

ActionAid Denmark is deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations, a critical platform for reimagining peacebuilding in an increasingly complex global landscape. As advocates for grassroots peacebuilders, our work at ActionAid Denmark amplifies the voices of social movements and civil society, whose bottom-up insights are vital for addressing the very questions posed by this review, e.g. with our Copenhagen People Power Conference 2025 (CPPC25). Drawing on the rich discussions and case studies from our recent conference, highlighting the transformative roles of movements in contexts like Sudan, the DRC, and Myanmar, we offer this submission to underscore the pivotal role of grassroots actors in building inclusive, just, and sustainable peace, ensuring operations draws effectiveness from their resonance within the communities they serve.

In response to Q1: What are the main challenges confronting peace operations today and what challenges are expected to be faced by peace operations in the future?

ActionAid Denmark, see that peace operations today face a confluence of immediate and structural challenges, as evidenced by escalating global conflicts and weakened multilateral frameworks. Key current challenges covered by the Copenhagen Peace Report 2025, include:

- **Geopolitical rivalry and fragmentation:** Interstate wars and internationalized civil wars are rising, with great powers asserting spheres of influence (e.g., Russia in Ukraine, regional actors in Sudan). This paralyzes multilateral institutions like the UN, as seen in the limited role of the UN Security Council in Ukraine or Gaza, leading to reduced legitimacy and effectiveness.
- **Militarization and arms proliferation:** Global military expenditure reached \$2,718 billion in 2024, a 9.4% increase, with rising nuclear inventories and small arms flows fueling conflicts in Africa and beyond. This exacerbates violence intensity and civilian casualties, undermining operations' protective mandates and undermines political investment in diplomatic and non-violent conflict resolution efforts.
- **Exclusion of grassroots actors:** Traditional peace operations often sideline social movements and civil society, focusing on elite-driven processes and armed actors. As highlighted at the Copenhagen People Power Conference 2025 (CPPC25), this ignores the pivotal role of unarmed civilians in reducing conflict risks (e.g., by 64% when civil society is included) and addressing root causes to secure lasting conflict resolution.
- **Humanitarian and operational constraints:** Protracted conflicts cause massive displacement (e.g., 123 million people by mid-2024) and attacks on peacekeepers, as in Mali where MINUSMA was expelled. Underfunding and lack of enforcement for international humanitarian law as in Gaza further hinder responses.

Looking to the future, peace operations are expected to confront challenges in an even more fragmented, multipolar world:

- **Transnational threats intersecting with local conflicts:** Climate change, AI-driven disinformation, and resource competition will amplify grievances, creating hybrid conflicts that transcend borders. For instance, digital repression and propaganda in Sudan and Myanmar could escalate polarization globally.
- **Declining multilateralism and ad-hoc diplomacy:** With the Global Peace Index showing a 6% deterioration over 16 years, institutions like the UN may face further erosion, leading to reliance on unpredictable coalitions. This risks inconsistent implementation, as seen in stalled ceasefires without monitoring.
- **Increased polarization and spheres of influence:** Revival of imperial logics (e.g., territorial claims in the Arctic or South China Sea) could fragment responses, making operations vulnerable to vetoes or proxy wars.
- **Sustained exclusion risks:** Without adaptation, operations may fail to integrate social movements and the constituents, perpetuating cycles where elite agreements collapse (e.g., 50% of peace deals fail without civil society involvement).

These challenges demand a shift toward inclusive, adaptive strategies to prevent operations from becoming obsolete.

In response to Q2: How could UN peace operations adapt in response to current and future challenges (e.g. in terms of political and substantive work, mandates, operational and administrative requirements, and capacities)?

UN peace operations must evolve into more agile, inclusive, and preventive entities, drawing on grassroots insights and innovative diplomacy to address militarization and fragmentation. Adaptations could include:

- **Political and substantive work:** Shift from elite-focused mediation to integrating social movements as core actors, recognizing their roles in awareness-raising, service delivery, and reconciliation (e.g., Sudan's Resistance Committees providing aid amid state collapse). Incorporate conflict transformation approaches, addressing root causes like inequality through just peace frameworks, as advocated in CPPC25.
- **Mandates:** Adopt modular mandates with regular reviews (every 12-18 months) to adapt to dynamic environments. Mandate explicit inclusion of civil society in planning and evaluation, emphasizing prevention (e.g., early warning via grassroots voices) and peacebuilding (e.g., supporting women's mediation e.g. in Ethiopia or Sri Lanka).

- **Capacities:** Build specialized training in nonviolent resistance synergy (e.g., USIP's SNAP guide), cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed approaches. Establish centralized hubs focusing on flexible partnerships with local movements for contextual relevance. Increase quotas for women and youth to foster inclusive leadership.

These adaptations would align with the Pact for the Future's call for agile responses, ensuring operations remain effective amid geopolitical shifts.

In response to Q3: What could UN peace operations be expected and mandated to do in the future? Under what conditions are UN peace operations least likely to be effective in achieving their objectives?

In the future, UN peace operations could be mandated to prioritize transformative, inclusive roles beyond traditional peacekeeping:

- **Facilitate grassroots-driven processes:** mandating collaboration with social movements for local ceasefires, mediation, and reconstruction (e.g., supporting LUCHA in DRC or women's coalitions in Sri Lanka). Inclusion of social movements and civil society in negotiations could reduce agreement failure by 64% (ICNC), and address root causes via community governance (e.g., Ethiopia's psychosocial support), to secure sustainable peace.
- **Focus on prevention:** early warning awareness, norms transmission (e.g., humanitarian law in conflict zones), and long-term peacebuilding addressing structural violence.

Operations are least likely to be effective under conditions of:

- **Elite-driven exclusion:** When ignoring grassroots legitimacy, as in failed agreements without civil society (e.g., 50% failure rate).
- **Geopolitical paralysis:** Vetoes or rivalries blocking action, as in UN's limited role in Ukraine or Gaza.
- **Lack of accountability and resources:** Without enforcement or funding, operations falter (e.g., MINUSMA expulsion in Mali).
- **Misalignment with local needs:** Imposing external models risks co-optation or irrelevance, especially amid transnational threats like climate change.

In response to Q4: What could be the role of partnerships, with regional organizations, international financial institutions, or other actors, in future UN peace operations? What are the opportunities and challenges presented by partnerships, and what principles should underpin them?

Drawing on insights from the Copenhagen People Power Conference 2025 (CPPC25), partnerships in future UN peace operations must prioritize collaboration with grassroots social movements and civil society as primary peacebuilding actors, alongside regional organizations and international financial institutions (IFIs). These partnerships can enhance operations by embedding local legitimacy and addressing root causes of conflict:

- **Grassroots social movements and civil society:** As emphasized in CPPC25, movements like Sudan's Resistance Committees, LUCHA in the DRC, and women's coalitions in Sri Lanka are critical for sustainable peace. They provide local knowledge, mediate local ceasefires, deliver services (e.g., mutual aid in Sudan), and foster people-to-people connections that bridge divides (e.g., Sri Lanka's WAN uniting Sinhala and Tamil women). UN operations should partner with these actors to integrate their nonviolent strategies into conflict analysis, early warning, and peace processes, reducing relapse risks by 64% when civil society is included. These partnerships can amplify marginalized voices (e.g., women, youth) and support advocacy against structural violence, such as inequality or exclusion.
- **Regional organizations:** Entities like the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, or the EU can co-lead mediation, share logistics, and provide regional legitimacy (e.g., AU and IGAD in Sudan). They can facilitate dialogue platforms and monitor ceasefires, leveraging conflict proximity for rapid response. International financial institutions e.g. the World Bank or regional development banks can fund long-term peacebuilding by addressing socioeconomic drivers of conflict, aligning with movements' calls for just peace.

Opportunities:

- **Enhanced legitimacy and effectiveness:** Partnering with movements ensures operations are rooted in local realities, increasing trust and sustainability (e.g., Sudanese committees' role in 2019 transitional governance). Regional organizations and IFIs can amplify this by providing resources and frameworks. Collaboration reduces UN operational costs and leverages diverse expertise, from movements' contextual insights to AU's regional networks or IFIs' economic tools.
- **Innovative solutions:** Movements' nonviolent tactics (e.g., activism, community governance) and ad-hoc coalitions (e.g., Egypt's post-2023 Middle East coalition) offer

innovative and effective pathways for dialogue and de-escalation, complementing traditional diplomacy.

Challenges:

- **Co-optation and bias:** External partners, including IFIs or regional powers, may impose agendas that sideline or co-opt movements, as seen in elite-driven processes ignoring Sudan's civil society. Geopolitical rivalries (e.g., Gulf states in Sudan) can skew priorities. Grassroots actors face targeting by state or non-state actors (e.g., M23 attacks on LUCHA in DRC), requiring UN protection mechanisms to ensure safety.
- **Coordination gaps:** Ad-hoc partnerships, as noted in the Copenhagen Peace Report, often lack institutional anchoring, risking inconsistent implementation (e.g., stalled Sudan talks). IFIs may prioritize economic metrics over social justice, misaligning with movement goals.

Principles:

- **Do no harm:** Avoid exacerbating conflicts by ensuring partnerships respect local agency and avoid external imposition, as CPPC25 stresses.
- **Local leadership and inclusivity:** Center movements, especially women and youth, in decision-making to ensure equitable representation, given their <1% share of ODA despite proven impact.
- **Long-term commitment:** Support movements across all conflict stages (latent to post-conflict), as CPPC25 advocates, to build resilient peace architectures.

By prioritizing grassroots movements as equal partners, UN operations can harness people power to transform conflicts, aligning with CPPC25's recommendation of recognising movements as architects of peace rather than peripheral stakeholders.

In response to prompt 5: Please share any additional observations that may benefit the Review:

The transformative power of grassroots social movements must be at the heart of reimagining UN peace operations, as they are not merely stakeholders but indispensable architects of sustainable peace. The inclusion of social movements in peace efforts is paramount, as they embody people power, reducing conflict risks, fostering just resolutions, and ensuring sustainable outcomes by centering those most affected, transforming victims into agents of change in a fractured world.

As evidenced by the Copenhagen People Power Conference 2025 and ICNC/ActionAid Denmark's findings, movements like Sudan's Resistance Committees, LUCHA in the DRC, and women's coalitions in Sri Lanka demonstrate unparalleled resilience in navigating fractured state systems, delivering services, mediating local ceasefires, and fostering reconciliation where elite-driven processes falter. Their nonviolent strategies, ranging from activism to community governance, reduce conflict relapse risks by 64% and address root causes like inequality and marginalization, which traditional operations often overlook. Women and youth, despite receiving less than 1% of official development assistance, drive inclusive peace, as seen in Ethiopia's psychosocial support networks or Sri Lanka's cross-ethnic dialogues.

Future operations must prioritize their inclusion through dedicated funding, legal protections, and platforms for dialogue to counter digital repression and geopolitical paralysis. By amplifying these voices and documenting successes like Liberia's women-led peace efforts, the UN can build adaptive, just, and resilient peace architectures that transform victims into agents of change in an increasingly volatile world.

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