

Remarks by USG Pollard at the 2023 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial
Session 3: Conditions for Success
(including Host Government Support, Inclusion, Conduct, Strat Comms)
6 December 2023

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and an honour to open and moderate this session on conditions for success.

We have a distinguished group of panellists representing two governments, one of our peacekeeping missions and civil society. Before we hear from them, allow me to offer a few thoughts on what success may mean for peacekeeping missions and some of the conditions for success.

Regarding the conditions for success, we have already heard quite a lot during the side meeting yesterday and in the plenary earlier today. Mr. Lacroix emphasized how important it is that Member States provide their unified support, especially in the Security Council. In the first two plenary sessions, we heard about the kinds of capabilities and partnerships we need to make our missions more effective.

We should keep in mind that success in peacekeeping can take many forms, depending on our mandates and the contexts in which our missions are deployed:

- In many cases, peacekeeping missions have helped countries make the transition from conflict to sustainable peace.
- In other contexts, our mission prevent conflict from recurring, often for many decades, as has been the case in Cyprus; or they prevent the escalation

of conflicts, as our colleagues in UNIFIL are doing at this very moment in Southern Lebanon.

- Even when conflict has been ongoing for years and political solutions seem out of reach, peacekeeping missions are often able to reduce the levels of violence against civilians significantly, or they may separate thousands of children from armed groups, or support victims of conflict-related sexual violence. These actions are immensely meaningful to those most affected by conflicts even if they don't resolve them or bring sustainable peace. And even in these circumstances, our missions can accomplish remarkable results against enormous odds and with limited resources.

So our mandates, the resources we are given, and the contexts in which we operate to a large extent dictate the kinds of successes we are able to achieve. But there are a few factors that matter across every context, some of which we have listed in the title of this session: host government support, inclusion, conduct, and strategic communications. The active support of Member States is crucial in all of these areas, whether at the broader political level or in the form of very specific commitments or expertise.

Allow me to say a few words about each of them:

Host government support

First, on host government support. As a consent-based tool, peacekeeping missions need the support and cooperation of host governments to succeed. Sometimes that consent is withdrawn, as happened in Mali in June, and a mission has to withdraw.

In other contexts, host governments have violated status-of-forces agreements (SOFAs), resulting in reduced access or other restrictions on our missions. We know that proactive and constant engagement with those host governments can produce some positive results. In South Sudan for example, a monthly ministerial-level coordination mechanism between UNMISS and the Government helped to reduce access denials and other SOFA violations.

Beyond our own engagement with the host governments, also at the New York level, we rely on consistent political backing from Member States and especially the Security Council in ensuring unimpeded implementation of our mandates. Troop and police contributing countries can also play an important role in some cases when they engage host governments on restrictions that affect their contingents.

Inclusion

The second condition relates to inclusion. We know that more inclusive political agreements are more implementable and sustainable. More inclusive processes and agreements result in greater ownership, enjoy greater legitimacy, and better reflect differentiated needs and grievances.

Inclusion matters at different levels and during different stages. Our missions promote greater inclusion of women, youth, minority groups and others at the national level, through our SRSGs and deputy SRSGs and their engagement in national political processes. They also do so at the local level, through our civil affairs, human rights and other civilian colleagues who are working on local level conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Inclusion is not just a process issue. It matters just as much in the outcome and during the implementation of agreements. I'm sure Hon. Alokiir will touch on this during her intervention, given her prominent role during the different stages of the peace process in South Sudan.

Conduct

Serving as a peacekeeper under the UN flag is an honour for all Member countries and troop contributors. We should recall that the United Nations has won the Nobel Peace Prize for our collective work in peacekeeping. This is something that we can be proud of and celebrate as a collective accomplishment.

Let me now turn to a condition that has to do with our own behaviour as peacekeepers. Every peacekeeper, civilian or uniformed, has to serve with honour, upholding our standards and the image and credibility of the entire UN. This is an essential requirement for acceptance by local communities and to effectively implement our mandates.

When it comes to our uniformed personnel, we have to work in close partnership with the troop and police contributing countries to ensure those standards are met.

The vast majority of our peacekeepers meet that responsibility honorably and with distinction. We have worked closely with many Member States and troop contributors to learn from and disseminate good practices in conduct and discipline that can be expanded.

Unfortunately, the terrible actions of a small minority cast a shadow on the honorable work of so many, some of whom have given the ultimate sacrifice.

We have launched an initiative for Member States to establish national prohibitions against the most gruesome of misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse. We note that progress in this regard has been made and look forward to receiving further updates.

Managing the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, with a focus on prevention, is a collective responsibility, and we are enhancing an integrated approach to risk management for peacekeeping missions.

A key priority is to ensure all uniformed personnel receive mandatory training on the United Nations standards of conduct and that commanders receive the newly released UN Reinforcement Training Programme as part of their pre-deployment training.

When allegations of misconduct occur, we call on Member States to conduct timely investigations, providing the Secretariat with the required information on results of these investigations and accountability measures taken, where applicable, including for criminal conduct. Efforts are still needed to conclude long-standing

open matters and, to that effect, we have developed a platform that provides access for Member States to all cases involving their own personnel.

With reports of sexual exploitation and abuse often come paternity and child support claims. To attain the just resolution of such claims, we are focusing on strengthening our partnership with Member States, including to identify the actions required to enable paternity issues to be resolved and, when established, for effective child support to be provided.

Finally, noting the victim-centred approach adopted by the United Nations Secretariat, I thank those Member States that have voluntarily contributed to the Trust Fund in support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and would welcome any further contributions for others. The projects funded by the Trust Fund have provided much needed support in building the capacity of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse to sustain themselves.

Strategic communications and mis/disinformation

The final area I will mention that is critical for our success is strategic communications and addressing mis- and disinformation. This issue has become more urgent and important with every month that passes and was rightly elevated to one of the themes of this Ministerial.

We need your support to echo and amplify the voices of our missions, help manage expectations, and to demonstrate the tangible impact of our work through strong and compelling narratives that help build credibility and trust.

We also need support to deal with the dramatic increase in mis- and disinformation that is threatening communities and peacekeepers. We have taken some important steps this year, including the creation of a dedicated team in the Department of Peace Operation, but much more needs to be done. This includes building the resilience of societies against the onslaught of mis-, disinformation and hate speech (as we heard during the first session today).

I look forward to hearing our panel members' perspectives on these and other areas.