



United Nations  
Press Release

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# UN Secretary-General: Peacekeeping missions rising to new high

(UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 7 September) — The number and scope of United Nations peace operations are approaching what may become their highest levels ever, improving prospects for conflict resolution but also stretching thin the capacities of the system, Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported to the General Assembly today.

“The increased demand for United Nations peace operations that has arisen in 2004 represents a challenge not seen since the rapid increases in the scale and complexity of operations in the 1990s,” the Secretary-General says, in his annual report on implementation of the year-2000 Millennium Declaration.

The UN, which has bolstered its support to peacekeeping from its headquarters, is administering 17 operations, including in complex and fragile political environments in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Georgia and Kosovo. UN forces are now withdrawing from a stable Sierra Leone, where they have helped the Government to consolidate peace. The UN is also downsizing according to plan in Timor-Leste, after UN peacekeepers contributed to that country’s independence.

New operations were authorized over the past year in Liberia, Côte d’Ivoire, Haiti and Burundi, and planning is ongoing for a substantial mission in Sudan. The Secretary-General is also seeking to strengthen significantly the peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that progress in the peace process is not reversed.

The Secretary-General projects that more than 30,000 uniformed personnel may be required to meet the surge in demand for peacekeeping operations, in addition to more than 50,000 already deployed in early 2004. This could mean that more troops and civilian police would be serving as blue helmets than during UN peacekeeping’s peak in 1993, when 78,000 uniformed personnel served, according to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

## **Commitments prerequisite for expansion**

While welcoming the increased demand for UN missions as a signal of new opportunities for peace, the Secretary-General warns that commitments of political, financial, material and human resources are necessary, and that a clear exit strategy is vital for each operation.

The UN is seeking support for peacekeeping from developing and developed countries alike, the Secretary-General stresses. While it may be possible to find troops, he notes critical gaps in specialized military capabilities, such as tactical air support and field medical facilities, as well as a dearth of francophone police and a pending depletion of strategic reserve stocks for peacekeeping.

The UN Secretary-General also points to the need for steady, ongoing work with local institutions to promote sustainable economic development and good governance and to consolidate **the rule of law**.

“The international community must be conscious of the need to respect and uphold the international rule of law — in all spheres — ranging from maintaining international peace and security to managing international trade and protecting human rights,” the Secretary-General says in his report, an annual assessment of follow-up on the goals agreed by heads of State and Government at the September 2000 Millennium Summit in New York.

In other sections of the report, the Secretary-General states that the global response to **drugs and cross-border crime** has been bolstered by the coming into force of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in September 2003, and its ratification by 82 States, as well as by the adoption and opening for signature of the UN Convention Against Corruption in December 2003 in Mérida, México.

Organized crime today is taking on the aspect of complex business conglomerates, while hierarchical structures such as “families” and cartels are disappearing, according to the report. A diversification of criminal pursuits, along with decentralized structures, are posing difficulties for law enforcement, and criminal networks are taking advantage of civil conflicts and political instability, as well as opportunities to service terrorist organizations.

The frequency of **natural disasters**, and their impact on the poor and vulnerable, appears to be increasing, the report also says. In 2003 alone, 75,000 people lost their lives in 700 natural occurrences, including the Bam and Algerian earthquakes. Six hundred million people were affected, and combined economic losses are estimated to exceed \$65 billion. A number of trends, including rising sea levels, more widely varying extremes in temperature and rainfall and changes in agricultural production patterns, suggest continued dangers.

Fortunately, the international community is applying new strategies for disaster prevention and mitigation of risk. Widespread flooding in South Asia in July, although severe, was less destructive than previous floods, due to local preparedness and response capacities. Addressing the structural obstacles to food security in the Horn of Africa has averted a major famine from the drought cycle that began in 2002.

The annual report from the Secretary-General also includes an assessment of mixed progress towards achievement of the **Millennium Development Goals** (*see associated press release*).

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