

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
27 July 2021

Original: English

Letter dated 26 July 2021 from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the pleasure to inform you that, under the presidency of India, the Security Council will hold an open debate on the theme “Protecting the protectors: technology and peacekeeping”, under the item “United Nations peacekeeping operations”, on Wednesday, 18 August 2021, at 10 a.m. (Eastern Daylight Time).

In order to guide the discussions on the topic, India has prepared a concept note (see annex).

Member States and observers wishing to participate are invited to submit a written statement of approximately 500 words through the eSpeakers module on the e-deleGATE+ platform (see enclosure).

I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) T. S. Tirumurti



Annex to the letter dated 26 July 2021 from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on the theme “Protecting the protectors: technology and peacekeeping”

1. United Nations peacekeepers are deployed in some of the most challenging and perilous environments, doing what others cannot or simply will not do. With armed conflict situations getting far more volatile, complex and hazardous, our peacekeepers now operate in far riskier environments than ever before. Peacekeeping fatalities unfortunately continue to be high and our peacekeepers continue to confront uniquely difficult challenges across each of our peacekeeping missions.

2. Peacekeeping missions, which are often underequipped, with major gaps in both equipment and training, face serious threats from armed groups, criminals and terrorists, many of whom have access to sophisticated weapons and technology. In volatile environments, the security situation can deteriorate quickly. Peacekeeping mission bases and camps have often been the target of attacks by armed groups. Direct attacks involving mortar and rocket attacks are becoming increasingly common, as is the use of improvised explosive devices and mines placed on roads used by our missions’ convoys. These tactics destabilize peace processes and obstruct the delivery of vital humanitarian assistance.

3. The use of modern technology to help peacekeeping missions establish and maintain situational awareness, carry out their mandates effectively and efficiently and protect themselves is neither aspirational nor a luxury. No mission can be expected to succeed in today’s complex environments without an ability to innovate and make effective use of technology, and no advantage should be withheld from those working for the noble cause of securing and maintaining peace. It is from this point of departure that, in 2020, the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Peace Operations and the Under-Secretaries-General of the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance agreed to develop a strategy for the digital transformation of United Nations peacekeeping. The strategy, which is being finalized, will pursue four goals:

(a) Drive innovation to position peacekeeping so that it continues to evolve and capitalize on technological innovation for effective mandate implementation and safety and security;

(b) Maximize the potential of current technology to enable the use of existing digital technologies to their full potential and incorporate these considerations when acquiring and/or deploying new digital technologies;

(c) Understand threats to the safety and security of peacekeepers and to mandate implementation in order to detect, analyse and address potential threats in a timely and integrated manner, identify opportunities to promote mandate implementation and build awareness and support;

(d) Ensure the responsible use of digital technologies for peacekeeping by setting parameters and monitoring and overseeing implementation of the strategy.

4. United Nations peacekeeping missions frequently lack a wide range of capabilities now considered by most militaries, law enforcement agencies and international organizations to be the absolute minimum needed in order to operate effectively. In fact, when it comes to technological necessities, the gap between what the average peacekeeping mission does have and what it should have is so pronounced that some of

the countries with the world's most capable militaries and police forces have been reluctant to participate in many difficult and challenging peacekeeping operations.

5. Technology may not supplant the need for human presence, but it can enhance peacekeepers' abilities to do their jobs more effectively. Most modern technologies are neither too expensive nor too sophisticated to be within the reach of all peacekeepers. Rather than making them vulnerable, technology will undoubtedly enhance the safety and security of United Nations personnel serving in difficult, remote and dangerous environments.

6. Technology and innovation must not be seen as euphemisms for the introduction of non-transparent or intrusive technology into mission areas for narrow politicized purposes, as some would hold. Advanced technologies, including unmanned aerial systems, are an integral part of the "update equation" that can bring decided advantages to peacekeeping operations. Enabling a peacekeeping mission to use technology or other advanced means to gather information does not violate the basic principles of peacekeeping impartiality and objectivity and State sovereignty.

7. To execute their mandates effectively and efficiently, peacekeeping missions must be able to move fast to acquire, validate and fuse information from a wide range of openly available sources to enhance situational awareness, augment security, aid operational planning and support decision-making. United Nations peacekeeping simply cannot afford to cede the information advantage to those actors in a mission area who are determined to undermine prospects for peace and who use the advantages of modern technology to aid and perpetuate their violent cause.

8. In remote locations where little or no infrastructure exists, reliance on advanced technologies such as mobile communications centres, unmanned aerial vehicles, sensors and security devices, tethered observational balloons and advanced analysis software have contributed to the operational efficiency of missions and supported the peace process.

9. Greater deployment and use of modern technology and innovation can help preserve and sustain life in the field, reduce a mission's environmental footprint and enable greater efficiencies over time. Immediate efforts to strengthen the technological foundation of peacekeeping operations, and thereby increase their operational effectiveness, should focus on three key areas: getting the basics right; supporting operational imperatives; and streamlining mission support.

10. Peacekeepers must be able to deploy and redeploy rapidly within a mission area with minimum delay and, more specifically, be able to mitigate risk and enhance awareness of the increased threat caused by improvised explosive devices. Missions must also be able to provide timely, routine and emergency medical assistance in situ, and be able to extract personnel and transport them to advanced levels of care as and when the situation demands it.

11. The United Nations can also work towards introducing modern technologies and innovative practices to enable peacekeepers to execute their mandates more effectively. To begin with, it is critical that existing and relevant operationally proven technologies, including those in the "military grade" category, be incorporated into peacekeeping operations. In recent years, military intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and camp security technologies have become necessary in peacekeeping operations owing to the evolution of peacekeeping and the increased threats against peacekeeping personnel. All key mandate areas – such as protection of civilians, policing and upholding the rule of law, and border/boundary demarcation and monitoring – would benefit from the deployment of technologies in peacekeeping missions. The exercise of authority, the coordination of operations and the prioritization and direction of resources require regular and reliable access to high-quality information, a critical enabler of operational effectiveness.

12. Peacekeeping is, first and foremost, a partnership. Our collective success depends on all partners playing their respective roles with unwavering commitment. This includes the Security Council, troop- and police-contributing countries, regional organizations, host Governments and financial contributors who together allow more than 100,000 United Nations peacekeepers deployed around the world help protect more than 100 million lives. Our peacekeepers, who are the crucial last arm of implementation in this partnership, need access to the best technologies, services and support available.

13. The United Nations Partnership for Technology in Peacekeeping initiative offers Member States and other partners a unique opportunity to strengthen their support to United Nations peacekeeping, using innovative technological capacities that meet the needs of United Nations peace operations to ensure that we have well-structured, equipped and trained forces ready to effectively deliver on their challenging mandates.

14. Going forward, Member States must explore all available cutting-edge technologies and best practices that can contribute towards the protection of civilians and United Nations personnel, and allow for safer and more successful peacekeeping missions. The focus must be on implementing technology solutions that are proven, sustainable, practical and contextual, given the complexity and multinational composition of peacekeeping operations. Efforts must also be made to effectively integrate technologies into the day-to-day operations of peacekeeping missions and to introduce innovative training methods on the use of technology solutions.

Guiding questions for Member States

- How can technology be a strategic enabler in a complex security environment, and what can the Security Council do to allow technology deployment to become an integral part of mission mandates?
- How can technological improvements enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers, strengthen communications within missions, improve situational awareness and reduce the environmental impact of peacekeeping operations?
- How can technology be used to make peacekeeping operations more cost-effective and efficient?
- How can we address confidentiality concerns related to information-gathering by unarmed unmanned aerial vehicles?
- How can we enhance cooperation among troop- and police-contributing countries, host States and the Secretariat to reduce capacity gaps in the use of technology?
- How can peacekeeping missions incorporate technology into the design and implementation of strategies for the protection of civilians, in particular their early warning and early response mechanisms?

Format

The event will be a high-level open debate and will be chaired by the External Affairs Minister of India, S. Jaishankar. It will take place on 18 August 2021, at 10 a.m. (Eastern Daylight Time). Non-members will have the opportunity to submit written statements, which will be compiled as an official document.

Briefers

- The Secretary-General, United Nations
- Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission (to be confirmed)

Enclosure

Guidance note: submission of written statements

Security Council open debate on the theme “Protecting the protectors: technology and peacekeeping”

With reference to the Security Council open debate on the theme “Protecting the protectors: technology and peacekeeping”, to be held as a videoconference on 18 August 2021, delegations may submit written statements through the eSpeakers module.

Member States wishing to do so should transmit their statements in Microsoft Word format with a cover letter, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or Chargé d'affaires a.i. and addressed to the President of the Security Council, no later than the date of the meeting, 18 August 2021. The statements will be published as part of an official compilation document containing the interventions submitted in connection with the open debate.

- Delegates are invited to contact their access focal points to be granted access to the eSpeakers module on the e-deleGATE+ platform.
- Delegates can submit written statements by clicking on the eSpeakers sub-item in the Security Council menu item.

For technical support related to user logins and passwords, please contact the Office of Information and Communications Technology help desk at 212-963-3333 or by email at missions-support@un.int.

For other questions related to the open debate, please contact the Security Council Affairs Division at dppa-scsb3@un.org.
