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PRESS RELEASE

The protection of civilians during peacekeeping operations by the UN and regional organisations

Directorate-General for Communication
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

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Stepping up civilian protection in peacekeeping operations

Rapporteurs: Dr Komi Selom Klassou (Togo) and Johan Van Hecke (ALDE, BE)

Civilian protection needs to be made an integral part of peacekeeping operations, in a "routine process" enabling parties to settle their disputes, says a report adopted by the Political Affairs Committee on 24 November. The report calls for permanent civilian peace services to be set up at national level and in regional organisations such as the African and European unions.

Rapidly-deployable civilian peacekeepers

Military strategies alone cannot succeed in the absence of humanitarian measures and political objectives for peace, says the report, which stresses the need for peacekeeping operations to develop an "improved capacity to act". This should include a "standing civilian peacekeeping capacity", with a coordinating office at operational HQ and rosters of rapidly-deployable civilian personnel.

Troops need training too

The report reminds EU Member States of their responsibility under international law for ensuring the appropriate training of all civilian and military personnel, in line with international humanitarian standards. European training for African military personnel under the "Euro Recamp" programme should include systematic training in human rights and protecting civilians it adds.

UN member states should set up a joint training academy for peace missions to provide at least for command personnel with standard multinational basic training on humanitarian tasks and technical assistance for protecting civilians.

It also stresses the need for pre-mission and in-service civil protection training (e.g. in human rights law and preventing sexual violence) for multinational troop deployments.

No immunity for abuses of power

The report strongly condemns peacekeepers who abuse their power by sexually exploiting civilians or engaging in corrupt practices. Such criminals should rigorously prosecuted by national authorities or by the International Criminal Court, says the report, which opposes granting immunity, in any form, to UN staff or UN-mandated soldiers.

The report advocates creating national "watchdog" mechanisms to ensure that complaints of abuse are investigated and dealt with fairly.

Civil protection instruments

Military strategies for peacekeeping operations with specific protection mandates should include instruments such as civilian unarmed protection, night patrols and radio communication, village defence committees to alert peacekeepers, air cover, rapid reaction forces to respond to disturbances, and "stability police" to support missions and provide exit strategies, says the report.

Plenary debate

"The thousands of civilians forced onto the roads of North Kivu by General NKunda's offensive highlight the need to build civilian protection capacity in a world where ethnic cleansing, large-scale massacres and recourse to sexual violence as a weapon of war are rife", said Dr Selom Klassou, introducing the report.

"We need the goodwill of armed groups and dissuasive instruments such as the International criminal court to remove impunity", he added, pointing out that civilians tend to suffer more in today's conflicts than their perpetrators.

"The non-intervention principle should not apply to cases of genocide or ethnic cleansing" said Mr Van Hecke, adding that "soft-law measures are not what military people are best at - we need well-trained civilian personnel".

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_16/default_en.htm

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