



General Assembly

Distr.: General
18 August 2021

Original: English

Seventy-sixth session

Item 57 of the provisional agenda*

Comprehensive review of special political missions

Overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/100](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of the resolution regarding the overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, including efforts towards improving expertise and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender perspective and the equal participation of women as well as youth participation. The present report, which is the ninth to the Assembly on this item, covers the period from August 2020 to July 2021.

* [A/76/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [75/100](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, including efforts towards improving expertise and effectiveness, transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender perspective and the equal participation of women, as well as youth participation.

2. Special political missions play a critical role in supporting Member States in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Operating in complex operational environments, including many that are characterized by volatile security situations and fragile political contexts, special political missions remain essential mechanisms for implementing a range of mandates that contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. To achieve this goal, special political missions work closely with United Nations development, human rights and humanitarian partners to implement integrated responses to address multidimensional risks. They also support Member States in obtaining greater inclusion and the more meaningful participation of women and other marginalized constituencies, young women and men among them, in political and peace processes, thus helping translate into reality the commitments of the women and peace and security agenda and the youth, peace and security agenda.

3. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has manifested as one of the most significant crises in the history of the United Nations and has affected many areas of the work of special political missions. By upending lives and economies, posing challenges to community relations and undermining trust in the very institutions meant to address its fallout, the pandemic has exacerbated inequality, bred misinformation, stigmatization and hate speech, created new flashpoints for tension and increased risks of instability.

4. The interconnected nature of current global challenges places a premium on international cooperation. In advocating for a reinvigorated multilateralism, the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2020 (resolution [75/1](#)), called for the diplomatic toolbox of the Charter of the United Nations to be used to its full potential, including in the areas of preventive diplomacy and mediation.

5. Special political missions are an integral part of this toolbox and a manifestation of multilateral action and joined-up solutions. Despite a deteriorating global peace and security environment, they have pursued and expanded their work to support the peaceful resolution of disputes through multitrack and multi-partner diplomatic engagement, with enhanced partnerships with regional and subregional organizations an area of particular priority. They continue to provide nimble and flexible responses to a range of complex situations, such as in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Somalia, and constitute one of the most important mechanisms for operationalizing the work of the United Nations in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

II. Key operational developments

Africa

6. As a result of the mediation efforts deployed by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Libyan parties agreed to a national ceasefire in October 2020 in the context of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission. The UNSMIL-facilitated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum subsequently adopted a political road map in

November 2020. The road map contained provisions for the formation of a new interim executive authority including the Government of National Unity, which took office in March 2021. According to the road map, presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled to be held on 24 December 2021. UNSMIL and the participants in the January 2020 Berlin Conference on Libya continued their work in the framework of the International Follow-up Committee on Libya and its four working groups on political, security, and economic issues and human rights and international humanitarian law. On 23 June 2021, Germany and the United Nations co-chaired the Second Berlin Conference on Libya, which was attended by a high-level delegation from Libya led by the Prime Minister.

7. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) continued to implement its core functions of good offices, preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention, as well as the promotion of good governance, rule of law and human rights. UNOWAS worked to advance the women and peace and security agenda and advocated for the participation of women as well as youth in political and peace processes in West Africa and the Sahel. It also focused on analysing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change on peace and security in the subregion. UNOWAS continued to support the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and collaborated with the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) on multiple interregional issues, such as the crisis in the Lake Chad basin, maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and security issues related to transhumance. The new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel also served as Chair of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission, which continued to facilitate implementation of the 10 October 2002 judgment of the International Court of Justice on the Cameroon-Nigeria boundary and territorial dispute.

8. Pursuant to Security Council resolution [2512 \(2020\)](#), the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS) closed on 31 December 2020. The United Nations country team in Guinea-Bissau continued to implement the United Nations transition plan, including the peacebuilding priorities validated by the Government of Guinea-Bissau in November 2020, and to support the Government in the implementation of the urgent reforms outlined by the road map of the Economic Community of West African States and the 2016 Conakry Agreement on the Implementation of the Economic Community of West African States Road Map for the Resolution of the Political Crisis in Guinea-Bissau. UNOWAS assumed a good offices function upon the closure of UNIOGBIS to ensure continued United Nations accompaniment in support of consolidation of peace and democracy in the country.

9. The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan (UNITAMS) reached its initial operational capability and began delivering on its strategic objectives in January 2021. UNITAMS provided assistance to the transitional Government of the Sudan on political, peacebuilding, human rights, rule-of-law and protection issues and supported the peace process and implementation of the Juba Agreement for Peace in the Sudan. The Mission acted as a facilitator during the peace talks in Juba between the transitional Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North Abdelaziz al-Hilu faction and advocated for the increased participation of women in the talks.

10. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) supported the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member states in maintaining sustained dialogue and implementing the 17 September electoral model, which set the foundation for the 2021 federal elections. In response to the electoral impasse between the Federal Government and some federal member states, the United Nations, jointly with the African Union, the European Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), conducted shuttle diplomacy

resulting in the 27 May electoral agreement. The United Nations in Somalia also continued its advocacy for ensuring women's political rights and assisted Somalia in advancing crucial national priorities, including the deepening of federalism, the constitutional review process and security sector reforms. In addition, the United Nations provided technical advice and support to the Federal Government in implementing its human rights commitments, including via the universal periodic review process and its recommendations. The United Nations in Somalia also supported the Somali authorities in their COVID-19 response.

11. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa provided support in consolidating and sustaining gains in peace and security in the Horn of Africa to enhance regional prevention and efforts to sustain peace. The mission collaborated with IGAD, the African Union and other regional organizations to promote peace and security in the region, including by supporting mediation processes and enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting issues, while coordinating the implementation of the comprehensive regional prevention strategy for the Horn of Africa.

12. The Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region continued to support the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, in partnership with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community. Working closely with key partners, the Office developed the United Nations Strategy for Peace Consolidation, Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes Region, which focuses on three main priorities: peace, security and justice; sustainable development and shared prosperity; and resilience to long-standing and emerging challenges.

13. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA continued to provide good offices in the subregion, including in the run-up to the presidential elections in the Congo in March 2021, in Chad in April 2021 and in Sao Tome and Principe in July 2021. He also met with the transitional authorities of Chad and with other stakeholders to help ensure a peaceful, inclusive and consensual process towards a constitutional order and civilian rule. UNOCA and the Commission of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) adopted a joint strategic plan for the period 2021–2025.

14. In the wake of the generally peaceful presidential election on 20 May 2020 in Burundi, and at the request of the Security Council, the Secretary-General dispatched a strategic assessment mission to Bujumbura from 14 to 19 September 2020 to explore ways for the United Nations and Burundi to enhance their cooperation. After considering the Secretary-General's subsequent report ([S/2020/1078](#)), the President of the Security Council issued a statement on 4 December 2020 ([S/PRST/2020/12](#)) in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to cease his periodic reporting on the situation in Burundi and to cover Burundi as part of his regular reporting on the Great Lakes region and Central Africa. In this context, based on that statement and subsequent discussions, the Secretariat and the Government agreed to close the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Burundi by 31 May 2021 and to liquidate it by 30 June 2021.

The Americas

15. The Security Council, in its resolution [2547 \(2020\)](#), extended the mandate of the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH) for an additional year until 15 October 2021. BINUH continued to work closely with the country team, supporting national efforts in the following priority areas: good offices, community violence reduction, justice, police development, human rights, elections and

sustaining peace. Following the 7 July assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse, BINUH assigned four United Nations police investigators to assist the Haitian National Police Inspector General and the judicial police in the investigation of the assassination. Prime Minister-designate Ariel Henry formed a new Government on 20 July tasked with building the necessary consensus to hold elections as soon as feasible in 2021. BINUH harnessed its full mandate to provide immediate support to the Government, mainly in the area of security.

16. The United Nations continued to support the implementation of the Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo. The Security Council, in its resolution [2574 \(2021\)](#), extended the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia until 31 October 2021 and expanded it to include the monitoring of compliance with transitional justice sentences to be handed down by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace. The Verification Mission worked with the Colombian Government, the Comunes party (formerly the Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común), civil society and local communities to build trust and verify progress in the implementation of peace agreement commitments, particularly those related to security guarantees for former combatants, human rights defenders, social leaders and conflict-affected communities, as well as in the political and socioeconomic reintegration of former combatants.

Asia and the Pacific

17. Pursuant to its mandate under Security Council resolutions [2513 \(2020\)](#) and [2543 \(2020\)](#), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued to support the Government of Afghanistan in its efforts to promote peace and stability and to advance the Afghanistan peace negotiations launched in September 2020. Following the announcements by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on the withdrawal of their remaining military forces by 31 August 2021, the security situation, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, continued to be highly volatile and unpredictable. UNAMA held regular dialogues with various parties to advance the peace process, reported on the human rights situation and supported regional initiatives to enhance economic, political and security cooperation as well as regional connectivity. UNAMA facilitated the implementation of local peace initiatives, bringing together officials, tribal representatives and other community members to devise approaches for the resolution of disputes.

18. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar continued to draw global attention to the plight of stateless Rohingya, mobilizing international support for the creation of conducive conditions to allow for the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return of Rohingya. In the lead-up to the 8 November 2020 general elections, the Special Envoy advocated for an inclusive process with wide political representation and participation. The democratic transition was abruptly halted when, on 1 February, the Myanmar military declared a state of emergency and detained political leaders and others, justifying its actions by alleging election fraud. The Special Envoy amplified the Secretary-General's condemnation of the repression carried out by security forces in the wake of the killing of civilians and called for unified international action, including regionally, to restore the country's path to democratic reform, peace and stability. The Special Envoy cooperated closely with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other regional actors in advocating for an orderly and peaceful resolution. She maintained active engagement with all domestic stakeholders and international and regional organizations, including ASEAN, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the European Union. Through regular engagement with the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Special

Envoy advocated for a coherent international response to prevent further deterioration and to address the wider implications of a multidimensional crisis that has been further complicated by the spread of COVID-19.

Europe and Central Asia

19. The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus continued its engagement with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides to facilitate discussions towards a resumption of formal negotiations. Following the Turkish Cypriot leadership elections on 11 and 18 October 2020, Ersin Tatar emerged as the new Turkish Cypriot leader. A United Nations senior official continued to hold discussions with the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders and the guarantor powers: Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. She also maintained regular contact with Security Council members and representatives of the European Union. From 27 to 29 April 2021, the Secretary-General convened an informal five-plus-one meeting on the Cyprus issue in Geneva that aimed at determining whether common ground existed for the parties to negotiate a lasting solution to the Cyprus problem within a foreseeable horizon. Despite United Nations efforts and intense discussions between the parties, sufficient common ground could not be found during the informal meeting to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus issue. With a view to continuing the dialogue, the parties agreed that the Secretary-General would convene another informal meeting of the five-plus-one in the near future, with the objective of moving in the direction of common ground to allow for formal negotiations to start.

20. The Office of the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions worked closely with the European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on the situation in Georgia under the framework of the Geneva International Discussions, which are co-chaired by the three organizations. The Co-Chairs continued to engage with all participants and to encourage constructive dialogue and progress on core agenda issues. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person rounds of the Discussions resumed at the end of 2020 and returned to their regular schedule in 2021.

21. The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia provided good offices and implemented activities in its priority areas, including preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism, managing transboundary waters, promoting conflict prevention among youth and supporting regional cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan. Following significant political developments in Kyrgyzstan, the Centre conducted fact-finding missions and explored possible avenues for a consolidated United Nations response, which resulted in United Nations plans to support political and socioeconomic reforms in the country.

Middle East

22. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria worked to promote common ground among stakeholders in support of a United Nations-facilitated political solution to the Syrian conflict that would meet the aspirations of the Syrian people for dignity, freedom and justice, pursuant to Security Council resolution [2254 \(2015\)](#). Particular effort was focused on building trust and confidence, including by appealing for a nationwide ceasefire, calling for the release of detainees and abductees and of information on missing persons, advocating for immediate and unhindered humanitarian access, facilitating sessions of the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned Constitutional Committee in line with its mandate and terms of reference and encouraging a more constructive international diplomacy with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic.

23. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen focused his efforts on reaching agreement on a nationwide ceasefire, the reopening of the Sana'a airport, easing restrictions on the flow of fuel and other commodities into Yemen through Hudaydah port and the resumption of face-to-face political negotiations between the parties. In February 2021, the Houthi movement (which also calls itself Ansar Allah) launched a military offensive in Ma'rib that proved detrimental to those mediation efforts and posed a threat to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and others in need.

24. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) continued to assist the Yemeni parties in implementing the Agreement on the City of Hudaydah and the Ports of Hudaydah, Salif and Ra's Isa ([S/2018/1134](#), annex) and focused largely on restarting the Redeployment Coordination Committee and supporting mechanisms, including a joint operations centre and joint observation posts on the front lines. On 14 July 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution [2586 \(2021\)](#), which extended the mandate of UNMHA for one year, until 15 July 2022, called on the parties to cooperate in the Redeployment Coordination Committee, stressed the importance of the functioning of the Committee and its joint mechanisms and demanded an end to hindrances to the movement of UNMHA personnel.

25. On 27 May 2021, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution [2576 \(2021\)](#) extending the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) until 27 May 2022 and bolstering its electoral assistance mandate. In this context, UNAMI initiated preparations for the deployment of additional United Nations electoral personnel on the ground. The United Nations also scaled up its technical assistance to the Independent High Electoral Commission. The Mission continued to support inclusive political dialogue, preventive diplomacy and national reconciliation, as well as the strengthening of Baghdad-Erbil relations.

26. The Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process continued to work with regional and international partners to defuse tensions, encourage improvements on the ground, and advance political negotiations towards a just, comprehensive two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Throughout the summer of 2020, the Special Coordinator worked closely with the parties and stakeholders to avoid unilateral actions, including the threats of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied West Bank, that could hinder the peace process. The Secretary-General welcomed the agreements between Israel and Arab countries, which suspended the plans of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank and hoped that these developments would encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution and create opportunities for regional cooperation. In connection with the May 2021 escalation of violence, the Special Coordinator's efforts focused on the crisis in Gaza, with a view to garnering support for urgent humanitarian projects and supporting mediation efforts for sustaining the ceasefire arrangements in the Gaza Strip.

27. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon worked with national stakeholders and international partners to promote stability in Lebanon in the wake of the 4 August 2020 port of Beirut explosions and the subsequent resignation of the Government and amid an accelerating socioeconomic crisis and the ongoing pressures of COVID-19. The Office focused on promoting the consolidation and extension of the authority of the Lebanese State and the de-escalation of tensions between Lebanon and Israel. That included working with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and other actors towards increasing deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout Lebanon. Despite a political stalemate, the Office advocated for the formation of a fully empowered Government capable of implementing reforms, as well as for adherence to the 2022 electoral calendar. The

Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs continued to fulfil the reporting functions on the implementation of Security Council resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#).

Work of sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels

28. In its resolution [2557 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council extended the mandate of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team until December 2021. On 29 December 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution [2560 \(2020\)](#) and requested the Monitoring Team to study the basic and extraordinary exemptions procedures set out in paragraphs 81 (a) and (b) of resolution [2368 \(2017\)](#) to provide recommendations to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities within nine months.

29. On 31 October 2020, the Secretary-General submitted a report ([S/2020/1067](#)) to the Security Council that included options for the elaboration of benchmarks to assess arms embargo measures in South Sudan in accordance with progress on implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. He submitted a second report ([S/2021/321](#)), dated 31 March 2021, and proposed key benchmarks for the Security Council to assess the arms embargo, namely, progress on political and governance issues, progress on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform, and progress in the humanitarian and human rights situation.

30. On 30 November 2020, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1718 \(2006\)](#) updated its guidance to international and non-governmental organizations seeking to deliver humanitarian assistance to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The updated Implementation Assistance Notice No. 7¹ simplified several areas of the application process, extended the standard duration for exemptions and made expedited approval procedures applicable to urgent requests for emergencies such as pandemic outbreaks and natural disasters.

31. In its resolution [2571 \(2021\)](#), the Security Council decided to extend for 15 months the authorizations and measures in respect of attempts to illicitly export petroleum from Libya. On 5 May 2021, the Secretary-General reported ([S/2021/434](#)) to the Security Council on the implementation of resolution [2526 \(2020\)](#), by which the Council extended the authorizations set out in earlier resolutions² relating to the inspection, on the high seas off the coast of Libya, of vessels bound to or from Libya, to ensure the strict implementation of the arms embargo.

32. In his letter dated 15 June 2021 addressed to the President of the Security Council ([S/2021/573](#)), the Secretary-General provided an update on the progress achieved by the authorities of the Central African Republic on the key benchmarks for the reform of the security sector, the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process and the management of weapons and ammunition, as established in the statement by the President of the Security Council dated 9 April 2019 ([S/PRST/2019/3](#)).

33. On 31 July 2021, the Secretary-General submitted a report ([S/2021/696](#)) to the Security Council based on an assessment of the situation in Darfur, which had been conducted in close coordination with the Panel of Experts on the Sudan and in consultation with the Government of the Sudan. The report included

¹ Available at www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718/implementation-notice.

² Security Council resolutions [2292 \(2016\)](#), [2357 \(2017\)](#), [2420 \(2018\)](#) and [2473 \(2019\)](#).

recommendations for key benchmarks that could serve to guide the Security Council in its review of the measures on Darfur.

III. Interactive dialogue with Member States

34. In its resolution [75/100](#), the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to hold a regular, inclusive and interactive dialogue on the overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions and requested the Secretariat to reach out to Member States prior to the holding of this dialogue to ensure wide and meaningful participation.

35. Following consultations with the co-facilitators of this item and the Bureau of the Fourth Committee, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs organized the eighth annual interactive dialogue on special political missions on 1 June 2021. The dialogue focused on how special political missions are carrying out their conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding mandates in a changing global peace and security landscape and in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

36. In her remarks, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs emphasized that conflicts were becoming more complex, fragmented and regionalized, which made them harder to resolve. Other significant sources of stress included technological disruption and renewed global and regional strategic competition, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating many of these risks. She highlighted the climate emergency as a potential multiplier of crises and instability and stressed the efforts of special political missions with a mandate in this area, such as UNSOM and UNOCA, to integrate climate-related considerations into their work. Observing that special political missions had redoubled their efforts to support Member States in the peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomatic engagement, she provided concrete examples of this work in three priority areas: promoting inclusion, addressing multidimensional risks to peace and security and fostering partnerships with regional and subregional organizations and other actors.

37. The Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support briefed Member States on his department's coordination with Member States and other United Nations entities on system-wide efforts to advance vaccination for United Nations personnel working in special political missions and in peacekeeping operations. He stressed that Headquarters would continue to support special political missions to deliver on their mandates despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He thanked Member States for helping the United Nations to distribute COVID-19 vaccines to missions and to conduct medical evacuation activities.

38. During the subsequent exchange, Member States commended the efforts of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and of special political missions in implementing their mandates. Several speakers noted the important role played by special political missions in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, as well as in promoting the principles outlined in the declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. They highlighted the flexible and nimble nature of these missions as an important asset, which allowed them to adapt to changing operational circumstances and respond to new threats.

39. Participants encouraged special political missions to continue to take measures to support Member States in responding to the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on vulnerable communities. They noted the importance of ensuring that a wide range of actors, including civil society,

particularly women and youth groups, as well as other national stakeholders, were involved in the design of responses to the pandemic.

40. Multiple Member States called on special political missions to continue to prioritize the women and peace and security agenda, as well as the youth, peace and security agenda, which remained critical, particularly in view of the differentiated effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and youth. Participants encouraged the Secretariat to continue to enhance geographical representation and gender parity in special political missions.

IV. Key policy issues pertaining to special political missions

The women and peace and security agenda

41. Special political missions continue to play a key role in promoting women's meaningful participation in peace and political processes and in supporting gender-responsive peacemaking and peacebuilding. Gender advisers and gender focal points in special political missions provide advice and support to special envoys and special representatives on ways to promote women's political participation, make peace processes and peacebuilding efforts more inclusive, and include a gender perspective in the political work of the United Nations in the field.

42. In line with Security Council resolution [2493 \(2019\)](#), the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs continued to support special political missions in designing and implementing strategies for inclusive peace processes. During the reporting period, special political missions held dedicated high-level meetings to develop context-specific approaches for women's participation in United Nations-supported processes. In Afghanistan, for example, UNAMA conducted outreach and good offices to support the peace negotiations and the full, safe, equal, effective and meaningful participation, engagement and leadership of women at all levels of decision-making.

43. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, special political missions have found new ways to promote participation through strategies for digital inclusion and online engagement. In Yemen, the Office of the Special Envoy conducted an innovative large-scale online consultation with over 500 civil society representatives, of whom more than 30 per cent were women. In Libya, UNSMIL engaged with a wide range of Libyan stakeholders, including through consultations with women's groups and dialogue meetings with mayors and youth, in order to promote increased participation of women in meetings of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. The Mission also promoted increased participation of women in the subsequent meetings of the political track that was launched in October 2020.

44. In a number of contexts, special political missions are providing support to Member States in implementing national women and peace and security strategies, as well as to civil society organizations, including women's organizations. In Lebanon, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator has continued to support Lebanese-led advocacy efforts for the implementation of the country's national action plan on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), including by promoting greater political participation by women as candidates and voters in the 2022 elections. In Central Asia, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy launched a women leaders' caucus for Central Asia, comprising prominent women political leaders from the five Central Asian States. This initiative is a high-level platform devoted to establishing the first-ever Central Asian informal coalition of women leaders, which is dedicated to fostering the role of all women in advancing sustainable development and supporting peace and security in the region.

Youth, peace and security

45. In line with Security Council resolutions [2250 \(2015\)](#), [2419 \(2018\)](#) and [2535 \(2020\)](#) on youth, peace and security, special political missions have worked to increase the meaningful participation of young women and men in peacebuilding and political processes. In its resolution [2535 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council urged special political missions to develop and implement context-specific strategies on youth, peace and security and to coordinate and increase operational capacities in that regard. In response, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund, with support from the Folke Bernadotte Academy, developed a youth, peace and security programming handbook. Youth, peace and security focal points are currently being identified in all special political missions.

46. In Somalia, UNSOM continued to advocate for youth inclusion in political processes. Together with partners, it conducted a two-day training in April 2021 for 36 young political aspirants from different political parties, and in June 2021 it convened a dialogue with over 100 young women and men on the future of youth political participation in Somalia. The United Nations is currently supporting the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports in the development of the second national youth policy in Somalia.

47. In Iraq, UNAMI hosted a series of youth workshops in all the governorates, entitled, “Iraqi youth: pioneers for dialogue and stability”. This 18-month process mobilized over 500 young women and men from different backgrounds and culminated in a national youth conference held in Baghdad in November 2020, at which deliberations from the workshops were presented to Iraqi authorities.

48. In Libya, UNSMIL established a “Libyan youth track” to ensure the participation of young people in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum. Over 40 young women and men from various political, ethnic and tribal backgrounds in Libya had the opportunity to meet and develop recommendations that were presented to the Forum.

49. Special political missions have also cooperated in interregional youth, peace and security initiatives. For example, the missions in Colombia and Iraq, in partnership with the peacekeeping operation in Kosovo,³ organized a joint online workshop in August 2020 for young leaders to share best practices and experiences in working on local peacebuilding initiatives.

Peacebuilding and sustaining peace

50. The General Assembly and the Security Council concluded the third review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture and, in December 2020, unanimously adopted, respectively, General Assembly resolution [75/201](#) and Security Council resolution [2558 \(2020\)](#). The review showed that the United Nations had been able to strengthen leadership, accountability and capacities and enhance partnerships that maximized comparative advantages in peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Special political missions continued to support the implementation of inclusive and nationally led and owned peacebuilding priorities through their work with United Nations country teams and resident coordinators.

51. Adequate, predictable and sustained financing for peacebuilding remains a critical challenge. The above-mentioned resolutions called for a high-level meeting

³ References to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution [1244 \(1999\)](#).

of the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session to advance, explore and consider options in this regard.

52. The Peacebuilding Commission is uniquely positioned to provide clear, realistic, applicable and qualitative peacebuilding perspectives to the Security Council, upon request. The advisory role of the Commission to the Council has been particularly important during the Council's consideration of the mandates of special political missions. In 2020, the Commission provided advice in the context of the consideration of the final mandate of UNIOGBIS. The Commission also engaged on several peacebuilding issues in contexts where special political missions are deployed, such as Colombia, where the Commission helped to strengthen engagement with female former combatants and survivors.

53. The Peacebuilding Fund continues to support programmatic efforts undertaken together by special political missions and United Nations country teams. In 2020, the Fund directed \$25.3 million in new approvals to countries where special political missions are deployed, or 15 per cent of total approvals that year. In Guinea-Bissau, the Fund approved \$4 million to support transition priorities identified as part of the UNIOGBIS closure. In August 2020, the Secretary-General renewed the eligibility of Somalia for the Peacebuilding Fund for another five years, following a request by the Government, with a focus on reconciliation, justice, governance and security. The new phase would also prioritize funding for initiatives supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. In 2020, the Peacebuilding Fund allocated \$22.1 million to youth, peace and security projects through the Youth Promotion Initiative.

Promoting a regional approach to peace and security issues

54. A key feature of the contemporary peace and security landscape is the fact that many of the challenges the international community faces today are cross-boundary in nature. The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate emergency have underscored the need for global and regional cooperation to address transborder challenges. Special political missions, many of which have regional mandates, are well equipped to contribute to this goal. They have been at the forefront of designing and implementing genuinely regional, multidisciplinary responses to a range of peace and security issues and of strengthening the United Nations partnership with regional and subregional organizations, which remains a pillar of the Organization's work to maintain international peace and security.

55. The United Nations Office to the African Union, working closely with the African Union Commission, continued to oversee the implementation of the Joint United Nations–African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security. The Office facilitated the annual joint consultative meeting and the annual joint informal seminar between the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and members of the Security Council in September 2020 and monthly coordination meetings between the Chair of the Peace and Security Council and the President of the Security Council. The Office also organized several meetings between the United Nations Secretariat and the African Union Commission.

56. In the Great Lakes region, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General continued his good offices to promote dialogue and strengthen trust and good neighbourly relations between countries in the region. He also supported regional efforts to strengthen cooperation in the fight against illegal armed groups, which culminated in the operationalization of a contact and coordination group tasked with overseeing the implementation of non-military measures to promote voluntary disarmament and cut off the recruitment and supply lines of armed groups. In June 2021, the Office of the Special Envoy co-organized the sixth meeting of the Great Lakes Judicial

Cooperation Network to fight impunity for cross-border crimes by harmonizing legal systems.

57. In the Horn of Africa, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General continued to support the implementation of the comprehensive regional prevention strategy for the Horn of Africa. The Office of the Special Envoy collaborated with IGAD, the African Union High Level Implementation Panel and other regional and subregional organizations in promoting peace and security across the region, including supporting mediation processes and enhancing subregional capacities to address cross-border and cross-cutting issues.

58. In Central Africa, UNOCA and the ECCAS Commission met regularly to discuss issues of peace and regional stability and the need to further strengthen ECCAS preventive diplomacy. On 29 March 2021, they held an online joint retreat during which they endorsed their joint strategic plan for the 2021–2025 period. The plan focuses on advancing national and regional governance issues and on promoting an integrated approach to transnational security challenges and armed groups. The Special Representative for Central Africa consulted regularly with the African Union and ECCAS to ensure coordinated support for the transition in Chad.

59. In Central Asia, despite COVID-19-related restrictions, regional cooperation continued to expand. All five Central Asian States relied on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia as a platform to support their own multilateral efforts aimed at stronger connectivity during the pandemic. The Centre convened two meetings of the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Central Asia and Afghanistan in 2020 devoted to regional cooperation and the promotion of regional initiatives.

Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for special political missions

60. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest global emergencies the United Nations has confronted, profoundly affecting health, peace and security across the globe. Its devastating consequences continued to be felt across the world during the reporting period. As of the writing of the present report, over 4.1 million deaths had been reported to the World Health Organization. Close to 200 million people have been infected. Around 100 million people were pushed into extreme poverty in 2020, an unprecedented annual increase.⁴ In 2020 alone, 8.8 per cent of global working hours were lost due to the pandemic, equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs.⁵ New strains of the virus have unleashed more severe waves of infection at a time when health systems and social safety networks are already on the brink, contributing to rising numbers of COVID-19 cases in many of the contexts in which special political missions are deployed or engaged.

61. The pandemic has hindered diplomatic action and complicated peacemaking efforts. It has not, for the most part, affected the underlying dynamics of armed conflicts. However, by exacerbating existing fragilities, it has amplified the prevention challenge and made the steps needed to address that challenge more urgent. The Secretary-General's call on 23 March 2020 for a global ceasefire, which appealed to warring parties to stop the fighting and help create corridors for life-saving aid, was supported by 180 Member States, one non-member observer State,

⁴ World Bank, "Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: turning the corner on the pandemic in 2021?". Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/updated-estimates-impact-covid-19-global-poverty-turning-corner-pandemic-2021>.

⁵ International Labour Organization, "ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work", 7th ed. (Geneva, 2021). Available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_767028.pdf.

conflict parties, regional organizations, civil society and religious representatives. It was further reinforced by Security Council resolutions [2532 \(2020\)](#) and [2565 \(2021\)](#).

62. The pandemic has affected the support provided by the United Nations to political and peace processes. In some cases, it has had a direct impact on the work of missions. In Cyprus, for example, restrictions put in place by both sides increased political tensions and posed practical challenges to movement across the divide and to the continuation of bicommunal contacts and trust-building activities on the island. While United Nations sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels were able to conduct field visits and investigations into sanctions violations in various countries, these visits were fewer in number compared with the number conducted during the reporting periods before the COVID-19 pandemic.

63. Special political missions had to adjust to the changing reality brought about by the pandemic by combining virtual and in-person work and taking calculated steps to fulfil their mandates to advance peace processes, de-escalate crises and prevent conflict. In Central Asia, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy used online platforms and other innovative tools to support the countries of the region in building trust, developing mutual contacts and implementing existing and new regional initiatives. New tools, such as digital focus groups, were developed and used to broaden the inclusiveness of political engagements.

64. In its resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to help ensure that all relevant parts of the United Nations system, in accordance with their respective mandates, accelerate their response to the COVID-19 pandemic with a particular emphasis on countries in need, including those in situations of armed conflict or affected by humanitarian crises. This request was further reiterated by the Council in resolution [2565 \(2021\)](#), in which the Council asked special representatives and special envoys of the Secretary-General, within their respective mandates, and in coordination with all relevant stakeholders, to use their good offices and mediation with parties to armed conflict to facilitate the COVID-19 response, including vaccination in situations of armed conflict. Special political missions remain committed to supporting Member States in this area.

65. Special political missions are also working closely with national authorities to assist in their responses to the medium- and long-term risks and vulnerabilities exacerbated by the pandemic. The coordination of international efforts in this regard is particularly important. For example, on 9 September 2020, the Peacebuilding Commission held an online meeting on the impact of COVID-19 in the Lake Chad basin, which aimed at mobilizing the international community to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on peacebuilding gains in the region. The Special Representative for Central Africa participated in the discussion and called for the development of a regional response to the pandemic building on strategies developed by ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States.

Geographical distribution and gender representation

66. Under Article 101 of the Charter, due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible. Promoting geographical diversity is not only a legal obligation under the Charter, but also a critical factor for the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations as a universal organization. The Secretary-General remains committed to promoting a more diverse workforce.

67. As of April 2021, the distribution of the 1,365 internationally recruited staff serving in field-based special political missions was as follows: 33 per cent from the Group of Western European and other States, 24.2 per cent from the African Group, 23 per cent from the Asia-Pacific Group, 12.6 per cent from the Eastern European

Group and 6.4 per cent from the Latin American and Caribbean Group. Of the 1,838 locally recruited staff, 75.7 per cent were from the Asia-Pacific Group, 13.1 per cent from the African Group, 9.1 per cent from the Latin American and Caribbean Group, 0.8 per cent from the Group of Western European and other States and 0.2 per cent from the Eastern European Group.

68. The Secretary-General is equally committed to improving the representation of women throughout the Organization, including in field-based special political missions. As of April 2021, 33.2 per cent of internationally recruited staff serving in these missions were women, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points over the previous year. Among the locally recruited staff, 19 per cent were women, an increase of 2.3 per cent.

V. Observations

69. The activities and achievements of special political missions described in the present report demonstrate their significant contribution to advancing conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding. During a challenging year for the international community, special political missions showed resilience and flexibility, responding rapidly to help to address risks brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic while continuing to deliver on their mandates. That they were able to deliver results while operating in a complex geopolitical landscape, and often in volatile security environments, is a testament to their role as a critically important United Nations mechanism for the maintenance of international peace and security.

70. The contribution of special political missions to increased inclusivity has been particularly notable over the past year. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, they adapted approaches to advance the women and peace and security agenda, using innovative means to reach women's groups and provide them with the space to engage in peace and political processes. Special political missions also played an important role in the implementation of the youth, peace and security agenda through concrete actions taken to involve youth in peace and political processes. As we move towards a networked and more inclusive multilateralism, a creative approach to expanding the inclusivity of our engagements will help ensure that our work in the area of peace and security responds directly to the aspirations of those we serve.

71. In line with my call to action for human rights, special political missions also continued to play an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. Six special political missions have integrated human rights components, implementing a range of mandates in this area. More broadly, human rights considerations remain closely linked to our efforts to prevent conflict, protect populations from violence, and address the root causes of conflict. They are an essential part of the work of special political missions.

72. In the face of an increasingly interdependent world, regional approaches must be central to efforts to address threats to peace and security. The unique regional mandates of several special political missions position them to implement a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustaining peace, working with Member States, development, humanitarian and human rights partners, regional and subregional organizations and civil society. The significant progress made in recent years to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations will be sustained and built upon. I remain committed to making this a central goal of special political missions.

73. The majority of field-based special political missions are deployed in areas that are highly vulnerable to climate change. In an effort to prevent and manage the

adverse effects of climate change on peace and security, special political missions with a mandate in this area will continue to collaborate with United Nations country teams and other partners to identify climate-related security risks and integrate climate considerations into their work.

74. The support of Member States is essential for the success of special political missions and for the enhancement of their effectiveness. I note, in this respect, the outstanding question of funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions.

75. The declaration on the commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations demonstrated the enduring commitment of Member States to the multilateral system. Special political missions will be an important part of Our Common Agenda in years to come. They will play a central role in particular in the context of the call made by Member States for the enhancement of the diplomatic toolbox of the Charter in order to prevent the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of hostilities. I count on the support of Member States to make that vision a reality.

76. Finally, I would like to pay tribute to my special representatives, advisers and envoys and to the dedicated and courageous United Nations staff and affiliated personnel serving in special political missions deployed across the world. They work, under often difficult conditions that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, to put into practice the promise of the Charter of the United Nations. I deeply value and appreciate their work and commitment.

Annex

United Nations special political missions (as at 14 July 2021)

Special and personal envoys, advisers and representatives of the Secretary-General

1. Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus
2. Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
3. Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara
4. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution [1559 \(2004\)](#)
5. United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions
6. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria
7. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region
8. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen
9. United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement
10. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar
11. Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa

Sanctions monitoring teams, groups and panels, and other entities and mechanisms

12. Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo
13. Panel of Experts on the Sudan
14. Panel of Experts on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
15. Panel of Experts on Libya
16. Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic
17. Panel of Experts on Yemen
18. Panel of Experts on South Sudan
19. Panel of Experts on Mali
20. Panel of Experts on Somalia
21. Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team pursuant to Security Council resolutions [1526 \(2004\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and the Taliban and associated individuals and entities
22. Implementation of Security Council resolution [2231 \(2015\)](#)
23. Support for the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [1540 \(2004\)](#) on the non-proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction
24. Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
25. United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant

26. Office of the Ombudsperson to the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions [1267 \(1999\)](#), [1989 \(2011\)](#) and [2253 \(2015\)](#) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities

Regional offices, offices in support of political processes and other missions

27. Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
 28. Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process¹
 29. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
 30. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
 31. United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
 32. United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa
 33. United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
 34. United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia
 35. United Nations Office to the African Union²
 36. United Nations support team to the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission
 37. United Nations Support Mission in Libya
 38. United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia
 39. United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti
 40. United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan
-

¹ Funded from the regular budget but technically not part of the special political mission budgetary category.

² Funded partially from the regular budget but technically not part of the special political mission budgetary category.