Challenges Forum Dialogues at the Peace Operations Review Week in New York

5-7 November 2025

In November, **the Peace Operations Review Week** convened the global community of experts in peace operations in New York, united in their commitment to support the *Review on the Future of All Forms of Peace Operations (the Review)* with concrete ideas, evidence, and strategic guidance. Co-organised by *Challenges Forum, the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), the Global Alliance for Peace Operations*, and several partner organisations, the week gathered around 30 organisations that hosted workshops and discussions exploring the full spectrum of issues shaping contemporary peace operations.

The week opened with an event hosted by *the Permanent Missions of Sweden and Ghana*, where the *Challenges Forum International Secretariat (CFIS)* and the *Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)* **launched the Challenges Annual Forum 2025 key takeaways**. The gathering brought together more than 120 officials and experts from Member States, the UN system, academia, and think tanks. Ambassadors from Sweden, Ghana, and Denmark delivered opening remarks, with Denmark speaking on behalf of the Peace Operations Trio on the *UN Security Council* (Denmark, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan).

As part of the programme, Challenges Forum also co-hosted an event on **UN Policing and the future of peace operations** with the *International Peace Institute (IPI), the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN, the Swedish Police, the Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF),* and *the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP).*

Key Recommendations

In today's turbulent global environment, predictable multilateral institutions are more vital than ever. UN peace operations remain an indispensable tool, but only with sustained investment.

The UN's liquidity crisis is a real test of resilience. "Doing more with less" is neither feasible nor responsible; persistent underfunding and unpaid dues weaken mandates and undermine the credibility of the UN. Yet these pressures can also spur renewal, driving innovation, adaptation, and a reimagining of how the UN delivers peace and security. This was evident at the two dialogues that Challenges Forum hosted during the Review Week.

Key messages were:

1. **Refocusing on Peacemaking**
   Peacemaking must once again be placed at the core of the UN's work. In an increasingly polarised and transactional international environment, the UN needs to reclaim its political space through proactive leadership and a strengthened use of the Secretary-General's good offices.

   Concerns were raised, however, that the ongoing reforms may not gain the necessary traction, as the current Secretary-General is unlikely to have sufficient time to fully implement the proposed changes before the end of his mandate.

Expectations for the next Secretary-General are therefore high. Several participants stressed that the reforms currently underway should provide an essential foundation on which future leadership can build.

2. **Strengthening the Relationship Between the UN and Host States**
   The UN must renew its engagement not only with host governments but also with civil society and local communities. These actors should be regarded as partners and co-architects in both the planning and implementation of peace operations. Responsibility for delivering on mission mandates must be more evenly shared between the missions, host countries, and the Security Council.

   A strategic compact between these stakeholders could reinforce mutual commitments, increase political costs for parties withdrawing from agreed frameworks, and ultimately provide a more sustainable basis for partnership. More research is also needed to understand how host states and communities perceive and interact with peace operations. Such insights could help ensure that future missions are legitimate, context-appropriate, and genuinely rooted in local realities.

3. **Addressing the Demand–Supply Disconnect**
   In many regions — including the Sahel and West Africa — governments request specific forms of support that the UN and its partners are not always able to provide. Discussions in Accra highlighted that the region views violent extremism and terrorism as acute threats. There is a clear expectation that UN peace operations should contribute to addressing these challenges. On the contrary, in New York, counter-terrorism activities are generally regarded as a separate track and not part of peace operations' mandates. This disconnects risks undermining confidence in the UN's ability to respond effectively.

   The UN must therefore reassert its role as a convening actor capable of bringing together diverse partners behind a shared political strategy. Doing so requires optimising the UN's full toolbox and mobilising capacities across both mission and non-mission settings. Partnerships with regional and sub-regional organisations must deepen, and Security Council resolution 2719 needs to be operationalised and tested in practice.

   While doing this, it is essential that the UN clarifies the normative implications of working with partners engaged in peace-enforcement or other offensive operations. Amid rising militarisation and global rearmament, the UN must safeguard its normative agenda and act as a guarantor that political, security-related, and peacebuilding tools are applied coherently and in accordance with international principles.

   The concept proposed in the UN80 report—*networked multidimensional peace operations*—was highlighted as a useful model going forward.

4. **Drivers of Adaptations**
   Technological innovation is a central driver of change and was emphasised as a means of strengthening mandate implementation—particularly at a time of

financial constraints and reductions in mission staffing. Although the UN has established relevant frameworks and policies, implementation remains slow.

Climate change constitutes another critical driver, requiring peace operations to adapt both their working methods and their operational presence. Missions will increasingly operate in complex environments and confront new types of conflict, necessitating updated expertise and appropriate equipment.

The sustained need of protection of civilians (PoC) is further requiring adaptations. Wherever a UN mission is present, there is an expectation that the civilian population will be protected — whether it is explicitly included in the mandate or not. Protection is most effective when civilian, military, and police components work together, which has implications in the context of current downsizing and the anticipated shift toward smaller missions with fewer boots on the ground. Political missions should therefore also have clear strategies and a stronger commitment to PoC to uphold the UN's legitimacy.

Both PoC, technological innovation and climate adaptation demand substantial resources and long-term, sustainable financing if UN peace operations are to remain effective and relevant.

5. **The Role of UN Police in Future Peace Operations**

   Police components should play a more central role in future peace operations. They are particularly well suited to addressing emerging risks; from rising urban violence and transnational organised crime to new threats linked to rapid technological development, including artificial intelligence and cyber-crime.

   Police officers are also often better placed to build close, trusted relationships with local populations. Their presence tends to be more acceptable to host states, and policing initiatives can operate effectively even outside traditional mission settings. Importantly, they are significantly less costly than large-scale peacekeeping operations, making them a critical asset in a period of tightened budgets.

To conclude, peace operations stand at a critical crossroads. Their future depends on the ability to adapt, lead, and invest in the people and partnerships that make peace possible. The Review Week delivered a clear message: we must build a renewed foundation for peace operations, because communities around the world still rely on them to save lives and support sustainable peace.