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UN Peacekeeping Operations in Africa
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Chairwoman Bass, Ranking Member Smith, Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to be here today to testify about the value of United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Africa. I am Director of the Peacekeeping Policy at the Better World Campaign, an organization that was created to support strong, consistent, and constructive U.S. engagement with the United Nations. Having traveled to six UN peacekeeping missions in sub-Saharan Africa over the last five years to observe their work in the field, I would like to speak to you today about the importance of UN peacekeeping activities on the continent and why continued U.S. financial support for these operations is an investment worthy of American taxpayer dollars.

While not specifically referenced in the UN Charter—the treaty signed in San Francisco nearly 74 years ago that established the UN—peacekeeping operations have become one of the most visible and significant manifestations of the UN’s work around the world. These missions are a concrete embodiment of the core purpose of the organization, as elaborated in the Charter: “to maintain international peace and security” through “effective and collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.” Deployed to some of the most dangerous and inhospitable environments in the world, blue helmets are tasked with a number of critical responsibilities by the UN Security Council, including but not limited to: promoting stability in countries torn apart by conflict; protecting civilians from violence; facilitating delivery of international humanitarian and development assistance to communities in need; training police forces and building the capacity of governing institutions; monitoring human rights violations; providing electoral assistance; and more.

They do all of this at a relatively modest cost: at just over \$7 billion this year (equivalent to approximately one percent of the annual U.S. defense budget), the UN’s peacekeeping budget covers more than 100,000 personnel deployed to 14 missions spanning four continents. According to a report released by the U.S. Government Accountability Office in 2018, UN peacekeeping missions are eight times less expensive than deploying U.S. forces alone.

The last two decades have witnessed an unprecedented expansion in the size and scope of peacekeeping missions, a trend strongly supported by a succession of both Democratic and Republican Administrations. The reasons for this are manifold: countries undergoing conflict provide fertile ground for the growth of extremist groups and organized crime, threatening U.S. national security and economic interests. By undertaking a range of stabilization and protection measures, such as those described above, peacekeepers help avert the collapse of fragile states, prevent civil wars from metastasizing into full-blown regional conflicts, decrease the likelihood that dormant conflicts will flare up again, and create conditions on the ground that support peaceful transitions of power and allow for displaced civilians to return home.

Let me touch on what this looks like in the field. Last year, I traveled to Mali, a land-locked country in West Africa that currently hosts the third largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world. In March 2012, Mali was plunged into turmoil when its democratically elected president was overthrown in a military coup d’état. In the security vacuum that followed, secular Tuareg rebels, who have long accused the Malian state of marginalization and neglect and had mounted a rebellion against the government, seized control of the northern two-thirds of the country and declared an independent Tuareg state. These forces were later pushed aside by a collection of

well-armed radical Islamist groups, including an organization linked to al-Qaeda. These extremists imposed a harsh interpretation of Sharia law in the territories they controlled, reportedly carrying out inhumane punishments such as beatings, stonings, and amputations, and destroying key elements of Mali's cultural heritage.

In early 2013, the situation became even more dire: the extremists launched an advance south, capturing several towns and threatening the Malian capital of Bamako. At the request of Mali's government, France initiated a military intervention and, together with African forces, drove militants out of the country's northern population centers. In the wake of these events, the Security Council voted to authorize a UN peacekeeping mission—known by its French acronym MINUSMA—to help support long-term stabilization activities. The mission was tasked with working to secure key population centers and help reestablish state authority in northern Mali; supporting peace talks and the implementation of the eventual 2015 peace agreement between the Malian government and Tuareg separatists; and aiding efforts to restore democratic governance, which they accomplished by supporting free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, the first-of-their-kind since the coup.

During my trip, I witnessed the impact of the UN's efforts in the fabled town of Timbuktu, a center of Islamic scholarship and trans-Saharan trade during the Middle Ages that had been reduced to a decimated shell of its once glorious existence. When extremists occupied the area in 2012, they destroyed the town's famed historic libraries, books, and mausoleums of Sufi saints, and administered harsh punishments against musicians and artists who dared to play music and women who refused to wear hijab. Since their deployment, MINUSMA troops have worked hard to stabilize the situation, providing security and carrying out joint patrols with local forces to prevent the extremists from returning, and supporting efforts to rebuild local governance and justice institutions. Further south, in the town of Gao, I saw another hopeful aspect of this work: we met with local youth who, with the help of the UN, were building a garden, establishing roots and investing in the land with the hope that it will someday feed their community.

Make no mistake, however, the security challenges that Mali faces are immense. While no longer in control of major population centers, extremists still operate in the country's vast northern region, posing major asymmetric threats to Malian and international forces. This has made MINUSMA one of the most dangerous peacekeeping missions in the world, with 122 personnel killed in militant attacks since 2013. Just last week, one Egyptian peacekeeper was killed and four more were wounded when their convoy was struck by an IED, an atrocity claimed by the "Group to Support Islam and Muslims," a militant organization linked to al-Qaeda. Together with the G5 Sahel regional force and French counterterrorism forces, MINUSMA is also facing challenges from a regional affiliate of ISIL—the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS). The establishment of terrorist safe havens in Mali and the wider Sahel is a potential threat not only to the region itself, but to our European allies and our own national security. As a result, it is critical for the U.S. to continue to support a robust MINUSMA presence in Mali.

In addition to continuing concerns over security in the north, a worrying new development is forming in the Mopti region in central Mali. Here, long-running interethnic disputes are being manipulated by extremist groups with predictable consequences. More than 200 civilians have been killed in violence in this region in 2019 alone, including more than 160 villagers who were

massacred in towns near the border with Burkina Faso in March. As a result, Security Council Member States—particularly the United States—are debating the reconfiguration of MINUSMA in order to bolster the mission’s presence in the center of the country ahead of its mandate renewal in June. While increasing MINUSMA’s presence in these areas would be a welcome development, retooling the mission must not come at the expense of its activities in the north, which continue to be vital to regional security.

I have also been privileged to witness the work of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), a mission that, in 2014, allowed the international community to live up to the promise of “Never Again,” when it helped prevent vicious sectarian violence between Christian and Muslim communities from spiraling into genocide. In fact, in 2016, Amnesty International released a report saying that the UN mission, “has saved many lives and prevented much bloodshed.” Furthermore, in 2016, MINUSCA helped the country hold free and fair elections and supported a peaceful transition of power from an interim government to an elected one. Nevertheless, while the Central African Republic—a country whose political history has been marked by successive coups and instability since it gained independence from France in 1960—has made important strides in recent years in large part due to the assistance of UN peacekeepers, serious challenges remain. The government only controls about one-fifth of the country’s territory, and while a peace agreement reached with 14 armed groups this February provides some hope of greater stability in the future, it remains quite fragile. The Central African Republic is also experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis: the country has been deemed the most dangerous place in the world to be a child, with an estimated 1.5 million children at risk of starvation. The country is also extremely dangerous for humanitarian workers: according to UNICEF, there were nearly 396 violent incidents against humanitarians in 2018 alone.

All of this demands a continued robust posture by UN forces in the country, and MINUSCA is working to help the government extend its authority and prevent remote areas of the country from turning into safe havens for extremists and criminals. Earlier this month, for example, peacekeepers launched an attack on a local militia group that was attempting to control the main road between the capital of Bangui and Cameroon. In January, Portuguese peacekeepers were in a firefight for five hours with militia in the town of Bambari to protect civilians after two police officers were killed. MINUSCA is armed with a robust mandate from the Security Council to pursue armed groups that are targeting civilians, and the mission has proven itself willing to step up to the plate to address insecurity.

The UN is working to protect civilians and address insecurity in other critical corners of the African continent as well. In 2015, I traveled to see the work of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Here again, UN peacekeepers are doing invaluable work. In 2013, just two years after the country gained independence from Sudan—a milestone that the U.S. worked hard to make a reality under the Bush and Obama administrations—the country descended into a vicious inter-ethnic civil war, with fighting breaking out between forces loyal to the President, Salva Kiir, and Vice President, Riek Machar. Tens of thousands of civilians fled to UN compounds to seek shelter, and in an unprecedented move, the mission opened its doors, saving large numbers of people who otherwise would have been directly targeted by warring parties. Today, UNMISS continues to protect nearly 200,000 people at six Protection of Civilians sites around the country. In addition, UNMISS troops have helped deliver humanitarian access to more than 100,000

people, despite efforts by the warring parties to obstruct its freedom of movement. In recent interviews with two researchers—Adam Day of United Nations University and Charles T. Hunt of RMIT University, Melbourne—some South Sudanese credited the mission’s actions—particularly during the height of the fighting—as having “prevented a genocide.”

Last fall, Kiir and Machar signed a peace deal which, while fragile and far from perfect, offers what is perhaps the best opportunity in years to find a way out of this crisis. The UN, which helped support talks between the two sides with regional partners, is working to hold the parties accountable for their commitments. Robust U.S. engagement, both on the Security Council and through its bilateral channels with the South Sudanese, will be critical to ensuring an end to the violence and putting the country on the path to fulfilling the promise of its 2011 independence.

U.S. engagement will also be critical to ensuring the continued protection of civilians in the near term. Given the reduction in violence since the signing of the peace deal, UNMISS is currently evaluating how and when to eventually close the Protection of Civilians sites and facilitate the safe and voluntary return of displaced civilians to their homes. It is important that, as this process moves forward, and civilians do leave the UN sites, the U.S. insists that peacekeepers be given a strong mandate to provide security in areas where civilians are returning. Such measures will be critical to preventing a reoccurrence of the devastating violence and horrific abuses against civilians that has characterized South Sudan’s civil war, and providing breathing space for the peace agreement to take hold at the local level.

It will also be crucial for the U.S. to maintain a watchful eye on developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has seen some hopeful signs of progress recently but still faces significant challenges. UN peacekeepers were first deployed to DR Congo in 1999 in the wake of two devastating “African World Wars,” which claimed nearly five million lives. However, persistent violence in the country prompted the Security Council to authorize an extension of that force in 2010, as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The mission was established to protect civilians from violence, facilitate humanitarian access, and disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former combatants back into society. Since the adoption of MONUSCO’s original mandate, the Security Council has altered its scope of work, most notably creating a “Force Intervention Brigade,” the first-of-its-kind for a UN peacekeeping mission, to carry out targeted offensive operations to neutralize and disarm armed groups in eastern Congo. As part of these efforts, the mission has sought to confront the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)—a Ugandan Islamist rebel group accused of killing hundreds of civilians—in the Beni area of North Kivu, which is currently also in the midst of a large Ebola outbreak.

Recently, there have been indications that the DR Congo may be on the cusp of turning a corner in its decades-long struggle for stability and peace. Early 2019, for example, saw the first peaceful transfer of power in Congo’s history—albeit one marred by irregularities—when Félix Tshisekedi assumed the presidency from Joseph Kabila, a leader who had repeatedly delayed constitutionally-mandated elections in order to cling to power. Nevertheless, the new government faces ongoing questions regarding its legitimacy, given the controversial circumstances under which the recent elections took place. In addition, serious human rights abuses and violent attacks by armed groups persist in eastern Congo—particularly in areas where

the ADF is active—and in the Kasai region in the center of the country. This is happening at a time when the Security Council, some of whose members are eager to reduce the size of the UN's peacekeeping budget, are seeking to downsize the mission. Indeed, MONUSCO is already planning to close seven offices across the country, including four in the volatile east, by June 30th as a way to save the mission \$100 million. While the push for a reduction in the mission's footprint is understandable in the context of improved conditions in certain parts of the country, it will be important for the U.S. to keep a watchful eye to ensure that there is not an escalation of violence and consider supporting a return to those areas—and a corresponding increase in budget—if violence does escalate.

It is important to take a moment and address one repeated criticism of peacekeeping—that missions continue in perpetuity and never shut down, regardless of changes in conditions on the ground. While some missions have existed for decades, that is because members of the Security Council have deemed it beneficial to maintain a stabilizing presence in highly contentious areas like Cyprus and the Israeli/Syrian/Lebanese borders and it is the responsibility of the Security Council, Host Countries, and Member States to work towards a political solution, not solely the work of peacekeepers. Also, in any of these missions, the U.S. could have vetoed mandate renewal and if they had chosen to do so, the mission would have had to close.

Moreover, in recent years, several large missions have closed, most notably Liberia in 2018 and Côte d'Ivoire in 2017. As I witnessed during a trip to both countries, each missions had a significant positive impact on security in their respective countries; in Liberia from a devastating civil war and in Côte d'Ivoire a major political crisis. UN peacekeeping forces successfully supported peaceful democratic elections and transitions of power in both countries, helped disarm and demobilize former combatants, and trained local police forces to ensure law and order. The stability engendered in part by the presence of peacekeepers has helped allow hundreds of thousands of displaced Liberians and Ivoirians to return home. After 74 years, Liberia saw its first peaceful transition of power between President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and President George Weah in 2018. Liberia, a country founded by former slaves from the U.S., has important historic ties with our country—a fact that was underlined by the leadership role taken by the U.S. in responding to the country's Ebola outbreak in 2016. Côte d'Ivoire, in recent years, has been Africa's fastest growing economy, due in significant part to the stabilization efforts of peacekeepers from 2010-2016. In both cases, the work of peacekeepers was not a quick overnight fix—the benefits of their activities took years to reach fruition. But when they did, the Security Council ended their mandates, and brought the international troops, police, and civilian personnel home. In the end, the decision to downsize or withdraw a mission must reflect realities on the ground, not artificial timetables dictated by politics in New York, Washington, DC, or anywhere else.

None of this is meant to imply, however, that the UN is a perfect institution or that the organization's peacekeeping architecture does not need to be re-tooled or improved to meet the challenges of the 21st century. That is why UN Secretary-General António Guterres, with strong support from the U.S., has made it priority to reform UN peacekeeping to make the enterprise more efficient and effective for the future. These measures include implementing strategic reviews of each mission and evaluating if peacekeeping is the right tool to address the unique challenges facing a given country. Such evaluations led to the closure of the missions in Liberia

and Côte d' Ivoire, as well as the down-sizing of the military footprint in Haiti to create a police mission to better address the situation on the ground. The mission in Haiti is scheduled to close in October 2019. With U.S. pressure on the mission in Western Sahara, the parties in conflict recently met for the first time in six years and are scheduled to meet again this spring. It remains clear that constructive U.S. engagement at the UN—focused on more than just budget cuts—drives reform and better transparency and accountability.

Of course, none of these activities can happen in the first place without dedicated funding from UN Member States, and here—like on the Security Council, where it uses its status as a permanent, veto-wielding member to influence peacekeeping mandates and deployment timetables—the U.S. plays a pivotal role. UN peacekeeping operations are financed through Member State assessments, determined by a complex formula that considers several economic indicators and is also used to determine assessments for the UN regular budget. The five permanent members of the Security Council are assessed at a slightly higher rate than what they would otherwise pay for the regular budget, however, because of their veto power over the establishment of peacekeeping missions. Assessment rates are renegotiated by the UN General Assembly every three years, and the current U.S. rate of 27.89 percent represents a reduction from the 1990s, when it paid nearly 32 percent. Meanwhile, China's rate has ballooned from just 3.1 percent in 2008 to 15.2 percent in 2019.

Unfortunately, since the mid-1990s, U.S. law has arbitrarily capped U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping at 25 percent. This policy is anachronistic and unnecessary: since 2000, the U.S.'s regular budget contributions have been subject to a 22 percent ceiling agreed to by the UN, an arrangement that no other developed country benefits from. Because a country's regular budget assessment rate is one of the key determinants of its peacekeeping assessment, the regular budget cap keeps the U.S. peacekeeping rate at a significantly lower level than what it otherwise would be. According to a document released by the U.S. State Department in December, without this ceiling, the U.S. would be obliged to pay 27 percent of regular budget and 33 percent of peacekeeping costs. This is one reason why the U.S. voted for the final assessment rate resolution in the General Assembly. Thus, if we are benefitting from the arrangement and voting for it, we should honor our commitments and pay at the assessed rate.

While Congress has frequently waived this requirement in its annual appropriations bills, since FY'17 it has declined to do so, causing the U.S. to accrue \$750 million in peacekeeping arrears. The effect of these underpayments is quite worrisome: the UN is currently facing a significant and growing cash crunch, with the result that countries who provide troops to peacekeeping missions—including U.S. partners and allies like Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Egypt, and Indonesia—are not being fully reimbursed for their contributions, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. This is fundamentally unwise, particularly given that the U.S. itself contributes few uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations (currently just several dozen military observers and police officers out of a total force of more than 90,000) and therefore relies on poorer countries—who have fewer resources at their disposal to sustain large military deployments—to fill the gap in missions that we ourselves voted to send into the field.

Moreover, this is happening at a time when rivals of the U.S.—particularly China—are increasing their profile at the UN and using their new-found clout to champion their own

worldview at the expense of American values and priorities. The risk of this was illustrated most recently during UN negotiations last June over the 2018-2019 peacekeeping budget, when Russia and China sought to use arguments over cost savings to eliminate a number of critical human rights monitoring posts in UN missions. The fact that this was even attempted in the first place is a clear indication of China's growing influence over UN peacekeeping, which is in large part a function of its status as one of the biggest troop contributors and second largest funder of UN peacekeeping operations. By weakening our credibility and ceding our influence over the decision-making process to countries that are willing to fill the gap and put their money where their mouth is, further unilateral U.S. cuts are likely to only exacerbate this trend.

This state of affairs is counter-productive and should be addressed by Congress this year. Therefore, we call on Congress, for Fiscal Year 2020, to honor our financial obligations to UN peacekeeping operations, and include language in final appropriations legislation allowing us to pay our peacekeeping assessments at the full assessed rate.

Finally, peacekeepers are a last resort and go when and where no one else will go to help the most vulnerable communities living in forgotten crises. I believe it is the U.S. obligation to fully fund our peacekeeping dues and provide peacekeepers the resources to support global peace in security, not just because it serves American national security interests, but because it is also the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time.