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## The Ethical Impacts by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Peacekeeping Missions in Mitigating Complex African Conflicts: A Qualitative Approach

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### ABSTRACT

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), one of the main UN bodies, is charged with promoting and upholding international peace and security. The UNSC is empowered by resolutions to deploy peacekeeping forces to any crisis zone to preserve international peace and security. However, these UN peacekeeping missions have encountered moral conundrums in the course of their work using the DRC as a case study, this research sought to investigate the ethical dilemmas faced by UNSC peacekeeping operations in complex African complexes. The main objective of the study was to critically examine the ethical and community dilemmas that the UNSC's peacekeeping missions in the DRC had to deal with. The study used the constitutive theory as the main theory that formed the hinge of the study. Qualitative data was gathered from the Military, Police, Civilian, Prisons and Correctional Services, and diplomats who were selected for their particular experience and proficiency in peacekeeping missions. NVIVO 11 was used to analyze the collected data, and the results yielded themes that the researcher then presented verbatim. In this regard, the study revealed that the UNSC peacekeeping force is confronted with several moral dilemmas, including social disintegration, human casualties, constitutional crises, and UN Charter violations that have resulted in ceaseless wars. Therefore, the study recommends that African nations make security-related investments if they want to protect their national sovereignty from outside influence, reliance, and meddling. African nations must also be self-sufficient and not overly reliant on other nations to solve their problems.

### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), a principal UN entity, is responsible for fostering and maintaining international peace and security. The UNSC is authorized by resolutions to deploy peacekeeping forces to any crisis area to maintain international peace and security. Consequently, the UNSC has deployed soldiers to many UN peacekeeping missions, including those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, and numerous other countries (Murphy, 2016). Nonetheless, these UN peacekeeping missions have faced ethical dilemmas during their operations, such as the appropriation of host nations' mineral resources, violations of international law, the sexual abuse and exploitation of minors, and the use of force against

vulnerable civilians (Blair, Di Salvatore, & Smidt, 2022). The DRC conflict has numerous underlying reasons. Ndikumana (2016) identifies multiple factors contributing to the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which can be categorized into four groups: institutional, economic, regional, and global geopolitical. The aspects are interrelated and must be considered together to understand the underlying causes of conflicts, formulate conflict resolution strategies, or foster economic development post-war (Väyrynen, 2023). The overall economic deterioration substantially influenced the initiation of the disputes (Gerard & Thomas, 2023). The probability of conflict was elevated at the onset of the anti-Mobutu war. The overall decline of the macroeconomic environment, the mismanagement

of the public sector, and the exacerbation of social conditions—especially the sharply increasing youth unemployment rate—significantly compromised the state's ability to ensure security and necessities for the Congolese populace (Maboko, 2021). This created optimal conditions for the emergence of violent challenges to state authority driven by bitterness and greed.

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo and across Africa is predominantly attributed to the legacies of colonialism (Chilunjika, 2024). Numerous researchers and experts agree that African nations remain governed and affected by their past colonizers; they have only attained political independence (Magu, 2021). This pattern is seen in the instances of former French colonies alleged to have supported coups that contravened their national interests. Unilateral sanctions may be imposed on nations such as Zimbabwe, a former British colony supported by the US, under the guise of safeguarding democracy and the rule of law when diplomatic ties deteriorate. The issue of colonial heritage arose in the 1960s when the inaugural black president of the Democratic Republic of Congo championed change (Yuksel, 2023). Walter Rodney encapsulated this notion in his 1972 work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, by delineating how European colonial administrations systematically exploited and stunted Africa's development.

Since 1999, almost US\$21.7 billion has been allocated to peacekeeping, and the UN has encountered various ethical dilemmas (UN website, 2023). The principal ethical dilemma pertains to the fulfillment of the mandate as articulated in the UN Charter and UNSC Resolutions (Lepard, 2021). The involvement of peacekeepers in cross-border mineral trafficking and their trade in gold and arms with rebels has tarnished the force's credibility (Tunamsifu 2022). Furthermore, the sexual exploitation and abuse of minors, female rapes, sex trafficking, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS represent some of the most egregious violations of international law perpetrated by those in blue helmets (Nyongesa, 2024).

One of the most significant ethical dilemmas concerning UN peacekeepers is the application of force against unarmed civilians (Khan, 2022). This recent round of anti-UN rallies in the DRC has been

particularly violent, despite previous occurrences (Sengenya 2022). The UN has declared it immoral and irresponsible for peacekeepers to lethally fire people (Kayode, 2024). Sengenya (2018) indicates that four of the 36 victims were wearing blue helmets, highlighting that these murders represent one of the ethical dilemmas recorded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In certain instances, the guardian of the populace emerges as the perpetrator, provoking demonstrations as individuals express their fury about perceived inadequacies in safeguarding civilians from deadly insurgent assaults. Moreover, Anders Kompass, the former director of field operations for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, resigned, citing a deficiency of accountability and impunity throughout his 17-year career. Consequently, it is apparent that in these circumstances, member states are not adhering to the UN's principles of justice.

UN peacekeeping operations, while regulated by the Guiding Principles for the UN Peacekeeper's Code of Conduct, derive their power from their mobility, military strength, and access to essential resources such as food, water, and financial assets (Adeyeye & Atidoga, 2021). This results in an imbalance of power between the host community and the peacekeepers. Although their principal duties as uniformed personnel include maintaining the law, safeguarding human rights, and serving as societal exemplars, they have concurrently breached their oaths and responsibilities, leading to a problem of unethical conduct. Violating the code of conduct may result in contract termination or repatriation, financial liabilities, criminal prosecution, and internal disciplinary measures.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other war regions, incidents of sexual violence, rape, and sexual exploitation have continued unabated despite numerous interventions (Abu al-Haj 2013). The misconduct by individuals in blue caps has exacerbated the already intricate and violent conflicts in Africa. Podder & Manzillo (2021) assert that the UN has established a code of conduct for peacekeepers; yet, adherence to these principles seems lacking. UN publications in the *Women Africa Report* (2023) indicate that over 2 million civilians have perished due to prolonged armed conflict, with estimates of women subjected to rape surpassing 1 million. Women have endured

suffering due to the unethical actions of certain state and non-state actors in the DRC conflict (Quadri, 2021). Articles 5, 14, and 15 of the DRC constitution provide a legal foundation for justice and equality programs; yet, women currently hold merely 7.2% of positions in the national parliament and cabinet, the apex of decision-making (Abate & Woldie, 2022).

As much as 52% of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo assert that they have encountered domestic violence, whereas 39% report having been intimidated or harmed (Niggeler, 2021). 27% of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo experience violations of customary practices. Early marriage is prevalent, as indicated by the UN Women Africa Report (2023), which reveals that 39% of women in their early twenties were married or in a union before the age of 18. Illiteracy rates are often higher, and women and girls have poorer access to school compared to males and boys (Dimbuene et al., 2022). Opportunities for respectable employment are scarce for Congolese women. This underscores the UNSC's deficiencies since it places them in a challenging ethical predicament while striving to uphold peace in the DRC. The DRC situation has presented numerous ethical challenges to the UNSC. These ethical dilemmas encompass the homicide of vulnerable bystanders, the abuse of women, and the illicit extraction of minerals (Massey, 2024). Notwithstanding the UNSC's presence, the nation has endured extensive human rights violations and the exploitation of its plentiful mineral resources. The ethical dilemmas presented by the UN forces' operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo undermine their significance and effectiveness notwithstanding their mandate. This study examines the ethical problems faced by the international community about UNSC interventions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

## **METHODS**

The study employed qualitative research to obtain deeper insights into participants' perceptions regarding the effects of ethical challenges encountered by the UNSC in DRC peacekeeping. This study was based on the interpretivism research paradigm. The qualitative research approach involved developing questions and protocols,

collecting specific data from participants, performing inductive data analysis to identify common themes, and evaluating the significance of the findings. The qualitative approach was combined with a phenomenological study design to investigate participants' impressions of their social interactions and contexts. The study's participants included diplomats accredited to Zimbabwe from countries that have held positions on the UNSC, as well as previous and current service chiefs from Zimbabwe who had participated in peacekeeping missions.

These primary informants have intimate experience of the ethical dilemmas confronting the UNSC in the DRC. These persons are regarded as the most knowledgeable and hold the requisite information in the field of study. Due to their considerable expertise and competence in peacekeeping operations, thirty senior officers from the Police, Military, Prisons, and Correctional Services, together with civilians, are involved. Although a sample size of 30 was selected, only 17 responders engaged. The saturation concept was employed to ascertain the adequacy of the sample size. The determination of their sufficiency was derived from the application of the informational redundancy hypothesis proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This indicates that sampling ceased when further units could no longer yield new data. The study employed a purposeful, non-probability sampling technique, whereby the researcher selects cases based on established criteria. The analysis of data was conducted utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The explicit and implicit subjects of the interview transcripts were extracted utilizing an emergent analysis method. Efforts were taken to guarantee that only narratives preserving the original text's meaning were utilized. NVivo 11, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, was utilized.

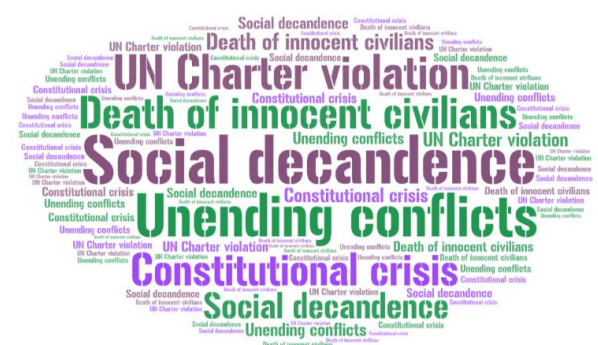
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research aimed to assess the impact of ethical dilemmas on United Nations Security Council peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This section summarizes a word cloud regarding the impact of moral dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping operations in the DRC. Violations of the UN Charter, the massacre of innocent civilians, social decay, constitutional

crises, perpetual conflicts, and civilian fatalities are among the consequences of the ethical dilemmas confronting UNSC peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains critical after over 20 years of UN peacekeeping efforts (Khan, Ahona, and Chakma, 2021). Murphy (2016) asserts that despite the establishment of the UNSC, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has endured severe human rights violations, including civilian killings, sexual and gender-based violence, the use of child soldiers, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Diller (2016) asserts that the UN forces inadequately upheld and safeguarded human rights due to structural deficiencies, including MONUSCO's bureaucratic framework, budgetary constraints, and legal restrictions on the Peacekeeping Force, as well as operational challenges such as difficulties in protecting civilians and UN personnel, insufficient logistics and manpower, and incidents of gender-based violence perpetrated by certain UN personnel and peacekeepers within MONUSCO. These studies demonstrate that numerous ethical dilemmas are indeed involved with UNSC peacekeeping operations.

Figure 1. Impacts of ethical dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping missions in the DRC



Source: Primary data (2025)

## Social Decadence

When asked about the impacts of ethical dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping missions in the DRC, interviewee C1 had to say: The ethical dilemmas exacerbate the conflict in the DRC and have an impact on operational inefficiencies and credibility. Peace and security will continue to be elusive due to corruption, bribery, dealing in minerals, and sexual exploitation. They are

preoccupied with buying illegal minerals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, trading ammunition for ivory, and buying drugs from the rebels, failing to promote the disarmament of the rebel group, instead of peacekeepers addressing concerns of peace and security.

Interviewee C4 supported the view of the first respondent, he had to say: “At one point Peacekeepers deployed in Beni, in the eastern DRC, were arrested, and suspended as part of a case involving alleged sexual exploitation and violence”.

Interviewee C7 was of the same view as he had to say: “One distinguishing characteristic of the DRC's conflict-ridden area is sexual violence. There are several claims, including ones about rape. Rape and sexual exploitation by UN soldiers, aid workers, and civilian perpetrators have become more commonplace as a result of conflict-related violence”.

### Death of Innocent Civilians

When asked about the impacts of ethical dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping missions in the DRC. Interviewee C6 had to say: “During my term in office, about 1,300 civilians were killed in separate conflicts involving armed groups and government forces in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), with the violence forcing many people from their homes”.

Interviewee C10 said the same view and had to say: I am horrified by the rise in violent attacks by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) against defenseless civilians, as well as by the response of the military and security services, who have also perpetrated serious crimes such sexual assault and killings. These actions are not only abhorrent and illegal, but they also undermine public confidence in political and security officials in the state.

## Constitutional Crisis

When asked about the impacts of ethical dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping missions in the DRC. Interviewee C12 had to say: As you recall, Ralph Bunche, the first UN Special Representative to the Congo, abruptly left the country due to disagreements with Prime Minister Lumumba over political issues. Andrew Cordier, another American diplomat, took his post. When Andrew Cordier arrived, there was a severe constitutional crisis going on, with President and Prime Minister Patrice

Lumumba trying to remove one another from office in turn.

Interviewee C10 supported the same view he had to say: "These communities run a serious risk of feeling forced to form self-defense groups in the absence of effective protection by state security forces, which would most likely exacerbate an already dire situation causing a constitutional problem".

#### **UN Charter Violation**

Interviewee, C11 had to say: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) claimed that military forces from Burundi, Uganda, and Rwanda had been occupying its eastern border regions and systematically violating international law and human rights. These purported violations included the massacre of people in large numbers and the siege of a hydroelectric dam, which cut off electricity to houses, schools, and hospitals, killing patients who were critically ill and in need of life support. This clearly violates the United Nations Charter.

Interviewee C12 was of the same view as the first respondent and had to say: The African Charter, which also requires the Commission to protect international law, is violated by the transgressions of international law. In defiance of the UN Charter and the rules governing cordial relations between states, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been the target of an act of military aggression.

Interviewee C10 was also of the same view as he had to say: "It is believed that the Ugandan soldiers intentionally propagated HIV/AIDS among the indigenous populace through the commission of sexual assaults. The region's natural mineral richness and widespread robbery of private property were also alleged, as was the forced relocation of inhabitants from the area into "concentration camps" in Rwanda with the goal of creating a "Tutsi land".

#### **Endless Conflicts**

When asked about the impacts of ethical dilemmas in UNSC peacekeeping missions in the DRC. Interviewee C 7 had to say: "One of the worst internal displacement and humanitarian catastrophes in history has resulted from the Democratic Republic of the Congo's escalating conflict between rebels and militias loyal to the government".

Interviewee, C10 had to say: "The self-declared Islamic State and the Allied Democratic Forces claimed responsibility for the attack in North Kivu province; since 2021, Ugandan and Congolese forces have worked together to destroy rebel strongholds in the area, but attacks persist".

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The research aimed to assess the impact of ethical dilemmas on UNSC peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study suggests that the primary ethical issues of UNSC peacekeeping encompass social decay, civilian casualties, constitutional crises, and violations of the UN Charter, resulting in perpetual wars. In summary, the ethical concerns have impacted operational inefficiency, undermined credibility, and exacerbated the conflict in the DRC. Corruption, bribery, mineral trafficking, and sexual exploitation directly undermine operational efficiency, rendering peace and security unattainable. Rather than addressing matters of peace and security, peacekeepers are preoccupied with the illicit acquisition of minerals from the DRC, trading ammunition for ivory, and procuring drugs from rebels, so neglecting their obligation to facilitate the disarmament of these organizations.

The research advocates that the onus of addressing the challenges confronting African nations should rest with those nations themselves, emphasizing their mandate and obligation to safeguard their populace without excessive reliance on foreign entities, particularly during periods of war and conflict.

Furthermore, it is advised that the persistent inadequacy of UNSC peacekeeping missions in Africa to achieve their objectives of sustainable peace and stability in conflict-affected nations and regions be addressed. The perpetual conflict in resource-rich African nations ensures a sustained need for armaments, hence perpetuating the profitability of Military Industrial Complexes through ongoing weapons manufacture to satisfy the escalating needs of conflict zones. In this context, certain Western powers and their multinational corporations do not favor complete peace in nations and regions where UN peacekeeping missions are active. It is thus advised that African nations recognize that UN peacekeeping missions represent significant commercial interests for industrialized

countries and their multinational enterprises. The UN peacekeeping deployments are not primarily deployed to establish complete peace in these African nations before the installation of a favored regime.

The report recommends that African nations must invest in their national security to protect their sovereignty against foreign influence, dependence, and meddling. Consequently, authorities in African nations must be vigilant regarding the true objectives of superior powers when sanctioning the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops in Africa.

A recommendation is made that African countries should adhere to a standard of African value systems, which, if violated, can be addressed through peer review and correction, rather than relying on foreign nations and continents to resolve African conflicts. It is recommended that Africa engage in research and development to avoid dependence on foreign technology for economic advancement and to equip its security forces with domestic resources. Investment in research and development may yield robust economic performance and advancement, ultimately reducing internal discord among many tribes or races.

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