

Box 2.6 Safety and Security

Staff of peacekeeping missions regularly operate in highly volatile and insecure environments, risking injury, harassment, abduction, civil unrest, terrorism, and conflict. While these risks are present in all peacekeeping contexts, they are particularly acute in the least-secure environments, including Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sudan. In Afghanistan, the ten-year international operation suffered its deadliest month ever in August 2011, with 66 peacekeeping fatalities; between January and September, over 300 troops were killed.¹ As of October, UN peacekeeping as a whole suffered 91 fatalities in 2011, with significant losses in Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan.

Recognizing these risks, the UN has made a number of improvements in its approach to ensuring the safety and security of personnel. In 2005 it established the Department of Safety and Security, which is mandated to lead and oversee the UN's security management

system in reducing the risks that UN personnel face in the field. The UN bases its security approach on a "how to stay" principle aimed at finding ways to keep personnel safe and secure during their engagements.

In January 2011 the UN introduced a new security system, based on objective threat assessment, to assist missions in identifying the most acute threats and possible options for mitigation. The UN has also extended security training to nationally recruited staff and introduced a new security policy manual. It has also established an executive group on security to advise and support the Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security.

Despite these advancements, it is ultimately the host governments that bear the primary responsibility for the security of UN personnel. To date, only 89 of the UN's 193 member states have signed the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel,

which requires states "to take all appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security" of these personnel. The challenge of addressing this significant gap in the provision of safety and security for peacekeepers was brought into sharp focus in 2011 in Sudan, where in August three peacekeepers serving with the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) died after the government of Sudan threatened to shoot down a helicopter dispatched for their evacuation after their patrol was hit by a landmine.² While the Sudanese government denies any interference, the incident fits a pattern of previous action on its part to limit peacekeeping activity, and violates the status of forces agreement between the UN and the government of Sudan. The incident also underscores the significant risks for UN personnel operating in these insecure and volatile environments.

Notes: 1. "August Was 'Deadliest Month' for US in Afghan War," *BBC News*, 30 August 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-14720918>.

2. UN News Centre, "Sudan Delayed Evacuation Flight for Wounded Peacekeepers," 4 August 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39235&Cr=Abyei&Cr1>.