



Security Council

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Strengthening security sector reform

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

Building on the priorities of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and Our Common Agenda, the present report highlights lessons learned and recommendations in select areas of United Nations and international support for security sector reform.

Section I outlines the background and global context in which security sector reform takes place.

Section II reflects on priority principles of United Nations support for security sector reform, including (a) inclusive national ownership; (b) the primacy of political solutions; and (c) ensuring a governance-focused approach at all stages of reform, including assessments, planning, programming and evaluation.

Section III examines the practice of addressing security sector reform in conflict-affected settings, with a focus on key junctures and mechanisms of reform in which the United Nations is involved, including (a) mediation and peace processes; (b) support for temporary and transitional security arrangements; (c) national policy and planning frameworks for security sector reform; and (d) coordination of international support for security sector reform.

Section IV reviews the experience of supporting security sector reform in the context of sustaining peace and transitioning from peace operations to United Nations country teams, which carry forward support for the key reforms needed to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. In that context, the report analyses the key challenges in ensuring sound national and international funding of security sector reform that is aligned with the principles of transparency and accountability.

Section V outlines key priorities for increasing the meaningful participation of women in the security sector and for strengthening the role of the United Nations in gender-responsive security sector reform.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions [2151 \(2014\)](#) and [2553 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council emphasized the role of the United Nations, including through its peacekeeping operations and special political missions, in supporting national Governments, upon their request, to strengthen security sector governance and develop security institutions that are accountable, professional, inclusive, representative, accessible and transparent, with full respect for human rights and the rule of law, and responsive to the needs of their population, including minorities, women and girls.

2. Following the two reports of the Secretary-General on the topic ([A/62/659-S/2008/39](#) and [A/67/970-S/2013/480](#)), in the present report, the Secretary-General updates the Security Council on the efforts to strengthen the engagement by the Organization in security sector reform and sets out his vision on further steps needed to adapt the Organization's work to the current demands, challenges and opportunities, in line with the priorities of his Action for Peacekeeping initiative and Our Common Agenda ([A/75/982](#)).

II. Reflecting on the core principles of United Nations support for security sector reform

3. Lessons from the past decade of United Nations engagement in contexts of state fragility have demonstrated that even with significant national and foreign resources, countries seldom transition neatly from post-conflict turmoil towards peace and stability. Robust security institutions that provide protection to all groups in society – a sine qua non for genuine stability – can be built only on a bedrock of integrity, accountability and transparency. These values must not only direct the formal conduct of security sector entities, but also take root in the informal power relationships that drive government decision-making. Such reform processes are complex, whole-of-system endeavours. They require sustained political buy-in, engagement and planning and thus need to be an integrative part of larger peacebuilding and development strategies.

4. The climate emergency, global health crises, a renewed proliferation of armed conflict, unprecedented levels of migration, media manipulation, gender inequality and the digital revolution have direct bearings on how safe people feel within and across borders. Governments and organizations struggle to adapt to developing concepts of security, too often still employing compartmentalized approaches that are habitually focused on the military. National security should be understood in wide, multidimensional terms, which will also have implications when sources of funding are considered.

5. The key principles that should guide the United Nations approach to security sector reform were outlined in the report of the Secretary-General of 2008 ([A/62/659-S/2008/39](#)). While those principles remain valid today, they should be reflected upon in the light of the experience and lessons learned over the past decade. Three guiding principles stand out: (a) the principle of inclusive national ownership, with a focus on the meaningful participation and representation of local communities, women, young people and civil society; (b) the principle of the primacy of politics; and (c) the principle of a governance-focused approach anchoring the Organization's actions in United Nations values.

Inclusive national ownership

6. The principle of national ownership of security sector reform is foundational. The Security Council has recognized important elements of national ownership of security sector reform.¹ Yet, the development of inclusive national ownership of reforms remains a persistent challenge when such reforms depart from, and rely only on, narrow political alliances. It is critical that national ownership be reinforced through a complementary bottom-up approach utilizing consultations with local communities and inclusive dialogue. Rather than being singular events, such efforts need to be central mechanisms for security sector reform through which inclusive consensus can be enhanced over time. More investment should also go towards building government capacities for coordination and consultation, national security budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation of reforms.²

Primacy of politics in security sector reform

7. Security sector reform should be understood as foremostly a political endeavour. It needs to be in support of, and informed by, broader national political processes, inclusive of all segments of society as recognized by the Security Council in its resolution [2553 \(2020\)](#).

8. Changes in the way that the security sector is governed and organized will inevitably bring about changes in the distribution of power and resources, not only among national institutions but also in society, including changes to dynamics between men and women. It is therefore important that reforms be implemented through national dialogue and agreements while striving for a more equitable distribution of power and resources, including through the negotiated changes in the composition and architecture of security institutions at all levels. While capacity-building is important, including by providing entry points for reforms, it is vital to understand the political and economic role of institutions from the perspective of different actors and communities.

Governance-focused approach

9. Security sector governance implies a range of societal norms, often linked to culture and history as much as to formal laws, that govern how security is understood, organized, delivered and perceived. Security sector reforms that neglect the prevailing norms that shape security sector governance and focus on technical security approaches alone lack effectiveness.

10. The application of principles of adequate security sector governance pertains to the strengthening of transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and responsiveness to the needs of the people at all levels of governance. Those principles are aligned with the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 16 and contribute to the realization of the wider 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

11. Security sector governance facilitates a wide understanding of security mechanisms and practices in a given context. Mechanisms that are effective in addressing local security threats may not necessarily be recognized as part of the

¹ In its resolution [2553 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council noted that national ownership and leadership of security sector reform was reflected in an inclusive national vision for reform, coordinating the implementation of the vision, dedicating national resources towards national security institutions and monitoring the impact of the security sector reform process.

² DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, *Enhancing Multilateral Support for Security Sector Reform: A Mapping Study covering the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (Geneva, 2018).

security sector, yet they may present viable entry points for strengthening cooperation with state security institutions. Recognizing the value of local arrangements can help to chart a sustainable path towards extending legitimate State authority and the evolution of a more inclusive national security architecture.

12. Security sector governance further brings into focus the role and incentives of diverse actors beyond State security institutions, such as private, informal and traditional security actors, including elders, religious leaders and armed groups. Where relevant, the possible engagement of such groups needs to be assessed against considerations related to diversity and representation.

13. Consistent with the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights and Our Common Agenda, security sector reform should place human rights at the centre of engagement, while adopting a gender-responsive lens to all aspects of security sector reform. Demonstrable human rights compliance is a key indicator of the professionalism of security forces and the exercise of responsible command. Without it, security sectors will not gain the trust of populations – with insecurity, not security, as a consequence. Integrating human rights into security sector reform activities includes issues that address structural or institutional reform, the exercise of command and control and the individual conduct of security forces. Examples are the transparent and fair selection and screening of personnel, combating discrimination within security institutions, training and regulation of operations, and strengthening accountability frameworks. Building dedicated human rights expertise within security institutions to support the operationalization of human rights obligations in practice is important. At the same time, solid coordination of security sector reform with national transitional justice initiatives is crucial.

Recommendation 1

Despite agreement by Member States and practitioners that security sector reform should always be implemented in the service of political solutions, in practice, approaches are often technical in nature. The United Nations will further enhance its support for political approaches to security sector reform and governance by developing, through the Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force, a short system-wide policy on the topic.

III. Security sector reform in conflict-affected settings

14. In its resolution [2553 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council reaffirmed the importance of security sector reform in peacebuilding and sustaining peace, including conflict prevention, and in the stabilization and reconstruction of States in the aftermath of conflict. For security sector reform to play that key role, it needs to be addressed meaningfully early on. In the context of conflict resolution, peacemakers and mediators may have to resist the temptation of having parties sign off on a quick but insufficiently explicit accord that leaves too many disputes unresolved. While the appeal of rapid progress in dire situations is understandable, experience has shown that rushed agreements can easily collapse when further steps are required towards concrete compromise or division of power, in particular regarding the security sector.

15. Today, United Nations engagement in post-conflict security sector reform is shaped largely by the outcomes of mediation and peace processes that typically leave too many security-related disputes unresolved and often put in place fragmented temporary arrangements to buy time. Security Council mandates that subsequently request peace operations to “implement” peace agreements may not be effective when the political foundations for such implementation are absent. The establishment of solid political foundations for security sector reform should therefore guide

considerations around prioritization, sequencing and the content of United Nations support and should inform international coordination of security sector support.

Mediation and peace processes

16. Over the past decade, peace agreements have typically included rudimentary provisions on security sector reform. However, instead of sketching initial contours of longer-term security architecture and governance arrangements that would redefine power structures, they often only establish mechanisms that should start addressing those gaps.³ Experiences in Libya, Mali and South Sudan highlight the political challenges of reaching agreement on meaningful reform provisions as pressure grows to conclude peace agreements that put an end to civilian harm caused by the conflict. Such agreements may be mere ceasefire arrangements that require targeted use of good offices and technical advice to parties to achieve progress on a prospective security architecture or a longer-term security transition plan.

17. The 2015 Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali called for comprehensive reforms of the security sector, anchored in the principles of inclusivity, representation and unity of command of the Malian defence and security forces. What remained unresolved were domestic regional demands for decentralization and diversification of security forces, including the establishment of a territorial police in the regions, and the redeployment of smaller and reconstituted army units in the north of different ethnic composition.

18. Rather than addressing those issues during mediation, the agreement transferred these central outstanding questions on security arrangements to technical bodies and an implementation mechanism for consideration. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was mandated to support the establishment of dedicated mechanisms, namely, a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration commission and a national council for security sector reform. That task took three years to accomplish. Despite significant efforts by MINUSMA, agreement on the implementation of the institutional, security and defence reforms envisioned by the peace agreement and a national security strategy remains outstanding.

19. The 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan addressed security sector reform requirements in broad terms under the chapter on a permanent ceasefire and transitional security arrangements but left the development of detailed reform plans to a technical body. Through the good offices and advice of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the Strategic Defence and Security Review Board established under the peace agreement has been making slow progress in discussing elements of the security sector reform vision.

20. In Libya, the Libyan Political Agreement reached in 2015 focused on political power-sharing arrangements, while security provisions remained at the level of principles such as democratic civilian control and State monopoly over the military and the police. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) was mandated by the Security Council to help build the capacity and promote the reunification of Libya's security institutions. In support of the Berlin process, UNSMIL facilitated an intra-Libyan dialogue, including political, security and economic tracks. This three-pronged approach recognizes that political, security and economic issues are independent and should be factored into a broader solution to the conflict in Libya.

³ DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, *Provisions on SSR and DDR in Peace Agreements* (Geneva, 2020).

Recommendation 2

Given that the security sector often provides the most direct access to levers of power, long-term security arrangements are at the heart of political contestation in many conflicts. In peacemaking, avoiding the topic of institutional arrangements in the security sector risks bringing about a relapse into conflict. It is vital that mediators actively engage not only with civilian political leaders but also with security actors, who often carry a significant political influence.

Recommendation 3

The priority of United Nations engagement on security sector reform is the facilitation of political dialogue on long-term, sustainable and gender-sensitive security governance arrangements, providing advice at the early stages of a mediation process on the design, planning and implementation modalities for security sector reform, including in contexts where other actors are leading such mediation efforts. Mediators can be tempted to prioritize short-term agreements over engaging on allocation of access to and control of security institutions. It is important that parties and mediators consider the costs of deferring such necessary longer-term agreements.

Recommendation 4

To strengthen the role of the United Nations in advising on security sector reform in the context of peace processes, the Organization will continue to advance the integration among the dedicated political, security sector and mediation capacities at Headquarters and at the country level through shared analysis and planning for security sector reform. Cooperation will be further strengthened with key partners such as regional organizations in the area of security sector reform and mediation.

Recommendation 5

Tailored investments in security capabilities, political dialogue and reaching inclusive security agreements have proved indispensable for sustainable security sector reform. Initiatives that build trust between security institutions and local communities and that build the capacities of institutions at all levels to respond to local security and humanitarian needs can advance political dialogue and prepare the ground for wider security sector reform.

Temporary and transitional security arrangements

21. In the context of peace processes, demands to transform governance and institutional arrangements in the security sector are commonly raised. These can be expressed as calls for the integration of former armed groups into security and defence structures. Demands for better representation of local or ethnic communities in national security institutions are also common. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, questions around the scope, required standards and conditions of integration and future governance of the security sector often remain unresolved. Instead, during that period, attention is often focused on transitional and ad hoc security arrangements with limited impact.

22. The situation in the Malian peace process is a case in point. Progress in security sector reform and in the integration of armed groups into the Malian security and defence forces had been a prerequisite for the commitment of signatory movements to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. But while agreement on those issues could not be reached, a pilot project aimed at the progressive redeployment of

joint military and security units to the three northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu was drawn up. In 2021, six years after the peace agreement was signed, only some 50 per cent of the agreed number of former combatants foreseen to take part in the pilot had been integrated into the Malian defence and security forces.

23. In South Sudan, building on the lessons of previous security sector reform efforts, the international community has been more cautious in its support for the implementation of the transitional security arrangements outlined in the 2018 Revitalized Agreement. UNMISS has remained engaged in facilitating dialogue and providing discreet technical advice on a national security vision. The international community has also remained consistent in its messages that international support for security sector reform can be based only on an inclusive national vision for security sector reform and in tandem with enhanced and transparent investment of national resources in the security institutions.

Recommendation 6

Intensive support for transitional and ad hoc security arrangements, beyond low-key confidence-building measures, has largely failed to serve as a bridge towards longer-term security arrangements. The investment of resources in such arrangements may also adversely impact the incentives of actors to reach sustainable agreements and may contribute to a fragmentation of the security landscape as more groups that want to benefit from arrangements emerge. This lesson reinforces the primacy of United Nations political engagement towards lasting security sector reform and governance agreements among parties. The United Nations will strengthen its capacity to advise on security sector reform models, including process design, assessments of cost implications and timelines. The Organization will develop knowledge and lessons from diverse national experiences and will reinforce United Nations and national capacities for strategic planning of security sector reform.

National policy and planning frameworks

24. National security policies and strategies have long been the hallmark of national ownership of security sector reform. They signal strategic intent to external stakeholders and are intended to enhance transparency and accountability at home. They are also the collective articulation of what a country and its peoples uphold as their security values. Ownership is also expressed through constitutional provisions and laws that govern the security sector, including its oversight and accountability. Support for the development of an inclusive national vision for the security sector has been a central part of United Nations engagement in security sector reform over the past decade.

25. Conflict, insecurity and violence play out in unique ways in each context, requiring unique responses. Nationally owned security frameworks present an opportunity to translate general principles of security sector reform and the rule of law into local conditions and needs. Nonetheless, a review of frameworks in conflict-affected contexts reveals that such documents often display very little conflict sensitivity or gender sensitivity.

26. Societal divisions, competition in access to State resources and unwillingness to address structural risks and drivers of conflict in the security sector are key obstacles to developing inclusive and meaningful security frameworks in conflict-affected settings. Tight deadlines, often imposed by donors who are unwilling to provide support in the absence of national planning frameworks, inadvertently favour technical documents developed by foreign experts over broad-based dialogue and consultation. More broadly, in contexts of ongoing conflict, national security sector

reform frameworks should not serve as a justification for internationally supported security-institution and capacity-building programmes that outpace progress in political dialogue and social and economic reforms.

27. National frameworks often display little consideration for the political, economic, social, cultural or institutional context in which they are placed. In situations in which communities have not experienced protection by national military or security forces and have relied on community-based mechanisms for generations, national-security frameworks have largely failed to recognize or address those realities or provide for a sustainable and locally owned vision for their future role in security sector governance.

28. As work conducted by the United Nations in parts of Latin America and other regions demonstrates, evidence-based and problem-specific security sector policies, developed in close collaboration with communities and relying on locally accepted mechanisms of participation and oversight, can make a real difference in reducing violence and building trust between citizens and institutions of the State.⁴ In Ukraine and El Salvador, balanced and inclusive support to government and grass-roots organizations connected the national security planning process with local conditions and needs, fostering an environment conducive to peacebuilding and development.

Recommendation 7

Current practices underpinning the development of national security frameworks should prioritize national and local context over generic capacity indicators. The capacity of society to participate in security governance at the levels of local government, communities, civil society, women and young people needs to be fostered. Policies that focus on resolving specific security challenges would be more amenable to meaningful evaluation and timely adjustments. Importantly, such approaches could spur nationally owned innovation in institutional design and lead to sustainable security improvements that generic capacity-building strategies and programmes have largely failed to deliver. National security policies and strategies also offer an important opportunity to mainstream a gender perspective in all aspects of security sector reform and governance, remove legal, institutional and regulatory barriers to women's equal participation in the security sector and increase their representation at all levels within security institutions.

Coordination of international support in conflict-affected settings

29. Coordination of international support to security sector reform is a prime national task. Over the past decade, the Security Council and national Governments have frequently requested the United Nations to lead support for the coordination of international assistance in respect of national security sector reform efforts, in compliance with the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces. The United Nations has played an important role in improving the mechanisms and rules governing the coordination of security sector reform. The implementation of relevant mandated tasks by MINUSMA, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UNSMIL and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia has resulted in a strengthening of the principle of national ownership, the building of national capacity for coordination, the strengthening of accountability mechanisms to address human rights violations and abuses, the strengthening of

⁴ United Nations Development Programme, *Analysis on innovation in citizen security and human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean – A perspective from the public policies and institutional management* (2020).

partnerships and an improvement in multilateral cooperation more broadly. Coordination frameworks have contributed to more predictability as partners step up to lead on specific aspects of reform under the overall direction of national authorities.

30. Despite that progress, the lack of coordination among international partners is a persistent challenge for effective security sector reform.⁵ Unlike other areas of international assistance, such as development or humanitarian action, security sector coordination is not guided by overarching principles. Coordination among international partners does not depart from shared analysis, assessments and planning and is rarely linked to clear priorities. Technical capacity-building programmes are developed and approved in national capitals and cannot be easily adjusted to changing circumstances on the ground. Addressing those gaps and clearly aligning the coordination of security sector reform with agreed principles as outlined in Security Council resolution [2553 \(2020\)](#) is a key priority, including in defence sector reform. Partnership mechanisms and processes should clarify roles to ensure the predictability of support by international actors.

Recommendation 8

Peace operations will develop and periodically update integrated plans in support of security sector reform that are aligned with mandates and political objectives and clearly outline the roles of all United Nations system actors, in line with relevant mandates, and taking into account the engagement of other bilateral and multilateral actors. The United Nations will conduct security sector reform assessments in close cooperation with national counterparts and international partners to inform planning and joint monitoring and evaluation of security sector reform support.

Recommendation 9

The Security Council has requested that the Secretariat develop strategic partnerships and ensure the transparency, accountability and inclusivity of international support, including through the Organization's coordination role where mandated. The Council has also asked the Secretary-General to report on international support for security sector reform through specific reports. To implement those tasks, the Organization will work closely with partners to develop joint planning mechanisms for security sector reform support and to better link such planning to national priorities and will put in place coordination mechanisms regarding international support for security sector reform as outlined by the Security Council in its resolutions [2151 \(2014\)](#) and [2553 \(2020\)](#). In contexts in which the United Nations is implementing Security Council mandates for security sector reform, it is critical that all international support provided, including bilateral and multilateral and that of the United Nations, be closely coordinated. Effective coordination should also include cooperation in the joint application of the human rights due diligence considerations.

IV. Role of security sector reform in sustaining peace and facilitating sustainable development

31. It is the prerogative of every society to determine its own vision of security and to choose and develop institutional and governance arrangements for the security

⁵ Adedeji Ebo, "UN support to SSR: From peacekeeping to sustaining peace" in Adedeji Ebo and Heiner Hänggi (Eds.), *The United Nations and Security Sector Reform: Policy and Practice* (Vienna, 2020).

sector most suitable to its specific historical, cultural, economic and security traditions, in full compliance with the State's international legal obligations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers an important framework for planning and implementing security sector reforms tailored to the unique circumstances of each context and able to respond to complex and emerging challenges such as climate change, urbanization and the digital revolution.⁶

Planning for drawdown and transitions from peace operations

32. The ability of national security institutions to effectively protect civilians and uphold human rights is a key requirement as peace operations start to draw down. Typically, important reforms are still under way or have yet to be initiated, while support for such processes needs to be handed over from peace operations to country teams and partners. Where transition processes were conducted successfully, they ensured that national authorities had in place whole-of-government strategies that were affordable and were implemented as part of overall public administration reform and national development frameworks. Peace operations are essential in fostering early-on collaboration among national authorities, the United Nations country team and relevant partners, to ensure the continuation of national reform through sustained implementation of key initiatives and sustained national and international funding of reforms.

33. Following the exit of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), security sector reform has played an important role in sustaining peace in those countries. Since the completion of the UNOCI mandate, the United Nations country team has continued to support security sector reform, including local civil-military committees enabling the population to participate in the implementation of a national security sector reform strategy. Those efforts require continued political engagement by the resident coordinator to create the space for the United Nations country team to strengthen the rule of law and human rights and to reinforce the accountability and transparency of the security sector, thereby creating a safeguard against the resurgence of conflict.

34. The Peacebuilding Fund has been critical in those contexts, including through the funding of peace committees that were set up in all 15 counties in Liberia to further the community-centred approach to security sector reform. Such mechanisms allow for public participation and ownership of reforms and have served as legitimizing factors for States that were gradually restoring their authority and rebuilding the social contract with communities and stakeholders at the local level, in line with a broader governance framework set forth in the national security sector reform strategies.

35. Transition planning in Liberia also focused on rendering peace consolidation through security sector reform affordable. The security sector public expenditure review undertaken jointly by the United Nations and the World Bank in Liberia estimated that a financing gap of \$86 million between the cost of maintaining public order and projected revenues would emerge in the period 2012–2018. It recommended inter-agency collaboration among the Ministry of Finance, the National Security Council and the leadership of security institutions to reallocate funds or identify cross-cutting measures.

⁶ United Nations Office at Geneva-DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, “The Impact of Climate Change on Global and Local Security Governance: Learning from Local Experiences of the Security Sector”, Seminar Report, 2020.

Recommendation 10

To ensure that key reforms of the security sector can be financially sustained after the drawdown of peace operations, the Secretary-General's senior representatives work closely with national authorities to support and conduct in a timely manner, when requested, a national security sector public expenditure review to ensure the affordability, national ownership and sustainability of security sector reform processes and ensure that gender-related aspects of reform are considered and appropriately funded. Such reviews are especially relevant in transition settings to help host States prevent and mitigate financial shortfalls following the drawdown of peace operations, which is often accompanied by a reduction in international financial assistance. Peace operations can offer technical support to such reviews at key stages of the national security sector reform process and the mission cycle, including at the start-up and transition phases if mandated or requested to do so. Pooled funding, such as multi-partner trust funds, could also support sustained security sector reform implementation.

Sustaining peace beyond conflict-related settings

36. In a growing number of contexts, national authorities have requested United Nations support in the design, coordination and implementation of national security sector reform processes. In Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea and Lesotho, national Governments initiated security sector reforms following a peaceful transfer of power. Yet, developments in Guinea and Burkina Faso, where the military disposed of elected governments, illustrate too well the challenges of maintaining a true commitment to a key notion of democratic societies: civilian control of the armed forces.

37. Guided by national priorities and local context, the United Nations has increasingly leveraged the combined expertise and tools of the peace and security, development and human rights pillars, under the leadership of resident coordinators and often utilizing the Global Focal Point for the Rule of Law, to support Member States in developing their security sectors in line with broader political and democratic changes in society.

38. In each context, the important role of the resident coordinators was highlighted and the Peacebuilding Fund played a pivotal role, providing flexible resources to support security sector reform design and coordination. In the Gambia, it enabled the operationalization of a civilian-led system of governance and management for the security sector, increased coordination among international and regional organizations and facilitated the development of the 2019 national security policy and the subsequent strategies on security sector reform.

39. Leveraging the good offices of regional and subregional organizations and close coordination and alignment of efforts with bilateral partners is critical to ensuring the sustainability of international support. The United Nations has worked alongside the African Union as well as the Economic Community of West African States in the Gambia and the Southern African Development Community in Lesotho to maintain political commitment to security sector reforms. Joint assessments facilitated a common understanding of peace and development challenges early in the process. Inter-agency security sector reform technical assessment missions deployed to the Gambia in 2017, 2019 and 2021 contributed directly to national priority-setting and generated entry points for coordinated political engagement by the United Nations and its partners.

40. In the Western Balkans, the United Nations recently supported authorities in developing a regional road map for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession,

misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. The road map was operationalized through tailored action plans developed by each road map beneficiary, with measurable and time-bound overall targets. The establishment of a unique regional coordination and monitoring platform supported by the European Union, and the United Nations multi-partner trust fund is further contributing to the provision of timely, targeted and coordinated support by international partners and donors to national Governments in the region.

41. Some of the key challenges that Governments have faced pertain to the funding and prioritization of reforms and the coordination of external support. Popular demand for quick and visible changes places pressure on Governments that have a security sector that weighs heavily on the national budget, yet equipment and infrastructure are outdated and the salaries of ordinary police officers, soldiers and ministry employees are low. Changes that enhance the transparency of expenditures, including procurement and payroll management, are often sensitive given that they touch on vested interests of groups and individuals, but may be necessary to allow for the hiring and training of young recruits that could also enhance inclusivity and increase the representation of women.

42. The absence of sustainable pensions for security sector personnel presents an additional financial and political burden on reforms. Thus, Governments tend to find it challenging to maintain a commitment to structural reforms.

43. In Burkina Faso, owing to a broad consultation process that included consensus-building among political parties, civil society and security institutions, it took close to four years to develop an inclusive and nationally owned security strategy, which was adopted in late 2020. At the same time, a rapidly deteriorating security situation led the Government to shift its focus towards military-led counter-terrorism efforts. The United Nations Mine Action Service has partnered with the Ministry of Security on improvised explosive devices threat mitigation. The recent military coup has put into question the nationally agreed commitments and vision for security sector reform, which are focused on strengthening policing capacity and democratic governance of the security sector.

Recommendation 11

The United Nations will continue to build the expertise and capacity of resident coordinators to accompany Governments that are striving to develop and strengthen their security sector as part of democratic transitions. Timely support through surge capacities, including the standing capacity on security sector reform and governance (“SSuRGe Team”) in Brindisi, Italy, established through extrabudgetary support from partners and donors, is intended to include support for Governments to plan for and raise funding to address urgent reform needs.

Recommendation 12

To ensure continued progress and build broad-based ownership, one good practice has been the integration of security reforms into national development plans that allow for deliberate changes over time while not losing sight of the commitment to implement needed structural reforms. Linking reforms of security institutions to development plans may help to insulate reforms from polarization and short-term thinking in moments of crisis.

Financing security sector reform and development assistance

44. Parts of funding for national defence are still too often outside national budget frameworks, not based on international standards for public expenditure and financial

accountability and not subject to parliamentary oversight. Confidentiality in limited areas of national defence and intelligence budgeting can at times be justified. However, in such cases, behind-closed-door oversight arrangements for parliament would help to maintain needed checks and balances. Lack of transparency in security expenditure management hinders effective national budgeting and sharply increases the risk of corruption in the security sector, in turn weakening the effectiveness and professionalism of security forces and undermining popular trust in State institutions. It is also important to ensure the integrity, impartiality and transparency of external support, including expert advice. The practice of defence offsets – industrial compensation arrangements required by arms-importing Governments as a condition for the purchase of foreign defence articles and services – is a particular example of non-transparent financial handlings that are prone to corruption.

45. Shrinking fiscal space and increased debt servicing, exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis, have further reduced the financial resources available to the most fragile Member States for security sector reform.

46. Conflict-affected countries depend more than ever on external financing and technical cooperation to close budgetary gaps for security sector reform and to make progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16. External financing of security sector reform is recognized by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development as contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. The members of the Committee can report expenditures for technical cooperation aimed at improving good governance, democratic control and civilian oversight as official development assistance (ODA).

47. ODA-eligible funding for security sector reform remains a largely untapped source of external financing for security sector reform and governance. The Development Assistance Committee reported that its members had allocated \$802 million in ODA to security system management and reform globally, or 0.6 per cent of their total ODA, for 2019. Host States of United Nations peacekeeping operations (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, Mali and South Sudan) received, in total, around \$100 million in ODA for security sector reform per year. Regrettably, this is insufficient to start bridging funding gaps in conflict-affected States.

48. In addition, security is not included in the integrated national financing frameworks for sustainable development.⁷ There is a concern that important national security sector reform and governance priorities, such as democratic governance and accountability of security institutions, may not receive sufficient funding even when prioritized in national prevention, recovery and development plans.

49. The international financing landscape for security sector reform is fragmented and lacks transparency. There is no mechanism to track the flow of non-ODA-eligible support. Donors do not use a shared methodology to record different categories of support, thus placing a burden on national oversight and accountability mechanisms such as parliaments, independent oversight bodies or civil society. This undermines national ownership as well as the effective planning, coordination and evaluation of security sector reform. The ongoing dialogue between the members of the Development Assistance Committee and their partners on a new concept of total official support for sustainable development is thus welcome.

⁷ Adopted in the 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda in the context of the financing for development initiative. See <https://inff.org>.

Recommendation 13

It is critical to scale up support for the strengthening of the institutional capacity of conflict-affected States to plan, mobilize, budget, allocate and spend national resources on defence and security in line with national priorities within a strong accountability and oversight framework and ensuring the integration of gender-related priorities and needs. Enhanced reporting by Member States on external security assistance in the total official support for sustainable development would improve transparency and mutual accountability between development partners and contribute to enhancing the sustainability of national financing for security sector reform. The Inter-Agency Security Sector Reform Task Force will contribute to that dialogue.

50. The United Nations has supported the Governments of the Central African Republic, Liberia, Mali and Somalia in strengthening national capacities to efficiently plan, mobilize, allocate and manage national resources and donor funding towards their security sector reform processes. In 2016, the United Nations assisted the Central African Republic, jointly with the European Union and the World Bank, in conducting a recovery and peacebuilding assessment and elaborating a national plan for recovery and peacebuilding that outlines the costs for priority initiatives, including on security sector reform. In the period 2017–2018, support provided by UNMIL to the Liberian authorities in respect of costing and budgeting the action plan for the national security strategy ensured predictable funding for the security sector in the context of the Mission drawdown and exit.

51. Within the United Nations-World Bank Partnership Framework for Crisis-Affected Situations, the United Nations and the World Bank have collaborated on supporting joint public expenditure reviews of the security and justice sectors in five countries: Liberia (2011–2013 and 2017–2018), Somalia (2014–2017), the Central African Republic (2016–2017), Guinea-Bissau (2017–2018) and the Gambia (2018–2019). Those reviews have informed national-security planning, including the Liberia-UNMIL security transition plan, and a security sector assessment in the Gambia. A joint technical guidebook (2017) provides detailed guidance on the methodology to conduct such reviews.⁸

Recommendation 14

The United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and the World Bank will further strengthen the coordination of security sector reform support at Headquarters and at the country level. The African Union Peace and Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission should enable the exchange of experiences and good practices based on agreed global and regional norms for security sector reform.

Recommendation 15

Building complementarity between international security, peacebuilding and development partners is vital for effective and accountable international financing of security sector reforms. The United Nations will develop system-wide planning tools for security sector reform support, in close cooperation with key partners. Principles to guide international coordination of security sector support should also foster policy coherence among development, human rights, peacebuilding and security actors and strengthen strategic partnerships.

⁸ Bernard Harborne, William Dorotinsky and Paul M. Bisca, eds., *Securing Development: Public Finance and the Security Sector: A Guide to Public Expenditure Reviews in the Security and Criminal Justice Sectors* (World Bank-United Nations, 2017).

Recommendation 16

Working through dedicated partnership arrangements, the United Nations will further strengthen its engagement with international financial institutions to encourage enhanced and innovative financing of security sector reform as part of broader public sector reforms to increase the fiscal space necessary to undertake the needed investments in the security sector.⁹ It will also ensure better alignment of available financial and programmatic tools through regular joint planning among the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union and the World Bank, with a view to prioritizing structural risks, developing incentives for national stakeholders to act in line with national commitments for reform and developing the capacity of institutions and mechanisms at all levels of society to participate in security sector governance. These mechanisms should also ensure that adequate funding is in place to advance the implementation of measures to increase the participation of women in the security sector and to increase their role in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of security sector reforms at the national level.

V. Gender and security sector reform

52. During the past decade, many Member States have advanced gender equality in their national security sectors, including by ratifying international human rights instruments, repealing gender-discriminatory regulations and implementing gender-responsive national security strategies. As a result, women in many countries have been able to enter positions in the security sector traditionally occupied by men. As of 2021, 12 per cent of the ministers of defence in the world are women,¹⁰ demonstrating that change is possible even at the highest levels. Globally, United Nations norms on gender-responsive security sector reform significantly advanced with the adoption of Security Council resolution 2553 (2020), in which the Council, for the first time, encouraged Member States to develop security sector reform strategies and programmes that removed legal, institutional and regulatory barriers to women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the security sector and increased their representation at all levels within the security sector.

53. However, in country-specific mandates, gender is featured in the language of only 4 out of 11 Security Council mandates on security sector reform.¹¹ Furthermore, where mandates and policies exist, a significant gap is found between the expectations established by those frameworks and the resources – political, technical and financial – available for the Organization's work in that area.¹²

⁹ The proposal by the African Development Bank to design security-indexed investment bonds that will allow Africa to leverage resources on the global markets to reinforce its security is a good example of innovation.

¹⁰ Publicly available data from 193 countries compiled by the Security Sector Reform Unit, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peace Operations in August 2021.

¹¹ United Nations Support Mission in Libya, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

¹² Department of Peace Operations, "Consultation on strengthening UN peace operations support to gender-responsive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform: Leveraging opportunities and lessons learned", October 2019.

Building inclusive and accountable security sectors: Removing barriers to women's participation

54. The promotion of gender equality and women's participation in the security sector has been widely recognized as a critical step in building more accountable, inclusive and responsive institutions. However, United Nations and partner assessments¹³ in this area have found that women face significant political, policy, legal and institutional barriers that impede their recruitment, retention and promotion in the security sector, including assignment to traditional gender roles; exclusion from career training and combat positions; inadequate facilities, equipment and uniforms; discriminatory pregnancy policies; limited access to child care; sexual harassment from peers and superiors; weak accountability mechanisms; and rules and regulations that inhibit their access to higher positions.¹⁴

55. As at 31 October 2021, only 7.5 per cent of uniformed personnel in peace operations are women.¹⁵ As part of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations,¹⁶ 18 barrier assessments have been undertaken worldwide to identify obstacles that remain at the national level to women's deployment to peace operations.

56. In response to those challenges, the United Nations has taken significant steps to help countries address barriers and increase women's participation in national security sectors, including through assessments, the establishment of gender parity quotas, the review of human resources policies and gender-sensitive recruitments. For example, in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA is supporting national security institutions in achieving the 35 per cent quota established for women in the country's Equality Law. In Somalia and the State of Palestine, United Nations support resulted in an increase in women's representation in the police from 5 per cent to 15 per cent and 3.5 per cent to 6 per cent, respectively. In the Western Balkans, the representation of women in the armed forces increased from 3 per cent to 6 per cent in 2012 to 6 per cent to 9 per cent in 2020.

Enhancing the capacities of national security sectors to prevent violence and protect communities

57. Lack of representation and diversity within the security sector affects peoples' trust in State institutions and negatively impacts the ability of countries to prevent violence and deliver responsive security services to all. Grievances deriving from abuses by security forces can trigger the occurrence or reoccurrence of violent conflict and negatively influence public perceptions of the State and the willingness of women, young people and communities to collaborate with security services or, alternatively, compel them to turn to other actors for protection and justice.¹⁷

¹³ On the basis of data collected for the present report from United Nations entities based on 27 countries. Other assessments include: United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans* (2014 and 2021); and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and International Criminal Police Organization, *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region* (2020).

¹⁴ See Department of Peace Operations, "Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028", available at peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/uniformed-gender-parity-2018-2028.pdf.

¹⁵ United Nations peacekeeping gender statistics, Contribution of uniformed personnel to the United Nations by mission, personnel type, and of experts on mission, formed police units, individual police, staff officers and troops as at 31 October 2021.

¹⁶ See dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative.

¹⁷ United Nations – World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches for Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, D.C., 2018).

58. Globally, fewer than 10 per cent of women subjected to sexual violence seek the help of the police.¹⁸ In conflict-affected settings, mistrust in security institutions is widespread, as security forces are often among the main perpetrators of conflict-related sexual and other forms of gender-based violence.¹⁹ In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO supported the investigation and prosecution of serious crimes committed against the civilian population, which resulted in the trial and imprisonment of senior officers from the national army and armed military groups. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and United Nations Development Programme assist Governments around the world with building national security sector capacities to prevent and protect communities from sexual and gender-based violence, from Iraq, Kyrgyzstan and Mexico to Nigeria and Pakistan.

59. Ending impunity and establishing vetting mechanisms that prevent perpetrators of sexual violence and of other serious human rights violations and abuses from being recruited, retained or promoted within the security sector remains critical. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, since the adoption by the army of an action plan to prevent and respond to sexual violence in 2014, 137 soldiers, including senior officers, have been prosecuted. In South Sudan, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and UNMISS helped to develop an action plan containing provisions to vet perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence. In Somalia, the police developed and implemented the Somali police selection, vetting and recruitment guidelines, which include vetting actions to prevent the recruitment of offenders of sexual violence.

Recommendation 17

The United Nations will continue to strengthen its capacity to mainstream gender in all forms of United Nations support for security sector reform. The United Nations will also publish a report on gender equality and the status of women in the defence sector, which will help countries to enhance women's representation in the armed forces, including in their troop contributions to peace operations. At the national level, the Organization will work with Member States to support barrier assessments that identify obstacles to women's participation in national security sectors, particularly in decision-making positions.

Recommendation 18

The establishment of vetting mechanisms to prevent perpetrators of sexual violence from joining the security sector remains a priority. This includes putting in place effective oversight and accountability mechanisms to end impunity for all forms of violence against women and underrepresented groups serving within security institutions and addressing any form of abuse against women and girls by security forces. The Organization will also foster early-on inclusion of women who are part of the security sector and civil society organizations in the negotiations on security provisions of peace agreements, national security policies, strategies and operations, and military expenditures.

VI. Conclusion

60. National and international experience has highlighted time and again the sensitive nature of security sector reform and its centrality to reaching sustainable peace and restoring trust in the State. The United Nations has seen the shortcomings

¹⁸ Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (New York, 2015).

¹⁹ See the 2021 report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence ([S/2021/312](#)).

of mere technical approaches to support, where political conditions and national ownership of reform efforts were not sufficiently present. As the Organization commits to a new Common Agenda to rebuild trust and strengthen the social contract between Governments and societies, it should redouble efforts to strengthen the rule of law and human rights and ensure that security forces protect people and safeguard democratic processes. The lessons outlined in the present report reaffirm the important role that the United Nations has to play in supporting Member States in security sector reform through the good offices of the Secretary-General's senior representatives and by developing knowledge and impartial expertise to support Governments in the assessment, planning and design of security sector reform and strengthening international cooperation and coordination in line with agreed principles. This in turn relies on Member States further strengthening the foundations for solid, genuine and effective security sector reform and governance.
