Stressing That Cost-Cutting Must Not Undermine Mandates, Speakers Voice Support for Peacekeeping Reform, as Fifth Committee Considers 2017/18 Proposed Budget

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Delegations voiced support today for the Secretary-General’s efforts to reform peacekeeping, but warned that cost-cutting must not undermine the ability of missions to effectively carry out their mandates, as the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) took up the Organization’s proposed 2017/18 peacekeeping budget and budget performance for 2015/16.

Introducing the Secretary-General’s overview report on the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations during those periods, Maria Costa, Director of the Peacekeeping Financing Division of the Department of Management’s Office of Programme, Planning, Budget and Accounts, said proposed resources from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 — during which the focus would remain on Africa and the Middle East — amounted to $7.97 billion, an increase of 1 per cent ($82.70 million) over 2016/17 that reflected higher military and police personnel costs.

The representative of the United States — the biggest single contributor to the peacekeeping budget — emphasized the Committee’s responsibility to ensure that Member States’ investments in peacekeeping were used responsibly and delivered the intended results.  In the same vein, Japan’s delegate said assessed contributions should only be used for adequate purposes and that resource requirements from the Secretariat should correctly reflect the intention of intergovernmental bodies.

For his part, Brazil’s speaker said reforming peacekeeping operations should not mean deforming them.  “Across-the-board cost-cutting exercises would be an ill-conceived approach towards attaining more efficient, effective and sustainable peacekeeping operations,” he said.  He went on to suggest a greater say for troop- and police-contributing countries - a view shared by the representative of Ecuador, speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” and China, who expressed concern as well that a small number of Member States still dominated senior peace and security positions in the Organization.

On other points, speakers emphasized the need for peacekeeping missions to engage more women and national staff, to work more closely with inter-agency United Nations country teams and to scale back their environmental footprints.  The European Union’s delegate, while emphasizing the importance of strict financial discipline, said the Committee should aim to give the Secretary-General strategic guidance and not micromanage the Organization.

In her presentation, Ms. Costa said that in 2015/16, $8.02 billion had been spent on peacekeeping, including in all missions, the Global Service Centre and the support account, compared with the approved budget of $8.30 billion.  Going forward, she said increased costs would be offset by the final closure of the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) by June 2017, the drawdown and planned closure of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) by 30 June 2018, the continued consolidation of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the reconfiguration and streamlining of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

Also speaking today were representatives of Switzerland (also on behalf of Liechtenstein) and Norway.

Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), introduced its reports on observations and recommendations on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations, and on the proposed 2017/18 peacekeeping budget and budget performance for 2015/16.

Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General for United Nations Field Support, also spoke.

The Committee will meet again at a date and time to be announced.

Peacekeeping Operations Budget Performance for 2015/16 and 2017/18

MARIA COSTA, Director, Peacekeeping Financing Division, Office of Programme, Planning, Budget and Accounts, Department of Management, introduced the Secretary-General’s report on the overview of the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations:  budget performance for the period from 1 July 2015 to 30 June 2016 and budget for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018 (document [A/71/809](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/809)), noting that in 2015/16, $8.02 billion had been spent, including in all missions, the Global Service Centre and the support account, compared with the approved budget of $8.30 billion.  The unencumbered balance of $279 million reflected situations including the non-deployment of helicopters, lower fuel prices and higher vacancy rates for international staff in the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), the gradual drawdown of the United Nations Operation in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI) and the faster-than-planned drawdown in United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).  A number of Security Council decisions had significantly impacted mission mandates, including by strengthening the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

During 2017/18, the focus would remain on Africa and the Middle East, she said, as both regions had a sustained need for high levels of deployment.  Proposed resources of $7.97 billion, an increase of 1 per cent ($82.70 million) over 2016/17, reflected higher military and police personnel costs that had been partly offset by reductions in operational and civilian personnel expenses.  Such increases included reinforcements or higher deployment levels in UNMISS, MINUSMA and the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), mandated reimbursements for self-sustainment in the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) and the increased reimbursement rate to troop- and police-contributing countries starting 1 July 2017, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/281.

The overall increase, she said, would be offset by the final closure of UNOCI by June 2017, the drawdown and planned closure of UNMIL by 30 June 2018, the continued consolidation of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the reconfiguration and streamlining of UNAMID operations.  Budget proposals had been formulated in accordance with legislative mandates alongside the Security Council’s recent decision to close MINUSTAH and establish a follow-on mission in October 2017, thereby further reducing overall resource requirements.  Secretariat-wide initiatives for improving the Organization’s effectiveness and efficiency, such as Umoja and supply chain management and global service delivery efforts, would continue and require resources for their successful development.

ATUL KHARE, Under-Secretary-General for United Nations Field Support, speaking on behalf of Bettina Tucci Bartsiotas, Assistant Secretary-General and Controller, Office of Programme, Planning, Budget and Accounts, Department of Management, said the Secretary-General’s report contained detailed information on achievements and plans for the coming year.  It also set forth key improvements in field support, including the introduction of a set of core performance indicators aimed at enhancing accountability and transparency and at providing Member States, Headquarters and missions with a common understanding of expectations, achievements and shortcomings.  On the implementation of the supply chain management initiative, he said the project had sought to get the right products to the right places at the right times and at the right costs for all missions.  Stressing the conclusion of the first version of a blueprint for an end-to-end supply management strategy, he noted progress in acquisition planning, centralized warehousing, analysis of international delivery terms in systems contracts and the implementation of the East Africa corridor, adding that the support account budget proposals for 2017/18 included the restructuring of the Department of Field Support’s Logistics Support Division.  The Department would continue to focus on the implementation of Umoja UE2 and the decommissioning of Galileo and other systems.

Highlighting other key areas, he said the Department would continue to implement a newly developed environmental management strategy, which focused on energy, water and wastewater, solid waste and relevant systems.  Concrete progress had already reduced missions’ environmental footprints, including through the acquisition of 439 wastewater treatment plants.  To achieve further gains, he proposed the creation of an environmental section within his Office through the reassignment of posts from within existing Department of Field Support resources.  Noting other developments, he pointed to an ongoing fruitful partnership with the African Union and looked forward to such relationships with other regional and subregional organizations.  More broadly, he said concerted efforts were being made to address challenges with regard to the Board of Auditors’ identification of recurring issues that needed improvement, including financial reporting, asset and property management and air operations.

CARLOS RUIZ MASSIEU, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), introduced its report on observations and recommendations on cross-cutting issues related to peacekeeping operations (document [A/71/386](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/386)), which examined several themes related to planning, budgeting and financial management practices and to delivering support to missions.  Recognizing the positive development of standardized indicators of achievement, the Advisory Committee made observations on the backstopping ratio, which had increased in recent years despite significant reductions in uniformed and civilian components.  It also expressed concern that the Secretary-General had not provided detailed information on the progress in developing scalability models for the United Nations Logistics Base and the support account for operations and made a number of observations on specific efficiency initiatives, including the ongoing implementation of Umoja in peacekeeping operations, the consolidation of payroll functions and the implementation of a supply chain management strategy.  On the latter, he noted with concern that a comprehensive description of project costs and benefits had still not been provided to the General Assembly despite a significant increase in resources that had been requested for 2017/18 and extensive relative structural changes, as reflected in individual budget proposals.

Turning to other areas mentioned in the report, he said regarding budget proposals that had included large numbers of redeployments and reassignments within and between mission components, the Advisory Committee considered such repeated changes yearly to be destabilizing while affecting the transparency of related resource requirements.  The Assembly should ask the Secretary-General to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the practice of inter-mission post reassignment and redeployment and all such movements should be fully justified in terms of responsibilities and workload.  On air operations management, the Advisory Committee requested that the Board conduct an audit of all such activities in field missions, covering all performance-related and compliance aspects.  Concerning programmatic activities, the Advisory Committed noted the expansion of such initiatives that were funded from peacekeeping mission budgets.  While it was not proposing adjustments to any proposals at the current stage, the Advisory Committee underlined an urgent need for clarity on a range of aspects, including a clear distinction between types of activities and clarification of each mission’s comparative advantage in the delivery of specific initiatives.  It also sought more information with respect to the management and oversight arrangements relating to the mine-action components within missions.

LOURDES PEREIRA SOTOMAYOR (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the “Group of 77” and China, expressed the Group’s appreciation for the Secretary-General’s six broad reform priorities.  However, consideration should be given to greater representation of troop- and police-contributing countries in the United Nations system.  She conveyed the Group’s concern that a small number of Member States still dominated a number of United Nations senior peace and security positions.  In terms of mandate delivery, she said repeated changes to mission structures and post/position locations and functions were destabilizing.  An effective triangular cooperation mechanism between all stakeholders would lend an impetus to mandate delivery.

The Group of 77 shared the Board of Auditors’ concerns over substantive variations between appropriation and actual expenditures, which implied poor budgetary formulation and implementation, she said.  Budgets should be drawn up on the basis of existing mandates and the specific circumstances of each mission.  With regard to supply chain management, she said the General Assembly had yet to be given a comprehensive description of project costs and benefits.  The Group of 77 looked forward to more information on Umoja implementation, unmanned aerial systems and efforts to reduce the environmental impact of peacekeeping operations, she said, adding that an increase in death and disability claims pending for longer than three months was a matter of concern.

HANNAH BODENMANN (Switzerland), also speaking for Liechtenstein, emphasized the importance of continuing efforts to achieve efficiency gains that would benefit all missions.  In that regard, she said the Secretary-General must realize all possible benefits from current and future management reform initiatives, including Umoja, but not with the sole aim of reducing costs at the expense of operational capacities.  Stressing that the prevention was the best, most effective and cheapest way to deal with any conflict, she welcomed a more systematic integration and expansion of programmatic activities in peacekeeping operations.  Finally, she welcomed the Secretary-General’s proposals to strengthen environmental management in peacekeeping operations, saying full compliance with the “do no harm” principle must be a priority.

JOANNE ADAMSON, European Union, said the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly should facilitate, not impede, the Secretary-General’s efforts to bolster the United Nations capacities to support effective political solutions in the area of peace and security.  The goal must be to give the Secretary-General strategic guidance, rather than micromanage the Organization.  Strict financial discipline was key.  Peacekeeping was going through a period of mandated change and that should be reflected in the administrative and budgetary handling of each specific mission, she said, adding that the European Union was open to using all available tools to ensure that budgets reflected changing circumstances.

Emphasizing that mission staffing should be smart and strategic, she said that, wherever possible, the Secretary-General should hire national rather than international staff, particularly for support components.  The growing number of programmatic activities on the part of many peacekeeping missions should not overlap with the activities of United Nations Country Teams, she said, stressing the need to ensure the same levels of transparency and accountability of all money spent by missions.  Budgets for travel, transportation, fuel, training, information and communication technologies and consultants should be drawn up with the utmost care, she said, welcoming the Secretariat’s attention to environmental management in peacekeeping operations.

LUIZ FELDMAN (Brazil), associating himself with the Group of 77, said the Security Council and Secretariat had yet to adequately reflect the perspective of troop- and police-contributing countries.  Their service entitled them to have a greater say, he said, adding that gender imbalance in the staffing of peacekeeping missions — particularly at the higher echelons — was a serious concern.  Brazil welcomed the Secretary-General’s victim-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as his efforts to maximize efficient use of natural resources in peacekeeping missions.  He went on to say that reforming peacekeeping operations should not mean deforming them, adding:  “Across-the-board cost-cutting exercises would be an ill-conceived approach towards attaining more efficient, effective and sustainable peacekeeping operations.”

CHERITH NORMAN CHALET (United States) said it was the Committee’s collective responsibility to ensure that Member States’ significant investments in peacekeeping were used responsibly and delivered intended results.  Peacekeeping budgets must reflect actual requirements, she said, adding that they must be driven by realistic planning assumptions and reflect efficiencies from ongoing management initiatives.  Welcoming the Secretary-General’s commitment to reform peacekeeping, she said her delegation stood ready to work with others to reach consensus on a resolution that would enable the Committee to fulfil its administrative, budgetary and management oversight of peacekeeping, ensure the most efficient delivery of mandates and advance reforms that would deliver tangible results on the ground.

KATSUHIKO IMADA (Japan) said peacekeeping missions needed structures that met — not exceeded — exact requirements for implementing mandates and that his delegation expected serious discussion on issues of support ratio and scalability, budgetary redeployment and programmatic activities as they related to financing.  He noted his delegation’s great interest in paragraph 181 of the Advisory Committee’s report concerning the need for further analysis of programmatic activities.  Reiterating his delegation’s basic position, he said assessed contributions should only be used for adequate purposes and that resource requirements from the Secretariat should correctly and precisely reflect the intention of intergovernmental bodies.  He also emphasized the Fifth Committee’s role.

HALVOR SÆTRE (Norway) said the need for peacekeeping reform was as urgent today as it was two years ago when the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations presented its report.  Many important steps had been taken, but the gap between rhetoric and implementation remained wide.  He said the Fifth Committee should support the Secretary-General’s quest for simplification, decentralization and flexibility.  Policies and procedures should empower the field while at the same time ensuring accountability and transparency.  Force commanders must have full tasking authority so as to run their operations effectively.  Norway invited the Secretariat to develop strategic guidelines and modalities for operation in increasingly dangerous environments.  More women must be nominated by Member States to all positions, including those in the field, and peacebuilding experts should be part of those missions with peacebuilding mandates in order to facilitate transitions and foster cooperation with country teams.  Concluding, he said the Fifth Committee should aim to reduce its tendency for micromanagement and support the Secretary-General’s efforts to reduce administrative barriers to effective delivery in the field.

Financing of Peacekeeping Missions in Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia

Ms. COSTA introduced reports of the Secretary-General on the budget performance for 2015/16 and the budget for 2017/18 for MONUSCO (documents [A/71/674](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/674) and [A/71/832](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/832)) and for UNMIL (documents [A/71/645](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/645) and [A/71/847](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/847)).  For MONUSCO, the proposed 2017/18 budget of $1.23 million represented a 0.1 per cent decrease compared with approved resources for 2016/17.  In March 2017, the Security Council had adopted resolution 2348 (2017), reducing the troop ceiling to 3,700 and deciding that the Mission should provide support to implement the 31 December 2016 agreement, assistance for the electoral process and related training to the national police.  A detailed needs assessment was currently being conducted to determine operational requirements and further action would be considered.  Associated costs arising from that resolution would be absorbed by the Secretariat within the 2016/17 approved budget and similar efforts would be made for 2017/18 to accommodate election-related costs within Assembly-approved resources.  The Secretariat would revert to the Advisory Committee and/or General Assembly in due course with a proposal for any required resources.

On UNMIL, the proposed 2017/18 budget of $122.10 million for the withdrawal and liquidation of the Mission by June 2018, in line with Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), represented a 34.7 per cent decrease compared with 2016/17 approved resources, she said.  Before its closure, an environmental clean-up of UNMIL sites would be carried out and assets would be disposed of in accordance with respective United Nations rules and regulations.

Mr. RUIZ presented the Advisory Committee’s corresponding reports on MONUSCO and UNMIL (documents [A/71/836/Add.11](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/836/Add.11) and [A/71/836/Add.16](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/71/836/Add.16)), respectively, recommending a reduction of $36.9 million to the former.  That would include a $27.6 million reduction related to the new 3,700 troop ceiling, he said, noting that reducing the military contingent could have an impact on related support structures and other requirements under civilian personnel and operational costs.  The Advisory Committee recommended, among other things, the application of a vacancy factor of 50 instead of 25 per cent in estimating the requirements of the eight temporary positions that had been proposed to be established in the electoral support unit.  It also recommended reductions under consultants, official travel, facilities and infrastructure and air operations.  On the latter, based on the usage of an unmanned aerial system, $5 million should be trimmed from proposed requirements of $15.1 million for a new system for the 2017/18 period.  It also asked the Secretary-General to provide the General Assembly with the latest information on current and projected expenditures related to the 150 temporary assistance positions established by the Controller vis-à-vis the voter registration process.

Turning to UNMIL, he said the Advisory Committee recommended a $7.7 million reduction in the proposed budget, stemming from the abolishment of one P-5 post and a reduction under general temporary assistance alongside cuts of 30 per cent to official travel, 10 per cent to facilities and infrastructure, and 20 per cent to both communications and information technology.  Concerned about unsatisfactory environmental efforts during the Mission’s duration, the Advisory Committee expected that the clean-up of all UNMIL sites would comply with relevant policies.