

Security Council Open Debate on International Peacekeeping Operations
26th of August, 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H. E. Ambassador João Maria Cabral, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations

Mr. President,

Thank you for convening this timely debate. It is most suitable that we address this issue under the chairmanship of India – one of the countries that has most contributed to UN peacekeeping, a fact that deserves our recognition.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his important intervention and the high priority and continuous commitment you have attributed to peacekeeping.

Mr. President,

Peacekeeping is the flagship activity, the most visible face of the United Nations.

As we speak, one hundred thousand women and men are serving the United Nations, as military and police personnel, in 17 missions, from Timor-Leste to the DRC, from Southern Sudan to Haiti. They are implementing the resolutions we approve in this room; turning our words into actions and our objectives into realities. Several of these women and men gave their lives for the United Nations. Therefore, they deserve our utmost respect and humble tribute.

Portugal has continuously assumed its part in the common effort of peacekeeping. Over 20 thousand military and 3 thousand police Portuguese women and men have served in peace operations. We are currently participating in the UN peacekeeping missions in Timor-Leste and in Lebanon, as well as in several other EU and NATO operations.

Mr. President,

When discussing peacekeeping we should bear in mind three of its cornerstone principles:

1. Consent of the parties – essential to assure the sustainability of a mission, implying, on the one hand, a shared strategic understanding of the objectives, as well as a continuous dialogue and constructive cooperation between the national authorities and the mission. On the other hand, this consent encompasses the responsibility of the national authorities to collaborate with the UN mission so that the latter has the proper conditions to fulfill its mandate.

2. Impartiality – as Sérgio Vieira de Mello said, “In the UN, we cannot surrender our impartiality. It is perhaps our greatest asset.”

3. Non-use of force except in self-defense and in defense of the mandate – in this regard, it is with satisfaction that we see that the defense of the mandates is becoming increasingly effective or robust – regardless of the preferred term, the important is the end result.

Mr. President,

Passing from principles to practice, and bearing in mind that this Council, as the executive board for international peace and stability, shoulders a responsibility which is legitimately bestowed upon us by the whole membership of the United Nations, I would like to briefly address 7 points which we deem essential to the success of UN peacekeeping:

1. We must continue our efforts to provide peacekeeping operations with clear, credible and achievable mandates. Subsequently, these mandates must be implemented in a precise, full and effective way.

2. We must provide peacekeeping operations with the required means to achieve the objectives defined by this Council. Capacities on the ground must match the mandated tasks. Otherwise UN's credibility will be undermined. In this regard, we call upon those members that possess more resources to contribute accordingly, be it in terms of force generation, be it in terms of equipment, such as helicopters.

3. The combination of, on the one side, widespread and growing peacekeeping objectives, and, on the other, limited resources available, imposes the need for an efficient and effective management and use of these resources. We welcome the Secretariat's efforts in this regard and encourage it to continue improving its management performance.

4. This Council must also continue to promote interaction with the relevant peacekeeping stakeholders. In this regard, we underline the unique role of Troop and Police Contributing Countries – those who match our words with deeds, through their boots on the ground. Therefore, we are committed to further enhancing the triangular cooperation between TPCC's, the Security Council and the Secretariat on the decision making process and throughout the implementation of mandates.

5. Bearing in mind the various UN presences in areas such as the Great Lakes or Sudan and South Sudan, we highlight the value of inter-mission cooperation, with a view to maximize potential synergies and the advantages that arise from a strategic regional perspective. Moreover, the missions must enhance their capacity to coordinate the activities of the different actors on the ground, namely regional and sub-regional organizations, development agencies and NGO's.

6. The role of international organizations in peace and security, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, is increasingly important. In this regard, we highlight the efforts being taken by the African Union, NATO and the European Union, as well as those of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), which is increasingly active in the promotion of democracy, human rights, political stability and social and economic development, namely in Guinea-Bissau and Timor-Leste.

7. Evermore, peacekeepers are early peacebuilders. Peacekeeping and peacebuilding are to be implemented within a comprehensive approach, no longer as sequential activities but rather as integrated efforts, with obvious synergies. Peacebuilding efforts, such as DDR, SSR and re-launching of the economy, should be considered from the genesis of a peacekeeping operation and carried out as soon as the situation on the ground permits it, and throughout the cycle of a mission. Moreover, a mission should also pave the way for a smooth transition to long-term development assistance, with a view to a successful exit strategy for international actors and self-sustained peace and stability.

Mr. President,

Protection of civilians is the paradigmatic example of the shared responsibility that binds all member States of the United Nations, in particular those serving in this Council.

Peacekeeping operations have a key role to play in protecting civilians in danger when governments are unable or unwilling to fulfill that responsibility. It is incumbent upon this Council to assure that they will continue to do so. The basic human rights and, ultimately, the lives of populations at risk depend upon it. In our time, failing to protect civilians is unacceptable and would deeply affect UN's credibility. Therefore, we must continue striving to fully implement resolution 1894 (2009). Moreover, we welcome DPKO's contribution to the definition of a coherent operational approach to the protection of civilians in UN operations.

Since the adoption of resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, missions have been mandated, with significant success, to boost women's participation in electoral and post-conflict processes, to prevent sexual violence, and to increase the presence of female peacekeeping personnel and trained peacekeepers to address gender issues. DPKO has made enormous progress in mainstreaming gender in peacekeeping but we need to strive harder in some of these areas.

As Graça Machel stated in her report on "The impact of armed conflict on children": "Protection of children must be central to the humanitarian, peacemaking and peacekeeping policies of the UN." We commend the fact that currently seven peacekeeping missions have advisers working on the needs of children.

Mr. President,

Peacekeeping is an instrumental element to the promotion of peace, aimed at creating security environments conducive to comprehensive political processes, through which sustainable solutions to conflicts can be achieved. In our quest for sustainable peace, this Council must also increase its focus on preventive diplomacy and, thus, pay close attention to new challenges to human security.