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### **Canada can and should do more to help United Nations Peacekeeping**

By Monique Cuillerier

Since 1948, there have been 71 United Nations peacekeeping operations. There are currently 16 such operations with over 125 000 uniformed and civilian personnel -- more than at any time in the organization's history.

Peacekeeping has evolved over the years, and will need to adapt further to meet the challenges arising from present and future demands.

In March, United States Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power announced that U.S. President Barack Obama would hold a [world leaders summit on peacekeeping](#) during the opening of the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in September "to help catalyze a wave of new commitments."

And in June, the UN Secretary-General received the [report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations](#) chaired by Jorge Ramos-Horta. The panel's report is due to be considered by governments this fall. Among the panel's many recommendations are a number of ideas Canada has championed in the past – like a rapidly deployable military headquarters, a vanguard force and other measures for more rapid deployment of peacekeepers.

The leaders' summit hosted by President Obama is intended to build support for improved peacekeeping, particularly by addressing the three core needs that were identified in the high-level panel report: closing gaps in existing peacekeeping missions (for example, the need for specific transport and other equipment); new commitments of rapidly deployable personnel; and a broader set of forward-looking personnel commitments to staff future missions and fill gaps in current operations.

The [2015 WFM – Canada fact sheet](#) on "Canada and UN Peacekeeping" documented significant personnel shortages, below levels mandated by the UN Security Council, in five current missions (in Abyei (Sudan), Central African Republic, Darfur (Sudan), Mali and South Sudan). The current shortage of peacekeepers was prominent in discussions earlier this year when U.S. Ambassador Power, went to Brussels to lobby European countries (and Canada) to increase their

commitments of personnel as well as medical capacity, military intelligence, and the provision of helicopters and other vehicles.

Another important issue is the use of technology. In a [recent report by the Expert Panel on Technology and Innovation in UN Peacekeeping](#) it was noted that, “despite the omnipresence of advanced technology and applications in our daily lives, United Nations peacekeeping remains well behind the curve.”

While the UN struggles to overcome shortages of equipment and personnel, sexual violence by peacekeepers continues to generate a great deal of negative publicity. In particular, there have recently been a number of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, some involving children, by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. Although UN officials insist on a “zero tolerance” policy, they are limited in their capacity to enforce reforms. The UN cannot take legal action against peacekeepers, as that is left to the troop-contributing governments. Former Canadian Supreme Court justice Marie Deschamps has been named to head an independent investigation into the current allegations. As well, the NGO AIDS-Free World has launched a campaign, [Code Blue](#), to address the issue of sexual abuse in the context of peacekeeping operations.

Will Canada return to its former role as a leader in UN peace operations? As reported in WFM – Canada’s current update of [Canada & UN Peacekeeping](#), while demand for peacekeepers has never been higher, Canada’s contributions remain at an all time low -- 26 military personnel and 85 police as of June 2015. Canada now ranks 66th in personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping even though public opinion measurements continue to demonstrate strong support from Canadians for peacekeeping as a top priority activity of their military.

“If Canada returned to UN peacekeeping, it could have a real and lasting impact on peace and security in many of the world’s most dangerous regions,” says Walter Dorn, Professor of Defence Studies at Canadian Forces College. “Post-Afghanistan, there is so much Canadian skill, equipment and know-how that can be put to good use.”

Peter Langille, a peacekeeping expert and member of WFM – Canada’s Advisory Board coordinated the [organization’s submission to the UN High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations](#). He has been a consistent campaigner for a UN Emergency Peace Service, a permanent standing UN capacity that would allow for rapid deployment. “Even if the Europeans, Canada and others strengthen their political commitment to UN peace operations, that will still leave the problem the UN has getting troops into the field in a timely manner. The best solution is to create a UNEPS, a kind of ‘UN 911.’ We wouldn’t want to live in a community without the means, such as police or a fire department, to respond quickly to emergencies. The time is long overdue to give the UN the capacity to respond rapidly when the Security Council calls for new peace operations.”