

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of
Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the pleasure to inform you that Brazil, in its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of July 2022, will hold a high-level open debate on the theme “Key role of strategic communications for efficient peacekeeping”, to be held on Tuesday, 12 July, at 10 a.m.

In order to guide the discussions on this topic, Brazil has prepared a concept note (see annex). I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Ronaldo Costa Filho**
Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations



Annex to the letter dated 5 July 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council high-level open debate on the theme “United Nations peacekeeping operations: the key role of strategic communications for efficient peacekeeping”, to be held on Tuesday, 12 July 2022

Strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping operations: key to mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers

Peacekeeping operations remain one of the most important tools at the disposal of the United Nations for maintaining international peace and security. As peacekeepers implement increasingly complex mandates in volatile security environments, strategic communications¹ must be at the centre of United Nations peacekeeping. Effectively communicating with relevant stakeholders is key to improving mandate implementation and to preserving the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Strategic communications are critical to securing the political and public support that United Nations peacekeeping missions need to implement their mandates effectively and to create a safe operational environment for peacekeepers. Strategic communications help to manage the expectations of relevant stakeholders, in particular local communities and the host Government, and to address the disinformation and misinformation that undermine the credibility of peacekeeping missions and endanger peacekeepers. Strategic communications are also essential to improve the situational awareness of peacekeepers and to promote the protection of civilians and the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda. In transition settings, a proactive and whole-of-mission approach to communications is necessary to create conditions conducive to the smooth withdrawal of missions.

In his Action for Peacekeeping Plus initiative for the period 2021–2023, the Secretary-General selected strategic communications as one of the seven priorities. According to the initiative, strategic communications must have an enabling and multiplying effect across all mandated areas and in support of the entire Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, which has been endorsed by 155 Member States and four regional organizations. There is an urgent need to integrate strategic communications into the daily planning and conduct of activities across the civilian, military and police components of peacekeeping operations.

As President of the Security Council, and having extensive experience as a troop- and police-contributing country, Brazil will organize an open debate on strategic communications in United Nations peacekeeping operations, with the following three main objectives:

- First: to highlight the key role played by strategic communications in peacekeeping mandate implementation across all mandated areas, with a

¹ According to the United Nations policy on strategic communications and public information of 2017, the definition of strategic communications is as follows:

“Purposeful or directed communication with the objective of building support for the mission, its mandate and activities, as well as for the peace process and related host country activities such as elections. Strategic communication requires the consideration of objectives, audience, messages and content, and the platforms for dissemination. It also involves evaluation and adjustments of communication plans to ensure objectives are met. Strategic communication can also help guide the mission’s response to crises.”

particular contribution to the protection of civilians and the women and peace and security agenda;

- Second: to underline that strategic communications are needed in order to promote the safety and security of peacekeepers, who operate in dangerous environments, while preserving the basic principles of peacekeeping;
- Third: to discuss concrete proposals to improve strategic communications capabilities in peacekeeping missions and at United Nations Headquarters.

Protecting civilians

Strategic communications are a critical element of a comprehensive, integrated approach to the protection of civilians. Communications strategies help with understanding, mobilizing and affecting the intentions, perceptions and expectations of all relevant actors, with a view to enhancing the protection of civilians. In implementing their protection mandate, peacekeeping missions must invest in dialogue and engagement.

Building trust with the local community and the host State, which has the primary responsibility for the protection of its citizens, is of particular importance. Effective communications strategies should engage local actors, in particular the local population, from the outset and build a protective environment for civilians from the bottom up.

Furthermore, communications strategies on the protection of civilians are useful for gathering timely information from key stakeholders in order to improve the missions' operational awareness and, consequently, the planning, decisions and activities when it comes to protecting civilians. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that communications strategies on the protection of civilians should also be directed towards United Nations entities on the ground, since information-sharing is still a challenge in many cases.

Advancing the women and peace and security agenda

United Nations peacekeeping operations should continue to use communications campaigns, based on verifiable, data-driven and human-focused storytelling, to raise awareness among local and international audiences of the women and peace and security agenda, as well as to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peace processes. In addition, more women experts should advise the Security Council in its attempt to improve this important aspect of the United Nations presence on the ground.

Strategic communications are also an important tool for preventing conflict-related sexual violence. Open communications channels between peacekeepers and all segments of the local community, in particular women, allow for confidence-building and intelligence-gathering, which are essential pillars of any strategy aimed at protecting women from conflict-related sexual violence. Moreover, communication, understood as a two-way process, is also key to addressing cases of misconduct, in particular sexual exploitation and abuse. United Nations peacekeeping missions must effectively communicate with local populations, including by publicizing in a proactive and transparent manner the measures taken to implement the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to protect victims.

Improving the safety and security of peacekeepers

Besides the challenging environments in which they operate, peacekeeping operations have faced mounting misinformation and disinformation challenges that tarnish the missions' reputation, negatively affecting the capacity to implement

mandates and threatening the safety and security of peacekeepers. The circulation of misinformation and disinformation can erode the confidence of local populations in peacekeeping operations and incite “anti-mission sentiment”. Without the support of the communities they are mandated to protect and serve, peacekeepers can easily become targets.

It is therefore essential for peacekeeping operations to build trust with host governments and local actors and to disseminate accurate information. Mission personnel must be adequately trained and equipped to proactively address the misinformation and disinformation that compromise their reputation. It is equally relevant that mission personnel act according to the basic principles of peacekeeping and effectively communicate these principles to local audiences.

Way forward: how to better communicate with relevant audiences

Given their importance for mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers, strategic communications are an operational necessity in peacekeeping operations. The Security Council, the General Assembly and troop- and police-contributing countries should encourage further improvements in both United Nations Headquarters and missions’ strategic communications capabilities, in alignment with the Action for Peacekeeping Plus plan and by making use of technologies to their full potential, as envisaged in the Strategy for the Digital Transformation of United Nations Peacekeeping. The Department of Peace Operations of the Secretariat is currently developing a new communications strategy, which will provide the basis for much-needed training materials for civilian and uniformed peacekeepers. A policy towards an integrated approach to misinformation and disinformation must also be developed.

In the field, mission leadership must spearhead improvements in strategic communications. There is a clear need for mission leaders to mainstream strategic communications into the planning and day-to-day decision-making of peacekeeping operations. All mission components have to be informed of and work under a single communications strategy, which will have a direct impact on overall mandate implementation. Strategic communications and public information teams in missions must be strengthened through better recruitment and training and the allocation of adequate resources. Monitoring and evaluation tools are needed to verify the accuracy and effectiveness of information campaigns and to guarantee the necessary adjustments and improvements to communications strategies.

Finally, effective strategic communications rely heavily on the adequate training of uniformed personnel, who are in daily contact with local populations and access the most remote areas. Experience has shown the need for a common military and police doctrine on strategic communications in peacekeeping missions. The recruitment and training of military public information officers and police strategic communications/public information focal points should be improved. Furthermore, predeployment training on strategic communications for all military and police officers would have a significant impact on the capacity of peacekeeping operations to dialogue with local stakeholders.

Guiding questions

- How effectively are the Secretariat and peacekeeping missions currently communicating with key audiences?
- What are the challenges, internal and external, faced by United Nations peacekeeping operations in terms of strategic communications? How can these challenges be addressed? How could the Strategy for the Digital Transformation

of United Nations Peacekeeping contribute to improving the communications capabilities of missions?

- How could the Secretariat and peacekeeping missions better monitor and evaluate the impact of strategic communications on mandate implementation and the safety and security of peacekeepers?
- How can the Security Council, the Secretariat, peacekeeping missions and troop- and police-contributing countries increase the impact of strategic communications on the protection of civilians and the advancement of the women and peace and security agenda?
- What role should strategic communications play in the context of peacekeeping transitions?
- What concrete measures should the Security Council take in order to improve strategic communications within peacekeeping operations?
- How could troop- and police-contributing countries contribute to improving missions' communications with relevant stakeholders, notably local communities?

Format, briefers and participation

The high-level open debate will be chaired by Ambassador Carlos França, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil. The following speakers (to be confirmed) will give a briefing to the Security Council:

- The Secretary-General
- The Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations
- The Force Commander of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lieutenant General Marcos De Sá Affonso Da Costa
- The Director of Research and Head of the Brian Urquhart Center for Peace Operations/International Peace Institute, Jenna Russo

Member States wishing to participate in person should add their names to the list of speakers through the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE. A letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, duly signed by the Permanent Representative or the Chargé d'affaires a.i. and containing a request to participate in accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure must be uploaded to the eSpeakers module of e-deleGATE.

In order to guarantee the participation of as many Member States as possible, statements should not exceed three minutes.