

## Possible reforms to manage armed conflict- towards a more effective protection and security system within the United Nations

23rd July 2025

### Introduction

Renewed approaches to UN protection and peacekeeping are urgently required, following the lessons learnt by the invasion of Ukraine by The Russian Federation and the massive number of war crimes being committed in Gaza by Hamas and the current government of Israel.

Gino Strada, founder of the organization "Emergency" RIP highlighted that for every soldier killed in conflict, nine civilians die, emphasizing that "collateral damage" is a misleading term that downplays the significant human cost of war. He argued that the term obscures the reality of civilian deaths and suffering, which are a far greater consequence of conflict than often acknowledged.

Major General Patrick Cammaert, the Deputy Force Commander of the UN Mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2008, described the terrifying scorched earth rape strategy being employed in that country (and others like it). *"It is now more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier in modern wars"*

Over many years, there have been relevant criticisms of the structure of the UN Security Council and its inability to control the power of the original 5 nations, which comprise its permanent membership. The full veto, as well as the failure to give "Yes" votes to carefully constructed and appropriate Resolutions, have seriously inhibited its effectiveness with tragic consequences, such as those now seen in Ukraine and Gaza.

A renewed approach to international protection and peacekeeping by the UN is proposed for assisting the present and future countries suffering armed conflict and to provide urgent assistance in a timely manner to minimise future deaths, immense suffering and destruction. Given the prolonged and multiple unsuccessful efforts in the past to modify, without success, the UN Security Council's approach to protection and peacekeeping, our suggestions focus on removal of the permanent membership status for 5 countries (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the USA) and removal of their ability to veto resolutions. A closer working relationship between the UN Security Council (UNSC) in combination with the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to form a **new system for protection and security** may create the best hope of providing effective protection against war crimes for civilians caught up in armed conflicts, such as those in Ukraine, Gaza and the many others where protection is currently failing. Stronger financial and international support for the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), and The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) in their roles within the UN protection and security system are urgently needed.

The establishment in April 1949 of the regional military "defence" organisation, The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), has inevitably weakened the UN's role in peacekeeping and protection. Perhaps it is time for NATO to become part of a new UN international protection and security system that benefits the world globally, not just the richest and most powerful countries (**see Action 6 below**).

**Summary of suggested actions to renew the effectiveness of the United Nations in protecting civilians, especially women, adolescent girls and children, from armed conflict.**

1. Urgent abolition of the permanent membership status, vetoes and abstentions in the existing structure of the UN Security Council.
2. Recognition and support for the already established and most effective UN protective system; namely the provision of protective, unconflicted, highly trained and ethically performing international peace keeping forces and “no-fly” zones into areas of conflict.
3. Combination of the UN Security Council and UN General Assembly into a new system which makes decisions relating to protection and security in situations threatening, or involved in, armed conflict.
4. The International Court of Justice, The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) and The International Criminal Court (ICC) are critically important in investigating and managing crimes resulting from armed conflict and require more funding and support from all member countries in the UNGA.
5. Identifying and addressing the conflicts of interest, regarding the relationships of those States involved in the new international UN security and protection system with respect to their manufacture and distribution of major weapons and small arms.
6. Encourage existing military alliances, such as NATO, to be closely integrated into the combined new UN Security Council and UN General Assembly System in preventing and managing armed conflicts. The protection and security of civilians, especially women and children, must be their primary objective.
7. The newly established UN protection and security system should encourage all membership states to establish ethical foreign policies regarding human rights; especially those relating to the manufacture and distribution of major weapons and small arms.
8. Strengthen the health and humanitarian narrative: armed conflict disproportionately affects women, newborns, and children, disrupting access to essential maternal health services and putting frontline health workers at extreme risk. The integration of and provisions for emergency obstetric care, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) response, safe zones for childbirth, and the protection of healthcare infrastructure is urgently needed in all conflict settings. All protection operations should also support UN-mandated mobile medical teams, reproductive health kits, and mental health support for war-affected populations.
9. Recognize and promote Global South leadership. Equity in global governance must be achieved. Countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific contribute most of the peacekeeping personnel but remain under-represented in decision-making. Reforms should include rotational leadership roles, regional representation in peace missions, and creation of a Global South Reform Caucus to champion restructuring efforts.
10. Include Civil Society and Community-Level Protection systems. Local people often provide early warning, safe passage, and basic health services in the absence of formal peacekeeping. Formal inclusion of civil society organizations are needed in:
  - 1) Mission planning and assessments
  - 2) Deployment of women-led protection teams
  - 3) Community feedback mechanisms to ensure responsiveness and accountability.

11. Expand cross-sectoral alliances. Key partners to engage include:
  - 1) Regional bodies: African Union (AU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), European Union (EU), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)
  - 2) UN agencies: WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women, UNHCR, OHCHR, and WFP
  - 3) International NGOs: Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, MSF, IRC, CARE International, Save the Children, War Child and MCAI.
  - 4) Academic institutions: Institute for Security Studies (ISS), SIPRI, University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, SOAS
  - 5) Peace advocacy networks: Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
  - 6) Parliamentarians for Global Action, interfaith coalitions (especially the Quaker movement), and youth peace movements such as the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY).
12. Finally, the creation of a UN Protection and Health Observatory consisting of an independent digital platform could be helpful in:
  - 1) Tracking in real time attacks on health facilities and personnel.
  - 2) Using satellite and Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to detect displacement patterns and violations.
  - 3) Issuing real-time alerts to UN bodies and humanitarian responders, coordinating responses with local personnel, and supporting accountability through data verification and reporting.

## Background

The current situation regarding [armed conflicts in 2025 is summarised here](#).

### The importance of the 1945 UN Charter

The Charter of the United Nations is the foundation document for all UN work. The UN was established to “*save succeeding generations from the scourge of war*”.

Peacekeeping, although not explicitly provided for in the Charter, has evolved into one of the main tools used by the United Nations to achieve this purpose.

The Charter currently gives the UN Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. In fulfilling this responsibility, the Council may adopt a range of measures, including the establishment of a UN peacekeeping and protection operation. For the reasons summarised in this paper, this process does not always work and urgently requires modification to give responsibility for a combined UN Security Council and UN General Assembly to uphold the UN Charter.

When the United Nations was established, following the UN Charter in 1945, the world was recovering from World War Two. Absolute power was given to the five countries who were, and are now, 80 years later, the permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the UK, and the USA). This was considered appropriate because they were the presumed protectors of the world. Out of the 51 sovereign nations at the time, 13 Western European countries were devastated and were recipients of the US Marshall Plan, but economic hardship had engulfed the entire world. The UN Charter resulted in the five countries exercising absolute power although initially they were never expected to exercise

that much power. That gesture resulted in the creation of the most exclusive club in the world - a club that does not allow new members. The application to join was closed when the UN charter was signed.

Here is the full text of the preamble to the UN-Charter:

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>

### **Reasons for Action 1 suggested above.**

### **Urgent abolition of the permanent membership status, vetoes and abstentions in the existing structure of the UN Security Council.**

Since the UN Charter was signed, the P-5 (Permanent 5) member countries have not yet declared wars against each other. Therefore, the UN charter works for them but not for the less empowered nations. Many wars have been declared since 1945. The first few sentences of the preamble of the UN Charter above should have worked for all nations but has failed in many and now its failure in Ukraine, Gaza and other Middle Eastern countries, threatens the security of the whole world.

Under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, The Security Council can take strong measures to maintain or restore international peace and security including, when peaceful means are exhausted, using military force by Member States, coalitions of Member States, or UN-authorized peace operations. All 193 members of the UN, have agreed under Article 25 of the UN Charter, [to accept and carry out decisions adopted by the Security Council](#). Actions taken by the Council are binding on all 193 UN member countries. (Note: There are two non-UN member observer states: Vatican City and the State of Palestine)

However, outside procedural matters, substantive decisions such as establishing a peace keeping operations require “YES” votes from all five permanent members: China, France, Russia, UK, USA. One permanent member can veto to end the discussion, which is why a peacekeeping operation to protect Ukraine did not happen on the 25th February 2022 because the Resolution was vetoed by Russia. In addition, even though China abstained, their action was not a “YES” vote.

The 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council are not only the most powerful and rich countries in the world but are also those manufacturing and selling the most weapons. Analysis of the 7 countries who exported the most major weapons between 2019-2023 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute <https://www.sipri.org> SIPRI 2024) shows that 5 of the 7 were permanent members of the UN Security Council. The leading countries **exporting** major weapons were: 1. USA (42%), 2. Russia (11%), 3. France (11%), 4. China (5.8%), 5 Germany 5.6%, 6. Italy (4.3%) and 7. UK (3.7%). (*Percentages represent proportions of total global exports*).

Distribution of arms without adequate international and ethical regulation contributes to global insecurity. Effective and ethical foreign policies are needed with respect to the manufacture and distribution of weapons with ever increasing destructive power, particularly with respect to the lives and bodies of civilians.

Robin Cook, DOB 28<sup>th</sup> February 1946 and UK Foreign Secretary 1997-2001, tried to introduce an ethical foreign policy into the UK Government

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/news/07/0717/ethic.shtml> As he pointed out, before his sudden death, the global reach of modern weapons creates a clear national interest in preventing proliferation and promoting international control of conventional weapons.

The UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing has emerged as an important global principle since the adoption of the United Nations "World Summit Outcome Document" in 2005. <https://www.globalr2p.org/what-is-r2p/>

The R2P concept emerged following the failure of the international community adequately to respond to mass atrocities committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s. The International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty developed the concept of R2P during 2001. R2P was unanimously adopted in 2005 at the UN World Summit, the largest gathering of Heads of State and Government in history. It is articulated in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document. The R2P stipulates three pillars of responsibility:

#### PILLAR ONE

Every state has the Responsibility to Protect its populations from mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.

#### PILLAR TWO

The wider international community has the responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that responsibility.

#### PILLAR THREE

If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations (for example the current government of Israel with respect to Gaza), the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter.

A recent (5th April 2022) UN document outlines what the UN currently can and cannot at present undertake. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115592>

### **Action 2 The vital nature of already existing UN Protection and Peace Keeping activities**

The UNSC has established over the years an extremely professional system which could achieve so much more if it was properly funded and supported by rich and powerful countries. Here follows a summary of the current work of the UNSC system.

The UN Security Council has mandated important tasks relating to the protection of women and children:

#### **1. UN Resolution on women, peace and security S/RES/1325 (2005)**

*First ever resolution on security and peace*

Called for prosecution of crimes against women, **increased protection of women and girls during war, and** for more women to participate in decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes

#### **2. UN Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict.**

### **3. UN Security Council resolution 1674 (2006) on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.**

#### **Existing UN protections and peacekeeping functions.**

The UN Security Council **alone** can determine the deployment of every new UN protection and peacekeeping operation. Currently if the UNSC determines that deploying a UN Peacekeeping operation is the most appropriate step to take, it will formally authorize this by adopting a Resolution. The Resolution sets out the operation's mandate and size and details the tasks it will be responsible for performing. This is currently a serious problem because the UNSC through veto and absence of YES votes, has not supported peacekeeping and protection for Ukraine (vetoed by Russia and abstained by China), for Ceasefires in Gaza (vetoed by the USA), and for Syria (vetoed by Russia).

In 11 countries, [UN peacekeeping operations](#), are currently saving lives and protecting vulnerable populations from murder, sexual violence, torture, loss of home and shelter, and malnutrition. Their most effective activities include the deployment of UN troops on the ground and “no-fly” zones.

Over [4200 UN Peacekeepers have lost their lives](#) in the cause of peace and protection. The prevention of the future deaths and injuries of these incredibly brave people is of major concern.

Political solutions to armed conflict are critical to peacekeeping, but peacekeeping is no longer only a post-conflict activity, as it was in 1945. In 2015, just over half of the 100,000 active peacekeepers have been deployed in countries with dangerously active armed conflicts, such as Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

[Non-violence](#) is appropriately at the core of the UN Peacekeeping's mission. One of the three main principles of UN Peacekeeping missions is the non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mission's mandate.

Since the implementation of the [Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy](#), meaningful progress has been made in increasing the number of uniformed women in peacekeeping. In 1993, women made up just 1% of deployed uniformed personnel. As of March 2023, they represent 8.4 per cent of approximately 76,700 uniformed peacekeepers. Women constitute 6.4 per cent of military contingents and 21 per cent of military staff officers and military observers. On the police side, 15.8 per cent of formed police units, 31 percent of Individual Police Officers and 40 percent of corrections officers in UN peace operations are women.

The core Action for Peacekeeping ([A4P](#)) initiative, launched in 2018 by Secretary-General António Guterres, is already focusing on the strengthening of peacekeeping operations.

When effectively supported, multidimensional and multidisciplinary protection and peace operations of the UN are potentially able to fulfil a range of tasks, including the protection of civilians, the maintenance of human rights, the disarming and de-mobilising of combatants, and the restoration of the rule of law.

If more international funds were spent on UN protection and peace keeping rather than on weapons and ineffective diplomacy, the major crimes against women and adolescent girls such as those in [Tigray](#), and the destruction of health facilities, hospitals and murders of



health workers (as outlined by the [Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition](#)) could in part be prevented

### **The existing structure of UNSC performed peacekeeping operations.**

UN peacekeeping brings together the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council, the Secretariat, troop and police contributors and the host governments in a combined effort to maintain international peace and security.

#### **Appointment of senior officials; planning, deployment and reporting.**

The Secretary-General normally appoints a Head of Mission (who is usually also called the Special Representative) to direct the peacekeeping operation. The Head of Mission reports to the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations at the UN Headquarters.

The Secretary-General also appoints a peacekeeping operation's Force Commander and Police Commissioner, and senior civilian staff. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS) are then responsible for staffing the civilian components of a peacekeeping operation.

In the meantime, the Head of Mission and DPKO-DFS leads the planning for the political, military, operational and support (i.e., logistics and administration) aspects of the peacekeeping operation. The planning phase usually involves the establishment of a Headquarters-based joint working group or integrated mission task force, with participation of all relevant UN departments, funds and programmes. These can include agencies such as WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNDP, UNHCR and WFP. They should also welcome non-governmental organisations which are used to working in maternal, neonatal and child healthcare protection in low resource or armed conflict settings, for examples MSF, IRC, CARE International, Save the Children, War Child and MCAI.

Deployment of an operation proceeds then as quickly as possible, considering the security and political conditions on the ground. Tragically many thousands have died since the onset of the major conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza and **there is an urgent need to assemble effective UN protection and peacekeeping forces inside Ukraine, Gaza and Syria.**

This process often starts with an advance team to establish mission headquarters and leads to a gradual build-up to encompass all components and regions, as required by the mandate.

Civilian staff of peacekeeping operations are international civil servants, recruited and deployed by the UN Secretariat.

The Secretary-General is required to provide regular reports to the joint Security Council and UN Assembly on the implementation of the mission mandate until the mission is completed or closed.

#### **What constitutes the membership of a UN peacekeeping/protection force and how are they deployed and how do they function?**

UN peacekeeping operations are currently deployed with the consent of the main parties to the conflict. *[This may not be appropriate in certain conflict situations; including that in*

*Ukraine where a Permanent member of the UN Security Council invaded a neighbouring state].* Their acceptance of a peacekeeping operation provides the UN with the necessary freedom of action, both political and physical, to carry out its mandated tasks. Ideally this should be the case, but sometimes will not be present at the time of implementation of the protection/peacekeeping force. It should be constantly sought.

UN Peacekeepers provide security and the political and peace-building support to help countries make the difficult, early transition from conflict to peace. UN Peacekeeping is guided by three basic principles: consent of the parties; impartiality; non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate. *[ These principles are ideal but sometimes will not be immediately attainable].*

Peacekeepers protect civilians, actively prevent conflict, reduce violence, strengthen security and empower national authorities to assume these responsibilities. These activities require a coherent security and peace-building strategy that supports the political strategy.

Decisions on funding for peacekeeping operations are taken by the UN General Assembly. As the largest funder of the Department of Peace Operations (DPO)—which oversees UN peacekeeping—the USA plays an important leadership role in authorizing and shaping UN missions. *[ This leadership role may not now be appropriate in some settings, including the situation now in Ukraine and in Gaza.]*

The UN has no existing army or police force on its own. Military and police personnel, from UN Member States, working as peacekeepers in peacekeeping missions around the world are members of their own national service first and are seconded to work with the UN. They are usually armed by their own countries.

Under international law, peacekeepers are non-combatants due to their neutral stance in the conflict between two or more belligerent parties (to the same extent as neutral personnel and properties outside of peacekeeping duties). However, they must be protected or be able to always protect themselves from attacks. UN peacekeepers/protection forces may have to use force to defend civilians and civilian structures including hospitals and schools, from attack by the armed forces of one or more of the protagonists in the conflict. They may also have to use arms to protect humanitarian corridors and the delivery of humanitarian and medical aid to all parties in the conflict. This situation is especially and urgently needed in Gaza.

Troops from different countries wear their national uniforms together with added distinctive UN arm bands and shoulder patches to identify them as UN peacekeepers. *"The blue beret and helmet were created by Secretary-General Hammarskjöld during the formative days of the first UN Emergency Force (UNEF1) in 1950".*

The UN cannot invade a country. The UN does not have a standing army of its own and does not have the power to order the invasion of a sovereign state. The UN can approve the use of military force by member states, but it only does this in cases of self-defence or as humanitarian interventions.

Since 1948, the UN has helped end conflicts and foster reconciliation by conducting successful peacekeeping operations in dozens of countries, including Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique, Namibia and Tajikistan.



## Contribution of troops to UN peacekeeping and financing of peacekeeping.

The dominance of the states having permanent membership of the UNSC is out of touch with the fact that low and lower-middle income countries contribute the most troops to UN peacekeeping. In 2015, for example, the proportion of peacekeepers from low or lower-middle income countries had reached 80 per cent. In June 2019, there were 100,411 people serving in UN peacekeeping operations (86,145 uniformed, 12,932 civilians, and 1,334 volunteers). European nations contributed only 6,000 units to this total. Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh were among the largest individual contributors with around 8,000 units each.

By August 2020, 120 countries were contributing a total of 81,820 personnel in Peacekeeping Operations, with Bangladesh leading (6,731), followed by Ethiopia (6,662) and Rwanda (6,322).

This is a [list of countries](#) by total number of peacekeeping troops contributed to UN operations based on UN reporting as of 29 February 2024.

Peacekeeping soldiers are paid for by their own Governments according to their own national rank and salary scales. Countries volunteering uniformed personnel to peacekeeping operations are reimbursed by the UN at a standard rate, approved by the UN General Assembly (as of 1 July 2019), of US\$1,428 per soldier per month.

Every UN Member State is legally obligated to pay their respective share towards peacekeeping. This is in accordance with the provisions of [Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations](#).

The [General Assembly](#) apportions peacekeeping expenses based on a special scale of assessments under a complex formula that Member States themselves have established. This formula considers, among other things, the relative economic wealth of Member States, with the five current permanent members of the Security Council currently required to pay a larger share because of their special responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

The General Assembly reaffirmed these and other general principles underlying the financing of peacekeeping operations in [resolution A/RES/55/235 \(23 December 2000\)](#). More on how [UN Peacekeeping is financed](#) by the UNGA.

The approved budget for UN Peacekeeping operations for the fiscal year 1 July 2024 - 30 June 2025 is \$5.6 billion. ([A/C.5/78/34](#)) **By way of comparison, this is less than a half of one per cent of the world's military expenditures which were estimated at \$2443 billion in 2023.**

This approved budget finances 9 of the 11 existing UN peacekeeping missions, and provides support, technology and logistics to all peace operations through global service centres in Brindisi (Italy) and a regional service centre in Entebbe (Uganda). The remaining two peacekeeping missions, the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) and the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), are financed through the [UN regular budget](#).

The 2024-2025 budget (about 5.6 billion) represents an average decrease of 8.2 per cent compared to the approved budget for 2023-2024 (about 6.1 billion USD).

The top 10 providers of assessed contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations for 2024-2025 are:

1. **United States** (26.95%)
2. **China** (18.69%)
3. **Japan** (8.03%)
4. **Germany** (6.11%)
5. **United Kingdom** (5.36%)
6. **France** (5.29%)
7. **Italy** (3.19%)
8. **Canada** (2.63%)
9. **Republic of Korea** (2.57%)
10. **Russian Federation** (2.29%)

View here the full list of assessed contributions by every country, 2024-2025: [\(A/79/318/Add.1\)](#)

Many countries have voluntarily made additional resources available to support UN Peacekeeping efforts on a non-reimbursable basis in the form of transportation, supplies, personnel and financial contributions above and beyond their assessed share of peacekeeping costs.

**Action 3. Is it now the time for the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to join in partnership with the Security Council (UNSC) to take over responsibility for effectively implementing a newly written version of the UN Charter?** We suggest that the new UN charter should outline **a system for both protection and peacekeeping operations.**

The UN has been long criticised for its lack of involvement in major conflicts and disputes. One reason why the UN lacks involvement is because of the unwillingness of some of its most powerful and permanent members such as the USA, UK, Russia, and China to support its peacekeeping activities and instead establishing military alliances such as NATO which inevitably weakens the UN's peacekeeping actions.

While decisions about establishing, maintaining or expanding a current peacekeeping operation are taken by the Security Council, the financing of UN Peacekeeping operations is already the collective responsibility of all 193 UN Member States (that is through the UNGA).

Our suggestion is that the UNSC now needs to be restructured to work in direct and complete partnership with the UNGA (the budget and resources are already subject to UNGA approval). For Resolutions relating to armed conflict there must be no permanent membership, no vetoes, and all conflicts of interest, especially those relating to weapons manufacture and distribution, made public.

### **Role of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)**

The General Assembly plays a key role in the financing of current peacekeeping operations.

The [General Assembly](#) is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. Comprising all [193 Member States of the UN](#), it provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of international issues, especially peace and security.

While not normally directly involved in political decisions on establishing or terminating UN peace operations, the UNGA plays a key role in [peace operation financing](#).

As all UN Member States share the costs of peacekeeping, the UNGA apportions these expenses based on a special scale of assessments, considering the relative economic wealth of each Member State.

The UNGA, through its [Fifth Committee](#) (Administrative and Budgetary) approves and oversees the peacekeeping budget. This includes how specific field operations are funded and equipped, based on detailed submissions provided to it by the UN Secretary-General and Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

Already the UNGA monitors the performance of UN Peacekeeping through its [Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations](#). It was established in 1965 to conduct a comprehensive review of all issues relating to peacekeeping.

Despite the UN Charter's provision limiting the UNGA's powers with regard to peace and security matters, there may be cases when the Assembly can take action.

**The [United Nations General Assembly resolution 377 A \(V\)](#), also called the "Uniting for Peace" resolution**, was adopted on 3 November 1950 and remains active now. It states that in any situation where the UNSC, because of a lack of unanimity among its permanent members fails to act as required to maintain international security and peace, the United Nations, as a whole, can act by holding an Emergency Special Session (ESS) of the UNGA. It can consider the problem immediately and may issue appropriate recommendations to all UN member states for collective measures, including the use of armed force when necessary, in order to maintain or restore international security and peace.

However, under the [UN Charter](#) the UNGA cannot force member countries to provide protective security actions which at present can only be taken by the UNSC. This is the core of the problem limiting the UN's role in managing armed conflict.

The General Assembly established the first ever [UN Emergency Force \(UNEF I\)](#) in 1956.

However, UNEF I was not a peace-enforcement operation, as envisaged in Article 42 of the United Nations Charter, but a peacekeeping operation to be carried out with the consent and the cooperation of the parties to the conflict. It was armed, but the units were to use their weapons only in self-defence and even then with utmost restraint. Its main functions were to supervise the withdrawal of the three occupying forces and, after the withdrawal was completed, to act as a buffer between the Egyptian and Israeli forces and to provide impartial supervision of the ceasefire. In the event, UNEF, stationed entirely on Egyptian territory with the consent of the Government, patrolled the Egypt-Israel armistice demarcation line and the international frontier to the south of the Gaza Strip and brought relative quiet to a long-troubled area. The Canal, blocked as a result of the conflict, was cleared by the United

Nations. UNEF I was withdrawn in May-June 1967 at the request of the Egyptian Government.

### **Why is Action 3 (a combination of UNSC and UNGA) urgent?**

The worsening situations in Ukraine and Gaza shows there is little time left for action if masses more civilians are to be protected from death, abuse or torture. Action Points 3 highlights possible ways forward, drawing attention to the conflicts, not only in Ukraine and Gaza, but elsewhere in the world.

All wars are unique in their origins and content but the war in Ukraine is in several major ways different to the others, not in terms of the terrible tragedies that all wars include, but in terms of the risks it creates for the whole world. Almost unthinkable, the Ukrainian war results from the invasion of a sovereign neighbour state by one of the 5 permanent members of the UN Security Council. This invasion alone constitutes a war crime and did not need to wait for action in the International Criminal Court before the world could act. It has enabled The Russian Federation to threaten the use of its military power (including through dominance in its ownership of nuclear weapons <https://fas.org/issues/nuclear-weapons/status-world-nuclear-forces/> ) to threaten the whole world with a nuclear confrontation.

The direct action of a permanent member of the UN Security council to start a war is contrary to the UN Charter. There is an urgent need to re-construct the UN security system before it is too late, not only for Ukraine, Gaza and countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, Sudan and Yemen, but for the prevention of a third world war.

### **Action 4 The involvement of The International Court of Justice, The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) and The International Criminal Court (ICC) into working with a new UN Protection and Security system to investigate and manage possible crimes resulting from armed conflict.**

The [Geneva Conventions](#), and [international humanitarian laws](#), are highly relevant to the conduct of armed conflicts. When broken, just as when laws are broken inside countries, effective international police forces and judicial systems are needed to urgently prevent continuation of harm whilst justice is achieved.

[The International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ) is the principal judicial organisation of the UN.

On 29 December 2023, South Africa instigated proceedings against the State of Israel before the ICJ concerning alleged violations by Israel of its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in relation to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. South Africa was seeking to found the Court's jurisdiction on Article 36, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the Court and on Article IX of the Genocide Convention, to which both South Africa and Israel are parties. [The Applicant, South Africa, requested the Court to indicate provisional measures](#) in order to “*protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people under the Genocide Convention*” and “*to ensure Israel's compliance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention not to engage in genocide, and to prevent and to punish genocide*”. Provisional measures were indicated on 26 January 2024 and a final ruling expected in some years to come.

[The International Criminal Police Organization \(Interpol\)](#) is an international

organization that facilitates worldwide police cooperation and crime control. It is the world's largest international police organization. Formed in 1923 and based in France, it is an inter-governmental organization with 196 members, and assists police in all of them to work together to make the world a safer place.

It shares and accesses data on crimes and criminals and offers a range of technical and operational support. Since 1994, Interpol has also been [actively cooperating with the UN International Tribunals and the International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#). Interpol works with Red Notices which are a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action. The individuals are wanted by the requesting member country, **or international tribunal**. Member countries apply their own laws in deciding whether to arrest a person.

[The International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest of crimes, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression. Governed by an international treaty called the Rome Statute, the ICC is the world's first permanent international criminal court. The Council on Foreign Relations provides a recent (2023) account of the [history of the development and progress of the ICC](#). The court relies entirely on the cooperation of member-state authorities to apprehend suspects, **as it does not have a police force of its own**. It cannot try individuals in absentia, and defendants are only subject to ICC warrants when they are in member-state territory.

[The ICC's founding treaty](#) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in Rome in July 1998. The Rome Statute entered into force on July 1, 2002. There are currently 123 countries party to the Rome Statute. 40 countries never signed the treaty, including China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. Others signed the statute, but their legislatures never ratified it. These include Egypt, Iran, Israel, Russia, Sudan, Syria, and the USA. Only 2 of the 5 permanent member countries of the UN Security Council (UK and France) are party to the Rome Statute; China, Russia and the USA are not. The Rome Statute grants the ICC jurisdiction over 4 main crimes against humanity.

#### **The 4 main crimes against humanity: Rome Statute**

**First, the crime of genocide** characterised by the specific **intent** to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group by killing its members or by other means: causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

**Second, crimes against humanity**, which are serious violations committed as part of a large-scale attack against any civilian population. The 15 forms of crimes against humanity include offences such as murder, rape, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, enslavement – particularly of women and children, sexual slavery, torture, apartheid and deportation.

**Third, war crimes**, which are grave breaches of the Geneva conventions in the context of armed conflict and include, for instance, the use of child soldiers; the killing or torture of persons such as civilians or prisoners of war; intentionally directing attacks against hospitals, historic monuments, or buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable

purposes.

**Fourth, the crime of aggression** defined as the use of armed force by one State against the sovereignty, integrity, or independence of another State. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is a recent example of this enormous crime.

The ICC has 18 judges elected by the UNSC and UNGA. Participation by a State is not mandatory, but once participation is agreed, compliance with ICC's decisions is mandatory. The ICC is intended to complement rather than replace national courts.

The ICC is based in The Hague and has field offices in 6 African countries. The court carries out its investigative work through the office of the Chief Prosecutor, led since 2021 by British lawyer Karim A.A. Khan, (currently on leave whilst he is undergoing investigation), who previously served as Assistant Secretary-General of the UN. In November 2023, he wrote a powerful article describing [the tragic situation, especially for women and children, in Gaza](#).

[This link describes how the ICC works.](#)

[In 2022 the approved annual budget for the ICC](#) was 169 million Euros. Most funding comes from its member states and is determined by dues corresponding to the size of each member's economy. In 2020, the largest contributions came from Japan, Germany, France, and UK.

The UNSC made its first referral to the ICC in 2005, for alleged crimes in Sudan. This was followed in 2011 by a referral for Libya. In addition, the prosecutor's office opened investigations to initiate investigations into situations without a referral from the Security Council or a state party; a power granted by article 15(1) of the Rome Statute, in Kenya in 2010, the Ivory Coast in 2011, Georgia in 2016, Burundi in 2017, Bangladesh and Myanmar in 2019, Afghanistan in 2020, and the Palestinian territories and the Philippines in 2021.

From 2005 to 2019, 31 cases, all from 8 African countries, have been considered. ICC judges have issued 40 arrest warrants. 21 people have been detained in the ICC detention centre and appeared before the Court. 15 people remain at large. Charges were dropped against 3 people due to their deaths, 3 were acquitted, 9 are pre-trial, 5 are on-trial. **Only 6 convictions have led to imprisonment.**

There has been little progress with major and obvious war crimes such as those in 2023 relating to Hamas's attack on Israel and Israel's attacks on Palestinian civilians. The recent indictment of Putin concerning Russia's invasion of Ukraine is, however, a major step forward. In 2022, the court launched an investigation after receiving a referral from more than 40 member states. Though neither Ukraine nor Russia are ICC members, Kyiv accepted the court's jurisdiction for alleged crimes on its territory going back to 2013 - 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea. In March 2023, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for President Putin on charges of forcibly deporting and transferring "at least hundreds" of children from occupied Ukrainian territory to Russia. [These indictments limit Putin's ability to travel abroad and attend important diplomatic forums](#), such as the 2023 BRICS summit in South Africa. As an ICC member, the South African government would be compelled to arrest Putin if he joined the talks in Johannesburg. Some observers say that, even without Putin's arrest, the ICC's warrant helps to further Russia's status as a global pariah.



Although recognising that legal processes take time, the ICC does not seem able to have worked with Interpol with sufficient urgency to stop war crimes from causing more suffering when criminal behaviors are obvious.

The failure of the international community to persuade major powers such as USA, China, and Russia to join the Rome Statute is also of major concern.

### **Additional final Actions**

**Action 5** addresses the major importance of arms control measures.

**Action 6** addresses the importance of incorporating military alliances such as NATO into an intimate relationship with the UN.

**Action 7** addresses the importance of ethical foreign policies relating to human rights, damaged so much by armed conflict and the manufacture and distribution of ever-more dangerous weapons.

**Actions 8 to 12** raise vital processes which will add to supporting the actions of the United Nations: the most important organisation in the world.

### **Conclusions**

Highly professional and successful UN Protection and Peacekeeping actions have saved so many lives and protected so many vulnerable people that it should not be criticised for failing to act in some of the world's current conflicts. The urgent establishment of a combined UNSC and UNGA protective and peacekeeping operation will build on what is already established as a highly functioning system.

States must declare conflicts of interest, there must be more global inclusion in UN decision making, and much more involvement of women especially in conflicts where sexual abuse is widespread and, often deliberately, the designed aims of some warring factions.

The ongoing suffering in conflict-affected regions such as Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and Tigray underscore the failures of the current UN protection system to deliver timely and impartial humanitarian support. In Tigray, for example, the world witnessed a humanitarian catastrophe marked by starvation, sexual violence, and systematic attacks on health infrastructure without adequate international action. This collective inaction reaffirms the need for urgent reform of the Security Council, enhanced humanitarian access mechanisms, and post-conflict justice processes that are survivor-centered and health-focused.

### ***“Call to Action”***

*“The time to act is now. The world cannot continue to witness the mass suffering of civilians—women, children, and health workers—under an outdated and ineffective international protection system. The United Nations, as the guardian of global peace and human dignity, must evolve to meet today's realities.*

*We call on all UN Member States, particularly those in the General Assembly, to initiate bold reforms that eliminate structural paralysis in the Security Council, ensure inclusive global governance, and place civilian protection at the center of international peace and security efforts. This includes reassessing permanent member privileges, strengthening legal accountability mechanisms, and embedding civil society and Global South leadership into peace and protection architecture.*



*A renewed system—centred on equity, accountability, and humanitarian principles—is not only possible but also essential. By investing in peacekeeping, empowering local personnel, and enforcing accountability for war crimes, the international community can reclaim its moral responsibility to protect.*

*History will judge us not by the strength of our institutions, but by the lives we save and the justice we uphold. Let us act—decisively, collectively, and urgently.”*

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