



Statement on the Release of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations

The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) welcomes the release of the High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations report, an assessment requested by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General designed to identify the current state of UN peacekeeping operations and emerging future needs.

As evidenced by the crises in Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Darfur—to name but a few examples—peacekeepers are often deployed into situations in which atrocities have already been committed or there is a significant risk to populations, and correspondingly the vast majority of modern peacekeeping missions have a mandate to protect civilians. While civilian protection mandates extend beyond the prevention of atrocity crimes, peacekeeping operations serve a vital function in assisting states and the international community to uphold the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P) populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing (often referred to as “atrocity crimes”).

Accordingly, the Panel reiterated that the protection of civilians is a core obligation of the United Nations. Despite such a reaffirmation and the increasing prevalence of protection of civilian mandates, more populations are vulnerable to atrocity crimes than ever before. In this regard, the ICRtoP hopes that Member States will consider the following as the UN Security Council and General Assembly deliberate on the Panel’s recommendations:

- **The primacy of prevention:** As the report states, *“the avoidance of war rather than its resolution should be at the centre of national, regional, and international efforts and investment.”* All actors agree that the prevention of conflict is more effective at protecting populations than conflict response and management tools, and are considerably less costly. This extends to atrocity crimes, with prevention serving as the primary goal of the Responsibility to Protect. Despite such consensus, the international community has failed to instill a culture of prevention, clearly illustrating that expanded political will is needed to put prevention into practice.

Member States should consider how they can enhance collaboration and funding with the Peacebuilding Commission, Special Political missions, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and other UN departments and agencies in this regard. In addition to implementing preventive practices, such coordination would also improve UN capacity to support political solutions to crises in which peacekeeping missions are deployed, a central recommendation of the Panel.

- **Increased focus on the use of unarmed strategies to protect civilians:** Under Pillar II of the Responsibility to Protect, the international community has the responsibility to assist States to fulfill their obligation to protect populations from atrocity crimes. As peacekeeping missions are often deployed into situations in which the Host State lacks capacity to uphold its own RtoP, these operations can support States to protect populations through measures such as human rights monitoring, mediation, security sector reform, and supporting disarmament efforts. Amplified attention on such unarmed, less controversial political tools will serve to better enhance the protection of populations in the long run.

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- **Developing assessments of threats to civilians using the UN Framework of Analysis on Atrocity Crimes:** The report encourages the use of threat assessments to drive capability requirements and planning of peacekeeping operations and mandates. At a time when an unprecedented number of populations are at risk of atrocity crimes, from Iraq to South Sudan to Mali, those entrusted to protect populations should undergo training on how to use and report on risk factors for atrocities as contained in the UN Framework of Analysis. Additionally, as underscored by the Panel, the UN lacks a mechanism to confirm that trainings such as these have been *"effectively delivered to all deploying personnel."* Such a system, which would be in line with the UN's Human Rights up Front initiative, should be developed in the immediate future.
- **Address impunity for abuse and exploitation of populations:** Avoiding accountability for peacekeepers that violate UN standards of conduct and integrity can no longer be tolerated by the Secretariat or Member States. Allowing peacekeepers who sexually exploit and abuse those they are delegated to protect to escape unpunished contradicts the very morals upon which the UN was constructed. The ICRtoP thus urges Member States to embrace the Panel's recommendations to implement the Secretary-General's proposed measures to strengthen accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse.

When populations are emerging from, are at risk of, or experiencing atrocities, UN peacekeepers are often the only actors to whom they can turn for protection. It is therefore crucial that the Security Council and General Assembly accept and clarify the recommendations made by the High-Level Panel—and, more importantly—strive to implement them in practice. Ultimately, the United Nations, its Membership, and its peacekeepers will not be judged by their resolutions or recommendations, but on their ability to fulfill their most solemn of commitments—that of protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

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The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect convenes and collaborates with civil society, Member States, and regional and sub-regional organizations to continue close scrutiny of the consistent implementation of the third pillar and develop effective methods to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

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