

The logo for the International Peace Institute (IPI) features the letters 'IPI' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a dark blue square.

INTERNATIONAL  
PEACE  
INSTITUTE

# The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space in UN Peacekeeping Operations

Lauren McGowan

OCTOBER 2024

Lauren McGowan is a Policy Analyst at the International Peace Institute.

The author is grateful to the reviewers of the paper, to Juhi Srivastava for her valuable research assistance, and to Jenna Russo, Albert Trithart, and Felix Romier for their support in the finalization of the paper.

IPI owes a debt of gratitude to its many donors for their generous support. This publication is part of IPI's Peacekeeping Observatory series, funded by the French Ministry of Armed Forces' Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS).

The views expressed in this paper represent those of the author and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

## Executive Summary

UN peacekeeping operations have a vital role to play in protecting and promoting civic space. Shrinking civic space undermines human rights, generates instability, and impacts the ability of missions to execute their mandates. Supporting civic space is also connected to core areas of missions' work, including support to political processes, the protection of civilians, and the promotion of human rights.

While not all missions have a shared understanding of civic space or a cross-cutting strategy to protect and promote it, and only the mission in South Sudan has an explicit mandate to promote civic space, several missions have undertaken work in this area. This includes efforts to promote political participation; work with governments to revise legal frameworks; protect human rights defenders and journalists; address misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech; and monitor threats to civic space. These efforts tend to coalesce during electoral periods, though other processes are equally important for advancing civic space.

One of the biggest challenges to missions' work on civic space is managing the consent of host states that may themselves be responsible for restricting civic space. Other challenges, including the risks faced by civil society actors that engage with the UN, are related to broader challenges facing UN peacekeeping. Another challenge relates to how peacekeeping operations coordinate with the network of actors working on civic space, including UN country teams.

Despite these challenges, peacekeeping missions have unique advantages, such as their ability to protect civilians and connect civic space initiatives to broader political mandates. Yet their efforts are not always part of a common strategy for promoting and protecting civic space. In this context, this paper offers four considerations to help guide future exploration of the topic:

- Policymakers should consider the utility of adding explicit language on civic space to mission mandates, and weigh the risks and benefits.
- Missions should consider how to connect the dots between their different efforts related to civic space.
- Missions that have implemented more systematic approaches to monitoring civic space should gather lessons on whether and how this monitoring has impacted their ability to respond to civic space restrictions.
- The UN should improve reporting on the collective impact of activities related to civic space to illustrate the role missions play and their comparative advantages.

## Introduction

In the policy brief “A New Agenda for Peace,” the secretary-general cites shrinking space for civic participation, notably the “rise in threats, persecution, and acts of violence against women,” as a threat to peace.<sup>1</sup> This comes in the wake of a steady global decline in civic space, with states increasingly restricting the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association, and assembly.<sup>2</sup> Examples of restrictions have included legislation prohibiting civil society organizations (CSOs) from operating, the unlawful use of force against protestors, and the repression of media, including attacks against journalists and denial of access to information.<sup>3</sup>

In UN peacekeeping settings, shrinking civic space undermines human rights, generates instability, and impacts the ability of missions to execute their mandates. At the same time, supporting civic space is connected to core areas of missions’ work, including efforts to support political processes, protect civilians, and promote human rights. To that end, UN peacekeeping operations have a vital role to play in protecting and promoting civic space—both offline and online.<sup>4</sup>

However, the degree to which there is a shared understanding of or strategy behind protecting and promoting civic space varies within and across missions. In part, this is because only one UN peacekeeping operation, the mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), has an explicit mandate to promote civic space. While other mandates do not explicitly refer to civic space, peacekeepers undertake a range of related activities as part of their other mandated tasks.

This paper identifies how missions are contributing

to the protection and promotion of civic space and the obstacles they face in doing so. The first section summarizes what civic space is and provides examples of how it has been restricted within peacekeeping contexts. The second section focuses on mission mandates, identifying how civic space has been reflected so far and analyzing whether the inclusion of explicit language on civic space has an impact on the work undertaken by missions. The paper then explores how missions have sought to protect and promote civic space and examines the challenges they face when engaging in these activities. The concluding section offers several considerations to help guide future exploration of the topic.

## Conceptualizing Civic Space in UN Peacekeeping Contexts

Shrinking civic space undermines human rights, generates instability, and impacts the ability of missions to execute their mandates.

This section responds to three key questions: (1) What is civic space? (2) How has civic space been restricted in peacekeeping contexts? and (3) Why is the protection and promo-

tion of civic space in peacekeeping contexts important?

### What Is Civic Space?

The concept of civic space is predicated on the right to participate in public affairs and a core set of related liberties, namely the rights to freedom of expression, opinion, association, and assembly.<sup>5</sup> Civic space is sometimes equated with or simply referred to as “political space.” However, civic space encapsulates a broader vision of participation—one in which people can exercise their full set of rights to influence all aspects of public life both offline and online—including the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Thus,

1 United Nations, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace,” July 2023, p. 6.

2 See, for example: The Global State of Democracy Initiative, available at <https://www.idea.int/gsod/ggod/>; Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024,” February 2024; CIVICUS, “Rights Reversed, A Downward Shift in Civic Space (2019–2023).”

3 See, for example: UN Human Rights Council, *Preserving the Gains and Pushing Back against the Global Attack on Civic Space and Growing Authoritarianism—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association*, UN Doc. A/HRC/56/50, June 21, 2024; CIVICUS, “People Power Under Attack 2023,” CIVICUS Monitor, December 2023; International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “Civic Freedom Monitor,” available at <https://www.icnl.org/our-work/global-programs/the-civic-space-initiative>; Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2024, Events of 2023,” 2023; Amnesty International, “The State of the World’s Human Rights,” April 2024.

4 While other types of UN missions, including special political missions, also address issues related to civic space, the focus of this paper is on UN peacekeeping operations.

5 For more information on how these rights are related, see: UN Human Rights Council, *Draft Guidelines for States on the Effective Implementation of the Right to Participate in Public Affairs—Report of OHCHR*, UN Doc. A/HRC/39/28, July 20, 2018.

civic space describes an environment in which people can safely express their views, engage in debate, organize, dissent, access information, and participate fully in public life, including in political processes. In other words, as one UN official described, civic space is about people being able to “shape their future... [by] influencing decision making across the board.”<sup>6</sup>

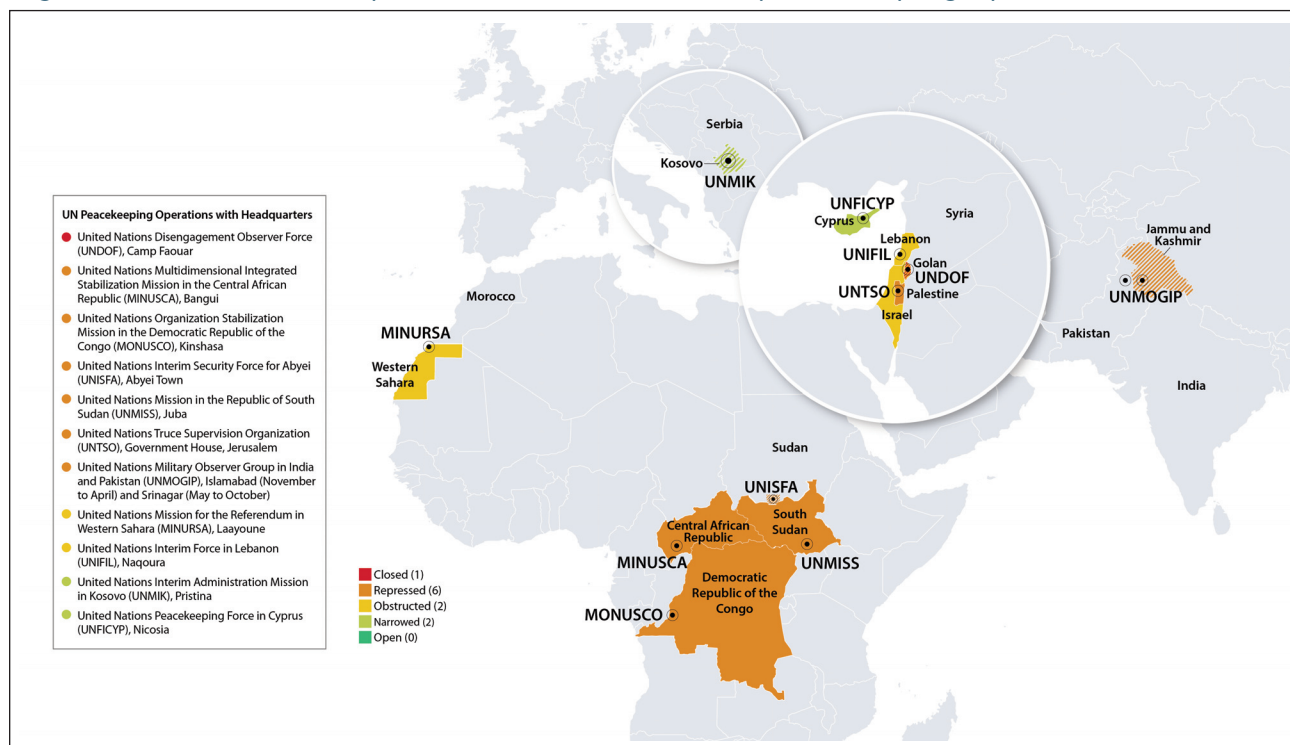
In 2020, the UN released a system-wide guidance note on the protection and promotion of civic space, which defines civic space as “the environment that enables people and groups—or ‘civic space actors’—to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their societies.”<sup>7</sup> The guidance note discusses the “3Ps”—participation, promotion of civic space, and protection of civic space actors—as a cross-cutting UN responsibility. In addition, it seeks to ensure “consistency” in the organization’s approach to promoting and protecting civic space and puts

forward recommendations for all UN entities, including peacekeeping operations.<sup>8</sup> However, as one UN official explained, the impact of the guidance note on peacekeeping operations “remains minimal.” They noted that “civic space has been conceptualized differently in peacekeeping because folks feel it’s a buzz word and these pieces of guidance are too abstract in the field.”<sup>9</sup> Another official noted that the guidance note’s impact is limited because peacekeeping officials feel like missions are already doing work related to civic space.

## How has Civic Space Been Restricted in Peacekeeping Contexts?

UN peacekeeping operations often operate in contexts where civic space is under threat (see

Figure 1. Status of civic space in countries with UN peacekeeping operations<sup>10</sup>



6 Interview 4, UN official, May 2024.

7 United Nations, “UN Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space,” September 2020. It is unclear exactly where the term “civic space” originated, though some argue it “can be traced back to legal and human rights discourses.” See: Kees Biekart, Tiina Kontinen, Marianne Millstein, eds., *Civil Society Responses to Changing Civic Spaces* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

8 For example, the guidance note states, “It is crucial that the United Nations system develop targeted strategies adjusted to particular contexts (including in mission settings), such as political or post-conflict transitions.” *Ibid.*, p. 12.

9 Interview 1, UN official, April 2024.

10 CIVICUS Monitor, 2023, available at <https://monitor.civicus.org/>.

Figure 1).<sup>11</sup> While each peacekeeping environment is unique, several threats to civic space are common across settings.<sup>12</sup> For example, restrictions on freedom of expression are prevalent across UN peacekeeping contexts. This includes actions taken by the state that repress or target the media, thus curtailing journalists' voices and limiting public access to information.<sup>13</sup> For example, before its withdrawal in 2023, the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA) regularly documented state restrictions on media workers.<sup>14</sup>

Journalists have also been victims of ill treatment and physical violence because of their reporting. In South Sudan, state security forces have implemented measures to “censor news that is critical or perceived to be negative about authorities” and arbitrarily detained and tortured journalists.<sup>15</sup> Risks are particularly high for women journalists.<sup>16</sup> For instance, women journalists in South Sudan often experience sexual and gender-based harassment.<sup>17</sup>

In several peacekeeping contexts, state authorities also suppress or censor dissenting voices. This can include bans on political parties or similar measures that curtail the ability of individuals to fully participate in formal political processes. For instance, in areas of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco, “political parties that advocate for Sahrawi independence or autonomy cannot operate,” and in areas controlled by the Polisario Front, other political

Restrictions on civic space can contribute to creating the conditions for instability and violence.

parties are banned.<sup>18</sup> It can also include the disruption of informal political participation, including through the use of excessive force against peaceful protestors. For example, Moroccan security forces have used disproportionate force during peaceful assemblies in Western Sahara, and Sahrawi women human rights defenders and their family members have been “subject to threats, harassment, and physical violence.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition, restrictions on civic space often involve state actions aimed at hindering the ability of CSOs to operate. For example, in December 2023, the Assembly of Kosovo amended a law on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and freedom of association, raising concerns over “restrictions on court access, limitations on NGO registration and increased financial liabilities.”<sup>20</sup>

Restrictions on civic space are often particularly acute during electoral periods. For example, ahead of the 2023 referendum in the Central African Republic (CAR), the UN mission (MINUSCA) documented an increase in violations of civil and political rights.<sup>21</sup> Ahead of the 2023 elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UN mission (MONUSCO) documented “intimidations, arbitrary arrests, and detentions... often targeting members of the opposition, human rights activists, and journalists.”<sup>22</sup> Women political leaders and candidates also experienced “physical and verbal misogynistic attacks, aimed at discouraging their full and active

11 Civic space can be threatened by a broad range of actors (state and non-state) and in myriad ways. This paper primarily considers actions taken by state authorities that repress civic space, though threats posed by non-state actors are briefly discussed.

12 This section draws on analysis from the Global State of Democracy Initiative, Freedom House, CIVICUS, the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, the secretary-general's mission reports, and reports by OHCHR and the Human Rights Council.

13 Other threats that curtail access to information include the use of surveillance technology and Internet shutdowns. For more information, see: United Nations Human Rights Council, *The Right to Privacy in the Digital Age: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, UN Doc. A/HRC/51/17, August 4, 2022; United Nations Human Rights Council, *Internet Shutdowns: Trends, Causes, Legal Implications and Impacts on a Range of Human Rights: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, UN Doc. A/HRC/50/55, May 13, 2022.

14 MINUSMA, “Note trimestrielle sur les tendances des violations et atteintes aux droits de l'homme et au droit international humanitaire au Mali 1<sup>er</sup> octobre - 31 décembre 2022,” March 2023.

15 United Nations Human Rights Council, *Entrenched Repression: Systematic Curtailment of the Democratic and Civic Space in South Sudan—Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan*, UN Doc. A/HRC/54/CRP.6, October 5, 2023, para. 61.

16 United Nations General Assembly, *Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression— Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Irene Khan*, UN Doc. A/76/258, July 30, 2021. See also: UNESCO, “The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence against Women Journalists,” April 2021.

17 UN Doc. A/HRC/54/CRP.6, para. 60. Beyond journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, women's rights advocates, youth activists, indigenous leaders, environmental defenders, trade unionists, and others can also be at risk when exercising their right to freedom of expression.

18 Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2024, Western Sahara,” 2024.

19 United Nations Secretary-General, *Situation Concerning Western Sahara*, UN Doc. S/2022/733, October 3, 2022, para. 78.

20 United Nations Secretary-General, *United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo*, UN Doc. S/2024/282, April 2, 2024, para. 54.

21 United Nations Secretary-General, *Central African Republic*, UN Doc. S/2023/769, October 16, 2023, para. 43.

22 United Nations Secretary-General, *United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Doc. S/2023/932, November 30, 2023, para. 32. For additional information, see: Human Rights Watch, “DRC: Crackdown on Opposition Ahead of Elections,” August 22, 2023.

participation in the public arena.”<sup>23</sup>

The broader information ecosystem can also have an impact on civic space. For example, large-scale disinformation campaigns can reduce civic space by promoting misleading or false narratives, impeding access to information, and crowding out dissenting voices.<sup>24</sup> In addition, some governments have adopted laws and policies with the stated purpose of combating misinformation and disinformation that in reality have further restricted civic space.<sup>25</sup>

## Why Is the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space in Peacekeeping Contexts Important?

Restrictions on civic space can contribute to creating the conditions for instability and violence. The UN civic space guidance note is framed around this idea, arguing that “participatory approaches to decision making and policy discussions... significantly reduce the risk of fragility, crisis and violence, thereby making societies safer and more resilient and policy-making more effective and legitimate.”<sup>26</sup> This logic is supported by the joint UN–World Bank report *Pathways for Peace*, which found that some of the greatest risks of violence “stem from the mobilization of perceptions of exclusion and injustice.” The report also notes that “whether collective mobilization becomes violent depends on a variety of factors, but is greatly influenced by whether aggrieved groups perceive themselves to have viable, peaceful alternatives for expressing grievances.”<sup>27</sup> Such peaceful alternatives—the ability to safely express views, dissent, engage in debate, organize, and participate in political processes—are fundamentally centered

on civic space. In other words, the lack of protection for civic space limits peaceful alternatives for groups to express their grievances and, in turn, can contribute to the outbreak of violence.

In addition, there is an increasing volume of evidence linking civic space to human rights and development. For example, the implementation and enforcement of anti-NGO laws can predict “a deterioration in the overall respect for human rights in a typical country.”<sup>28</sup> Restrictions on civic space have also adversely impacted the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>29</sup> It follows that protecting civic space is an enabler for rights and development; research has established the benefits of protecting civic space for economic growth, social inclusion, political stability, literacy, civic participation, control of corruption, trust in government, public service delivery, health, public safety, and peace.<sup>30</sup>

## Mission Mandates

Restrictions on civic space also have direct implications for UN peacekeeping missions, particularly when it comes to balancing relations with the host state. While it can be politically challenging, missions are uniquely placed to contribute to the protection and promotion of civic space given their mandates and capacities to support political processes, promote human rights, and protect civilians. Nonetheless, the UN Security Council has only recently included explicit references to civic space in UN peacekeeping mandates.

Historically, the council has not used the term “civic space” in mandates for peacekeeping operations, referring instead to “political space.” For example,

23 UN Web TV, “The Situation Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo—Security Council, 9500<sup>th</sup> Meeting,” December 11, 2023.

24 State actors can also be responsible for misinformation and disinformation. For more information on the impact of misinformation and disinformation, as well as hate speech, within peacekeeping settings, see: Lotte Vermeij et al., “The Impact and Response to Misinformation, Disinformation, Malinformation and Hate Speech in the Digital Era,” Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2024. See also: Internews, “Social Media and Mis/disinformation in Electoral Context in the DRC,” May 2024; and Lassane Ouedraogo, “Mali’s Fake News Ecosystem: An Overview,” Centre for Democracy and Development, February 2022.

25 See, for example: Peter Cunliffe-Jones et al., “Bad Law: Legal and Regulatory Responses to Misinformation in Sub-Saharan Africa 2016–2020,” in *Misinformation Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Peter Cunliffe-Jones et al., eds. (London: University of Westminster Press, 2021).

26 “UN Guidance Note on the Protection and Promotion of Civic Space,” p. 3.

27 UN and World Bank, “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict,” 2018, pp. xxii, 130.

28 Suparna Chaudhry and Andrew Heiss, “NGO Repression as a Predictor of Worsening Human Rights Abuses,” *Journal of Human Rights* 21, no. 2 (2022). See also: Bimal Adhikari, Jeffrey King, and Amanda Murdie, “Examining the Effects of Democratic Backsliding on Human Rights Conditions,” *Journal of Human Rights* 23, no. 3 (2024).

29 Specifically, SDGs 1 (end poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender equality), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduce inequalities), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 15 (life on land), and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). See: Naomi Hossain et al., “Development Needs Civil Society: The Implications of Civic Space for the Sustainable Development Goals,” Institute of Development Studies, April 2019.

30 Open Government Partnership, “The Skeptic’s Guide to Open Government,” 2022, chapter 6, “Civic Space.”

from 2013 to 2016, the council recognized the importance of “political space” in reducing the risk of instability in the DRC.<sup>31</sup> From 2016 to 2023, the council mandated MONUSCO to monitor, report, and follow up on human rights violations and abuses, such as “restrictions on political space and violence,” including in the context of elections.<sup>32</sup>

More recently, council members have begun using the term “civic space” rather than “political space” during discussions on peacekeeping operations, driven in particular by the United States and some elected members of the council that have become proponents of this term.<sup>33</sup> The secretary-general’s reports on MONUSCO, UNMISS, and the UN mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) often include information on civic space.<sup>34</sup> The secretary-general has also referenced civic space or associated freedoms in reports on the UN mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO), MINUSCA, the UN mission in Abyei (UNISFA), the UN mission in Cyprus (UNFICYP), and the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL).<sup>35</sup>

Despite more frequent references to civic space in the council and reports of the secretary-general, UNMISS is the only UN peacekeeping mission with an explicit mandate to promote civic space.<sup>36</sup> Resolution 2677 (2023) mandates UNMISS to assist

UNMISS is the only UN peacekeeping mission with an explicit mandate to promote civic space.

all parties to (1) “promote an open, free, inclusive, and safe civic space,” (2) use good offices to support stakeholders in “upholding the view of elections as a phased approach that must first focus on supporting the creation of conditions conducive to civic and political space,” and (3) provide technical and logistical support “focused on creating conditions for civic and political space.”<sup>37</sup>

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which has a leading role in protecting and promoting civic space within the UN system, has advocated for more explicit language on civic space in mandates. The UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders has echoed this call, advocating for peace operations to be “mandated to pay specific attention to civic space and in particular to the violations committed against women human rights defenders in conflict and post-conflict settings.”<sup>38</sup>

However, interviewees held different views on the utility of including explicit language on civic space in council mandates, reflecting broader debates over how detailed the council should be in articulating tasks for missions. Some experts doubted whether explicit language on civic space makes a difference, as civic space is already linked to other

31 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2098, UN Doc. S/RES/2098, March 28, 2013, para. 11(b); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2147, UN Doc. S/RES/2147, March 28, 2014, para. 3(b); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2211, UN Doc. S/RES/2211, March 26, 2015, para. 6(b); United Nations Security Council Resolution 2277, UN Doc. S/RES/2277, March 20, 2016, para. 29(b).

32 The 2014 and 2015 mandates also included monitoring, reporting, and following up on human rights violations and abuses, including in the context of elections, though “political space” was not explicitly mentioned until 2016.

33 On council discussions, see, for example: UN Press, “Critical Electoral Questions Remain Unanswered amidst Grim Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan, United Nations Officials Tell Security Council,” September 15, 2023; UN Press, “As Democratic Republic of Congo Elections Approach, Speakers in Security Council Express Concern over Humanitarian Situation, Regional Tensions,” December 11, 2023; UN Press, “Urging Continued Support for Central African Republic, Peacekeeping Mission Head Cites UN’s Role in Facilitating First Peaceful Transhumance Conference, Upcoming Elections,” June 27, 2024. For informal discussions, see: International Peace Institute, Stimson Center, and Security Council Report, “Prioritizing, Sequencing, and Streamlining UN Security Council Mandates: The Case of UNMISS,” March 2024; International Peace Institute, Stimson Center, Security Council Report, “Prioritizing, Sequencing, and Streamlining UN Security Council Mandates: The Case of MINUSCA,” November 2023.

34 These references are the most frequent in reports on UNMISS. See, for example: UN Doc. S/2024/188, February 26, 2024; UN Doc. S/2023/955, December 6, 2023; UN Doc. S/2023/433, June 13, 2023. For MONUSCO, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2024/482, June 20, 2024; UN Doc. S/2023/932, November 30, 2023; UN Doc. S/2023/691, September 21, 2023. For UNMIK, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2024/282, April 2, 2024; UN Doc. S/2023/735, October 5, 2023; UN Doc. S/2023/247, April 5, 2023.

35 For MINURSO, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2023/729, October 3, 2023; UN Doc. S/2022/733, October 3, 2022; UN Doc. S/2021/843, October 1, 2021. For UNISFA, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2021/383, April 20, 2021. For MINUSCA, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2024/170, February 15, 2024; UN Doc. S/2023/769, October 16, 2023; UN Doc. S/2022/762, October 13, 2022. For UNFICYP, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2020/685, July 13, 2020. For UNIFIL, see, for example: UN Doc. S/2022/214, March 11, 2022; UN Doc. S/2021/240, March 9, 2021; UN Doc. S/2020/1110, November 12, 2020.

36 While the focus of this paper is on UN peacekeeping operations, the council has not given any special political missions an explicit mandate on civic space. The resolution mandating the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) contains a reference to “civic engagement” and calls on the mission to “provide comprehensive analysis and liaison with all relevant Afghan political actors, civil society representatives, and other stakeholders to promote political inclusion and broad participation in the conduct of public affairs,” while the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) has a reference to “civic education.” Both terms are distinct concepts from civic space. For UNAMA, see: UN Doc. S/RES/2626, March 17, 2022, para. 5(d)(e). UN Doc. S/RES/2727, March 15, 2024 uses the terms of the 2022 resolution. For UNSOM, see: UN Doc. S/RES/2705, October 31, 2023, preamble.

37 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2677, UN Doc. S/RES/2677, March 15, 2023, paras. 3(c)(ii), 3(c)(iv), 3(c)(v).

38 United Nations General Assembly, *Situation of Human Rights Defenders—Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders*, UN Doc. A/78/131, July 7, 2023, para. 103.

### Box 1. The UNMISS mandate and civic space

The focus on civic space in the mandate for UNMISS can, in part, be traced back to the independent review of the mission in 2018. The review argued that “in order to prevent the further erosion of democracy in the country, the protection of civic space should be reinforced as one of the main priorities of the mission. Work in that area would include the protection of civil society actors under threat and the prevention of the additional deterioration of freedom of expression in the country.”<sup>39</sup>

Since 2018, mission leaders and the US (the penholder on the file) have been outspoken in articulating the link between supporting civic space and achieving stability in South Sudan. Notably, Nicholas Haysom, special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG) and head of UNMISS, has referred to civic space in nine out of the ten open briefings he has delivered to the council since assuming the position in 2021.<sup>40</sup> In March 2023, Haysom told the council that “the expansion of civic and political space... will be a defining legacy of the transitional period.”<sup>41</sup> The emphasis on civic space in South Sudan has also been referenced by the under secretary-general for peace operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, the US has advocated for the promotion and protection of civic space in South Sudan, which it views as fundamental to the credibility of elections and the implementation of the peace agreement.<sup>43</sup> The support from mission leadership and the penholder could help to explain why civic space has been incorporated into the mandate for UNMISS.

areas of missions’ work.<sup>44</sup> Some stakeholders argued that additional explicit language might even have negative implications given the pitfalls of overly prescriptive mandates. One reflected, “What do we stand to gain if we have an explicit mandate in the council—how much space is there for that?”<sup>45</sup> Another argued, “To my mind, [civic space] is just one more thing in a Christmas tree mandate.... It’s just adding another buzzword.”<sup>46</sup>

Others, however, argued that explicit mandate language would help elevate civic space as a priority among competing tasks in a context of scarce resources.<sup>47</sup> Clear language in mandates can also provide leverage with host states, particularly when host authorities are responsible for restricting civic

space. As explored below, the example of South Sudan illustrates the potential effectiveness of mandate language in improving a mission’s ability to undertake this work.

## Promoting and Protecting Civic Space in UN Peacekeeping Operations

There are several examples of how UN peacekeeping operations have supported the protection and promotion of civic space. At the same time, missions have faced several challenges in undertaking this work.

39 United Nations Secretary-General, *Special Report of the Secretary-General on the Renewal of the Mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan*, UN Doc. S/2018/143, February 20, 2018, para. 32.

40 In the one briefing in which he did not mention civic space, he referred to “political space.” These statements span the period from September 15, 2021 to December 14, 2023.

41 Security Council Report, “South Sudan: Briefing and Consultations,” *What’s in Blue*, June 19, 2023.

42 See, for example: UN Peacekeeping, “Under Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix’s Briefing to the Security Council on South Sudan,” March 5, 2024.

43 See, for example: US Mission to the UN, “Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Political and Humanitarian Situation in South Sudan,” March 6, 2023; US Mission to the UN, “Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Sudan and South Sudan,” September 15, 2023; US Embassy in South Sudan, “Remarks from Ambassador Adler as Prepared for Delivery on the Occasion of July 4, 2024,” July 4, 2024; US Department of State, “Calling on the Transitional Government of South Sudan to Urgently Open Political and Civic Space,” July 10, 2024.

44 Interview 1, UN official, April 2024; Interview 2, UN officials, April 2024.

45 Interview 2, UN officials, April 2024.

46 Interview 3, UN official, April 2024.

47 Informal briefing with UN officials, May 2024; Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

## Examples from Missions

Since civic space is grounded in respect for fundamental freedoms, the human rights divisions within missions typically lead on this issue.<sup>48</sup> The UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) in the DRC, comprising MONUSCO's human rights division and the former office of OHCHR in the DRC, provides a useful window into how human rights divisions promote and protect civic space. One of UNJHRO's thematic priorities for 2024–2026 is “enhancing and protecting civic space and people's participation.”<sup>49</sup> To achieve this goal, the office undertakes a range of activities such as training CSOs, particularly women and youth groups, to increase their participation in political processes; working with the government on the adoption of laws that protect the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly; strengthening the National Human Rights Commission's capacity to promote and protect human rights; combating disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech; and providing protection for human rights defenders, journalists, and other individuals at risk.<sup>50</sup>

UNJHRO has also indicated that it will implement “more systematic monitoring of the environment for civic space, including threats to it.”<sup>51</sup> This includes gathering data on the number of human rights violations related to civic space “disaggregated by type, including exercise of freedom of expression, assembly, and association.”<sup>52</sup> This is notable because internal reporting on indicators and trends related to civic space is not systematic across all missions.<sup>53</sup> UNJHRO's more systematic approach to monitoring civic space might provide

useful lessons that could be applied in other contexts.

As discussed below, missions' work on civic space is highly political, as it involves engaging with host authorities to change the way they interact with their populations. As one expert noted, host states can view civic space as “liberal Western ideals being imposed.”<sup>54</sup> This parallels a broader pushback on missions' human rights programming from some host states and UN Security Council members.<sup>55</sup> Thus, a rights-based framing of civic space can create challenges for missions in managing the consent of the host state.<sup>56</sup> However, as previously noted, a lack of civic space not only undermines human rights but can also contribute to creating the conditions for violence. Thus, framing civic space as an integral part of an overall peace process might be a more conducive way for missions to engage with host authorities.

UNMISS appears to have adopted such an approach. There have been concerted efforts to mainstream civic space throughout all parts of the mission in connection with the broader aim of supporting the implementation of the peace agreement and the electoral process. As articulated by one expert, “The SRSB and the team tried to mainstream [civic space] in a way where it became something that wasn't just an add-on—it was the mission strategy.... It was embedded in everything.”<sup>57</sup> To that end, the mission adopted a mission-wide strategy on civic space in 2022, established guidelines on the “Protection of Civic Space and Non-state Actors at Risk,” and created a coordination structure for civic space.<sup>58</sup> While tensions still arise between UNMISS and host

48 Interview 1, UN official, April 2024; Interview 3, UN official, April 2024; Interview 4, UN official, May 2024; Interview 5, UN officials, June 2024; Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

49 UNJHRO, “Strengthening Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Global Funding Proposal, 2024–2026.”

50 OHCHR, “OHCHR in the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/democratic-republiccongo/our-presence>; UN Human Rights Report 2023, p. 146.

51 Ibid, p. 9.

52 Ibid, p. 29. It is not clear whether this monitoring will encompass offline, as well as online, dimensions of civic space, but it could be interesting to analyze once UNJHRO has gathered data.

53 Interview 4, UN official, May 2024. At the request of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR prepared a report on the challenges and best practices in assessing civic space trends that offers recommendations on improving information-gathering on civic space. See: United Nations Human Rights Council, Civil Society Space—Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Doc. A/HRC/57/31, July 4, 2024.

54 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

55 See, for example: Sofía Sebastián and Aditi Gorur, “UN Peacekeeping and Host-state Consent: How Missions Navigate Relationships with Governments,” Stimson Center, March 2018.

56 Charles Hunt et. al, “UN Peace Operations and Human Rights: A Thematic Study,” Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, 2024, p. 110.

57 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

58 Charles Hunt et. al, “UN Peace Operations and Human Rights,” p. 110.



authorities, one UN official reported that this prioritization of civic space “creates some space for the mission to move.”<sup>59</sup> This is because civic space is seen as a whole-of-mission responsibility directly linked to the mission’s overall goal of supporting the government in building durable peace and implementing the peace agreement.<sup>60</sup>

While UNMISS’s human rights component still plays a leading role, the mission as a whole undertakes work to protect and promote civic space. For example, the mission’s civil affairs team has multiple workstreams that directly or indirectly support civic space. The team has been working to facilitate civil society “networks” by helping to connect organizations with similar interests and goals. In

Efforts to expand civic space need to go beyond electoral periods.

the lead-up to South Sudan’s upcoming elections, the civil affairs team has hosted a series of political dialogues at the state level to bring together women, youth, community and faith-based leaders, and other stakeholders to discuss their roles in the political process and efforts to support a free, fair, and inclusive electoral process.<sup>61</sup> The team has also

begun to host a quarterly townhall meeting where CSOs can directly voice their concerns to the SRSG. As one official noted, “freedoms are what CSOs are most concerned with, and civic space cuts across them all.”<sup>62</sup>

UN radio stations are another way missions can contribute to civic space. The missions in Abyei, CAR, the DRC, Lebanon, and South Sudan all

## Box 2. Links between the protection of civic space and the protection of civilians

There are clear connections between efforts to support civic space and the three tiers of protection of civilians (POC), although missions do not always explicitly address these links.<sup>63</sup> Engagement in civic space requires protection; meaningful engagement is only possible if people can engage safely.<sup>64</sup> This link to protection is particularly acute for women and individuals facing overlapping forms of discrimination, who face heightened risks when engaging in civic space.

Under the first tier of POC (protection through dialogue), missions can work with national authorities to promote civic space. For example, during the 2023 electoral process in the DRC, MONUSCO used its good offices to promote the “safe, meaningful, and constructive participation of women, youth, and Indigenous People.”<sup>65</sup> Under tier two (physical protection), peacekeepers have positioned themselves around polling stations to ensure that individuals seeking to vote are able to do so safely.<sup>66</sup> Missions also facilitate the protection of individual journalists, civil society members, and others who are at risk because of their civic engagement.<sup>67</sup> For example, in the DRC, UNJHRO has occasionally evacuated journalists whose safety has been threatened.<sup>68</sup> Finally, under tier three (establishment of a protective environment), missions build state capacity through support in areas like elections, human rights, gender equality, and security sector reform, all of which intersect with the protection and promotion of civic space.

59 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

60 Interview 5, UN officials, June 2024; Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

61 See, for example: United Nations Peacekeeping, “Call for Political and Civic Space by Participants Dominates Political Forum in Rumbek,” July 10, 2024. In September 2024, the South Sudanese government announced that it would postpone the elections for two years.

62 Interview 5, UN officials, June 2024.

63 For information on the three tiers, see: UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), “Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping,” May 1, 2023; Interview 3, UN official, April 2024.

64 For more information on the linkages between protection and participation, see, for example: Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, “At the Nexus of Participation and Protection: Protection-Related Barriers to Women’s Participation in Northern Ireland,” International Peace Institute, June 2021; Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, “Full, Equal, Meaningful, and Safe: Creating Enabling Environments for Women’s Participation in Libya,” International Peace Institute, July 2023; United Nations, “Agenda for Protection, Strengthening the Ability of the United Nations System to Protect People through their Human Rights,” February 2024.

65 United Nations Secretary-General, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, UN Doc. S/2024/251, March 21, 2024, para. 6.

66 One study found that there was a lower risk of electoral violence in areas where peacekeepers are deployed: see Hanne Fjelde and Hannah M. Smidt, “Protecting the Vote? Peacekeeping Presence and the Risk of Electoral Violence,” *British Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 3 (2022).

67 UN DPO, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook,” 2020, p. 167.

68 Charles Hunt, et. al, “UN Peace Operations and Human Rights,” p. 111.

operate radio stations.<sup>69</sup> While UN radio stations are, in part, a tool for the mission to publicize its work, they also provide populations with access to information, promote the voices of independent journalists, and foster a free media ecosystem.<sup>70</sup> For example, in the DRC, Radio Okapi is often the only source for national information.<sup>71</sup> Through its program “Dialogue entre Congolais,” the mission has invited a range of stakeholders, including government officials and representatives of civil society, to exchange views and engage in dialogue.<sup>72</sup> In doing so, the mission has contributed to the “enhancement of a dynamic civic space... by facilitating a culture of consultation and dialogue through its own example.”<sup>73</sup>

During electoral periods, different components of missions tend to coalesce to support civic space by facilitating participation in formal political processes. For example, in the lead-up to the elections in the DRC in December 2023, the mission documented restrictions related to civic space, organized meetings with local leaders on the “prevention of electoral violence and the political participation of young people and women,” provided protection for female candidates, used its radio station to combat disinformation and inform gender-sensitive approaches to elections, and trained the national police on election security, among other activities.<sup>74</sup>

However, interviewees noted that efforts to expand civic space need to go beyond electoral periods.<sup>75</sup> Other processes such as transitional justice and constitution-making are equally important for

advancing civic space and are also areas where UN missions have made substantial contributions.<sup>76</sup> For example, in Mali and CAR, UN missions helped to establish truth commissions, which expand civic space by creating literal spaces for participation and healing in response to human rights abuses.<sup>77</sup>

Despite missions’ efforts to support civic space, their work often focuses on opening formal channels for participation. The distinction between formal and informal channels is important because the former is typically led and sanctioned by the state, whereas the latter, which can include peaceful demonstrations and protests, is driven by communities. Despite the importance of community-led channels, missions can be averse to supporting informal participation due to their need to manage the consent of the host state.<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, some engagement with state actors can indirectly support informal channels for participation and produce “spinoff benefits.”<sup>79</sup> For example, through operational support and trainings, UN police have bolstered the capacity of state authorities to respond peacefully to mass gatherings, including in Cyprus, Mali, and South Sudan.<sup>80</sup> These efforts have helped to support freedom of expression. The acting director of a police unit in South Sudan noted that “protestors have rights; we, thus, learned professional ways in which to control public demonstrations and disperse crowds through a non-violent approach.”<sup>81</sup>

69 Radio Ophelia in UNMIK has been “put on hold.” See: UNMIK, “Radio Ophelia,” available at <https://unmik.unmissions.org/sq/radio-ophelia>.

70 For more information, see, for example: International Peace Institute, “Thirty Years of Peacekeeping Radio: Lessons for UN Media in a Changing Information Environment,” May 4, 2023.

71 UN Peacekeeping, “Radio Okapi: Twenty Years in the Service of Peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” March 1, 2022.

72 Fondation Hirondelle, “Radio Okapi: 20 Years of Commitment to Peace in DRC,” February 25, 2022. Radio Okapi is available online at <https://www.radiookapi.net/dialogue-entre-congolais?page=1>.

73 Alexandra Novosseloff et al., “Assessing the Effectiveness of the United Nations Mission in the DRC/MONUC–MONUSCO,” Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network, 2019, p. 18.

74 UN Doc. S/2023/932, November 30, 2023; UN Doc. S/2024/251, March 21, 2024; UN Peacekeeping, “UN’s Radio Okapi Sets Gender Equality Standards for Media in DR Congo,” Medium, February 13, 2019.

75 Interview 4, UN official, May 2024.

76 Interview 6, expert, May 2024.

77 United States Institute of Peace, “National Dialogues in Peacebuilding and Transitions: Creativity and Adaptive Thinking,” June 2021; UN Peacekeeping, “Promoting Human Rights,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/promoting-human-rights>; OHCHR, “OHCHR in Central African Republic,” available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/central-african-republic/our-presence>.

78 Interview 1, UN official, April 2024.

79 Interview 6, expert, May 2024.

80 For more information on UN police, including formed police units, see Charles T. Hunt, “‘To Serve and Protect’: The Changing Roles of Police in the Protection of Civilians in UN Peace Operations,” *Civil Wars* 26, no. 1 (2022); UN Police, “Training Materials for Formed Police Units (FPUS),” available at <https://police.un.org/en/training-materials-formed-police-units-fpus>; UN Peacekeeping Resource Hub, “Specialised Training Materials for Formed Police Units,” available at <https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/stm/fpu>; UN Peacekeeping, “PDT Standards for Formed Police Units: Crowd Dynamics in Public Order Ops,” 2015.

81 See: UNMISS, “Building Capacities, Nurturing Partnerships: UNPOL Officers Train National Counterparts on Crowd Management,” April 9, 2022, available at <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/building-capacities-nurturing-partnerships-unpol-officers-train-national-counterparts-crowd>.

### Box 3. Gender and civic space

The ability to engage in civic space (both offline and online) is deeply shaped by an individual's identity. In the context of a global backlash against women's and gender rights, women human rights defenders, including all women and girls who work on issues related to human rights and people of any gender who promote gender equality, are disproportionately impacted by shrinking civic space.<sup>82</sup> For example, there is a growing body of evidence that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by misinformation and disinformation, particularly if they face overlapping forms of discrimination.<sup>83</sup> Women who participate in public life are particularly vulnerable—a 2021 UNESCO study found that, globally, 73 percent of women journalists experienced online violence.<sup>84</sup>

While missions have implemented activities that address the gendered dimensions of civic space, such as programming to increase the participation of women in elections, their work in this area is still developing. The Department of Peace Operations' 2024 gender-responsive peace operations policy contains two references to civic space that have been added since the last version was released in 2018.<sup>85</sup> First, it states that senior mission leadership will engage with relevant stakeholders to “expand the civic space for the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women in peace, political and decision-making processes, their protection, and empowerment towards sustaining peace and the realization of Sustainable Development Goals.”<sup>86</sup> Second, through strategic communications, missions will “facilitate measures that expand the civic space and elevate women's voices and contributions to peace and security through specific initiatives.”<sup>87</sup>

## Challenges

The most common challenges experts identified regarding missions' work on civic space involved managing the consent of the host state. As one interviewee stated, missions are often “dealing with political regimes that aren't keen on opening up civic space [and are] either actively or passively restricting it. So, as a UN actor, you find yourself quickly in a corner.... While in principle we're committing to strengthening civic space, the actual margin for maneuver is limited because of the political context in which we operate.”<sup>88</sup> In that vein, the same official noted that while missions might be able to make advances in supporting civic space at the local level, their influence will be limited if national authorities seek to obstruct mission efforts.

Missions often find themselves walking a fine line between managing the consent of the host state and enhancing civic space. Some experts offered ways to combat this dilemma. Some stated that explicit mandate language can help provide missions with the political backing required to engage on civic space. One expert suggested that missions' interpretation of civic space and framing of their work are critical to ensuring support from the host authorities. In the view of this expert, part of the reason UNMISS has been able to engage in civic space is because its work is directly connected to the implementation of the peace agreement and elections. The mission has communicated with the government that “this is your peace agreement, we're here to support it, and all of this requires civic and political space.”<sup>89</sup> This sort of framing is one way missions could support civic space while

82 OHCHR, “Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls: Gender Equality and Gender Backlash,” available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/wg-women-and-girls/gender-equality-and-gender-backlash>; OHCHR, “Human Rights and Civic Space in the UN System Supporting Women Human Rights Defenders,” October 27, 2021.

83 See, for example: UN Women, “FAQs: Trolling, Stalking, Doxing and Other Forms of Violence against Women in the Digital Age.” For further information, see: UN Doc. A/78/288, August 7, 2023; Internet Governance Forum, “Best Practice Forum on Gender and Digital Rights, Exploring the Concept of Gendered Disinformation,” 2021.

84 UNESCO, “The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence against Women Journalists,” April 2021.

85 UN DPO, “Policy Gender-Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” July 2024.

86 Ibid, para. 27.

87 Ibid, p. vii.

88 Interview 1, UN official, April 2024.

89 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

maintaining some level of cooperation with the host state.

Many other challenges to working on civic space are related to broader challenges facing UN peacekeeping. For example, civil society actors who engage with the UN in any capacity—not just on issues related to civic space—are often the targets of intimidation, attacks, and reprisals.<sup>90</sup> In response, the UN has produced several guidance documents at headquarters and within missions on how to safely engage with civil society and host communities.<sup>91</sup> However, protection often remains a concern for CSOs that engage with missions, particularly in contexts where there are high levels of anti-UN sentiment.<sup>92</sup>

Another challenge relates to how peacekeeping operations coordinate with the broader network of actors working on civic space, including UN country teams. For example, in addition to OHCHR, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO both actively promote and protect civic space, while UN Women and UNICEF facilitate the political participation of women and youth, respectively. Civic space has also become a focus of several projects implemented through the UN Peacebuilding Fund. Additionally, investigative bodies mandated by the Human Rights Council investigate, document, and report on violations related to civic space alongside UN missions. Finally, the UN regional offices also work on civic space.

As a result, in the words of one expert, it can be difficult to assess the “value added of peacekeepers [working on civic space] versus the country team or development actors.”<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, UN peacekeeping operations have several comparative

Missions often find themselves walking a fine line between managing the consent of the host state and enhancing civic space.

advantages. For example, as part of their POC mandates, missions play a vital role in protecting civilians who are at risk because of their participation in civic space, such as CSOs and media actors (see Box 2). Relatedly, missions’ uniformed components can help human rights personnel and other protection actors access hard-to-reach places.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, as political actors, missions can connect efforts to protect civic space to their broader political mandates and strategies at the national and local levels. The secretary-general’s reports to the UN Security Council on individual peacekeeping operations can also draw the council’s attention to threats to civic space and gather political support for addressing them. Finally, as evidenced in South Sudan, peacekeeping operations can use the strengths and capacities of military, civilian, and police components to develop an integrated approach to protecting and promoting civic space.

However, civic space is still emerging as a cross-cutting issue within UN peacekeeping.

A key consideration moving forward will be how missions fit into the broader tapestry of actors working in this space. This will require gathering information to understand how missions’ efforts are contributing to civic space. Currently, reporting on missions’ contributions to civic space is ad hoc, scattered across different components, and not systematically tracked. In part, this is because there are conceptual misunderstandings of civic space that can make it difficult to measure. In addition, as another expert noted, missions have been “driven by the mandate and the moment.”<sup>95</sup> During electoral cycles, there tends to be greater attention paid to civic space, which can contribute to inconsistencies in reporting and a lack of institutionalization of this work.

90 Interview 4, UN official, May 2024; Informal briefing with UN officials, May 2024; Interview 5, UN officials, June 2024.

91 See, for example: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UN Department of Field Support, “Civil Affairs Handbook,” 2012; UN DPO, “Understanding and Improving Engagement with Civil Society in UN Peacekeeping: From Policy to Practice,” May 2016; UN DPO, “Peacekeeping Practice Note: Community Engagement,” March 2018.

92 See, for example: Harley Henigson, “Community Engagement in UN Peacekeeping Operations: A People-Centered Approach to Protecting Civilians,” International Peace Institute, November 2020.

93 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

94 See, for example: Center for Civilians in Conflict, “Integrated United Nations Approaches to Protection During Peacekeeping Transitions: Lessons Learned from MONUSCO,” November 2023.

95 Interview 6, expert, June 2024.

## Conclusion

Restrictions on civic space not only undermine human rights but can also contribute to instability. Missions employ multiple strategies to promote effective public participation and expand civic space. These efforts are connected to core mission mandates, including efforts to enhance human rights, support political processes, and protect civilians. While these efforts can be politically challenging, UN peacekeeping operations have multiple entry points to working on civic space and have a unique role to play in its promotion and protection. Yet at the moment, these efforts are not always part of a common strategy to protect and promote civic space. Four considerations could help guide future exploration of this topic:

- First, to date, the Security Council has only given UNMISS an explicit mandate on civic space. Policymakers should consider the utility of adding similar language to other mission mandates, including weighing the risks and benefits.
- Second, missions should consider how to connect the dots between their different efforts related to civic space (e.g., promoting women's

participation in peace processes, addressing mis- and disinformation, institution building, protecting individuals at risk). In doing so, it will be important to assess lessons from the rollout of the mission-wide strategy in UNMISS, including how the mission has navigated the political challenges.

- Third, both UNMISS and MONUSCO have implemented more systematic approaches to monitoring civic space, allowing them to track trends and threats. The missions should gather lessons on whether and how this monitoring has impacted their ability to respond to civic space restrictions, including its influence on their interactions with host authorities.
- Finally, missions undertake a range of activities related to civic space, yet there is no reporting on the collective impact of these efforts. This is a missed opportunity for illustrating the role missions play in protecting and promoting civic space. Such reporting would also help illustrate missions' comparative advantages vis-à-vis other actors working on civic space. The secretary-general's reports to the Security Council could be one platform for including such analysis.

The **INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE** (IPI) is an independent, non-profit organization working to strengthen inclusive multilateralism for a more peaceful and sustainable planet. Through its research, convening, and strategic advising, IPI provides innovative recommendations for the United Nations System, member states, regional organizations, civil society, and the private sector. With staff from around the world and a broad range of academic fields, IPI has offices facing United Nations headquarters in New York.



**777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3521, USA**

TEL +1-212-687-4300 FAX +1-212-983-8246

[www.ipinst.org](http://www.ipinst.org)