

UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
INCORPORATED

**AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT IN PEACEKEEPING
OPERATIONS**

**Submission to Inquiry held by Senate Standing Committee on Foreign
Affairs, Defence and Trade**

1. Introduction

1.1 This submission is in response to the invitation by the Senate Committee for comments on Australia's involvement in peacekeeping operations, with particular reference to (a) the policy framework for engagement in peacekeeping operations; (b) the training of Australians to participate; (c) the coordination among agencies and with the United Nations; and (d) lessons from previous participation.

1.2 This submission has been prepared by the United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) in association with the United Nations Youth Association (UNYA). UNAA is a non-governmental organisation seeking to promote the aims and ideals of the United Nations within Australia, and to encourage the Government in meeting its obligations as a member state of the United Nations. The Executive Committee of the UNAA approved this submission for transmission to the Inquiry.

1.3 The submission focuses initially on the context of peacekeeping, and Australia's role, then moves on to consider the Inquiry's terms of reference, exploring the implications for Australian policies. A set of recommendations is included at the end of the submission.

2. The Current Context of Peacekeeping.

2.1 Peacekeeping activities have become an increasingly prominent feature of the United Nations system as it responds to the challenges of conflicts around the world. The UN Department of Public Information issued a media release on 10 November 2006 headed *United Nations Military, Police Deployment Reaches All-Time High in October*. The release reported that at the end of October 2006 there were "80,976 military and police personnel and some 15,000 civilians serving in peace operations around the world. Currently the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations leads 18 different missions in Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Europe and Asia".

2.2 The upsurge in peacekeeping operations can be seen as reflecting renewed enthusiasm of the global community for the unique role of the United Nations in responding to global crises. The World Summit in September 2005 demonstrated that the world's leaders saw UN peacekeeping as a vital part of

that response, and encouraged further development of such ideas as rapid deployment in crises, and a standing police capacity.

2.3 The Summit agreed to establish a Peacebuilding Commission which would help integrate post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery and ensure better collaboration among the military, humanitarian and development actors. The Commission is now operating with around 30 members representing the range of nations within the UN system. One of its major roles will be to assist in the integration of peacekeeping within a wider framework of response.

2.4 Another part of the United Nations is the Department of Political Affairs which has as its focus the areas of conflict prevention, peacemaking and post-conflict peace building. Its work encompasses preventive diplomacy, electoral assistance, political analysis, and monitoring peace activities around the world.

2.5 The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) also has a role. It helps train diplomats and others involved in work related to IUN activities. This includes offering training in peacekeeping operations, as well as peacemaking and preventive diplomacy.

2.6 The UN Secretary-General has a very important function in overseeing the United Nations' response to conflicts. Through the use of good offices, special representatives, and well-trained staff, the Secretary-General provides the link among the various UN agencies involved in peacemaking and peacekeeping. In his message for the International Day of Peace (21 Sept 2006) Kofi Annan said: "States are paying more attention to preventive diplomacy. UN peacekeeping missions – and our efforts to support democracy and promote human rights – are making a difference".

2.7 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) continue to be an essential part of the peacebuilding scene globally. Their expertise and commitment contribute greatly to an effective response to critical needs, especially in the humanitarian and development areas.

2.8 Thus the context for peacekeeping today is complex and multi-faceted, and it is important that any peacekeeping operation be coordinated closely with the other work being done to build a more secure and peaceful world in which violent conflict can be prevented or at least its impact lessened, and the post-conflict options be expanded.

2.9 Professor John Braithwaite (RegNet, ANU) is undertaking a major research project on peacebuilding and governance. In a discussion paper outlining the project's aims, he says that some research has already been done into civil wars since World War II, and this has affirmed the UN's role. "UN involvement in negotiating treaties increased prospects of peace...the strongest predictor of success was multidimensional peacebuilding with extensive civilian functions in economic reconstruction, institutional reform, election oversight and brokering of a participatory peace".

3. Australia and Peacekeeping

3.1 Australia has generally played a constructive role in peacekeeping, both within and beyond the United Nations system. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has contributed to over thirty peace operations since World War II, and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) has also undertaken many operations. As a result Australia has achieved a good reputation for high standards of work by its military and police officers in areas of international conflict.

3.2 In order to enhance its role, Australia established a Peacekeeping Centre as part of the Australia Defence Warfare Centre at Williamstown NSW in 1993. Within the AFP there is an International Deployment Group (IDP) which manages civilian police involvement in UN peacekeeping missions.

3.3 There is an annual ADF International Peace Operations Seminar held in Canberra, at which 40-50 participants from Australia and overseas examine issues of conflict prevention, the UN's role, the roles of NGOs, legal issues (eg humanitarian law), and training for peace operations. Experts from government agencies, the UN and NGOs contribute to the seminar.

3.4 Current levels of military and police officers involved in peacekeeping work total around 200 ADF and a similar number of AFP, mostly engaged in the RAMSI and UNMISSET operations in Solomons and East Timor respectively.

4. Policy Framework

4.1 The Inquiry's first term of reference seeks comments on the policy framework, procedures and protocols that govern the Government's decision to participate in a peacekeeping operation; for determining the conditions of engagement; and for ceasing to participate.

4.2 AFP officer Peter White presented a paper to the Joint Services Defence College in Canberra in May 2006 called *Peacekeeping has a Long Tradition*. The paper appears on the AFP website. In the paper he suggested that the following criteria are important contributors to an effective peacekeeping operation (PKO) involving police – (a) all parties to the conflict have consented to the UN role; (b) the international community supports it through the UN Security Council; (c) the UN is in command of the PKO; (d) there is recognition of the need for impartiality by the peacekeeping forces. He further argues that an unarmed police presence is an added factor for success.

4.3 UNAA believes that Peter White's approach is relevant to all peacekeeping work by Australia. The effectiveness of any peacekeeping operation will be greatly enhanced if it is clearly under the banner of the United Nations and has the legitimacy that flows from endorsement by the Security Council. Recent interventions by Australian forces in the Pacific region have lacked that UN support and have accordingly generated

unexpected resistance. This has reflected Australia's dominant political and economic position in the Pacific region, making its interventions more easily characterised by opponents as self-serving.

4.4 In this context it is worth referring to a recommendation by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2001 in a report on *Australia's Role in UN Reform* "that Australia should only commit support to peace operations where there is (a) proper authorisation of the Security Council and the mandate is sufficient to meet the circumstances; or (b) in the absence of Security Council authorisation, an agreement and commitment between all parties to end a conflict; and (c) a specified exit strategy within the operation.

4.5 UNAA agrees with this recommendation and recognises that there may be circumstances when the United Nations is not willing or able to become involved, yet Australia has a concern to do so. In such cases, intervention will be far more likely to succeed if it has the clear support of the parties directly involved in the conflict and is within the ambit of a regional organisation such as the South Pacific Forum or ASEAN.

4.6 AFP officer Peter White says that there are some principles for determining deployment, such as (a) clear and achievable goals; (b) clear timetable; (c) supportable and sustainable commitment; (d) minimum but effective force; (e) acceptable risk to police personnel. UNAA considers all these factors to be appropriate criteria when the Government is assessing whether to become involved in any peacekeeping operation.

4.7 UNAA affirms the ongoing role of Australian diplomats in contributing to a peaceful world. It believes that the skills of these officials are important in understanding conflict and potential conflicts, and that the Australian Government should ensure that diplomatic perspectives are examined before any decision to become involved in any other region or country. This will make it more likely that any military or police intervention is integrated with political and diplomatic objectives and provides the best possible climate for the involvement of NGOs and other agencies in post-conflict reconstruction.

4.8 As a priority Australia should seek to use nonviolent means of intervention to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict. In post-conflict situations unarmed peacekeepers should be used wherever possible in preference to enforcing peace through military means.

5. Training and Preparedness

5.1 In relation to military personnel, UNAA and UNYA support the continuation and further development of the ADF Peacekeeping Centre at Williamstown NSW. Sufficient funding should be available to ensure that as far as possible military and civilian personnel to be deployed have access to its resources and training. It also urges the Government to encourage the formation of such centres in other countries with peacekeeping roles.

5.2 In his paper AFP officer Peter White indicates the wide range of functions that police can perform in peacekeeping missions. These include criminal investigation tasks, preserving civil order, resolving disputes between civilians, maintaining peace at major incidents, training local police, visiting prisons etc, These require considerable training and experience. The AFP needs to be assured the resources that will enable it to maintain its personnel at a level of readiness to respond rapidly to requests for deployment.

5.3 Other government agencies and many NGOs have very suitable personnel available to work in conflict situations. UNAA believes these people should have access to relevant aspects of the training provided to military and police officers in preparation for deployment. Language and cultural awareness training would be part of this.

5.4 It is imperative that Australians who work in peace operations understand the basic international law provisions (especially humanitarian law and human rights) if they are to avoid inappropriate interventions in conflict situations.

6. Coordination

6.1 At the United Nations level, it is essential that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations be strengthened to enable it to fulfil the best possible role in coordinating peacekeeping. Feedback from previous missions has suggested the need for stronger command structures, so that those in the field receive more immediate feedback and support for UN headquarters.

6.2 The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, in its report on *Australia's Role in UN Reform* in 2001, made the following recommendation: "The committee recommends that the Australian Government support and encourage other member states in the UN to expand both the personnel and financial capacity of the Department of Peacekeeping operations, in particular through the reintroduction of a system of gratis personnel and/or specific funding of places from the regular budget for a Deployable Headquarters within the department".

6.3 The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (see website) has adopted a plan of action which encompasses the following elements – (a) recruiting capable staff, (b) developing best practice peacekeeping policies, (c) building effective partnerships within the UN system and regional organisations, (d) securing the resources needed to improve operations, and (e) providing effective direction to field missions.

6.4 Within Australia the officers and resources of the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) and the UNHCR Representative – based in Canberra – would be available to assist Australian agencies preparing for peacekeeping operations.

6.5 At the public service level, Interdepartmental Committees could be used to ensure full co-operation among the agencies most involved in peacekeeping responses (eg Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (including AusAID), Department of Defence, Department of Treasury, Australian Electoral Office, Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet).

6.6 UNAA and UNYA believe that there should be regular reporting by the Australian Government to Parliament on its activities within the United Nations. If such reporting were to become an annual event, Members of Parliament would have the opportunity to learn more fully about Australia's peacekeeping deployments and other contributions to international peacemaking.

6.7 Regional fora such as ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum may need to review the structures and processes they use for coordinating responses to crises. The experience of RAMSI will be an important opportunity to consider whether different decision-making processes are needed and more logistical support provided for such interventions to ensure they are truly regional.

7. Lessons from Recent Peacekeeping Operations.

7.1 John Langmore, national president of UNAA, issued a statement on 20 September 2006 commenting on the difficulty being experienced by Australia as a result of unrest in the Solomon Islands. He said "A UN led peacekeeping operation would have allowed Australia to maintain a normal diplomatic relationship with its neighbour, whilst the UN dealt with disturbances to the peace and any legal action that was needed to deter further occurrences". He further stated that "the greatest moral force available in the world to settle conflicts is that of the international community acting together through the United Nations. I hope...Australia will renew its commitment to multilateral peacekeeping under the flag of the UN, and avoid the pitfalls of acting alone of with a couple of friends".

7.2 UNAA and UNYA encourage ongoing research into the impact of peacekeeping operations. The work to be done by John Braithwaite and Hilary Charlesworth at ANU on *Peacebuilding and Responsive Governance* will be a valuable source of information on how interventions have worked and not worked in our region.

7.3 The Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the UN has itself done periodic reviews of its work. A recent example was a study of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). This showed that (a) the 90-day timeline for deployment was unrealistic for a complex mission, (b) the rapid deployment team was unable to supply the civilians needed in the time required, (c) the rapid deployment of logistics personnel is essential, d) the absence of a qualified political team created operational problems, and (e) a standard practice is needed at the start-up phase of peacekeeping operations.

7.4 Australia could assist the UN by ensuring that it is fully aware of these

kinds of reports and is willing to consider ways of helping prepare the way for missions.

7.5 There has in recent years been an apparent reluctance to draw personnel from the State and Territory police forces to supplement those available from the Australian Federal Police for duty in peacekeeping operations. Given the additional pressure on AFP resources for their wide range of duties, this trend should be reversed.

7.6 UNAA and UNYA are pleased that a permanent memorial is to be erected in Canberra to honour those Australians who have served as military and civilian peacekeepers.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The current environment of peacekeeping requires it to be integrated with other aspects of peacebuilding and reconstruction. This both increases the challenge of being involved, and opens opportunities for a wider range of skilled participants.

8.2 Australia has contributed much to international peacekeeping over the years, and can continue this by improving its capacity to respond to requests from the United Nations and regional organisations, building better training and recruitment processes, and ensuring there are adequate resources to sustain such involvements.

8.3 Australia can ensure that its involvement in peacekeeping operations is guided by clear mandates, exit strategies, and procedures that provide legitimacy to its representatives working in difficult and dangerous situations.

8.4 As far as possible Australia should use nonviolent means of intervention in conflict situations, especially in our region. In this context, the conflict resolving and negotiation skills of peacekeepers warrant special training.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The Australian Government should make clear its public commitment to the work of the United Nations and other multilateral agencies in peacebuilding and peacekeeping. It should emphasise to the Australian people and to the public service, police and defence forces that peacekeeping is a major part of Australia's contribution to global peace.

9.2 The Australian Government should acknowledge the value of having the United Nations involved in conflict situations, especially in our region, and seek to work with the United Nations agencies to respond to crises in a coordinated and multilateral way.

9.3 The Australian Government should allocate more resources for the

training of participants in peacekeeping operations. This should include an expansion of the Peacekeeping Centre at Williamstown NSW. A similar facility should be established for the training of police and civilians from government and non-government organisations to ensure an adequate focus on peacemaking.

9.4 In assessing when to respond to call for intervention, the Australian Government should ensure that all parties to a conflict support such intervention, the UN or a regional authority has approved it, that there is a clear mandate and an exit strategy, and that the resources and personnel are available to sustain an effective operation.

9.5 The Australian Government, as part of its commitment to nonviolent approaches, should enhance the role of Australian diplomats in conflict prevention work, mediation and promoting dialogue.

9.6 The Australian Government support the work of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in its role as coordinator of peacekeeping activities around the world; and co-operate with other UN agencies in our region when preparing Australians for involvement in peacekeeping work.

9.7 Australia should work to ensure there are more effective mechanisms in place regionally (eg through ASEAN and the South Pacific Forum) to enhance their capacity to respond to crises with appropriate peacemaking and peacekeeping resources drawn from a range of member nations, avoiding undue reliance on Australia and New Zealand.

9.8 Australia should support ongoing research into the impact of peacekeeping operations on the countries where they are deployed.

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