

# UNEPS Backgrounder



UN Photos: Basile Zoma / Eskinder Debebe / Marco Domino / Martine Perret

## Time for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service

In his January 2009 report on “Implementing the Responsibility to Protect,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon pointed to a critical deficiency in the UN’s ability to respond in a timely and decisive manner when forceful measures are required. He said:

*“Despite years of study and public discussion, the United Nations is still far from developing the kind of rapid-response military capacity most needed to handle the sort of rapidly unfolding atrocity crimes referred to in paragraph 139 of the Summit Outcome. I appreciate the efforts by a number of Member States to consider the components of such a capacity, including doctrine, training and command-and-control issues. Much more needs to be done, however, to internationalize such efforts and put them in the larger context of finding better ways to protect civilians.”<sup>1</sup>*

For nearly as long as the UN has been doing peacekeeping there have been proposals for improvements to overcome such challenges as the slow or incomplete mission deployments that accompany the present standby arrangements.

Earlier formulations calling for a UN “standing army” or permanent “rapid reaction force” have

given way to the idea of a more integrated “peace service,” mirroring the evolution in UN peace operations that now brings military personnel together with a wider range of civilian police, judicial, governance, humanitarian, development and human rights actors.

The current growing support for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) normative framework has led to renewed interest in a UN Emergency Peace Service, particularly insofar as a UNEPS would provide complementary capacity toward the prevention of mass atrocity crimes.

## Key Characteristics

A UNEPS is specifically designed to help with:

1. The prevention of armed conflict;
2. Stopping genocide and mass atrocity crimes;
3. Protecting civilians at extreme risk;
4. Ensuring prompt start-up of demanding peace operations; and,
5. Addressing human needs in areas where others cannot.

As proposed, it is to be:

- A permanent, integrated UN formation;
- A highly trained and well-equipped firstresponder (‘UN 911’);
- Ready for immediate deployment (i.e. within two weeks of authorization);
- Multifunctional and multidimensional (civilians, police and military);
- Composed of 16,000 dedicated personnel

<sup>1</sup> A/63/677, Implementing the Responsibility to Protect, Report of the Secretary-General, Section IV, on “Pillar three: Timely and Decisive Response,” para 64.

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(recruited professionals, selected, trained and employed by the UN);

- Co-located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters;
- Capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security, humanitarian, health and environmental crises;
- At sufficient deterrent strength to operate in most high-threat environments; and
- A service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements.

A UNEPS would be paid for from the UN regular budget. Estimates on the cost of the Emergency Service vary, but start-up expenses could be as high as \$2 to \$3 billion. Annual recurring costs would be approximately \$1 billion. These costs would be shared among 192 member states and while these estimates may seem extensive, they should be considered in the broader context of a more effective United Nations. By comparison with current military expenditures of many UN member states, the cost of a UNEPS is modest. And a UNEPS would undoubtedly reduce the costs to “the system” from conflicts that could have been prevented or mitigated at earlier stages but weren’t. The net effect of UNEPS



UN Photo: Pasqual Gorriz

could well be fewer failed states, but certainly at a minimum the need for fewer more expensive, traditional peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

## Recommendation

A UN Emergency Peace Service would enhance the legitimacy and consistency of third pillar responses, while improving the effectiveness of R2P’s civilian and military tools, partnerships with regional organizations and preventive deployment capacities.

Although the need for such a standing capacity is clear, there are also financial and political obstacles that stand in the way of creating a UNEPS. To help build the needed consensus, civil society representatives recommend that governments use the occasion of the 2012 Interactive Dialogue on R2P to call for an intergovernmental group of experts (or a more ad hoc group of experts) to study further the requirements and advantages of a UN Emergency Peace Service.



UN Photo: Logan Abassi

*“This venture is of the greatest importance both to the UN as a responsible institution and to the millions as of yet unknown, innocent victims who might, in the future, be saved by this essential addition to the UN’s capacity to act on their behalf. There is one overwhelming argument for the United Nations Emergency Peace Service. It is desperately needed, and it is needed as soon as possible.”*

**– Sir Brian Urquhart, Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Special Political Affairs**