for the 2018 Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Photo: World Economic Forum/Mattias Nutt

24 January – With world leaders converging in Davos, Switzerland, for the annual World Economic Forum, a group of United Nations human rights experts has called on government and business leaders to use the occasion to decide on concrete actions to bring about positive change.

“What we are seeing in the world today is the economically disenfranchised yearning for a fairer economic system that spreads the rewards of economic development to all,” Anita Ramasastry, the chairperson of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, said on Tuesday.

“The inclusion of human rights objectives into political and economic decisions are crucial if economic reforms are to tackle the root causes of populism, global unrest, climate change and inequality,” she added.

In particular, the experts underscored the need for Governments and businesses to act in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by respecting the rights of workers across supply chains and avoid business operations that cause or contribute to adverse human rights impacts.

Welcoming a session of this year’s World Economic Forum on *Global Prospects for Human Rights*, they called on all participants to remind each other that human rights are not a fringe issue but are at the centre of the most pressing global risks and challenges, and therefore must be the focus of efforts to address those issues.

They also stressed that Governments and business leaders meeting in Davos wield the “power and influence” to set the world on a more inclusive and sustainable path and called on them to realize the commitments world leaders made “to realize the human rights of all” and “to leave no one behind.”

They reiterated their appeal on business leaders to support those pledges.

The Working Group on Business and Human Rights was established by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council in 2011.

Composed of five experts, the Working Group promotes the effective dissemination and implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights through promoting sharing of good practices and lessons learned, integrating a gender perspective, and suggesting recommendations.

UN Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Afghanistan: UN chief 'appalled and deeply saddened' by deadly attack on aid partner

24 January – United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has spoken out against the fatal attack on the Afghan offices of renowned international non-governmental organization Save the Children, saying that he was “appalled and deeply saddened” by the casualties.

In a statement issued Wednesday by his Spokesman Stéphane Dujarric, the Secretary-General expressed his deep sympathy to the families of the victims.

According to initial reports, the attack on the offices of Save the Children in Jalalabad killed two people and wounded dozens, including children.



Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Mark Garten (file)

“Humanitarian organizations provide life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable men, women and children in Afghanistan. Aid workers, and their premises and assets, should never be a target,” the statement said.

“The Secretary-General reiterates that all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan are obliged under international law to protect humanitarian workers and civilians,” it added.

Service and Sacrifice: Chadian peacekeepers on a UN mission for peace in Mali



Chadian peacekeepers with MINUSMA patrol near Kidal in northern Mali in December 2016. UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

24 January – As Tahir and his fellow Chadian peacekeepers set out on their daily patrol through the dusty streets of Kidal, in northern Mali, the question he faces is always the same – will he and his team return safely to the United Nations base?

“Many of my friends have died here in Mali. We lived together, ate together. Unfortunately, they lost their lives here,” said Chief Sergeant Mahamat Tahir Moussa Abdoulaye.

The UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, known by its French acronym MINUSMA, has become one of the most dangerous peace operations in the Organization’s history. Since 2013, 155 peacekeepers have lost their lives in the West African nation.

“Many of those who came here in this UN Mission are dead, others will have the scars of their wounds for life,” Tahir said, referring to his fellow Chadians who have served with MINUSMA.

Established in 2013, MINUSMA supports the Malian peace agreement by helping to restore State authority, advance diplomacy, strengthen security and promote human rights.

According to the Secretary-General’s most recent report on Mali, over the course of 2017, the security situation there worsened and attacks against MINUSMA and Malian defence and security forces increased and intensified.

The Chadians, in particular, have paid a heavy price. As of the end of 2017, of the 57 fatalities suffered by Chadian military and police while serving with the UN, 47 have occurred in Mali since 2013.

“UN peacekeeping – and the millions we serve – rely on Member States of the UN to provide the personnel and resources to ensure that our operations can effectively protect civilians and support political processes in some of the world’s most dangerous and complex environments,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. “Our Mission in Mali continues to work tirelessly to help bring peace to the country.”

“In the true spirit of the United Nations Charter, Chad has stepped up to provide protection to people in conflict,” he added. “We pay tribute to the Chadians who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace, and thank the people and Government of Chad for their continued partnership with the UN and their commitment to peace,” he added.

Given the increasingly challenging nature of today’s conflicts and the high number of recent peacekeeper casualties, the United Nations is actively engaged in seeking solutions that will reduce fatalities, improve the safety and security of our personnel and improve the overall performance of UN peacekeeping operations to protect the vulnerable and nurture a fragile peace.

Before being deployed with MINUSMA, Tahir had already fought against the Boko Haram terrorist group in Chad and Nigeria. “We are born warriors, we are born in war and we have always heard the sound of gunfire.”

But as he tells his contingent: “As peacekeepers, we are not here on a war mission, but on a mission for peace.”

As conflicts have evolved, so too has the role of peacekeeping operations; once required to monitor and observe ceasefires, today’s peacekeeping operations must perform a range of functions, including protection of civilians, promoting the rule of law, upholding human rights, supporting credible elections, building institutions of governance, supporting disarmament efforts and minimising the risk of unexploded ordinance.

Today, some 110,000 peacekeepers from more than 120 countries, serve in 15 peacekeeping operations around the world. Operating in highly volatile environments far away from their families, peacekeepers make sacrifices in the service of peace every day.

For Tahir and thousands like him, the reward is in the knowledge that men, women and children in these areas are safer as a result of their work.

This is the first in a series of stories by UN News as part of a campaign highlighting the contributions and sacrifices of the men and women who serve around the world in UN peace operations.