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UN officials stress national ownership and partnerships for successful peacebuilding



Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

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United Nations peacebuilding efforts are more effective when post-conflict countries set their own priorities and take ownership of the national institution-building process, senior UN officials told the Security Council today.

“Building peace means helping national institutions reach a point where they are able to maintain a sufficient level of stability and security, in particular through respect for the rule of law and

human rights,” said the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, in his remarks to a Council [meeting](#) on peacekeeping and its role in peacebuilding. “Strong national ownership and leadership in the formulation of peacebuilding priorities is essential.”

Peacekeeping is the most visible of the United Nations' work to maintain international peace and security. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) currently has 15 peacekeeping missions in four continents, with more than 120,000 men and women serving. Peacekeepers are often called early peacebuilders as increasingly since the 1990s peacekeeping operations have become involved in a wide range of activities to help build the foundations for sustainable peace in war-torn countries.

“In these last three years,” Mr. Ladsous told Council members, “we have come a long way in sharpening our understanding of what peacebuilding entails.”

“What then,” he asked, “is the specific role of peacekeepers in this effort?”

The peacekeeping chief emphasized that talking about the role of peacekeepers in peacebuilding is not about expanding peacekeeping, adding new tasks to mandates. “It is about making the best of tasks that peacekeepers are already being asked to perform,” he said.

“Peacekeepers are best suited to prioritize those initiatives that advance the peace process or political objectives of a mission,” Mr. Ladsous noted. “These initiatives may also ensure security or lay the foundation for longer-term institution building in a few key areas.”

He added that peacekeeping missions have a restricted time horizon and must synchronise their plans with those actors better suited to undertake long-term engagements.

In her remarks to the Council, the Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Susana Malcorra, focused on the social and economic impact on the life of host countries by peacekeeping missions, through job creation and local procurement but also, unless proper care is taken, through problems like environmental degradation and distortion of the job market.

Ms. Malcorra said that high levels of unemployment and slow economic recovery made it difficult for youth and war-affected populations to find legal income-generating opportunities locally. She added that such scenarios present a serious impediment for war-affected populations to establish alternative livelihoods and encourage sustainable reintegration in local communities.

Ms. Malcorra cited the example of Liberia, where the UN peacekeeping mission in that country ([UNMIL](#)) and its partners – the World Bank, the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)), the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) and the country’s Ministry of Public Works – designed a series of labour intensive road repair projects increasing accessibility as well as short-term employment opportunities.

The projects were concentrated around vulnerable communities, such as communities along borders and those in close proximity to desirable natural resources. They created over 75,000 jobs and channelled almost \$6 million into local communities, with the workforce including representation from all communities, ex-combatants, returnees, and women. In addition, 600

kilometres of primary roads and 300 kilometres of secondary roads were rehabilitated, improving access year round to many parts of the country.

Ms. Malcorra also focused on the Civilian Capacities initiative being undertaken by the Department of Field Support, aimed at supporting the development of national capacities.

“Accessing more effectively the needed civilian experts and deploying them into missions to support the development of national capacities, and to help us plan and execute peacebuilding tasks, as well as effective transitions, depends on stronger partnerships between the UN and external providers – principally Member States,” she said.

Building the capacity of national staff in peacekeeping missions is an important contribution of peacekeeping operations in post-conflict societies, said Ms. Malcorra. She noted that several UN peacekeeping missions – such as those in Sudan, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – have introduced specific strategies and programmes that are aimed at strengthening the capacity of national staff members who will play a critical role in the development of their country beyond the UN’s presence.

The officials also addressed the importance of partnerships for UN peacekeeping, with both UN and non-UN actors, based on each actor’s comparative advantage at different stages of the peacebuilding process, as well as their ability to deliver.

Mr. Ladsous said that the UN is only one of many actors contributing to any peacebuilding effort, and building strong partnerships with regional organizations, bilateral partners and international financial institutions in the early stages of planning processes is also necessary to ensure a coherent and coordinated approach.

The UN’s top peacekeeper pointed especially to peacekeeping missions as they draw down, a time-period when regional and bilateral partners are critical, as risks may persist after a peacekeeping operation draws down requiring planning of longer-term security guarantees with the help of partners.

“How do we know when to move beyond a peacekeeping mission? There is no easy, one-size-fits-all answer to this question,” Mr. Ladsous said. “In an ideal scenario, drawdown should happen gradually, on the basis of a careful review of the situation on the ground, discussions with our national, bilateral and regional partners, and testing of the host country’s capacity to assume responsibilities and public perceptions.”

He noted that no matter how much progress a country has made towards peace, the departure of a peacekeeping mission can also be expected to raise anxieties, and may be destabilising in itself.

“Building confidence between the host government, key national stakeholders and the international community and clearly articulating the facts of a transition through continued dialogue and communication strategies is critical to a successful drawdown planning,” Mr. Ladsous said.

Ms. Malcorra echoed his comment, noting that transitions from peacekeeping operations may be inherently political processes, but they can only succeed if they are well prepared and executed.

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