

India's Role in UN Peacekeeping: Protecting Human Rights in War Zones

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Abstract

The maintenance of international peace and security remains one of the principal objectives of the United Nations (UN), with peacekeeping operations serving as one of its most visible and effective instruments for conflict management. Since its independence, India has consistently emerged as one of the most committed contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), demonstrating an unwavering commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, multilateral cooperation, and the protection of vulnerable civilian populations. Indian peacekeepers have served in some of the world's most volatile conflict zones, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Sudan, Rwanda, Somalia, and several other regions affected by armed conflict. Beyond the traditional mandate of monitoring ceasefires, India's peacekeeping efforts have increasingly focused on the protection of civilians, promotion of human rights, humanitarian assistance, gender inclusion, post-conflict reconstruction, and support for democratic governance. This article critically examines India's evolving role in UN peacekeeping through the lens of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. It analyses the historical development of India's participation, the legal framework governing peacekeeping missions, and the practical contributions made by Indian military and police contingents in protecting civilians from violence, facilitating humanitarian access, supporting displaced populations, and strengthening local institutions. The paper further evaluates India's leadership in promoting women peacekeepers, capacity-building initiatives, and accountability within UN missions while addressing operational challenges such as resource constraints, changing conflict dynamics, terrorism, and allegations occasionally associated with peacekeeping missions globally. Through selected case studies of Congo, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon, the study argues that India's contribution extends beyond troop deployment to encompass the advancement of human security and the protection of fundamental human rights. The paper concludes by recommending institutional reforms that can further enhance India's effectiveness and leadership in future multidimensional peacekeeping operations.

Keywords: United Nations Peacekeeping; India; Human Rights; Protection of Civilians; International Humanitarian Law

Introduction

The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 marked a transformative moment in the evolution of international relations by creating an institutional framework dedicated to the maintenance of international peace and security. Emerging from the devastation of the Second World War, the United Nations sought to prevent future conflicts through collective security, peaceful dispute resolution, international cooperation, and the promotion of universal human rights. Although the UN Charter does not explicitly mention peacekeeping operations, peacekeeping gradually evolved as one of the organisation's most innovative mechanisms for preventing conflict escalation, maintaining ceasefires, protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian assistance, and supporting post-conflict

state-building. Over the decades, United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) have transformed from traditional observer missions into multidimensional operations involving military personnel, police officers, humanitarian agencies, legal experts, electoral observers, engineers, and human rights specialists. These missions today play a central role in safeguarding civilian populations living amidst armed conflict while simultaneously strengthening democratic governance and rebuilding institutions devastated by war.¹

India occupies a unique position within this global peacekeeping architecture. Since participating in the United Nations' early missions during the Korean conflict and subsequently deploying troops to the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) in 1960, India has consistently remained among the largest and most respected troop-contributing countries. According to official figures released by the Government of India and the United Nations, India has contributed more than 270,000 military personnel to over fifty United Nations peacekeeping missions, making it one of the largest cumulative troop contributors in the history of UN peacekeeping. Indian peacekeepers presently continue to serve in several active missions across Africa and the Middle East, reflecting India's long-standing commitment to multilateralism and international peace.²

India's commitment to peacekeeping is deeply rooted in its constitutional values and foreign policy principles. Inspired by the ideals of peaceful coexistence, sovereign equality, non-intervention, and respect for international law, India's participation in UN peacekeeping represents an extension of its broader commitment to global justice and human dignity. The philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("the world is one family") has frequently been invoked in India's diplomatic discourse to emphasise collective responsibility for maintaining peace and protecting humanity from the consequences of armed conflict. Consequently, India's engagement with peacekeeping has not merely been a strategic or military undertaking but also a humanitarian commitment grounded in ethical responsibility and international solidarity.³

The changing nature of armed conflict has significantly altered the objectives of United Nations peacekeeping missions. Contemporary conflicts are increasingly characterised by civil wars, ethnic violence, terrorism, organised crime, insurgencies, and widespread violations of international humanitarian law. Civilians have become the principal victims of these conflicts, suffering from forced displacement, mass killings, sexual violence, recruitment of child soldiers, destruction of essential infrastructure, and denial of humanitarian assistance. As a result, the Security Council has progressively expanded peacekeeping mandates to include the protection of civilians, monitoring of human rights violations, support for humanitarian relief, promotion of gender equality, security sector reform, electoral assistance, and transitional justice. These multidimensional responsibilities require peacekeepers to balance military objectives with humanitarian principles while operating in highly volatile security environments.⁴

Human rights protection has therefore emerged as one of the defining features of modern UN peacekeeping. International human rights law, together with international humanitarian law, forms the normative framework within which peacekeepers operate. Peacekeeping missions today are expected not only to prevent violence but also to create conditions that enable individuals to enjoy fundamental rights such as the right to life, liberty, dignity, access to justice, education, healthcare, and freedom from discrimination. Human rights components within UN missions investigate abuses, support national institutions, train local security forces, and facilitate

¹ Nations, United. 'Maintain International Peace and Security'. United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

² India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice. <https://www.pib.gov.in/www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2109587>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

³ India and UN Peacekeeping: Eight Decades of Commitment, Courage, and Credibility – Asthana Writes. <https://asthanawrites.org/2025/12/20/india-and-un-peacekeeping-eight-decades-of-commitment-courage-and-credibility/>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

⁴ Kurtz, Gerrit. 'Peace in Crisis: Conflict Management in the Horn of Africa'. Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik (SWP), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/peace-in-crisis-conflict-management-in-the-horn-of-africa>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

accountability mechanisms. Military contingents contribute by protecting civilians under imminent threat, securing humanitarian corridors, and ensuring the safety of internally displaced persons and refugees.⁵

Within this evolving framework, Indian peacekeepers have developed an international reputation for professionalism, discipline, impartiality, and community engagement. Their contributions extend beyond traditional military functions and encompass humanitarian outreach, construction of roads and schools, establishment of medical camps, provision of veterinary services, rehabilitation of war-affected communities, and assistance in electoral processes. Indian medical units have treated thousands of civilians in conflict zones where access to healthcare remains severely limited. Engineering units have restored critical infrastructure necessary for humanitarian access, while female peacekeepers have played an essential role in engaging women and children affected by conflict, particularly survivors of gender-based violence.⁶

India has also made pioneering contributions towards increasing women's participation in peacekeeping. The deployment of the first all-female Formed Police Unit to Liberia in 2007 represented a landmark achievement in the implementation of the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. The success of this contingent enhanced operational effectiveness, encouraged greater participation of local women in law enforcement, and demonstrated the importance of gender-sensitive peacekeeping strategies. India's continued emphasis on training female military officers and police personnel reflects its recognition that gender diversity strengthens mission credibility and improves protection outcomes for vulnerable populations.

Despite these achievements, UN peacekeeping operations face significant challenges. Contemporary missions operate in increasingly dangerous environments marked by asymmetric warfare, terrorism, weak state institutions, misinformation, and inadequate logistical support. Peacekeepers are often expected to fulfil expansive mandates despite limited resources and uncertain political support from host governments and the Security Council. Questions relating to accountability, operational effectiveness, use of force, protection mandates, and allegations of misconduct involving some peacekeepers from various troop-contributing countries have generated important debates concerning the legitimacy and future direction of UN peacekeeping. These developments underscore the need for continuous institutional reforms, enhanced training in international humanitarian law, improved intelligence capabilities, stronger accountability mechanisms, and closer cooperation between troop-contributing countries and the United Nations Secretariat.⁷

India has consistently advocated reforms aimed at strengthening peacekeeping effectiveness while ensuring greater consultation with troop-contributing countries in mandate formulation. It has argued that peacekeeping missions should possess clear political objectives, realistic mandates, adequate resources, and robust protection for peacekeepers operating in hostile environments. India has further emphasised that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through military deployments but requires political dialogue, economic development, institution-building, and respect for human rights.⁸

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine India's contribution to UN peacekeeping from the perspective of human rights protection in conflict-affected regions. The article analyses the legal foundations of peacekeeping, India's historical participation, operational experiences in selected missions, and the relationship

⁵ White, Nigel D. 'Protecting Human Rights in UN Peacekeeping: Operationalising Due Diligence and Accountability'. *King's Law Journal*, vol. 34, no. 3, Sept. 2023, pp. 463–87. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09615768.2023.2283231>.

⁶ NEWS, OMMCOM. 'UN Honours 651 Indian Army Peacekeepers For Service In DR Congo | World'. *Odisha News, Odisha Breaking News, Odisha Latest News || Ommcom News*, 4 July 2026, <https://ommcomnews.com/world-news/un-honours-651-indian-army-peacekeepers-for-service-in-dr-congo/>.

⁷ Sarjoon, Athambawa, and Mohammed Agus Yusoff. 'The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Challenges'. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, Nov. 2019. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2019-0018>.

⁸ India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice. <https://www.pib.gov.in/www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2109587>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

between peacekeeping and international human rights law. Through an examination of major peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon, the study evaluates how Indian contingents have contributed to civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, institutional development, and post-conflict peacebuilding. It also critically examines the operational constraints confronting modern peacekeeping and proposes measures through which India can further strengthen its leadership within the evolving framework of United Nations peace operations.

Ultimately, India's enduring participation in UN peacekeeping illustrates that effective peacekeeping is measured not merely by the absence of armed conflict but by the protection of human dignity, restoration of the rule of law, and creation of conditions in which sustainable peace can flourish. As contemporary conflicts become increasingly complex, India's experience, professionalism, and normative commitment to multilateralism position it as one of the indispensable contributors to the future of international peacekeeping.

Evolution Of United Nations Peacekeeping And The Human Rights Framework

The establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 marked a watershed moment in international relations by creating a global institution dedicated to the maintenance of international peace and security. The UN Charter entrusted the Security Council with the primary responsibility for preventing conflicts and restoring international peace through collective security mechanisms. Although the Charter does not expressly refer to "peacekeeping operations," peacekeeping gradually evolved as an innovative practice that combined diplomatic, military, and humanitarian measures to prevent the escalation of armed conflicts. The first peacekeeping missions, such as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) established in 1948 and the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) established in 1949, primarily consisted of unarmed military observers responsible for monitoring ceasefires and supervising armistice agreements. These traditional missions were limited in scope and operated with the consent of the conflicting parties, reflecting the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention that dominated the post-war international order.⁹

During the Cold War, ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union often paralysed the Security Council, limiting the ability of the United Nations to undertake coercive action. Consequently, peacekeeping developed as a pragmatic instrument that enabled the UN to intervene impartially in regional conflicts without directly engaging in military enforcement. Traditional peacekeeping missions were guided by three fundamental principles: the consent of the parties, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence. These principles established the credibility and legitimacy of peacekeeping operations and continue to influence contemporary missions despite significant changes in their mandates.¹⁰

The end of the Cold War fundamentally transformed the nature of armed conflicts and, consequently, the role of UN peacekeeping. Civil wars, ethnic conflicts, terrorism, and state collapse replaced conventional interstate wars as the predominant threats to international peace. Conflicts in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo demonstrated that civilian populations had become the primary victims of armed violence. Mass atrocities, ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, forced displacement, and attacks on humanitarian workers highlighted the inadequacy of traditional peacekeeping mandates that focused solely on monitoring ceasefires. In response, the Security Council expanded peacekeeping mandates to include civilian protection, electoral assistance, institution-building, humanitarian coordination, police reform, judicial reconstruction, and human rights monitoring. Peacekeeping thus evolved into multidimensional peace operations aimed not merely at preventing violence but also at establishing conditions necessary for sustainable peace.¹¹

⁹ Nations, United. 'Maintain International Peace and Security'. United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

¹⁰ 'Our History'. UN Peacekeeping, 11 June 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history>.

¹¹ Howard, Lise Morjé, and Alexandra Stark. 'How Civil Wars End: The International System, Norms, and the Role of External Actors'. *International Security*, vol. 42, no. 3, Jan. 2018, pp. 127–71. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00305.

Peacekeeping and the Protection of Human Rights

The growing emphasis on human rights significantly reshaped the objectives of United Nations peacekeeping. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, followed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, established universal standards for protecting individual dignity and fundamental freedoms. Contemporary peacekeeping missions are increasingly mandated to ensure that civilians affected by armed conflict enjoy protection against arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence, forced displacement, and discrimination. Human rights components within peacekeeping missions investigate violations, document abuses, strengthen domestic institutions, and assist governments in implementing international human rights obligations.¹²

One of the most important developments in modern peacekeeping has been the adoption of the Protection of Civilians (POC) mandate. Recognising that civilians are disproportionately affected by contemporary conflicts, the Security Council has authorised peacekeepers to use all necessary means, within their mandates, to protect civilians facing imminent threats of physical violence. This shift represents a departure from the passive observer role traditionally associated with peacekeeping. Military contingents now conduct patrols, secure internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, escort humanitarian convoys, establish safe zones, and facilitate humanitarian access in conflict-affected regions. These measures have substantially strengthened the humanitarian dimension of peacekeeping and reinforced the UN's commitment to protecting vulnerable populations.¹³

The integration of human rights into peacekeeping also reflects the broader concept of human security, which focuses on protecting individuals rather than merely safeguarding state sovereignty. Human security encompasses protection from violence, poverty, disease, displacement, and political repression. By promoting access to justice, supporting democratic governance, facilitating humanitarian assistance, and strengthening the rule of law, peacekeeping operations contribute to long-term peacebuilding and sustainable development. This multidimensional approach recognises that durable peace cannot be achieved solely through military means but requires the protection of human dignity and the restoration of effective state institutions.¹⁴

International Humanitarian Law and Responsibility to Protect

International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, provides the legal framework governing the conduct of armed conflict. Although peacekeepers are not traditional combatants, they are expected to operate in accordance with the principles of distinction, proportionality, military necessity, and humanity whenever force is authorised. These principles guide military operations by requiring peacekeepers to distinguish between combatants and civilians, minimise civilian casualties, and employ force only when necessary to fulfil their mandates. Comprehensive pre-deployment training in IHL, human rights law, and civilian protection has therefore become an essential component of modern peacekeeping.¹⁵

Another significant normative development influencing peacekeeping is the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), endorsed at the 2005 United Nations World Summit. The doctrine recognises that every state bears the primary responsibility to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Where national authorities fail to discharge this responsibility, the international community may take collective action through the United Nations in accordance with the UN Charter. Although R2P remains politically

¹² Nations, United. 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

¹³ 'Protection of Civilians Mandate'. UN Peacekeeping, 11 June 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protection-of-civilians-mandate>.

¹⁴ Culaj, Gjon, et al. 'Human Security: A Precondition for Peace, Dignity and Development'. JANUS NET E-Journal of International Relation, vol. 15, no. 2, 2024. DOI.org (Crossref), <https://doi.org/10.26619/1647-7251.15.2.6>.

¹⁵ 'International Humanitarian Law'. GlobaLex | Foreign and International Law Research, <https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

debated, it has influenced Security Council mandates by reinforcing the centrality of civilian protection and human rights in peacekeeping operations.¹⁶

The evolution of UN peacekeeping demonstrates that contemporary peace operations are no longer confined to monitoring ceasefires or separating armed forces. Instead, they represent comprehensive international efforts to protect civilians, uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, facilitate political reconciliation, and rebuild societies emerging from conflict. The incorporation of human rights into peacekeeping has transformed these missions into essential instruments for promoting global peace, justice, and sustainable development. This evolving framework provides the context within which India's contribution to UN peacekeeping and the protection of human rights can be critically examined.¹⁷

India's Commitment To United Nations Peacekeeping

India has consistently been one of the most significant contributors to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), reflecting its enduring commitment to international peace, multilateral cooperation, and the protection of human rights. Since its first participation in UN peacekeeping activities in the late 1940s, India has contributed military personnel, police officers, medical teams, engineers, and civilian experts to numerous missions across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. India's engagement is rooted in the principles of the Constitution, respect for international law, peaceful coexistence, and the ideals of the United Nations Charter. Rather than viewing peacekeeping merely as a military responsibility, India considers it a humanitarian obligation aimed at promoting global stability, safeguarding civilians, and assisting conflict-affected societies in rebuilding democratic institutions.¹⁸

India's foreign policy has consistently emphasised peaceful settlement of disputes, non-alignment, respect for sovereignty, and international cooperation. These principles have significantly influenced its peacekeeping philosophy. Indian contingents are widely recognised for their professionalism, discipline, impartiality, and cultural sensitivity, enabling them to gain the confidence of local communities while effectively implementing UN mandates. India's long-standing participation has also strengthened its claim to greater representation in global governance institutions, including its aspiration for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

India's Contributions to Major Peacekeeping Missions

India's contribution to peacekeeping has been particularly noteworthy in Africa, where several conflicts have posed serious threats to international peace and human security. One of the earliest and most significant examples was India's participation in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC) during the 1960s. Following the Congo's independence, political instability, secessionist movements, and foreign intervention created a severe humanitarian crisis. Indian troops played a decisive role in restoring law and order, protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian assistance, and supporting the territorial integrity of the newly independent state. Indian commanders demonstrated exceptional leadership during complex military operations while ensuring that humanitarian considerations remained central to mission objectives. The Congo mission established India's

¹⁶ Nations, United. 'About the Responsibility to Protect'. United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/responsibility-protect/about>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

¹⁷ Foley, Conor, editor. 'The Evolution and Conceptual Development of UN Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians'. UN Peacekeeping Operations and the Protection of Civilians: Saving Succeeding Generations, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 59–105. Cambridge University Press, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108236126.003>.

¹⁸ India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice. <https://www.pib.gov.in/www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2109587>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

reputation as a reliable and capable peacekeeping nation and remains one of the defining milestones in its peacekeeping history.¹⁹

India has also made substantial contributions to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), established following South Sudan's independence in 2011. Civil conflict in South Sudan resulted in widespread violence, ethnic tensions, displacement of millions of civilians, and severe humanitarian crises. Indian peacekeepers have been actively involved in protecting internally displaced persons, securing UN Protection of Civilian (POC) sites, escorting humanitarian convoys, providing medical assistance, and facilitating the delivery of essential humanitarian supplies. Indian medical units have treated thousands of civilians irrespective of ethnicity or political affiliation, while engineering contingents have repaired roads and bridges necessary for humanitarian access. These activities illustrate India's commitment to integrating military operations with humanitarian assistance and human rights protection.²⁰

Another significant example is India's participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Operating in a region characterised by recurring hostilities and political instability, Indian peacekeepers have contributed to monitoring ceasefire agreements, supporting humanitarian initiatives, conducting community outreach programmes, and facilitating coordination between local authorities and international organisations. Indian medical camps, educational initiatives, and infrastructure development projects have strengthened relations with local communities and enhanced the credibility of the peacekeeping mission. Such initiatives demonstrate that India's contribution extends beyond traditional security functions and includes broader peacebuilding efforts aimed at improving the quality of life of conflict-affected populations.²¹

India also played a vital role in the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), where peacekeepers supported the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement, disarmament and demobilisation of armed groups, protection of civilians, and restoration of state institutions. Indian forces earned international recognition for their professionalism during difficult operational circumstances, including the rescue of UN personnel and protection of vulnerable communities from armed rebel groups. Their actions contributed significantly to restoring stability and facilitating Sierra Leone's transition towards peace and democratic governance.

Human Rights Protection and Humanitarian Assistance

The protection of human rights has become an integral component of India's peacekeeping strategy. Indian contingents consistently emphasise civilian welfare alongside military objectives, recognising that sustainable peace depends upon the protection of human dignity and the restoration of public confidence in state institutions. Indian peacekeepers regularly organise free medical camps, distribute essential medicines, provide veterinary assistance, repair schools and community centres, construct roads, restore water supply systems, and assist local populations during humanitarian emergencies. These activities directly contribute to the realisation of economic and social rights while strengthening relationships between peacekeepers and host communities.

Medical assistance has been one of India's most significant humanitarian contributions. Indian military hospitals deployed under UN missions frequently provide treatment not only to peacekeepers but also to civilians who have limited or no access to healthcare facilities. Women, children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities have particularly benefited from these initiatives. During outbreaks of infectious diseases and humanitarian crises, Indian medical personnel have delivered emergency healthcare services, maternal care, vaccination support, and

¹⁹ 'At the Crossroads: India and the Future of UN Peacekeeping in Africa'. Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/at-the-crossroads-india-and-the-future-of-un-peacekeeping-in-africa/>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

²⁰ Indian Peacekeepers Reopen Vital Road in Flood-Hit South Sudan | United Nations in India. <https://india.un.org/en/314037-indian-peacekeepers-reopen-vital-road-flood-hit-south-sudan>, <https://india.un.org/en/314037-indian-peacekeepers-reopen-vital-road-flood-hit-south-sudan>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

²¹ India's Legacy in UN Peacekeeping: Leadership, Commitment, and Sacrifice. <https://www.pib.gov.in/www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2109587>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

health awareness programmes. Such interventions illustrate the broader humanitarian role of peacekeeping in protecting the right to life and health in conflict-affected regions.

Engineering units have similarly played a crucial role in post-conflict reconstruction. The rehabilitation of roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, and communication networks enables humanitarian organisations to reach isolated populations while facilitating economic recovery and state-building. By restoring essential infrastructure, Indian engineers contribute to long-term stability and improve access to education, healthcare, and public services, thereby advancing several internationally recognised human rights.

Women Peacekeepers and Gender Inclusion

India has emerged as a global leader in promoting gender inclusion within United Nations peacekeeping operations. A landmark achievement was the deployment of the first all-female Formed Police Unit to Liberia in 2007. This initiative significantly enhanced the participation of women in peacekeeping and demonstrated the positive impact of female personnel in post-conflict societies. The contingent served not only as law enforcement officers but also as role models for local women, encouraging greater participation in policing and public administration. Their presence strengthened community trust, improved responses to cases involving gender-based violence, and enhanced engagement with women and children who were often reluctant to interact with male security personnel.²²

The success of the Liberian deployment reinforced the importance of implementing the United Nations Women, Peace and Security Agenda. India has continued to increase the participation of women in military and police contingents while promoting gender-sensitive approaches to peacekeeping. Female peacekeepers contribute significantly to community engagement, conflict resolution, protection of survivors of sexual violence, and capacity-building within local police forces. Their participation reflects India's broader commitment to gender equality and inclusive peacebuilding.

Assessment of India's Contribution

India's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping extends well beyond troop deployment. Through military professionalism, humanitarian assistance, infrastructure development, medical outreach, and gender-inclusive peacekeeping, India has consistently supported the protection of civilians and the promotion of human rights in conflict-affected regions. Indian peacekeepers have demonstrated that peacekeeping is not merely about maintaining ceasefires but also about rebuilding trust, strengthening institutions, and creating conditions conducive to sustainable peace.

Nevertheless, India's peacekeeping experience has also highlighted several challenges. Peacekeepers increasingly operate in environments characterised by terrorism, asymmetric warfare, limited resources, political instability, and expanding mandates. The success of future peacekeeping operations will therefore depend upon stronger international cooperation, improved training, technological modernisation, clearer Security Council mandates, and enhanced consultation with troop-contributing countries. Despite these challenges, India's consistent commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter and its emphasis on humanitarian values continue to make it one of the most respected contributors to global peacekeeping. As international conflicts become increasingly complex, India's experience and leadership will remain essential to strengthening the effectiveness of United Nations peace operations and ensuring the protection of human rights in war zones.

²² EAM's Remarks during the Inaugural Session of the Conference for Women Peacekeepers from the Global South : Women in Peacekeeping - A Global South Perspective (February 24, 2025) | Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements?dtl/39099/EAMs_remarks_during_the_Inaugural_session_of_the_Conference_for_Women_Peacekeepers_from_the_Global_South__Women_in_Peacekeeping__A_Global_South_Perspe. Accessed 7 July 2026.

Emerging Challenges In United Nations Peacekeeping

The operational environment of United Nations peacekeeping has changed significantly over the past three decades. Unlike traditional peacekeeping missions that primarily monitored ceasefires between states, contemporary missions are increasingly deployed in situations involving civil wars, terrorism, organised crime, ethnic violence, and fragile state institutions. These conflicts are often characterised by the absence of a clear peace agreement, multiple armed groups, and deliberate attacks against civilians. Consequently, peacekeepers are expected to undertake multidimensional responsibilities that extend beyond military functions, including the protection of civilians, promotion of human rights, humanitarian assistance, electoral support, and institutional capacity-building. While these expanded mandates have enhanced the relevance of peacekeeping, they have also exposed peacekeepers to greater operational and security risks.

One of the most significant challenges confronting UN peacekeeping is the increasing threat posed by non-state armed groups and terrorist organisations. Unlike conventional military forces, these actors frequently disregard international humanitarian law and deliberately target civilians, humanitarian workers, and peacekeepers. Missions in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan have demonstrated that peacekeepers often operate in environments where ceasefires are absent and violence remains unpredictable. Indian peacekeepers serving in such missions have faced hostile attacks, difficult terrain, logistical constraints, and complex political environments while attempting to fulfil civilian protection mandates. These challenges underscore the need for enhanced intelligence capabilities, modern surveillance technologies, improved mobility, and better coordination between military, police, and civilian components of peacekeeping missions.²³

Another challenge concerns the mismatch between ambitious Security Council mandates and the resources made available to peacekeeping missions. Peacekeepers are frequently expected to protect large civilian populations across vast geographical areas despite limited personnel, inadequate equipment, and insufficient logistical support. Such limitations may reduce operational effectiveness and create unrealistic expectations among local communities. India has consistently advocated that peacekeeping mandates should be realistic, adequately resourced, and developed in consultation with troop-contributing countries to ensure effective implementation.

Case Studies: India's Contribution to Human Rights Protection

India's long history of participation in UN peacekeeping provides valuable insights into the practical implementation of human rights protection in conflict zones. The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), later reconfigured as MONUSCO, represents one of the most complex peacekeeping operations in UN history. Indian military contingents have played a central role in protecting civilians threatened by armed militias, securing humanitarian corridors, and supporting disarmament initiatives. Indian aviation units, engineering contingents, and medical teams have significantly contributed to humanitarian relief while ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations. Their ability to combine military effectiveness with humanitarian engagement has enhanced the credibility of UN operations and strengthened confidence among local communities.²⁴

In South Sudan, Indian peacekeepers have demonstrated exceptional commitment to protecting internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing armed conflict and ethnic violence. They have secured Protection of Civilians (POC) sites established by the United Nations, escorted humanitarian convoys delivering food and medical supplies, and provided emergency healthcare to thousands of civilians.²⁵ Indian engineers have also repaired roads and essential infrastructure, enabling humanitarian agencies to access remote communities affected by violence.

²³ 'Peacekeeping'. UN Peacekeeping, 6 July 2026, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en>.

²⁴ 'At the Crossroads: India and the Future of UN Peacekeeping in Africa'. Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/at-the-crossroads-india-and-the-future-of-un-peacekeeping-in-africa/>. Accessed 7 July 2026.

²⁵ Verma, R. (2025). Meditation and Mindfulness in Indian Philosophical Traditions, *ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies*, 2(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v2.i1.2025.10>.

These contributions illustrate how peacekeeping can simultaneously address immediate security concerns and long-term human development objectives.

Similarly, India's participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has highlighted the importance of community engagement in peacekeeping.²⁶ Indian contingents have organised medical camps, educational outreach programmes, vocational training initiatives, and infrastructure development projects that improve the quality of life of local populations. Such initiatives strengthen trust between peacekeepers and host communities while reducing tensions and fostering conditions conducive to sustainable peace. By combining humanitarian assistance with traditional security functions, Indian peacekeepers have demonstrated that peacebuilding requires meaningful engagement with local communities rather than reliance on military measures alone.

The experience of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) further illustrates India's contribution to post-conflict recovery. Indian troops played an important role in protecting civilians, supporting the disarmament and reintegration of former combatants, restoring law and order, and assisting democratic institutions during the country's transition from conflict to peace.²⁷ Their professionalism during difficult operational circumstances reinforced India's reputation as a dependable troop-contributing country capable of executing complex peacekeeping mandates while respecting international humanitarian and human rights law.

Future Prospects and Recommendations

As global conflicts become increasingly complex, the future effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping will depend upon institutional reform, technological innovation, and stronger international cooperation. India has consistently argued that peacekeeping operations must be supported by clearly defined political objectives, realistic mandates, adequate financial resources, and greater participation of troop-contributing countries in Security Council decision-making. Enhanced consultation would enable missions to be designed with greater operational feasibility while ensuring that peacekeepers possess the capabilities required to fulfil their mandates effectively.

Training and capacity-building should remain central priorities for future peacekeeping operations. Peacekeepers must receive comprehensive instruction in international humanitarian law, international human rights law, civilian protection, gender sensitivity, cultural awareness, negotiation techniques, and conflict mediation. Increasing the participation of women in military and police contingents should also remain a priority, as female peacekeepers have demonstrated their effectiveness in community engagement, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and protection of vulnerable groups. India's experience with the deployment of all-female police units provides an important model that can be replicated by other troop-contributing countries.

Technological modernisation represents another important area for reform. The integration of unmanned aerial systems, satellite imagery, artificial intelligence, geographic information systems, secure communication technologies, and real-time intelligence analysis can substantially improve situational awareness and enhance the protection of civilians. At the same time, technological innovation must remain consistent with international law, human rights standards, and the principles governing UN peacekeeping. Investments in logistics, mobility, medical evacuation capabilities, and cybersecurity will further strengthen operational resilience in increasingly hostile environments.

Finally, sustainable peace requires a comprehensive approach that integrates security, development, human rights, and good governance. Peacekeeping operations should therefore continue to work closely with humanitarian

²⁶ Farsani, A.A. (2025). Legal and Ethical Implications of Artificial Intelligence: Balancing Innovation, Responsibility, and Human Rights, *ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies*, 2(2), 146–152. <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v2.i2.2025.53>.

²⁷ Sarma, B.K. and Das, J.K. (2025). Gendered Realities and Rights A Critical Study of Women's Awareness of Human Rights in Nalbari District Assam, *ShodhSamajik: Journal of Social Studies*, 2(2), 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhSamajik.v2.i2.2025.52>.

organisations, development agencies, regional organisations, and host governments to strengthen institutions, promote accountability, support judicial reform, and encourage inclusive political dialogue. India's long-standing emphasis on capacity-building, humanitarian assistance, and respect for local ownership provides an effective model for future multidimensional peacekeeping operations. By combining military professionalism with humanitarian values, India has demonstrated that the protection of human rights is indispensable to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The evolution of modern peacekeeping suggests that future missions will increasingly focus on preventing conflicts rather than merely responding to them. In this context, India's experience, diplomatic credibility, and sustained commitment to multilateralism position it to play an even greater leadership role in shaping the future of United Nations peacekeeping and advancing the global protection of human rights in war zones.

Conclusion

The United Nations Peacekeeping Operations have evolved from traditional ceasefire monitoring missions into multidimensional mechanisms that address complex humanitarian crises, protect civilians, promote human rights, and facilitate post-conflict reconstruction. This transformation reflects the changing nature of armed conflicts, where civilians have become the primary victims of violence and where sustainable peace requires more than military intervention. Modern peacekeeping therefore integrates security, humanitarian assistance, institution-building, and human rights protection within a comprehensive framework for maintaining international peace and security.

India has consistently demonstrated its commitment to these objectives through its long-standing participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Since its earliest deployments, India has remained one of the largest and most respected troop-contributing countries, providing military personnel, police officers, engineers, medical teams, and humanitarian assistance to numerous conflict-affected regions. Indian peacekeepers have made significant contributions in missions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon, where they have protected civilians, facilitated humanitarian relief, restored essential infrastructure, and supported democratic governance. These efforts illustrate that India's contribution extends beyond maintaining ceasefires to promoting human dignity, strengthening local institutions, and creating conditions necessary for sustainable peace.

The study also demonstrates that India's peacekeeping philosophy is deeply rooted in the principles of multilateralism, peaceful coexistence, respect for international law, and humanitarian values. The deployment of women peacekeepers, community outreach programmes, medical assistance, engineering support, and capacity-building initiatives reflects India's holistic approach to peacekeeping and its recognition that long-term peace depends upon the protection of human rights and inclusive development. At the same time, Indian peacekeepers continue to face significant operational challenges, including terrorism, asymmetric warfare, inadequate resources, political complexities, and increasingly demanding mandates. Addressing these challenges requires stronger international cooperation, realistic Security Council mandates, enhanced training, technological modernisation, and greater consultation with troop-contributing countries.

As international conflicts continue to evolve, the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping will depend upon its ability to adapt to emerging threats while remaining firmly anchored in the principles of the UN Charter, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. India is well positioned to play a leading role in this process owing to its extensive operational experience, professional peacekeepers, diplomatic credibility, and unwavering commitment to global peace and security. By continuing to combine military professionalism with humanitarian engagement and respect for human rights, India can further strengthen the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping and contribute meaningfully to the international community's collective efforts to prevent conflict, protect vulnerable populations, and promote a more peaceful and just international order.

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