



**UNITED NATIONS  
OFFICE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**2024 Annual Meeting of the Field Legal Advisers and Officers**

**Opening remarks**

**by**

**Mr. Miguel de Serpa Soares**

Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and  
United Nations Legal Counsel,

**Wednesday 12 June 2024, 09:20 am**

**Conference room B, UN Headquarters**

Dear Field Legal Advisers and Officers, Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this year's meeting of the Field Legal Advisers and Legal Officers of peace operations and special political missions. Merci à tous et toutes d'être venus à New York. J'espère que votre voyage s'est bien passé. Heureusement que nous aurons de nombreuses pause-café pour vous aider à vous ajuster à l'heure de New York.

I am particularly pleased to see all of you here today, as this will be my last FLO meeting. As some of you may know, after 11 years as the United Nations Legal Counsel, I have decided that it is time for a change, both for me and for the Office. I have agreed with the Secretary-General that my last day will be the 15th of



September. I have very much cherished our frank and insightful exchanges during these meetings throughout our many years together. Your commitment to meeting in-person each year, despite the challenging context in which you carry out your work is an inspiring example of your dedication to the success of our engagement. I am hopeful that the FLO meetings will continue in the same spirit in the years to come.

Colleagues, our collective role is essential to maintaining legally sound and consistent approaches to the implementation of mandates across the globe, and I am grateful for all your contributions over the years. I extend a particularly warm welcome to those of our colleagues who may be joining us for the first time.

These meetings provide us all with an exceptional opportunity to exchange and engage on the various issues and challenges you encounter in the field as well as those which we are confronted with here at headquarters. The overall objective is to keep abreast of respective developments and to develop common approaches, for the best possible consolidated support and advice to our respective clients and stakeholders.

Over the past year we have witnessed several developments that have had multiple impacts across the missions and on your work as legal advisers and officers, notably in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Lebanon, Mali Sudan and Kosovo.





The Organization is going through a time of unprecedented challenges, particularly in the area of peacekeeping. The nature of our work is changing as well, as we are seeing in the context of the sudden closure of MINUSMA (Mali) and UNITAMS (Sudan), as well as the UN's efforts outside the traditional model of peacekeeping, including in Haiti, Ukraine and Gaza. My Office continues to provide legal advice and support to various parts of the Organization in relation to these novel and challenging operational matters.

In the context of the current peacekeeping and special political missions, issues that have recently arisen include withdrawal and liquidation of missions, engagement with de facto authorities, issues of privileges and immunities, evacuations of UN personnel, as well as various claims and insurance-related matters, to name just a few. I would be remiss not to highlight attacks against peacekeepers, and the efforts of the concerned missions to facilitate accountability by supporting the relevant national authorities in their investigations of these attacks and prosecution of those responsible.

Together with you, my teams working on peace operations in the General Legal Division (GLD) and in the Office of the Legal Counsel (OLC) have been an integral part of ensuring continued responsiveness to the ever-evolving needs, while providing the necessary legal support to ensure that the legal interests of the UN continue to be protected.





I am joined today by colleagues from GLD and OLC. Assistant Secretary-General Stephen Mathias will attend some of the afternoon sessions and close the meeting tomorrow together with the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix.

As you will have seen from the agenda, we will begin our meeting with our traditional and insightful Tour de table. This will be followed by the topical issues concerning SOFA/SOMA interpretation and implementation, a discussion of SOFA violations database and issues of privileges and immunities. We will also benefit from a presentation on commercial insurance and claims in field missions, particularly in the context of car accidents, by colleagues from the Department of Operational Support.

Tomorrow, GLD colleagues will provide relevant updates regarding Administration of Justice and SEA-related matters.

Colleagues from DOS will provide an overview of the UN's framework related to claims for compensation for death and disability of uniformed personnel, as well as an overview of the work of Boards of Inquiry, which is a topic many of you deal with regularly.

Developments in the areas of Data Protection, use of the UN's name and emblem, updates on issues involving engagements with non-state actors, and post-mandate





mission activities and issues arising from withdrawal and liquidation of UN missions will also be discussed.

In sum, we have a full agenda and will cover a broad range of topics together in the next two days. I look forward to your usual active engagement and I have no doubt that overall, we will have a very fruitful exchange.

Thank you.

