

UPF Israel Webinar Probes UN's Role in the Middle East

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Geneva, Switzerland - A webinar hosted by UPF-Switzerland on November 24, 2025, examined the United Nations' role in the Middle East, specifically addressing the question of how a UN peacekeeping mission could achieve sustainable peace in a conflict-torn region. Approximately 60 people followed on Zoom, with many others later watching the recording.

Ms. Chantal Chételat Komagata, secretary general of UPF-Switzerland, served as MC. She oriented the discussion within the framework of UPF's vision of a harmonious global community - based on interdependence, mutual prosperity, and universally shared values - emphasizing the need for a heart-centered, values-based approach to global challenges.

The keynote was delivered by Major General Patrick Gauchat, head of mission and chief of staff for the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and commander for the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), an EPFL engineer with extensive UN experience across continents. Major General Gauchat outlined the work of the United Nations in the areas of security and peacekeeping. He described UNTSO, established in 1948, as the original UN peacekeeping mission. Its core tasks, he explained, are ceasefire monitoring by non-armed staff from 31 nations, and maintaining a vital liaison channel between non-communicating parties.

He detailed the mission's operations across three time periods: before October 7, 2023; during the recent conflict initiated by Hamas on that date; and in the period following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2803 on November 17, 2025, which endorsed the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict and authorized an International Stabilization Force.

In his analysis of the current situation, the major general noted that the UN presence at the Blue Line - demarcated by the UN in 2000 to separate Israel from Lebanon - had created a necessary restraint on both parties, encouraging respect for the rules of war, even if ceasefires were not always upheld. He explained the distinction between Chapter VI missions, in which the UN helps parties achieve agreements, and Chapter VII missions, in which Security Council approved mandates are imposed. He

noted that any future mission in Gaza would likely fall under a Chapter VIII model, relying on a regional coalition to manage peacekeeping.

Addressing the operational challenges, Major General Gauchat spoke to the difficulty of maintaining

impartiality, and the dangers and trauma experienced by staff in the field, requiring the presence of stress counselors and frequently resulting in transfers. He described the UN's role in confidence-building by sharing neutral information between parties - such as between the Israel Defense Forces and Syrian transitional authorities. Ultimately, he expressed optimism that peace is achievable, citing the fundamental goodness of the people he has met and his belief that a culture of peace is possible.

The discussion was then broadened by two distinguished respondents.

Dr. Eldad J. Pardo is a research director at IMPACT-se - an Israeli NGO that monitors school educational content - and an expert on Iran and Middle Eastern curricula. He voiced the opinion that the UN's role should extend to education, and expressed appreciation that UN forces assist in restoring schooling in areas disrupted by conflict. This point was affirmed by Major General Gauchat, who responded by citing examples of his own involvement in educational institutions.

Dr. Pardo also analyzed the regional debate surrounding UN missions. He noted the generally positive opinion of UNDOF, but raised the concern in Israel that the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) may inadvertently strengthen Hezbollah's activities while restricting Israeli movement.

In her response, Dr. Shelley Elkayam, a professor of intercultural theology, psychoanalyst, and ethics specialist, addressed the spiritual and cultural dimensions of conflict. She emphasized the importance of ethics, noting that "each period has its own ethics." She highlighted the profound violation that occurs when aggressors desecrate sacred time, citing historical precedents - on October 7, 2023, and the October 6, 1973 Yom Kippur War - when Israel was attacked on holy days. She stressed the need to educate parties that these holy times must remain inviolable. Major General Gauchat confirmed his awareness of such religious sensitivities.

The webinar concluded with remarks from Mr. Hod Ben Zvi, chair of UPF-Israel, who reiterated UPF's commitment to the Middle East Peace Initiative (MEPI) and the importance of strengthening civil society and character-based leadership to complement the essential structural work of the United Nations in the pursuit of sustainable peace.



The video of the webinar is available [here](#).