



# INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION

OFFICE OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Substantive session of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations

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United Nations  
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Mr. Chairman,

While it may be uncommon for the IPU to speak before this committee, which in fact we do today for the first time, and with great pleasure, let me assure you from the outset that the IPU as an organization shares many of your concerns. We are keenly aware of the critical role of peacekeeping missions in saving lives and helping set the stage for a return to a sustainable peace in the aftermath of conflict, civil war, genocide and a host of other scenarios.

As an organization of national parliaments, the IPU endeavors to make sure that, in one way or another, the discussions about peacekeeping that take place here as well as, I should add, in the Security Council, resonate with members of parliament around the world and hence with the public at large. In fact, there is a need for more public awareness of what peacekeeping is and what it is not, as well as for more input into the ways and means to make peacekeeping operations more effective and beyond reproach.

Although it may not be so evident at first glance, parliaments have clear responsibilities with respect to peacekeeping and their action can be felt at multiple levels, both here at the UN and on the ground. It is parliaments that approve the deployment of troops or police for peacekeeping missions, and it is they that, through the adoption of national budgets, make available the necessary funds for peacekeeping missions and related UN operations. Parliamentary debates can often influence the position of national governments when it comes to shaping UN peacekeeping policies as well as, it goes without saying, when it comes to deciding whether a peacekeeping mission is called for in the first instance. Finally, in peacekeeping theaters, parliaments can also play a role in supporting peace negotiations and truces which in turn can determine the outcome of missions on the ground.

As a way of further mobilizing and sensitizing parliaments on recent reforms of peacekeeping, a joint UN-IPU meeting was held here last November, bringing together some 200 parliamentarians from over 60 countries. Part of the series of annual Parliamentary Hearings at the United Nations, the meeting was titled "Towards effective peacekeeping and the prevention of conflict: delivering on our commitments", and focused in good part on the various aspects of peacekeeping operations - including the issue of sexual violence and abuse.

The hearing showed that there is both interest and knowledge among parliamentarians of the problems that have become evident in peacekeeping operations in recent years, as well as of some of the reforms undertaken to address those problems. However, it is also clear from the discussions that this awareness needs to go deeper, and that there is much more that parliaments can do to make sure that reforms are effective and actually implemented on the ground.

The full report of the hearing will be available to you in a few weeks, when it will circulate as an official document of the General Assembly. In anticipation of that, allow me to provide you with the following highlights.

The hearing – which included the active participation of DPKO, as well as of MPs and permanent representatives from both troop-contributing and troop-receiving countries - afforded legislators a better appreciation of the increasing complexity of peacekeeping operations, in which peacekeepers have now much broader mandates and are expected to carry out activities such as restoring the rule of law, rebuilding state institutions, organizing elections and training police forces. Our members were particularly interested in the political challenges related to peacekeeping operations, such as achieving collaboration with all parties in the host country, strengthening national ownership of peace processes and managing the expectations of local populations vis-à-vis the peacekeeping mission.

The discussion also touched on the need for more training for peacekeeping troops prior to deployment and for ongoing training of soldiers once they are on the ground. All agreed that such training should include instruction in the language, culture, traditions and values of the destination country. For our members, pre-deployment training is particularly vital to prevent or deal with sexual violence, whether committed by civilians under peacekeeping control, other combatants, or by peacekeepers themselves.

When addressing the strategic challenges of peacekeeping operations, one important issue raised was the importance of gaining the consent of the actors involved, including non-state actors, for the deployment of peacekeeping missions. There is clearly a need for parliaments to pay more attention to this aspect when assessing the feasibility of peacekeeping missions. In connection to this, our members expressed a strong concern with the growing number and broadening mandates of peacekeeping missions and how this is not backed up by additional resources.

The discussion at the hearing also highlighted the need for peacekeepers to gain the trust of the local population. Perception management is important; peacekeepers must lead by example and show that they are part of the solution and not part of the problem. Legislators want to make sure, for example, that the policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse is strictly enforced. But they also appreciate how cases of abuse and exploitation by the hands of combatants are hard to deal with if peacekeeping forces on the ground are too small and overextended. There was a clear sense that an important remedy to these problems is to include more women peacekeepers in missions.

To conclude, Mr. President, the IPU will continue to follow these issues closely and encourage parliaments to be more engaged when it comes to both the conceptual and the operational aspects of peacekeeping.

I thank you for your attention.