

Annual Operational Report 2023

Shaping the Debate on more
Effective Peace Operations



**Challenges
Forum**

International Forum for the
Challenges of Peace Operations

Reflections from the Director

I believe it is in human nature to be optimistic. Hence, I really hoped and thought that this year should be better than the last. However, 2023 turned out to be a year filled with crises and conflicts, resulting in immense human suffering and unimaginable destruction. We saw, yet again, a rise in violent conflict with many casualties, not the least in a volatile Middle East and on the African continent. Rising geopolitical tensions added to the challenges of global peace and security.

International peace operations also continued to face serious challenges during the year in review. We saw member states' fatigue including budget cuts, a decline in host state consent, as well as more thematic areas such as increasing climate-related security threats, and detrimental mis- and disinformation. During 2023, some of the multilateral peacekeeping operations in Africa were urged by national governments or regimes to terminate the UN missions. Grounded in deep mission experiences, it is my belief that these are worrisome developments, not only for the citizens in these countries and regions but also for the entire world. In today's interconnected planet, we need to come together to work on finding innovative and durable solutions for sustainable peace, security and development.

During 2023, the Challenges Forum partnership brought light in the darkness by coming together on several occasions, to strive towards a better future. I feel proud that we collectively contributed with our input to the Secretary General's policy brief, the New Agenda for Peace. Together we highlighted the continued necessity, usefulness and importance of peace operations, as an indispensable tool for global peace and security.

A particular focus was that the future of multilateral peace operations must build on stronger and more viable

partnerships, a topic that was further explored at the Challenges Annual Forum 2023 (CAF23). Where we focused on the role of regional organisations with a particular focus on AU and UN. I enjoyed the frank and forward-thinking discussions - during our one and a half day together - aiming at finding new innovative approaches to future peace operations. Keeping in mind the changing realities on the ground, while adapting and strengthening our concepts.

While being grateful for all the constructive and rewarding interactions with partners and key stakeholders, in different fora, during the year - which you can read about in this report - I think 2024 will be a decisive year for global peace and security. Hence, the crucial role of the Challenges Forum will be most important following the road leading to the Summit of the Future. This is a "once-in-a-generation" opportunity to demonstrate that multilateralism works and that we can tackle current challenges and crises together.

In times when a strong, collective, and independent voice is needed, I end with a quote from my CAF23 speech: *"One of the pillars of the Challenges Forum is the way we discuss things, including difficult and challenging issues. We meet as equals, with open minds, with a willingness to both listen and share experiences. We are dedicated to find answers and possible solutions"*.

I am proud and humbled to be part of such an eminent choir.



Pernilla Rydén,
Director of the Challenges Forum
International Secretariat (CFIS)

Highlights: Key Results in 2023

Despite persisting global challenges, 2023 also provided the Challenges Forum with opportunities to contribute with ideas and recommendations, towards more effective peace operations. Here are some highlights of tangible results.

- The Challenges Annual Forum was co-hosted by the Training for Peace programme (T4P) and the Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS), in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It assisted in building some momentum for UN-AU partnerships towards the passing of the milestone UNSC resolution 2719 (2023), on using UN assessed funding for African-led peace support operations.
- The Challenges Forum, through its partners, key interlocutors and associated actors constructively contributed to the process of producing the UN Secretary General's policy brief, the New Agenda for Peace. Concrete ideas and language that will aid the process of developing the Pact of the Future's chapter on peace and security.
- The Challenges Forum's Mission Leadership Digital Tool was launched externally with former UN high-level leaders. The tool was further used in this year's UN Senior Mission Leaders' Course. The interactive digital tool provides support to UN senior mission leaders in the field, both in preparations for deployment and during the assignment.
- Over the year, the Challenges Forum, through CFIS, has organised public events on burning topics such as mis- and disinformation, climate security and transitions. This has resulted in a constructive dialogue between key stakeholders as well specific recommendations. These initiatives have further offered good opportunities for building relationships and strengthening the partnerships.



Partners and participants at the Challenges Annual Forum 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Results-based Framework

This report summarises the results of the work carried out by the CFIS in supporting the Challenges Forum (CF) partnership in 2024. The activities and outputs aim to contribute towards the strategic objectives in the Challenges Forum Strategy for 2019–2023¹. CFIS uses a results-based management (RBM) framework, linking activities and deliverables to our overarching goals, and evaluating their implementation.

At the beginning of each section in the report, the overarching (i) strategic outcome, (ii) immediate outcome, and (iii) outputs for 2023 are presented, followed by a more detailed account of the key results.

These are the framework's definitions:



Strategic Outcomes

Long-term expected results that indicate increased organisational capacity and/or changes to organisational behaviour.



Immediate Outcomes

Define our direct influence and are dependent on the outputs and activities executed by Partners and CFIS.



Outputs

Concrete deliverables by the CFIS and Partners throughout the year.



Key Activities

Actions by the CFIS to support Partners to achieve outputs and, in turn, the expected outcomes and strategic objectives.

1. [The Challenges Forum Strategy 2019 – 2023](#)

Results in 2023

Strategic Objective 1: Effective reform of peace operations



Strategic Outcome 1

Effective implementation of the development and reform of UN peace operations and related regional partnerships.



Immediate Outcome 1

The UN, Member States and related regional partners use the CF platform and integrate its recommendations into the development and reforms of peace operations.



Outputs

- Built on the key recommendations from CAF22 to contribute towards the UN Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace
- Supported CF Partners in organising the Challenges Annual Forum 2023
- Organised dialogue platforms in support of the development and reform of peace operations



Overview of outputs and outcome result

In February 2023, the Challenges Forum submitted a collective contribution to the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace policy brief. The input to the agenda was the result of key contributions from the partnership as a whole, and a joint effort by the Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS), together with the members of the advisory committee (POAC) and our patron Jean-Marie Guéhenno. The contribution was well received, and many of the areas and issues highlighted by the Challenges Forum are visible in the final policy brief of the Agenda.

On 13 and 14 March, the CFIS Director participated in a two-day conference to inaugurate the Climate Security Association of Canada (CSAC). Among other things



Roundtable discussion at Stockholm Forum with panellists: Andrea Tenenti, Head of the Strategic Communications and Public Information Section, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) | Flaminia Minelli, Chief Policy, Evaluation and Training Division, United Nations Department of Peace Operations | Pernilla Rydén, Director CFIS | Comfort Ero, President and CEO, International Crisis Group | Per Olsson Fridh, Director General of the Folke Bernadotte Academy.

Ms. Rydén was part of a panel discussion about climate changes, peace operations and future global interventions. CFIS built the interventions on the conclusions made at the CAF21, in Berlin. A forum the Challenges partnership dedicated to climate security and peace operations.

While in Montreal, on 16 March, the CFIS Director was a panellist at the conference “Information at the speed of trust: (dis/ill/mis) information and security issues”, arranged by the Centre Franco Paix (UQAM), the Network for Strategic Analysis (NSA) and the Bishop’s University, highlighting key recommendations made by the Challenges Forum on the topic.

On 16 May, CFIS and the UN Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO) co-organised a roundtable discussion at the 2023 Stockholm Forum for Peace and Development. It focused on concrete challenges and threats with mis- and disinformation in international peace operations, with a particular focus on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The discussion gathered an audience of approximately 80 participants, both on-site and online, resulting in a frank discussion that continued getting attention throughout the year. In connection with the Stockholm Forum, the Challenges Forum also wrote a piece for the SIPRI blog, furthering highlighting the outcome of the event.

On 1 June 2023, CFIS and the University of Oxford, together with Challenges Forum Partner the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) organised a panel discussion on UN peacekeeping transitions. The hybrid event gathered some 80 participants, both on-site and online, consisting of practitioners, academics, students, and Challenges Forum partners. The event included the launch of the research brief “What is the State of the State when UN Peacekeeping Operations Leave?”, by Prof. Andrea Ruggeri and Dr. Maline Meiske. Based on empirical evidence from 16 UN peace operations, the brief shows that state-building gains in governance, economy, health, and education can often not be sustained after the departure of peace operations. The brief is part of a report series supported by the Challenges Forum, the Swedish Defence University and the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA).

In June, the CFIS Director participated in a plenary session on regional prevention and the New Agenda for Peace, organised by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation at the Annual Meeting of the Academic Council of the United Nations System (ACUNS). The session discussed strategies and pathways towards the operationalisation of the resolutions on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, with a focus on regional prevention. The session brought together experts from diplomatic and policy domains, including

Ivan Šimonović, Croatia's Permanent Representative to the UN and Peace Building Commission Chair, as well as Olof Skoog, Ambassador, Head of the EU Delegation to the United Nations, amongst others.

On 26-27 October, the Challenges Annual Forum (CAF23) in Addis Ababa brought together over 130 partners and key stakeholders from more than 40 countries, including organisations from the five permanent member states of the UN Security Council. The African Union (AU) was represented by Political, Peace and Security (PAPS) Commissioner Bankole and several other high-level officials. The EU was represented by Roland Kobia, EU Ambassador to Ethiopia and acting Head of Mission to the AU. We had the pleasure of welcoming several Heads of Missions to the Forum, including from ATMIS Somalia, SAMIM Mozambique, and MNJTF Lake Chad. ECOWAS was also present and not least four UN Under-Secretary-Generals participated. This year's discussions were centred around strengthening Global-Regional Peace & Security Partnerships, particularly focusing on the partnership between the AU and the UN. The event, co-hosted by the Training for Peace Programme, featured high-level panel discussions, and working group sessions, delving into three critical sub-themes: improving political and strategic coherence; ensuring predictable financing for AU peace support operations; and strengthening AU-UN capabilities and inter-operability.

In November the CFIS hosted a hybrid event in New York discussing the key takeaways from the CAF23. The event was co-hosted by the New York University Centre on International Cooperation, the UN University Centre for Policy Research, Oxfam, and the Baha'i International Community. Participants included representatives from the UN, AU, member states, including Ghana, South Africa, Guinea-Bissau, Challenges Forum partners, and several other organisations and think tanks. The event highlighted the need for the UN to supplement its peace and security toolbox with deepened partnerships with regional organisations, such as the AU. Participants emphasised the need to build further convergence of African positions and suggested using the upcoming AU Summit in February 2024 as a regional platform to hear African voices in the run up to the Summit of the Future. Participants saw a continued role for the Challenges Forum platform to discuss and promote the future of peace operations, in the run-up to the Pact of the Future.

The adoption of UNSC Resolution 2719 is a milestone enhancing the UN partnership with the AU, and the Challenges Forum is pleased to have helped building momentum on the topic of using UN assessed budgets for AU peace support operations.



Participants listening to a plenary session at the CAF23 in Addis Ababa.

Strategic Objective 2: More effective mission leadership and management



Strategic Outcome 2

The UN and regional partners have more effective mission leadership and strategic & operational management capacity.



Immediate Outcome 2

The UN, Member States and related regional partners have further integrated CF leadership guidance into their planning, execution and evaluation of peace operations.



Outputs

- Launched the digital tool for Senior Mission Leaders
- Supported CF outreach to the UN and regional organisations
- Supported CF in organising dialogue platforms on future leadership in UN Peace Operations

Overview of outputs and outcome result

Effective and inclusive mission leadership and management are arguably the most crucial success factors in UN field missions. This requires imaginative and dedicated leadership that is based on integrity and competence, and with the ability to plan, implement and follow up on the mission's mandate and respond to new threats and crises. Given the current geopolitical trends, the UN is facing significant challenges, which is placing greater demands on the senior leadership. UN Mission Leadership Teams need to be better prepared, resourced, and integrated as well as more accountable for their actions.

The Challenges Forum has consequently developed support for serving and future UN mission leaders, in the form of Mission Leadership Digital Tool, which was launched at a virtual event in May 2023. The tool offers an accumulated resource of experiences and best practices



The handbook, Considerations for Mission Leadership in United Nations Peace Operations was promoted at the CAF23.



Pernilla Rydén, Director CFIS and Patron Jean-Marie Guéhenno at the launch of the Mission Leadership Digital Tool.

to be used in preparations, training and exercises, as well as support for practitioners in the field.

During the launch event, the usefulness of the digital tool was demonstrated, and former and current senior mission leaders were also sharing their experiences. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, USG for Peacekeeping Operations, talked about the importance of effective leadership, and Bintou Keita, SRSG of MONUSCO, shared her challenges as a leader in the DR Congo, with the mission withdrawal, in a pre-recorded message to the participants.

The importance of leadership was discussed by the event's high-level panel, consisting of Moustapha Soumaré, former DSRSG/RC/HC in South Sudan, Liberia and the DRC; Major General Robert Gordon (retd.), who served as the Force Commander for UNMEE and is a lead mentor in UN Senior Mission Leaders Courses; Brigadier General Hester Paneras, former Police Commissioner for UNAMID and currently working for the AU; as well as Leila Zerrougi, former SRSG in the DRC.

Participants included Challenges Forum partners, peace operations training centres, individual representatives from the UN and national entities designing and delivering Senior Mission Leadership courses and development programmes, including mentors, trainers, and leadership development experts. The event raised awareness of the tool and established it within the field of leadership support and training. It also contributed to an interactive discussion on leadership within the UN, which was highly appreciated by the participants.

Prior to and following the launch event, the Challenges Forum has engaged in discussions with the Integrated Training Service at the UN DPO. The digital tool, together with the handbook Considerations for Mission Leadership in UN Peace Operations, was used as preparatory material sent out to participants in the 2023 UN Senior Mission Leaders Course, hosted by Japan. The tool was well received by the participants and much appreciated by the trainers.

The new digital tool was also highlighted at the European Association for Peace Operations Training Centres (EAPTC) annual conference in Brussels 7-9 June. CFIS and FBA initiated and co-organised a special session dedicated to mission leadership. The many participants were given an opportunity to download the mission leadership digital tool in real time. This raised awareness of the tool among key stakeholders and led to a large engagement by the participants.

To ensure the accessibility of the tool, it was translated into French in 2023. This will allow for the tool to be integrated in the French-speaking SML programme scheduled for 2024.

During the second half of 2023, CFIS also made an inventory of current mission leadership preparations and training, including with the UN, EU, AU, and national institutions and partners, in preparations for presentation and implementation of a concept on Challenges Forum Leadership work in 2024.

Strategic Objective 3: The Challenges Forum partnership engaging in collaborative action



Strategic Outcome 3

The CF Partnership is fostering an inclusive and creative approach to change management by engaging in collaborative action.



Immediate Outcome 3

CF Partnership has strengthened its capacity and brand as a global platform for enhancing international peace operations.



Outputs

- Supported CF partners' engagement and identified potential new partners
- Further developed partnerships with regional organizations
- Initiated the process of developing a new Strategy for the CF

Overview of outputs and outcome result

In February, the annual Challenges Forum Partners' Meeting was held. It discussed our collective input to the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, where POAC had been highly engaged in the drafting. The Partners' Meeting is the highest body for collective guidance of the Challenges Forum and provides the partners with an opportunity to engage with one another on strategic issues, while setting the direction of the partnership for the coming year. Asif Khan, Director, Policy and Mediation Division, UN DPPA, and David Haeri, Director, Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training, UN DPO were invited to brief the partners on the process of the New Agenda for Peace and get input from the partnership. The meeting successfully provided a platform for engagement, and partners supported the collective contribution to the New Agenda for Peace and agreed on the direction for 2023.

In 2023, the Challenges Forum further develop partnerships with regional organisations, which culminated in the CAF23. Ahead of the forum, CFIS and the organising partners strategically engaged with regional organisations to ensure participation. The efforts resulted in high-level attendance of both the AU and EU, generating innovative discussions. AU also participated at the New York follow-up event on CAF23 key findings.

Earlier in the year, CFIS participated in both the 2023 EAPTC and IAPTC conferences, engaging with a large number of international and regional partners in order to strengthen mutually rewarding collaboration.

Time has also gone into the new Challenges Forum Strategy 2024-2028, to ensure its relevance and usefulness. A draft was presented to the POAC, before presentation to the partnership.

In addition to the above, CFIS has also met with several partners in 2023. In April, CFIS visited its French partners, the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as key researchers at Sciences Po University and the Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire. Topics that were discussed included closer collaboration and synergies on the future of peace operations, cultural and language proximity of peace operations, performance, leadership, and legitimacy of peace operations. France praised the Challenges Forum as an informal platform for dialogue on the future of peace operations, in a time of growing geopolitical tensions.

In May, CFIS also met with the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) to discuss challenges to peace operations, including host state consent, transitions, and UN support to AU peace support operations.

Also in May, the CFIS Director visited Ankara for a meeting with the Director-General of the Turkish Institute for Strategic Studies (SAM), an integrated part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to discuss a revitalisation of the partnership. SAM showed a particular interest in a possible joint event regarding the developments in the Sahel.

In connection with CAF23, CFIS engaged with the Challenges Forum Ethiopian partner Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) to discuss possible areas of collaboration, particularly related to peace efforts on the continent. The CFIS Director further gave a well attended guest lecture at the Addis Ababa University.

These visits and activities have shown clear results that, among other things, direct person-to-person interactions result in large engagements and attendances at Challenges Forum events, including the CAF23 in Addis Ababa.

In the end of November, CFIS visited New York to present the key findings from CAF23 and to reflect with strategic partners and key stakeholders on the Summit of the Future and Challenges Forum priorities. Interlocutors underlined a continued role for the platform to reflect on the future of peace operations. The adoption of UNSC Resolution 2719 is a milestone enhancing the UN partnership with the AU, and the Challenges Forum is pleased to have helped building momentum on the topic of using UN assessed budgets for AU peace support operations.



CFIS engaging with partners during the year.



Strategic Objective 4: The Challenges Forum Partnership has increased its influence



Strategic Outcome 4

CF has increased its influence on UN, regional organizations, and Member States regarding peace operations policy and practice.



Immediate Outcome 4

CF has strengthened its capacity and brand as a global platform for enhancing international peace operations.



Outputs

- Strengthened the interest for CF activities and recommendations
- Created commitment and engagement for the CAF23
- Maintained and further developed the partnerships' digital channels and virtual platforms

Overview of outputs and outcome result

Social media is one of our main communication channels for strengthening the brand of Challenges Forum as an important dialogue platform for enhancing peace operations. During the year, our presence on social media was confirmed by a wide selection of posts, images and videos, while engaging with partners online, highlighting important dates, and promoting the partnership's events.

The main focus for our communication activities was around the Challenges Annual Forum 2023, with practically daily publishing on X (formerly Twitter) from the start of September up to the actual event 26-27 October. The objective was to create engagement and commitment for the CAF23 as well as an interest for the key takeaways from the event's discussions. One contributing factor for the successful outreach of posts, films and social media cards, was the great collaboration between CFIS and our hosting





Preparations ahead of the CAF23 in Addis Ababa.

partners' communications departments. They helped sharing the messages to a wider audience by posting content from their accounts.

In addition to a slight increase in the number of followers on X for 2023, the engagement rate for the Challenges Forum account increased to 3,6 per cent during the year, indicating a major improvement of social media communication in terms of reach and audience engagement.



David Haeri, Director, Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training, UN DPO and Frank Djan Owusu, Team Lead Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) at CAF23.

The report with key takeaways from the Challenges Annual Forum has furthermore been digitally distributed to all partners and key stakeholders, in line with our objective to increase the partnership's influence on UN, regional organisations and member states, regarding peace operations policy and practice.

In line with previous years' focus on our virtual platforms – to allow for efficient communication to a wide range of participants – all our organised events were livestreamed, including the open sessions at the Challenges Annual Forum. One of the sessions, the panel discussion on "Youth, Peace & Security", had almost 330 views during 2023. This suggests an increased interest for the forum, to be compared to the most viewed CAF session the year before, of 209 views.

Moving images and video material have become a vital part of the Challenges Forum communication the last years, given the general idea that they can increase the outreach of a message, make complex information more accessible, and strengthen the brand. In an effort to further highlight our videos and make them more accessible and visible, we implemented a small development project of our website challengesforum.org. This resulted in a cleaner look with current video material presented on the landing page.

Lesson Learned and Ways Forward

The year of 2023 has in many ways highlighted the value of relationships and partnerships. They are the foundation of the Challenges Forum, and essential in challenging times. Strong partnerships requires both in-person meetings, as well as continuous contacts and engagement, also through digital means.

One insight from our many efforts and activities is the reminder of the power of collaboration. By working together, sharing information about the CAF23 and using partners' different communication channels, we managed to reach out better to relevant audiences.

Flexibility and adaptability are also key. This allowed us to successfully mobilise the partnership and contribute to the New Agenda for Peace in a timely manner. We will draw on this positive experience in 2024, when we aim to make the same kind of constructive difference in relation to the Summit and Pact of the Future.



The Challenges Forum International Secretariat at CAF23. From left; Pernilla Rydén, Benoit Plyyser, Julia Qwist Uddenberg, Susanna Ahlfors, Fanny Wellén, Jonas Alberoth.

CFIS Financial Report 2023

CFIS was financed by FBA through funds from the Swedish Government and Ministry in 2023. The table below specifies the budget and the budget outcome.

In addition to the Swedish contribution, it is important to highlight that Challenges Forum partners regularly provided in-kind contributions and assumed costs during different events and projects. We specially want to highlight the contribution made by NUPI and ISS to this year's Challenges Annual Forum. In this sense, the Challenges Forum is a genuine and quite rare partnership.

Table 1: Challenges Forum International Secretariat budget and financial results

1. Income 2023

	Budget SEK	Outcome SEK	Outcome EUR*
Folke Bernadotte Academy	5 690 000	4 882 000	425 391
Swedish Foreign Ministry	3 050 000	1 596 000	139 067
Sum income and expenses per contributor 2023	8 740 000	6 478 000	564 458

2. Expenses 2023

	Budget SEK	Outcome SEK	Outcome EUR*
2.1 CFIS Staff	5 580 000	4 882 000	425 391
2.2 Administrative overhead	110 000	112 000	9 759
2.3 Support to the reform of Peace Operations	1 000 000	553 000	48 185
2.4 Support to UN Mission Leaders	1 000 000	661 000	57 596
2.5 Strengthening Challenges Forum Partnership	500 000	47 000	4 095
2.8 Strengthening CF influence	500 000	190 000	16 556
2.9 Strengthening and development of CFIS	50 000	33 000	2 875
Sum of expenses per budget line 2023	8 740 000	6 478 000	564 458

ABOUT CHALLENGES FORUM

Established in 1996, International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations (Challenges Forum), is a global partnership of about 50 peace operations organizations and departments in 24 countries. Our partner organizations come from major troop- and, police- contributing countries to peace operations, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. We continually strive to strengthen the international network of actors contributing to and supporting the development and reform of peaceoperations.

Challenges Forum is governed by the Partner Meeting consisting of all its partners. Daily operations are led by the Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS).

The Challenges Forum provides an impartial and informal platform for dialogue on the enhancement of multilateral peace operations. A thought-provoking, innovative, inclusive and results-oriented network for sharing knowledge and experiences, we convene key actors in deliberation on different dimensions and approaches to peace operations at our events and workshops, and in our publications.

Through recommendations and guidance on effective policy reform of peace operations, we contribute to the strengthening of international capability and capacities so as to plan, conduct and evaluate peace operations. Central to our objective is to bridge the divide between policy and operational levels; and create a shared understanding among UN and regional organizations, Member States, T/PCCs and host countries.



Challenges Forum is a global partnership that uses its convening power to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations.



Challenges Forum International Secretariat is hosted by FBA – the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development – on behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership.

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