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“Assessing U.S. Policy on Peacekeeping Operations in Africa”

*Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights
Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith
September 13, 2012*

Good afternoon. Today’s hearing will examine U.S. policy on international peacekeeping operations in Africa and our material and other support for peacekeeping operations in African countries.

The U.S. Government contributes more than a billion dollars annually for African peacekeeping, most recently dedicating \$1.6 billion for Fiscal Year 2012. Today’s hearing offers an opportunity to look at how we evaluate the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations we support in Africa.

There are several current peacekeeping operations in Africa encouraged and/or supported by the U.S. government, and others are being planned even now. The effectiveness of peacekeeping operations has been called into question in terms of planning and execution. This is critical at a time when an important peacekeeping operation in Mali is in the planning stage.

Additionally, the length of peacekeeping operations often runs into decades, and new models of peacekeeping operations (such as hybrids) will be discussed.

Finally, but also of significant importance, we will be inquiring as to how well the United Nations is implementing its zero-tolerance policy with respect to human trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel. I personally have chaired seven hearings that highlighted this issue and other peacekeeping issues in this session of Congress alone, most recently in our June 26th hearing on Mali. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act that I sponsored in 2000 and its reauthorizations also contain provisions related to peacekeeping operations, including the prevention of human trafficking by peacekeeping personnel as part of the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons.

Peacekeeping refers to activities that create conditions favoring lasting peace. However, it is often associated with two other related concepts: peacemaking and peace building.

Peacemaking involves dealing with conflicts in progress and focuses on diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to a negotiated agreement. Peace building describes outside interventions designed to prevent the start or resumption of violent conflict within a nation by creating sustainable peace. As the concept of peacekeeping has evolved, it now includes all three elements.

The first UN peacekeeping mission was in 1948, when a small, unarmed observer force was sent to monitor a buffer zone between Arabs and Israelis in the Middle East. Between then and the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, there were 18 UN peacekeeping missions. Since 1990, however, the UN peacekeeping has risen to more than 50 missions, and the number of peacekeepers worldwide has grown to nearly 100,000 currently.

The record of success of UN peacekeeping missions in Africa has been mixed. A few of them have been credited as qualified successes, such as the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL). The United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) also is considered successful, but it remains incomplete.

Unfortunately, other UN peacekeeping operations have not been as successful. For example, the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNISOM), which operated from 1992-93, is clearly seen as a failure. We all remember the infamous "Blackhawk Down" incident, in which 18 U.S. soldiers were killed following the shooting down of an American helicopter. The repercussions of that disaster have affected the subsequent unwillingness of the U.S. government to commit U.S. troops to peacekeeping operations in Africa.

We now have regional organizations developing and managing peacekeeping operations – sometimes in concert with the UN or sometimes on their own. The African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, have engaged in peacekeeping operations on the African continent. The changes in peacekeeping operations in Africa will have a profound impact on U.S. policy and financial and other support for such operations.

As I mentioned earlier, sex trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeeping personnel is an issue of serious concern. UN peacekeeping missions have been subject to repeated accusations of sexual exploitation and abuse of local women and girls by foreign peacekeepers since 2001. The UN claims it has effectively addressed this problem, but we need to ensure that the blue helmets that are supposed to instill hope that peace is at hand don't create fear of abuse by the very protectors sent to help.

Our witnesses today are deeply involved in these issues and will tell us what the Administration believes peacekeeping in Africa will look like in the years ahead.