March 12, 2020

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Rogers:

We write to express our strong support for meeting our nation’s financial obligations for United Nations peacekeeping in the Fiscal Year 2021 State/Foreign Operations Appropriations bill. Your Subcommittee has long recognized the importance of cost-effective multilateral means of maintaining international peace and security such as UN peacekeeping operations, and we firmly believe these programs are deserving of your continued bipartisan support.

Peacekeeping operations are a critical component of the international community’s conflict mitigation and stabilization toolbox, as the UN Security Council authorizes such missions to separate warring parties, protect civilians, and support democratic elections. For example, in Mali, UN peacekeepers have worked to restore democratic governance and prevent extremists linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State from controlling territory in the country’s volatile north. In South Sudan, despite the existence of a relatively shaky peace deal between the government and armed opposition forces, peacekeepers continue to protect more than 200,000 civilians from political and ethnic violence. In eastern Congo, currently experiencing the second-worst Ebola outbreak on record, UN peacekeepers are protecting health workers from attack and providing logistical and operational support to the international health response. In all of these cases, the missions are far less financially burdensome than other forms of intervention: a 2018 Government Accountability Office report, for example, found that deploying UN peacekeepers is one-eighth the cost of sending U.S. forces to do the same job.

With respect to costs, we are increasingly concerned by the financial challenges currently facing UN peacekeeping, which are mainly the result of underpayments of U.S. assessments. As you know, for the past four years, Congress and the Administration have enforced an arbitrary 25% cap on U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, causing the United States to run up nearly $1 billion in arrears. As a result, countries that participate in peacekeeping missions are not being fully reimbursed for their contributions of personnel and equipment, which cost them tens of millions of dollars. This creates significant challenges for troop-contributors, most of which are lower-income countries like Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Bangladesh, that rely on reimbursements to help sustain complex, longer-term peacekeeping deployments. In fact, the
State Department acknowledged this reality in a June 2019 report to Congress on the impact of U.S. arrears to international organizations.

The State Department has also recognized the growing influence of China within international organizations, including at the UN. China is now the second largest financial contributor to the UN peacekeeping budget, and the tenth largest provider of troops for peacekeeping operations. Chinese diplomats have moved to use this growing clout to advocate for cuts to human rights monitoring and civilian protection posts in UN peacekeeping missions. If the United States continues to accumulate debt and send the message that it does not prioritize peacekeeping, these efforts to sideline U.S. priorities will only gain further traction.

We were pleased that your Subcommittee included $478 million in additional funding to help pay down our arrears as part of the House FY20 State/Foreign Operations bill. While we were disappointed that this provision did not make it into the final bill passed in December, the FY21 process fortunately provides a new opportunity to correct this situation. As a result, we request your support for a level of $2.616 billion for the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities account in FY21. This amount includes the funding necessary to pay our peacekeeping assessments at the current rate of 27.89%, which amounts to $1.660 billion, as well as funds necessary to pay our arrears. As part of this request, we ask that you include bill language lifting the cap on U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, similar to what has been done in the past under both Republican and Democratic leadership. We also ask that you support the Peacekeeping Operations account—which includes assessed funding for UN activities in Somalia—at a level of $525.3 million.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that these vital missions are fully funded. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

DAVID N. CICILLINE
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