

Building a world community



Update: Peacekeeping and Canada by Monique Cuillerier

Upon election, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to re-engage in UN peacekeeping. He gave explicit instructions to Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan in the minister's mandate letter.

In August 2016 Canada announced a commitment of up to 600 military personnel, 150 police and \$450 million over three years. That commitment was reiterated last November by the Prime Minister in remarks at the Vancouver Ministerial Meeting on UN Peacekeeping.

However, in May 2018 the number of peacekeepers fell to the lowest level (40 personnel; 19 military and 21 police) since Canada proposed the first peacekeeping force in 1956. Fortunately, the numbers are due to increase.

In March of this year, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland and National Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan finally announced the deployment of an Aviation Task Force to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) for a period of one year. The first aviators deployed in June and the Canadians are expected to be fully operational in August.

According to WPMC President Walter Dorn, "After more than two years of dithering and delay, Canada needs to take concrete steps towards re-engaging in peace operations. The Mali deployment is only the beginning. There are many other ways in which we can participate and contribute to the UN's peace operations".

WPMC's Canadians for Peacekeeping campaign seeks to mobilize Canadians and calls on the Government of Canada to increase and improve its commitment to United Nations peace operations. Practically, the campaign's website tracks the status of the promises and pledges that Canada has made, and actual Canadian deployments, using statistics and benchmark data that are updated on a monthly basis.

The Canadian deployment to MINUSMA in Mali includes up to 250 personnel in an aviation task force composed of Canadian Chinook transport helicopters and Griffin armed helicopters to provide escort and protection. Though six helicopters are being

offered, Canada is only allowing one mission at a time (one "tasking line"). So the Canadian offer does not allow the United Nations to send the helicopters to two or more destinations at the same time. This is an inefficient approach. Also it reduces UN capacity, given that the German helicopter detachment could conduct two missions at a time.

Three significant questions regarding the Mali deployment also raise questions regarding the extent of the government's longer-term support for UN peace operations.

1) Duration. A Department of National Defence March 19 press release indicated that Canada's aviation task force would deploy for "up to 12 months." A minimum three-year deployment is customary. How long will Canadians be deployed to Mali?

2) Mandate. Media reports have said that Canadian helicopters and support personnel will be tasked to operate as part of MINUSMA, but also as part of the French-led Operation Barkhane counter-terrorism operation and the newly created regional G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) regional force. Will Canadian personnel deploy for other authorities besides the UN?

3) Training. The Canadian Forces have contributed very low levels of personnel to UN peace operations for over two decades. There is a need to train Canadian military personnel for participation in future United Nations peacekeeping missions, but few measures to increase Canada's training for UN operations have been taken. What is Canada planning to do to increase the training of its soldiers and lead an international training effort as the Prime Minister called for.