## Strengthening a Rights-Based Approach to United Nations Peace Operations

Charles T. Hunt and Adam Day February 2024

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### Introduction

During a July 2020 open debate the United Nations (UN) Security Council highlighted the crucial roles human rights play in peace operations, including by providing early warning of issues or problems, supporting good offices, improving the protection of civilians, strengthening national rule-of-law capacities, ensuring due diligence/compliance for military operations, leading a range of protection-related activities and supporting efforts to protect political space in fragile settings. Despite this recognition of the important role of human rights, there has been relatively little research into how human rights support the implementation of the mandates of a range of peace operations, leaving the evidence base for understanding the contribution of human rights to peace operations very thin. 2

The purpose of this policy brief is to chart out key complexities linked to operationalising a rights-based approach to peace operations. It identifies and introduces critical challenges to mandate implementation through specific themes, including the contribution of human rights to the protection of civilians, stabilisation mandates, smaller-footprint field offices, the political work of special envoys and mission transitions.<sup>3</sup>

The paper examines both theoretical and operational aspects of human rights in peace operations. In line with the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations report (2015),<sup>4</sup> it discusses human rights considerations in relation to a range of UN peace operations, including peacekeeping and special political missions, regional prevention offices, and special envoys.<sup>5</sup> The first section locates human rights components and concerns across a spectrum of UN peace operations, comparing how human rights contribute to a wide range of peace and security engagements. The second section highlights several

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> UN (United Nations), "Integrating Human Rights into Peace Operations Brings Missions Closer to People, Advances Inclusive Development, High Commissioner Tells Security Council", Press Release, SC/14242, 7 July 2020, https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14242.doc.htm.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> See R. Mamiya, "Going Further Together: The Contribution of Human Rights Components to the Implementation of Mandates of United Nations Field Missions", UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, October 2020.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The brief also serves to strengthen the Geneva Centre for Security Policy's Swiss Peacebuilding Training Course and Mikeland Scenario; see <a href="https://www.gcsp.ch/courses/swiss-peacebuilding-training-course-sptc-2023">https://www.gcsp.ch/courses/swiss-peacebuilding-training-course-sptc-2023</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> UN, Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People, A/70/95 and S/2015/446, 17 June 2015, <a href="https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/report-of-the-high-level-independent-panel-on-peace-operations-on-uniting-our-strengths-for-peace-politics-partnership-and-people/">https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/report-of-the-high-level-independent-panel-on-peace-operations-on-uniting-our-strengths-for-peace-politics-partnership-and-people/</a>.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> The brief draws on desktop research and is based on a review of past research and literature (primary and secondary sources) related to questions of human rights and peace operations. It also draws on consultations with experts and practitioners involved in human rights and peacebuilding work, including officials from the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and experts in the fields of human rights and peace operations. The authors have also conducted field research on human rights and protection in peace operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic in the past few years.

challenges to realising human rights aims and objectives in field missions. The final section proposes a series of questions that warrant further discussion to elucidate and support a rights-based approach to peace operations that could help to respond to the call in the New Agenda for Peace for a reflection on the limits and future of UN peacekeeping and other ongoing policymaking within the UN system. The paper illustrates that in order to support the UN's recommitment to its core principles and human rights pillar, there is a need for greater attention to the ways that human rights can support the analysis and strategic positioning of UN peace operations.

# The evolution of human rights in UN peace operations

The promotion and protection of human rights was laid down as constituting a key purpose and guiding principle of the UN Charter. Since then, the UN and its member states have sought to advance human rights protections through a range of treaties, conventions, and multilateral resolutions and its on-the-ground activities.

While the commitment to human rights has been central to the UN from the outset, a series of failings in settings like Rwanda, the Balkans, and Sri Lanka prompted significant changes in the UN's architecture and approaches to human rights over time. One of the most important was Secretary-General Ban Kimoon's promulgation of the UN Human Rights Up Front initiative in 2016, which aimed to mainstream the prioritisation of human rights concerns in everything the organisation did. This imperative was echoed in the twin Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on sustaining peace that recognised the "interlinked and mutually reinforcing" relationship between peace and security and human rights. While the Human Rights Up Front initiative has since been discontinued, to 2020 Secretary-General Guterres "Call to Action for Human Rights" reaffirmed that human rights concerns should be central to all of the UN's work, including the way in which the organisation identifies and responds

<sup>6</sup> UN, "A New Agenda for Peace", Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9, 2023, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> 2023 marks 75 years since the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

<sup>8</sup> J.A. Mertus and J. Mertus, The United Nations and Human Rights: A Guide for a New Era, Routledge, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See UN, Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka, 2012, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/737299?ln=en.

<sup>10</sup> G. Kurtz, With Courage and Coherence: The Human Rights Up Front Initiative of the United Nations, Berlin, Global Public Policy Institute, 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A/RES/70/262 and S/RES/2282. The twin resolutions further emphasise that "respect for, and protection of, human rights and fundamental freedoms" are central to sustaining peace.

<sup>12</sup> E. Paddon Rhoads, "Putting Human Rights Up Front: Implications for Impartiality and the Politics of UN Peacekeeping", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.26(3), 2019, pp.281-301.

programmatically to risks of violent conflict.<sup>13</sup> In 2021, "Our Common Agenda" called for a system-wide comprehensive approach to human rights as part of building towards a new "social contract", again underscoring a central role for human rights across the organisation.<sup>14</sup>

Violations of human rights can be simultaneously the cause, catalyst and consequence of violent conflict. Their protection and promotion must therefore be at the heart of efforts to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict, and to build and sustain the peace. Tonsequently, one of the major avenues for the UN and its member states to advance and defend human rights is through its spectrum of peace operations. To

The first modern human rights component in peacekeeping was deployed in 1992 in the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador. Since then, the mandates of peace operations have grown in size and scope, and currently involve a far greater number of areas requiring collaboration between human rights teams and other critical mission components. Indeed, the centrality of human rights to peace operations is not limited to peacekeeping, but also includes special political missions, regional prevention offices, and UN envoys (all broadly considered "operations"). Today, most UN peace operations contain the promotion and protection of human rights as a core aspect of their mandates. Across a range of mission types, human rights sections are tasked with monitoring and investigation; analysis and reporting; capacity-building for state and local rule-of-law institutions, including national human rights institutions, and civil society; early warning; the protection of civilians (PoC); and providing support to governments in combatting impunity. 17 Mission human rights officers cooperate and coordinate with military and police components and the panoply of civilian sections, as well as local authorities and counterparts. Other commonly mandated areas include the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and violations against children, while security and justice sector reform and transitional justice initiatives are fundamentally underpinned by human rights principles.

<sup>13</sup> A. Guterres, Call to Action for Human Rights, UN, 2020, https://www.un.org/en/content/action-for-human-rights/index.shtml#:~:text=Focusing%20on%20seven%20thematic%20areas,robust%20civic%20space%20 for%20everybody%3B.

<sup>14</sup> A. Guterres, *Our Common Agenda*, Report of the Secretary-General, UN, 2022, <a href="https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda">https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda</a>.

<sup>15</sup> See OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), *On the Contribution of Human Rights to Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace*, 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/1.\_ohchr\_thematic\_paper\_on\_the\_contribution\_of\_hr\_to\_sp\_and\_recommendations.pdf. See also E. Anasarias and P. Berliner, "Human Rights and Peacebuilding", in J. Rivera (ed.), *Handbook on Building Cultures of Peace*, Springer, 2009, pp.181-195.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> S. Maus, *United Nations Peace Operations and Human Rights*, Brill|Nijhoff, 2020, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004433090">https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004433090</a>. See also K.M. Larsen, *The Human Rights Treaty Obligations of Peacekeepers*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> UN, "Protect Human Rights", https://www.un.org/en/our-work/protect-human-rights.

UN policy and guidance have likewise evolved to place human rights as a central goal of peace operations, demanding that all mission components and leadership share responsibility in promoting and protecting human rights, and putting in place clear requirements for integrating human rights into mission planning. These policies have also been explicit in giving the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) an independent and lead role in supporting human rights work in peace operations, giving human rights sections dual reporting lines within peace operations.<sup>18</sup>

As is often the case with UN peace operations, much policy in this area has been generated from the bottom up, built on experiences in the field. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), perennial ethical and legal concerns around joint operations of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) with material and logistical support to Congolese military actors accused of grave human rights violations led to efforts to mitigate the risks associated with the provision of UN support to state actors. Innovations in MONUSCO eventually contributed to the UN's 2013 "Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to Non-UN Security Forces" (HRDDP) – developed to prevent the provision of assistance to non-UN actors guilty of or likely to commit human rights violations. The HRDDP noted a responsibility for missions to "respect, promote and encourage respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law". 21

# Critical challenges to (human rights) mandate implementation

Despite a great deal of progress on human rights work across the UN system and within the policy and practice of the UN's peace operations, a number of impediments to effective implementation remain.

#### Do no harm

Perhaps the most important aspect of UN peace operations realising a rights-based approach is that, in general, peacekeepers do not themselves

<sup>18</sup> See UN, *Policy on Human Rights in United Nations Peace Operations and Political Missions*, 1 September 2011. See also OHCHR/DPKO/DPA, *Policy on Public Reporting by Human Rights Components of UN Peace Operations*, July 2008; Secretary-General Decision No. 2005/24 on Human Rights in Integrated Missions, 26 October 2005; UN Peace Operations Guidance Note, "Integrating Human Rights in United Nations Military Components: Good Practices and Lessons Learned", 2013. Note: these guidelines have recently been updated.

<sup>19</sup> CIVIC (Center for Civilians in Conflict), "Enabling Support by Mitigating Risk: MONUSCO's Implementation of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo", CIVIC Policy Brief, Washington, DC, 2020, https://civiliansinconflict.org/publications/policy/enabling-support-by-mitigating-risk/.

**<sup>20</sup>** S. Tiberia, "Human Rights Due Diligence Policy: Origins, Development and Challenges in the Implementation in the DRC", *Peacekeeping Trends and Challenges in Africa, ITPCM International Commentary*, Vol.10(36), 2014, pp.45-54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> UN, Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces, 2013.

commit human rights violations. UN personnel are legally obliged to adhere to international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law and to uphold UN human rights principles and standards when implementing their mandates. Acts of misconduct and ill-discipline by UN personnel, including sexual exploitation and abuse, can create widespread perceptions of UN peacekeepers as predators rather than protectors in terms of the preservation of fundamental human rights. 23

More typically, human rights concerns arise in the context of joint actions with government forces. For instance, in theatres where UN troops are mandated to use lethal force to protect civilians, the prospects for collateral damage are real. This has been the case in large stabilisation missions such as MONUSCO in the DRC, for example, where UN troops have conducted joint operations with Armed Forces of the DRC units who have been (in)directly responsible for grave rights violations, and where civilian casualties have been a frequent outcome of operations.<sup>24</sup> But this is also an issue of significance where UN-mandated parallel forces and host government partners are conducting coercive counterinsurgency operations that may lead to violations by combatants/armed groups and the mistreatment of local populations.<sup>25</sup> These issues are prevalent in terrorism-affected environments like Mali, Somalia, Libya and Yemen, where military operations often take place in dynamic environments with a range of armed actors. <sup>26</sup> The HRDDP and initiatives such as the human rights compliance framework for the G5 Sahel Joint Force have sought to address the vetting and mitigation aspects of this joint work, helping to reduce the risks that the UN will unintentionally enable human rights violations by its partners.<sup>27</sup> However, as both the Mali and DRC examples demonstrate, even robust measures to mitigate risk do not eliminate the possibility of unintentional consequences.<sup>28</sup>

Beyond the use of force, UN peace operations can unintentionally contribute to a broader range of human rights challenges. For example, recent research has explored how UN peacebuilding more generally may have inadvertently contributed to widespread restrictions on political space, and at times provided

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> C. Foley, *UN Peacekeeping Operations and the Protection of Civilians: Saving Succeeding Generations*, Cambridge University Press, 2017; K.M. Larsen, *The Human Rights Treaty Obligations of Peacekeepers*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> J.-K. Westendorf, *Violating Peace: Sex, Aid, and Peacekeeping*, Cornell University Press, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> D.M. Tull, "The Limits and Unintended Consequences of UN Peace Enforcement: The Force Intervention Brigade in the DR Congo", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.25(2), 2018, pp.167-190.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> C.T. Hunt, "All Necessary Means to What Ends? The Unintended Consequences of the 'Robust Turn' in UN Peace Operations", *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.24(1), 2017, pp.108-131.

**<sup>26</sup>** C.T. Hunt, and S. Zimmerman, "Counter-Terrorism & Peace Operations: The Impacts of UN Security Council Approaches to Tackling Terror on the Pursuit of Peace", Securing the Future Initiative Brief, Washington, DC, RESOLVE Network, 2022.

**<sup>27</sup>** G. Hirschmann, "Cooperating with Evil? Accountability in Peace Operations and the Evolution of the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy", Cooperation and Conflict, Vol.55(1), 2020, pp.22-40, <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719828406">https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719828406</a>.

<sup>28</sup> CIVIC, 2020.

resources to actors with patchy human rights records.<sup>29</sup> In these ways, peace operations can further curtail fundamental freedoms and universal rights by enabling the authoritarian tendencies of host governments in some settings.

Any rights-based approach to peace operations must therefore first overcome the possibility that the UN can be part of the human rights problem rather than the solution.

#### Protecting human rights vis-à-vis protecting civilians

Protecting human rights and protecting civilians are clearly mutually reinforcing mandates for the UN. Human rights activities contribute to preventing and responding to threats of physical violence against civilians, including through the investigation and monitoring of violations, sensitisation campaigns on the content and applicability of international humanitarian law, and efforts to tackle impunity.<sup>30</sup>

However, this does not mean that PoC and human rights activities are always perfectly aligned in the UN's engagement itself. Cultural and institutional silos may mean that military and human rights components fail to collaborate around protection activities in missions. Information-sharing restrictions within missions can lead to disjuncts between human rights and protection work. Tensions may arise when the military components see the HRDDP process as inhibiting their joint operations with state security actors. And as peace operations have experienced increasing downward pressure on budgets, differences may arise across mission components on the most effective use of scarce resources.<sup>31</sup>

#### Prioritising human rights in 'state-support operations'

Specific challenges arise to a rights-based approach in missions with a strong stabilisation mandate, especially when based on the use of force. For example, missions in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the DRC have experienced complex challenges where host governments are seen as corrupt, predatory, and/or involved directly in human rights violations themselves. In Mali and the CAR, the presence of state-aligned private military security companies (e.g. the Wagner Group) has complicated the UN's ability to navigate host-state consent and the need to maintain a robust human rights approach. As with problems around coercive operations, careful application

<sup>29</sup> A. Day et al., *Peacebuilding and Authoritarianism: The Unintended Consequences of UN Engagement in Post-Conflict Settings*, New York, UN University, 2020, <a href="https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/peacebuilding-and-authoritarianism-the-unintentional-consequences-of-un-engagement-in-post-conflict-settings.html#outline.">https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/peacebuilding-and-authoritarianism-the-unintentional-consequences-of-un-engagement-in-post-conflict-settings.html#outline.</a>

<sup>30</sup> S. Delaine Rhodes and G. Guerrero, "Human Rights and the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations", *Revista Política y Estrategia*, Vol.140, 2022, pp.149-169.

<sup>31</sup> For an analysis of challenges arising between military and human rights components, see A. Day and C.T. Hunt, *Protecting Together: Lessons from Mali and South Sudan on Coherence between Human Rights and Military Components in UN Peace Operations*, New York, UNU-CPR, 2021, <a href="http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8263/UNU\_ProtectingTogether.pdf">http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8263/UNU\_ProtectingTogether.pdf</a>.

of the HRDDP can help to prevent the provision of direct material support to abusive elements, but cannot entirely mitigate the negative perceptions that result from these associations.

#### **Human rights in transition moments**

Another major consideration for mainstreaming a rights-based approach concerns the role of human rights thinking and practice during mission transitions, either during the significant reconfiguration or downsizing of missions. When large-footprint multidimensional missions are withdrawn and/or replaced by smaller special political missions, important questions arise around how human rights and protection issues should be brought into the follow-on presence of the UN. For example, in Sudan when the African Union-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur was replaced by the UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, the unique role of the State Liaison Functions presented both opportunities and challenges for the human rights dimensions of UN peacebuilding objectives.<sup>32</sup> In many settings the UN's human rights work has relied in large part on the presence of team sites and the use of military assets to secure access to dangerous areas. When this static presence departs during a transition, it is not always clear how the UN's human rights work will continue.

Given the recent withdrawal of the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the ongoing transition of MONUSCO in the DRC, with others likely in the near future, the role of human rights in ensuring early warning, the protection of civilians, and continuing monitoring beyond the life of a mission points to the need for a more in-depth understanding of these issues.

#### Special political missions

As part of the broader spectrum of peace operations, human rights challenges also arise in non-military, "special political missions" (SPMs). Indeed, two of the largest SPMs, in Iraq and Afghanistan, have encountered some of the most complex human rights challenges globally. Equipped with a smaller set of resources, heavily reliant on partner organisations and dealing with sensitive political processes, SPMs often struggle to gain traction on key human rights issues. The longstanding inability of the UN to address major human rights concerns in Afghanistan – not least related to the rights of women and girls – offers one negative example. In contrast, the UN mission in Colombia has effectively pushed to include human rights in the Colombian peace process (including relating to transitional justice), and the UN in Iraq has played an important role in monitoring and advocating for improvements in human rights law and practice.

**<sup>32</sup>** Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance and UN Sudan, "UN/AU Transition in Darfur: Lessons from Assistance on Rule of Law and Human Rights through the State Liaison Functions", 2021, p.39. See also D. Forti, *Walking a Tightrope: The Transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS in Sudan*, New York, International Peace Institute, 2021.

Regional offices and special envoys offer a unique set of challenges for the UN's human rights work. The UN offices for West Africa and the Sahel, the Great Lakes, Central Africa, and the Horn of Africa have important advocacy roles in terms of human rights. But lacking fixed staff on the ground and spread thinly across regions with varying human rights challenges, these offices often have very limited ability to drive a human rights agenda at the country level. Moreover, the relevant regional organisations are often unable or unwilling to advance a strong human rights approach: the League of Arab States and Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa, for example, have almost no capacity to advance a human rights agenda in their respective regions.

# A pathway to a rights-based approach to UN peace operations?

The challenges presented above raise a number of key questions relating to the direct and indirect contributions of human rights efforts in UN peace operations that warrant further attention. The five sets of questions laid out below are not exhaustive, but are particularly important given current trends in UN peace operations, the organisation-wide discussions taking place in the wake of the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace policy brief, and, in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future.

A first set of questions relate to **how human rights work underwrites or creates the conditions for achieving the main objectives of peace missions**. It is important to ask where, when and how human rights components contribute to implementing overarching mission priorities. Given the drawdown and transition of major missions and the broader trends towards lighter-footprint missions in future, another key question is to ask how human rights can become a more central aspect of mission transitions, helping to bridge moments of reconfiguration, drawdown, and withdrawal.

A second area for more detailed examination is the **impact of human rights work across other field mission components or substantive sections**. For instance, how do missions' human rights sections support and/or enable the impact of the military and police components?<sup>33</sup> Human rights may also contribute more broadly to mission early warning, root-cause analysis or humanitarian engagement in ways that are poorly understood today. How are human rights analyses on issues of discrimination and inter-group animosity used for early warning, protection, and longer-term peacebuilding efforts? How do human rights actors feed information and analysis into arrangements that extend beyond the UN's purview such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Protection Cluster?

<sup>33</sup> Day and Hunt, 2021.

A third set of questions concerns how clear human rights language in mandates interacts with other key cross-cutting mandated areas. One critical area deserving of more attention is the role of human rights in pursuing the protection of civilians. What are the overlaps and areas of shared understanding? Equally, what are the points of possible tension between PoC and human rights mandates and their different approaches to protection?<sup>34</sup> When and why are they mutually reinforcing or contradictory and what should be done to leverage the opportunities but minimise the risks? Along with the police, justice and corrections officials, how does a human rights-based approach to mandate implementation contribute towards (re)establishing the rule of law? Do human rights principles influence the way that capacity-building in this domain leads to more effective and legitimate institutions that enshrine human rights in meaningful ways? How can human rights approaches issues of state capture or the unintentional bolstering of authoritarian tendencies in some settings? When and how do human rights enable more inclusive, equitable political settlements that may reduce the risks of relapse or escalation?

A fourth set of questions are more oriented towards operational-level guidance and mechanisms designed to mainstream and safeguard human rights. Generally speaking, are there mission-specific innovations around human rights that could be identified and mainstreamed into UN practice more broadly (in the same way that the HRDDP evolved through the DRC experience)? What mechanisms and practices exist for coordinating among human rights sections and other components of peace operations? Is there evidence that some practices generate more positive impacts than others? Importantly, given the growing risks of digitally driven conflict (e.g. hate speech and disinformation through social media, via cyber weapons, and/or AI-driven risks), can the UN's human rights architecture help to identify and respond to emerging risks in a faster and more nimble way than current approaches?

These point to broader institutional and policy questions that should be considered in ongoing efforts to improve peace operations, including those called for in the New Agenda for Peace. How can human rights and UN peace operations better align at the strategic level? Can conflict prevention and peacebuilding approaches be considered more directly in human rights mechanisms and special procedures? How can the approaches taken in peace operations be better integrated into and benefit human rights objectives and activities? To what extent do the relationships across the UN system – the OHCHR, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and so on – need to change, and how?

Answers to these questions and the insights from such investigations would promise a great deal of value to ongoing policy development at the intersection

**<sup>34</sup>** In the context of peace operations, "PoC" refers to protection from threats of physical violence. It is therefore closely linked to human rights work aimed at guaranteeing the right to life and physical integrity, and to the positive obligation to protect people from threats to their right to life and from ill-treatment, as established by human rights law.

of human rights and peace operations. This would simultaneously strengthen the case of those seeking to advance the cause of human rights promotion and protection through the UN system, as well as those who want to ensure that the peace operations and peacebuilding engagements of tomorrow are in tune with ambitious human rights goals, despite prevailing head winds at the geopolitical level. In short, the findings would go a long way to mapping out and making possible a more rights-based approach to UN peace operations and peacebuilding.<sup>35</sup>

#### Conclusion

As has been shown above, in order to support the UN's recommitment to its core principles and human rights pillar, there is a need for greater attention to the ways that human rights impact the strategies and operationalisation of the full spectrum of UN peace operations. As the UN system develops and refines the New Agenda for Peace between now and the Summit of the Future in 2024, this policy brief suggests that attention should be paid to the synergies between human rights, on the one hand, and peace and security, on the other hand. While human rights have been a critical component of the way in which the UN engages in peace operations since their inception, the changing nature of conflict has generated new and complex challenges for peace operations in how they protect and promote the human rights of civilians. Ultimately, as the New Agenda for Peace has recognised, the risks of violent conflict arise from the kinds of inequalities and exclusion that most communities experience as violations of their human rights.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> For further detail, see: C.T. Hunt et al, *UN Peace Operations and Human Rights: Promoting and Protecting Universal Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*, Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, Oslo, NUPI, 2024.

**<sup>36</sup>** See also UN and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2018.

### People make peace and security possible

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