
Foreword

As the United Nations and its partners work to prevent and resolve deadly conflict around the globe, field-based political missions are an increasingly important instrument in their employ. UN political missions are operating today in some of the most difficult of the world's hotspots – from Iraq to Afghanistan, Somalia to the Middle East – promoting peace, reconciliation and good governance in war-torn societies. At the same time, possibly because these operations lack the same visibility of peacekeeping or humanitarian aid, their relatively discreet activities have made them a lesser known and understudied phenomenon.

This new publication by NYU's Center on International Cooperation – a first-of-its-kind review of political missions in the field – helps to address this gap. Its observations and recommendations should be looked at carefully by practitioners, United Nations Member States, and all others who take an active interest in international conflict resolution. On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to congratulate the Center for taking this important initiative, which complements its well-regarded *Annual Review of Global Peace Operations*.

The moment has arrived to pay closer attention to this topic. At a time when the burden of violent conflicts is overtaxing the ability of the

international community to respond, political missions have the potential to help save lives and scale down costly commitments in managing crises and rebuilding after civil wars. They are already making an important difference in many places, as this study compellingly illustrates.

The United Nations has more than a dozen political missions in the field today – covering a wider variety of states and regions than any other organization. They range from classic mediation efforts led by a senior envoy and a small staff – such as the Secretary-General's good offices for Cyprus or Western Sahara – to very sizeable and multi-faceted field operations in complex and dangerous environments, such as the UN political missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. They include a unique mission assisting the peace process in Nepal as well as peace-building offices tending to the difficult politics of post-war reconciliation and state-building in places such as Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic. The list also includes regional offices serving as platforms for preventive diplomacy in West Africa and Central Asia. A similar office is soon to be established for Central Africa.

If there is a common thread connecting these and other diverse operations profiled in this study it may be this: the conviction that at the root of most violent conflicts around the

globe lay political problems requiring political solutions. Different stages of conflict require us to adapt and tailor our responses. The international community needs to enhance its ability not only to stabilize conflicts and tend to the humanitarian suffering they produce, but ultimately to find lasting political solutions.

As we increasingly look to political missions as an option for responding to crises, serious efforts of this kind to assess their performance, draw attention to their needs, and shed light on

their positive contributions are both timely and much needed. As this study makes clear, among the most important challenges moving forward is to ensure that political missions have adequate resources and oversight to carry out their mandates successfully.

CIC has provided us with a valuable mirror on our work, and a learning tool for the future.

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