



UNCOPS 2026 Side Event Concept Note

Language as a Force Multiplier: Strengthening UN Peacekeeping through Language Training

Tuesday, 07 July 2026 | 11:30 – 13:00

United Nations Headquarters, Conference 3 | 405 E 45th St, New York, NY 10017

In United Nations peacekeeping, language and cultural competence play a vital role across all dimensions of mission effectiveness: building trust with host communities, enabling dialogue with armed actors, and strengthening the delivery of protection mandates.

While the operational contributions of UN police and military peacekeepers are widely recognized, the role of language proficiency as a prerequisite for effective engagement is underrated and under-resourced. This side event, convened on the margins of UNCOPS 2026, will take the form of a panel discussion examining the practical impact of language training on peacekeeping performance, with particular focus on Arabic-speaking mission environments.

Context

UN peacekeeping missions rely on the daily, frontline engagement of uniformed personnel to prevent, mitigate, and respond to threats against civilians. These efforts depend, in large part, on the ability of peacekeepers to communicate directly and credibly with the communities they serve. Language barriers limit situational awareness, reduce trust, and constrain the ability of police and military personnel to carry out their mandates effectively. The capacity to engage without intermediaries including with local authorities, community leaders, witnesses, and potential spoilers is one of the most undervalued comparative advantages a peacekeeper can bring to the field.

Language and cultural awareness by uniformed personnel is exercised by peacekeepers at all levels and functions and serves multiple operational objectives: it enables peacekeepers to gather and act on timely information; to build the relational trust necessary to influence behavior and de-escalate tension; to support host-state institutions in upholding their primary protection responsibilities; and to create the conditions in which other civilian and humanitarian actors can operate. In this way, language is not a secondary skill, but a core operational capability that reinforces and amplifies the integrated approach to protection in peace operations and whose absence carries measurable operational costs.

Recognizing this critical gap within the UN peacekeeping capabilities, the UAE Ministry of Interior in partnership with the UN Light Coordination Mechanism launched the first dedicated



Arabic Language Training Programme for UN peacekeepers. This initiative reflects a practical and replicable model of how Member States can strengthen mission readiness beyond the deployment of personnel alone by investing in the linguistic and cultural competencies that ultimately determine whether peacekeepers can engage effectively, build trust, and deliver on their mandates.

Objective and Expected Outcomes

This side event will recognize and demonstrate the operational impact of language and cultural competence training on UN peacekeeping effectiveness, with particular focus on Arabic-speaking mission environments. It will convene Member States, troop- and police-contributing countries, UN training entities, and peacekeeping personnel to showcase evidence from the UAE Ministry of Interior's Arabic Language Training initiative and identify pathways for broader adoption.

The discussion aims to strengthen recognition of language competence as an integral component of mission readiness, drawing on the practical experiences and testimonies of Nepal and Kazakhstan. It will also seek to advance understanding of the training frameworks, institutional partnerships, and sustained political commitment required to systematically embed language and cultural competence within standard pre-deployment preparation, positioning it as a core capability rather than an optional enhancement.

As the future of peace operations is under consideration, the contribution of language and cultural awareness to mission effectiveness should remain in view. Deployments have their merits, but even the most capable contingent is constrained without the ability to communicate directly with the communities, authorities, and actors it engages. Language training is a force multiplier i.e. one that enhances performance across every function and level of a mission.

Ultimately, this event will contribute to ongoing efforts to ensure that UN peace operations are not only adequately resourced in personnel, but equipped with the capabilities that determine whether those personnel can deliver on their mandates.

Guiding Questions

- How do language barriers manifest as operational constraints across different functions and levels of UN peacekeeping missions, and what is their measurable impact on mandate delivery?
- What comparative advantages do peacekeepers with language and cultural competence bring when engaging with host-state authorities, local communities, and non-state actors?



- Which specific training approaches, programme designs, and institutional partnerships have proven effective in building language and cultural competence for deployment in Arabic-speaking environments?
- What considerations and lessons from the UAE Ministry of Interior's Arabic Language Training initiative can help inform and improve pre-deployment preparation across the broader UN peacekeeping system?
- To what extent can the UAE Ministry of Interior's Arabic Language Training model be replicated or adapted for other linguistic contexts relevant to current and future mission environments?

Agenda

11:30	Welcoming Address	Ms. Fatima Saif Al Ali (Moderator) UAE MOI
11:35	Opening Remarks	HE Dana Al Marzouqui Director General of the International Affairs Bureau, UAE MOI
11:40 – 12:20	Panel Discussion	Jean-Pierre Lacroix Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Herbert Loret Head of the UN LCM Program Inspector General Dan Bahadur KARKI, Chief of Nepal Police Head of Delegation of Nepal for the UNCOPS V 2026 Head of Delegation of Kazakhstan for the UNCOPS V 2026
12:20 – 12:45	Q & A	
12:45 – 13:00	Closing Remarks	