



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



Preparatory Conference for the 2023 Peacekeeping Ministerial
Organized by Rwanda, Indonesia, the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of the Netherlands
On Protection of Civilians & Strategic Communications
23-24 October 2023

Background

The Preparatory Conference (PrepCon) on Protection of Civilians (POC) and Strategic Communications (StratCom) seeks to further the A4P and A4P+ agenda and help generate concrete pledges in these areas by focusing on the importance of community engagement, adequate mission planning, capacity and integration, proactive communication, technology and information. Based on the [Declaration of Shared Commitments](#) chapter on Protection, the cross-cutting focus of the PrepCon on POC and StratCom is improving strategic communications and interactive engagement with local populations. The PrepCon will also be an opportunity to discuss mis-, disinformation and hate speech and related challenges.

Themes:

Protection of Civilians:

POC in UN peacekeeping is grounded in international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international refugee law, and reflects the desire of the Security Council to protect civilians from harm. POC in peacekeeping requires the integrated and coordinated activities by all civilian and uniformed mission components to prevent, deter or respond to threats of physical violence against civilians (within the mission's capabilities and areas of deployment) through the use of all necessary means, up to and including deadly force, regardless of the source of threat. POC mandates are implemented through activities across three tiers which are mutually reinforcing and are implemented simultaneously, with no inherent hierarchy or sequencing between them. These are: i) Protection through dialogue and engagement, ii) Provision of physical protection, iii) Establishment of a protective environment. Peacekeeping missions are mandated to support the host state's POC efforts but may act independently to protect civilians when the host state is deemed unable or unwilling to do so, or where government forces themselves pose a threat to civilians. UN peacekeeping missions with a POC mandate can therefore play an important supporting role for host states to fulfill their primary responsibility to protect civilians and promote respect for human rights.

Strategic Communications:

Strategic communications refers to engagement with stakeholders across all methods of communication, including traditional, digital and in-person, to build an understanding of the roles,

responsibilities and capacities of missions, which helps to manage expectations and demonstrate the tangible impact of peacekeeping. Communication strategies should be aligned with the priorities of missions and reflect the importance of "communicating to protect people". This involves informing the affected population about the mission's role in providing assistance and protection, as well as informing the broader community of the actions being taken by the mission to prevent and address crises. Proactive communication is crucial for the prevention, mediation, and resolution of conflict. Effective messaging to various actors (host state, perpetrators of violence, civilians, etc) to influence their behavior can increase the overall level of protection. This outreach to all stakeholders should be built on a comprehensive analysis of perceptions of missions and contribute to building the support needed for the safe and effective conduct of mandated activities across all components; military, police and civilian. Improved analysis and outreach are critical to addressing the growing threat of mis- and disinformation and hate speech. The actions of mission personnel (uniformed and civilian) influence perceptions and can thus either undermine or reinforce messaging. As such, all mission activity is strategic communications in nature. Communication and activity must therefore be mutually supportive and planned coherently to create a (sufficiently) permissive operating environment. Proactively leading the narrative; anticipating and correcting counter-narratives; adopting a multidisciplinary approach; comprehensive monitoring and analysis; the conduct of effective community engagement, political outreach and good offices; and adapting the posture of uniformed personnel are all essential components of a comprehensive approach to effective strategic communications and the countering of mis/disinformation and hate speech.

Goals:

The PrepCon on POC and StratCom has the following **goals**:

1. Improving the Protection of Civilians and Strategic Communications in UN peacekeeping. Enhanced understanding of perceptions of missions and strengthened engagement and communication with host nation populations, media, civil society and NGOs, and the international community by UN Peacekeeping at all levels – from HQ to missions and contingents.
2. Identification of the critical elements of a comprehensive approach required by UN Peace Operations to address disinformation, misinformation and hate speech, to mitigate and prevent their harmful effects. This will also contribute to the Protection of Civilians and the Safety and Security of Peacekeepers.
3. Provide the groundwork for - and encourage - meaningful discussion among participants on pledges on these topics for the 2023 Peacekeeping Ministerial in line with the pledging guide.

To achieve these goals, the PrepCon will have the following **sub-objectives**:

- a) To develop and share a deeper knowledge of POC, focused on host nations' primary responsibilities but spreading awareness of the UN's role and contribution at all levels (UNHQ, FHQ and T/PCCs), including support to host nations to fulfill their primary responsibility to protect civilians, whilst reaffirming the [Kigali Principles](#) on the Protection of Civilians.

- b) Gain a deeper understanding of all aspects of StratCom; demonstrate its importance as a core function for mission leaders, uniformed and civilian peacekeepers, Agencies, Funds and Programs, as part of a One UN communications approach.
- c) Generate greater understanding of the relationship between StratCom and POC, and the importance of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach to addressing mis- and disinformation, including hate speech.
- d) Learn from expert civil society organizations and NGOs; build connections and foster conversations between the UN, Member States, missions and security actors.

Format and Conduct:

This PrepCon will take place in-person over the course of one and a half days. On the first day there will be two plenary sessions, followed by a dinner and reception. The second day will consist of the two remaining plenary sessions examining various sub-themes of the preparatory conference. The day will end with a summary and closing session prior to lunch and dispersal.

During the sessions, panelists will have an opportunity to discuss POC, StratCom and their inter-dependence; share their experiences; and respond to questions and suggestions from the audience.

The conference will be in English. French translation will be provided. Video recordings of the sessions will be available.

Participation:

The preparatory conference is intended for senior national and international experts on peacekeeping, peacebuilding, sustaining peace and communication; civil society organizations and NGOs; and researchers (Academia and Think Tanks). Senior representatives from the United Nations, other regional and subregional organizations, and senior civilian, police and military participants from capitals are also welcome.

Registration:

The registration link is: https://ems-rwanda.qtsoftwareltd.com/web/?r=site/event-registration&event_id=1559