

## UNEPS Backgrounder



UN Photos: Basile Zoma / Eskinder Debebe / Marco Dormino / Martine Perret

### Time for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service

For nearly as long as the UN has been doing peacekeeping there have been proposals for improvements to overcome such challenges as the slow or incomplete mission deployments that accompany the present standby arrangements. As former UN Secretary – General Kofi Annan observed:

*“Our system for launching United Nations peace operations has sometimes been compared to a volunteer fire department, but that description is too generous. Every time there is a fire, we must first find fire engines and the funds to run them before we can start dousing any flames. The present system relies almost entirely on last minute, ad hoc arrangements that guarantee delay.*

In May 2016, following three expert studies on the UN’s peace and security machinery, governments endorsed a new vision of a better coordinated, system-wide response to threats to international peace. “Sustainable peace” is the term for this emerging framework that is intended to reflect a more integrated approach, linking the UN’s activities from conflict prevention, mediation and conflict resolution, peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peacebuilding.

However, a determination by Member States to strengthen political and financial commitments to UN operations will be necessary in order for these aspirations to be realized.

At a time of unprecedented demand for UN blue helmets, support is growing for providing the UN with standing peace operations capacities, such as a UNEPS.

Earlier formulations calling for a UN “standing army” or permanent “rapid reaction force” have given way to the idea of a more integrated “peace service,” mirroring the evolution in UN peace operations that now brings military personnel together with a wider range of civilian, police, judicial, governance, humanitarian, development and human rights actors.

### Key Characteristics

A UNEPS is specifically designed to help with:

1. The prevention of armed conflict;
2. Stopping genocide and mass atrocity crimes;
3. Protecting civilians at extreme risk;
4. Ensuring prompt start-up of demanding peace operations; and,
5. Addressing human needs in areas where others cannot.

As proposed, it is to be:

- A permanent, integrated UN formation;
- A highly trained and well-equipped first-responder (a ‘UN 911’);
- Ready for immediate deployment upon authorization of the UN Security Council;
- Multifunctional and multidimensional (civilians, police and military);
- Composed of 16,000 dedicated personnel (recruited professionals, selected, trained

## UNEPS Backgrounder

and employed by the UN);

- Co-located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters;
- At sufficient deterrent strength to operate in most high-threat environments; and
- A service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements.

A UNEPS would be paid for from the UN regular budget. Estimates of the costs vary, but start-up expenses could be as high as \$2 to \$3 billion. Annual recurring costs would be approximately \$1 billion. These costs would be shared among 193 member states. While these estimates may seem high, by comparison with the military expenditures of many UN member states, the cost of a UNEPS is modest. And a UNEPS would undoubtedly reduce the costs to “the system” from conflicts that could have been prevented or mitigated at earlier stages but weren’t. Over time the effect of UNEPS could well be fewer failed states and fewer more expensive, traditional peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.



UN Photo/Logan Abassi

In addition to more timely and effective deployment of peace operations, a UN Emergency Peace Service would enhance the legitimacy and consistency of Responsibility to Protect “third pillar” responses. It would provide an additional tool for the prevention of armed conflict, as well as UN collaborative arrangements with regional organizations. It would also strengthen the UN’s efforts to promote adherence to standardized doctrine and best practice by peacekeepers.



UN Photo/Pasqual Gorriz

### The way forward

Although the need for such a standing capacity is clear, a political consensus in favour of the creation of a UN Emergency Peace Service remains elusive. While a comprehensive 16,000-person service as described here remains the goal of progressive civil society organizations and governments, it is also possible that the development of a UNEPS will be evolutionary and incremental. For example, the 2015 report of the Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance calls for a 400-person standing UN Police Standing Capacity; and the 2015 UN High-level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) has identified the need for a United Nations “vanguard capability” to allow the UN to insert a quickly responding military capability into a new or existing mission area. The HIPPO also called for creation of a standby Rapidly Deployable Military Headquarters.

Discussions in 2016 of the UN’s peace operations machinery and peacebuilding architecture demonstrate a widespread recognition of the need to do better. This is a necessary first step, a foundation for future progress. Secretary-General Guterres may be in a position to cultivate the political will to create standing capacities, such as a UN Emergency Peace Service.