Ethics in Peace Operations



COURSE AUTHOR The Centre for Military Ethics, King's College London



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Peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) conduct an operation dubbed "Frelana" to protect civilians and their property in the south-west of Gao. 12 July 2017. UN Photo by Harandane Dicko.

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Ethics in Peace Operations

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Foreword

This course is the result of compiling existing manuals, courses, and official guidance that have addressed topics related to ethics across the full spectrum of peace operations. The authors have attempted to provide an overview and have considered perspectives concerning the major aspects of modern-day peacekeeping and peace support operations from an ethical perspective. This course is not intended to be an academic work or, even less so, a scientific one. Rather, it presents a general introduction to the basic ethical aspects of peace operations.

This text was written for a general audience. It adopts an approach to the material that seeks to be both universally applicable and free of any political agenda. It makes no claim to providing comprehensive coverage of all subject areas that make up the field of humanitarian assistance but instead refers the student to other references, organizations, and websites. In addition, this course should not be considered a technical reference work; it does not attempt to replace the excellent documents that have been produced over previous decades by various actors within the United Nations System and across international non-governmental organizations.

The intent of this course is to provide a basic overview and create an understanding of ethics in peace operations. Through the use of the case studies and practical examples, this compilation aims to be a guideline for peace support personnel in the field. It is our hope that the readers will share their thoughts and discuss with each other the issues raised in this course.

-The King's Centre for Military Ethics



Method of Study

This self-paced course aims to give students flexibility in their approach to learning. The following steps are meant to provide motivation and guidance about some possible strategies and minimum expectations for completing this course successfully:

- Before you begin studying, first browse through the entire course. Notice the lesson and section titles to get an overall idea of what will be involved as you proceed.
- The material is meant to be relevant and practical. Instead of memorizing individual details, strive to understand concepts and overall perspectives in regard to the United Nations system.
- Set personal guidelines and benchmarks regarding how you want to schedule your time.
- Study the lesson content and the learning objectives. At the beginning of each lesson, orient yourself to the main points. If possible, read the material twice to ensure maximum understanding and retention, and let time elapse between readings.
- At the end of each lesson, take the End-of-Lesson Quiz. Clarify any missed questions by rereading the appropriate sections, and focus on retaining the correct information.
- After you complete all of the lessons, prepare for the End-of-Course Examination by taking time to review the main points of each lesson. Then, when ready, log into your online student classroom and take the End-of-Course Examination in one sitting.

Access your online classroom at <www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user_login> from virtually anywhere in the world.

- Your exam will be scored electronically. If you achieve a passing grade of 75 per cent or higher on the exam, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion. If you score below 75 per cent, you will be given one opportunity to take a second version of the End-of-Course Examination.
- A note about language: This course uses English spelling according to the standards of the Oxford English Dictionary (United Kingdom) and the United Nations Editorial Manual.

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- Access to all of your courses;
- A secure testing environment in which to complete your training;
- Access to additional training resources, including multimedia course supplements; and
- The ability to download your Certificate of Completion for any completed course.

LESSON

Code of Conduct



Peacekeepers represent both the United Nations and their own countries.

Ahlam Alhabahbe, UN Police (UNPOL) officer from Jordan serving with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), poses for a photo for the commemoration of International Women's Day. 01 March 2021. UN Photo by Gregório Cunha.

In this lesson »

Section 1.1 Guiding Principles for the UN

Helmets

- Peacekeepers Code of Conduct

 Section 1.2
 The UN Code of Conduct for Blue
- Section 1.3 Consequences of Violations of the of Conduct
- Section 1.4 Duty to Report

Lesson Objectives »

- List and briefly discuss the UN code of conduct and standards of behaviour for service in field missions.
- Understand the UN Values and Behaviour Framework.
- List the consequences of actions that fail to comply with the code of conduct.



Gladys Ngwepekeum Nkeh (centre), UN Police officer from Cameroon serving with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and her colleagues visit a police station in Bangui, where they monitor policing and standards. 23 October 2017. UN Photo Eskinder Debebe.

Introduction

Peacekeepers represent both the United Nations and their own countries. Their positive and negative conduct affects the success of the whole mission. The UN embodies people's aspirations for world peace. In this context, the UN Charter requires all peacekeeping personnel to maintain the highest standards of integrity and conduct. Peacekeepers, whether military, police, or civilian, must comply with the guidelines on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) for forces undertaking UN peace operations and all applicable portions of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) as the fundamental basis of all their standards of action. The UN has a three-pronged strategy to address misconduct: prevention, enforcement of the UN Standards of Conduct, and remedial action.¹

United Nations, "Conduct in UN Field Missions". Available from: https://conduct.unmissions.org/>.

Peacekeepers are present in the mission area to aid in the recovery from conflict-induced trauma. As a result, they must consciously be prepared to accept social constraints in their public and private lives to work and to pursue the ideals of the UN. Peacekeepers are accorded certain privileges and immunities through agreements negotiated between the host country and the UN — specifically to execute peacekeeping duties. During a peace operation, expectations of the world community and the local population will be high. A peacekeeper's actions must meet or exceed these expectations. Therefore, their conduct and actions will be closely observed.

Section 1.1 Guiding Principles for the UN Peacekeeper's Code of Conduct

The UN Core Pre-deployment Training Materials (CPTM)² denotes the values and behaviours that give shared language and understanding about the organizational culture and UN expectations that guide all UN personnel.³ The UN Values and Behaviours Framework defines nine linked elements (four values and five behaviours) detailing expectations for personnel.

The Framework comprises:

- Four values: inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity.
- **Five behaviours:** connect and collaborate; analyse and plan; deliver results with positive impact; learn and develop; and adapt and innovate.

» Values

- 1. Inclusion: taking action to create an environment of dignity and respect for all, regardless of any aspect of identity.
- Integrity: acting ethically, demonstrating the conduct of the UN and taking prompt action when witnessing unprofessional or unethical behaviour, or any other breach of UN standards.
- Humility: the ability to demonstrate self-awareness and willingness to learn from others.
- 4. Humanity: acting according to the purposes of the UN with peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet.

» Behaviours

- 1. Connect and Collaborate: build positive relationships with others to advance the work of the UN and work coherently as one UN.
- Analyse and Plan: gather and use data from a wide range of sources to understand problems, inform decision-making, propose evidencebased solutions and plan action.
- Deliver Results with Positive Impact: hold oneself and others accountable for delivering results and making a positive difference to the people and causes that the UN serves.

3) United Nations, "Competencies for the Future". Available from: <https://careers.un.org/lbw/attachments/competencies_booklet_en.pdf>.

United Nations, "Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials". Available from: ">https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/pre-deployment/cptm/intro>.

- 4. Learn and Develop: pursue learning and development and contribute to the learning and development of others.
- 5. Adapt and Innovate: demonstrate flexibility, agility, and the ability to think and act in novel ways.

The guidebook, *Putting Ethics To Work*, provides the following fundamental ethical principles, which all UN peacekeepers must adhere to: independence, loyalty, impartiality, integrity, accountability, and respect for human rights.⁴

Independence

"United Nations personnel shall maintain their independence and shall not seek or receive instructions from any Government or from any other person or entity external to the United Nations and shall refrain from any action which might reflect negatively on their position as United Nations personnel responsible only to the United Nations."

Loyalty

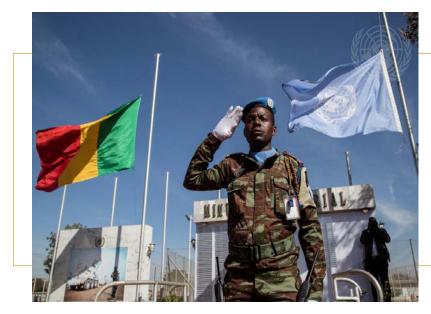
"Loyalty to the purposes, values and principles of the United Nations is a fundamental obligation of all United Nations personnel. They shall be loyal to the United Nations and shall, at all times, discharge their functions and regulate their conduct with the interests of the United Nations only in view."

Impartiality

"United Nations personnel, in the performance of their official duties, shall always act with impartiality, objectivity and professionalism. They shall ensure that expression of personal views and convictions does not compromise or appear to compromise the performance of their official duties or the interests of the United Nations. They shall not act in a way that unjustifiably could lead to actual or perceived preferential treatment for or against particular individuals, groups or interests."

Integrity

"United Nations personnel shall maintain the highest standards of integrity, including honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and incorruptibility in all matters affecting their official duties and the interests of the United Nations."



The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) holds a memorial ceremony for 10 peacekeepers from Chad who were killed during the attack on 20 January against the MINUSMA Base in Aguelhok in the north of Mali. A Peackeeper serving with MINUSMA pays his respects during the ceremony. 27 January 2019. UN Photo by Marco Dormino.

⁴⁾ United Nations, "Putting Ethics To Work". Available from: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/603094?v=pdf>.

Accountability

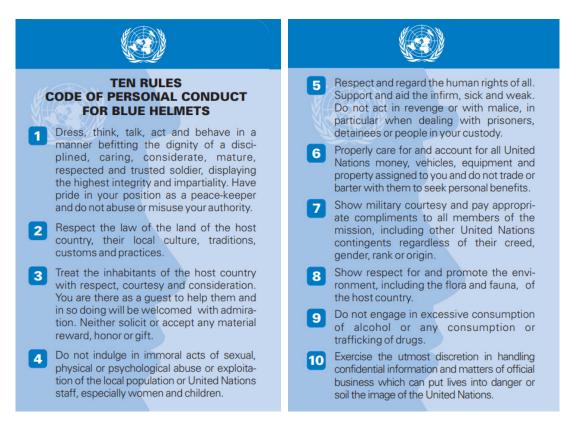
"United Nations personnel shall be accountable for the proper discharge of their functions and for their decisions and actions. In fulfilling their official duties and responsibilities, United Nations personnel shall make decisions in the interests of the United Nations. They shall submit themselves to scrutiny as required by their position."

Respect for Human Rights

"United Nations personnel shall fully respect the human rights, dignity and worth of all persons and shall act with understanding, tolerance, sensitivity and respect for diversity and without discrimination of any kind."

Section 1.2 The UN Code of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets

All Peacekeepers must maintain the highest standards of conduct whilst on a mission. The following 10 rules summarize the "Dos and Don'ts" associated with the three guiding principles. Each peacekeeper is issued one card as a reminder of their personal code of conduct. Read it frequently and do not violate the code. If you do, there will be serious personal consequences for you and for the UN mission. This card is supported by the "We are United Nations Peacekeepers" card, listed in Appendix B, which sets out the "Dos and Don'ts" in a recognizable format.



Section 1.3 Consequences of Violations of the Code of Conduct

Whilst certain privileges and immunities are granted to peacekeepers by the Secretary-General for the performance of their official duties and in the interest of the UN, these certain privileges and immunities are not for the personal benefit of peacekeepers. All peacekeepers must understand that privileges awarded to them in no way give them a right to violate standards of conduct. These privileges and immunities exist solely to help personnel perform their functions. Depending on your category (formed military contingent, military observer/civilian police, civilian), the immunities and privileges apply differently. Peacekeepers are still liable to disciplinary action and, in serious cases, criminal proceedings for violations of the code of conduct.

The principles underpinning the UN standards of conduct:

- Zero-tolerance for all forms of misconduct including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and sexual harassment;
- Accountability for misconduct, including authorities or those in command; and
- Applicable to all UN personnel.

Categories of misconduct

Misconduct is committed when any UN standards of conduct are violated. It can be the failure of an individual to comply with an organization's established rules or obligations, the failure to observe the standards of conduct, or the failure to obey local laws. Misconduct can involve more than one person as an alleged perpetrator. Categories of misconduct include misconduct and serious misconduct.⁵

Misconduct offences are lower-risk cases. The classification does not reflect the extreme distress such misconduct causes to victims. These include:

- Minor theft and traffic offences (e.g. speeding);
- Sexual and other work-related harassment;
- Traffic related inquiries;
- Simple thefts;
- Contract disputes;
- Office management disputes;
- Basic misuse of equipment or staff;
- Basic mismanagement issues;
- Infractions of regulations, rules, or administrative issuances; and
- Simple entitlement fraud.

Serious Misconduct offences are high-risk, complex matters, and serious criminal cases. Independent, professionally trained, and experienced investigators best handle inquiries into serious misconduct. For military contingents, their national authorities are responsible for handling investigations. These include:

- Serious or complex fraud;
- SEA;
- Other serious criminal acts or activity;
- Conflict of interest;
- Gross mismanagement;
- Waste of substantial resources;
- All cases involving risk of loss of life to staff or others, including witnesses; and
- Substantial violation of UN regulations, rules, or administrative issuances.

United Nations, "Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials". Available from: ">https://peacekeepingresourcehub.un.org/en/training/pre-deployment/cptm/intro>.

Consequences

Misconduct can have serious consequences for UN Missions as well as individuals. It undermines the UN values and principles while violating integrity and impartiality. Additionally, misconduct can erode the local community's trust and undermine the rule of law. Misconduct can reduce credibility and even threaten security. Depending on the level of the misconduct, staff may find themselves subject to one or more of the following consequences:

- Internal Disciplinary Action: Staff may be subject to disciplinary action by a superior officer or supervisor. This may include a verbal or written censure, a reprimand, and/or retraining in a skill area.
 Military peacekeepers may be subject to the code of military discipline by the Member State responsible for taking disciplinary and/or criminal action, resulting in fines, detention, repatriation, or dismissal.
- Repatriation/Termination of Contract: They may be repatriated to their home country on the recommendation of the Force Commander or the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). For a civilian peacekeeper, this may lead to termination of their contract with the UN. A permanent ban from future missions could also be enacted.
- Criminal Proceedings: In very serious cases of misconduct, especially where the laws of the host country have been broken, peacekeepers may face criminal proceedings in the host country. The immunities and privileges that individuals have as UN peacekeepers do not in any way permit them to break the established laws of the land.
- Financial Liability: In cases of negligent damage, loss of UN property, or substantiated cases of SEA, peacekeepers may be financially liable. This money may be sought from them personally or their national contingent, which may, in turn, take disciplinary action to recover the money from their salary.

Section 1.4 Duty to Report

Peacekeepers have a duty to report any violations and cooperate with any investigations. Suspected misconduct must be reported to the conduct and discipline team (CDT) in UN missions or Office of the Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) while uniformed personnel can report through their chain of command. Reports must be made in good faith and include as much information as possible.

Reports of misconduct can also be made through:

- Helpline + 1 917-423-5256; and
- Online reporting form <https://conduct.unmissions.org/report-now>.

Protection from Retaliation

Retaliation is direct or indirect action against a person who reports misconduct. Whistleblower protections guard against retaliation or threats of retaliation for reporting misconduct or cooperating with audits or investigations. Retaliation can be reported to OIOS, the CDT, Human Resource officers, or the Ethics Office. All reports of misconduct and retaliation will be handled with confidentiality.⁶

⁶⁾ United Nations, "Putting Ethics To Work". Available from: https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/603094?v=pdf>.



Lieutenant General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz (facing camera in centre), Head of Mission and Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL) visits peacekeepers from Indonesia serving with UNIFIL near El Odaisseh Village close to the Blue Line in south Lebanon. 09 April 2024. UN Photo by Pasqual Gorriz.

Case Study 1 – "Are These the Sort of People the UN Sends to Help Us?" »

A group of peacekeepers had been spending the night at a popular bar after work. They had been there for about three hours, and from the loudness of their conversation and their laughter, it appeared they had been drinking quite a bit. Other bar patrons were not looking too pleased but had yet to request that the peacekeepers keep their noise down.

The trouble started when one of the peacekeepers tried to stand up but stumbled and knocked the drinks off the following table. Four local young men who had also been in the bar for some time occupied that table. One of the local young men demanded that the peacekeeper pay for his drink and the broken glass and compensate him for his wet clothes. The peacekeepers disagreed, and a loud argument began. Other patrons joined the argument, and one local young man pushed a peacekeeper. The peacekeeper retaliated with a punch, and a fight started in the bar. More bottles and glasses got broken, and tables and chairs were pushed aside. One peacekeeper had blood gushing from the side of his head. Another had a swollen lip and a torn shirt.

Other peacekeepers arrived and assisted in restoring order. They also persuaded the drunken peacekeepers to leave the bar. As the peacekeepers left, one local was heard saying: "Are these the sort of people the UN sends to help us?"

Questions to consider

- 1. What code of conduct violations, if any, have occurred?
- 2. What were the basic causes of the bar fight?
- 3. How could this situation have been prevented?
- 4. To what dangers, if any, did the situation expose the peacekeepers?

- 5. How could this situation affect the credibility of the UN mission?
- 6. How did this situation change the perception of the peacekeepers in the host country?

Analysis and discussion of the case study

This case study is primarily intended to draw attention to the inherent dangers of peacekeepers' excessive alcohol consumption, especially in public places. The local's comment also offers lessons on how such conduct affects the credibility of the UN mission in a broader sense.

Even though regulations may not prevent peacekeepers from visiting public bars in the host country, the host population is keenly observing their conduct. Drunkenness and drug indulgence lower one's guard and cloud judgement. Peacekeepers must exhibit the highest standards in public places within the host country to act as a positive example.

Case Study 2 - "The Social Media Blunder" >>

During a long and tiring peace operation in a politically sensitive region, a group of peacekeepers decided to document their experiences on social media. They created a private group on a popular platform, sharing photos and videos of their daily activities, including interactions with locals and other peacekeepers.

One evening, after a particularly stressful day dealing with a minor conflict between two local tribes, several peacekeepers posted comments in their group venting their frustrations. Some of the comments were disrespectful towards the local population and contained culturally insensitive jokes. One peacekeeper even shared a photo of a local leader with a mocking caption.

Unbeknownst to the group, one of the peacekeepers had accidentally set the group's privacy settings to "public" a few days earlier. A local journalist discovered the group and published an exposé on the peacekeepers' behaviour, including screenshots of the offensive posts.

The story quickly went viral, causing outrage among the local population and diplomatic tension between the host country and the peacekeepers. The UN mission faced severe backlash, with calls for the immediate withdrawal of peacekeepers and questions about the UN peacekeepers's ability to maintain neutrality and respect for local cultures.

Questions to consider

- 1. What, if any, code of conduct violations can you identify in this case?
- 2. Would the messages sent be acceptable if the social media group was private?
- 3. How does this incident reflect on both the UN and the peacekeepers' attitudes?
- 4. What are the potential consequences of this incident on:
 - » The local community's trust in the mission?
 - » The overall effectiveness of the UN mission in the region?

» The safety and ability to operate of other peacekeepers in the mission?

- 5. What responsibilities do peacekeepers have regarding their personal social media use during missions?
- 6. What disciplinary actions would be appropriate for the peacekeepers involved?
- 7. How could this incident have been prevented? What measures should be put in place to avoid similar situations in the future?

Analysis and discussion of the case study

This case study highlights the critical importance of peacekeepers understanding their role as representatives of the UN. The peacekeepers' actions demonstrate a lack of awareness of the potential consequences of their online behaviour and the far-reaching impact it can have on the mission's success and international relations. In today's interconnected world, peacekeepers must know that their online activities can have real-world consequences, even in seemingly private spaces.

Peacekeepers must maintain respect for local cultures and populations at all times, both in their actions and their communications. Every action of a peacekeeper reflects on the UN as a whole, and such incidents can severely undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the entire peace operation. To prevent similar incidents, peace operations should implement comprehensive social media policies, provide cultural sensitivity training, and regularly remind peacekeepers of their responsibilities as international representatives. Additionally, stress management resources should be made available to help peacekeepers cope with the challenges of their work without resorting to inappropriate venting mechanisms.

Case Study 3 - "The Hometown Connection" >>

A UN peace operation is deployed to monitor a ceasefire between two ethnic groups in a conflict-torn region. The Force Commander is a refugee originally from the country this peace operation was in but left when she was a young child. She was assigned to lead a team responsible for investigating reports of ceasefire violations in a disputed border town.

The town, divided almost equally between the two ethnic groups, had been a flashpoint of tension. Upon arrival, the Force Commander discovered that she shared the same ethnic background as one of the groups involved in the conflict. This group originated from a region that included her hometown.

Initially, the Force Commander saw her background as an advantage, believing her cultural understanding would help her navigate the complex local dynamics. However, as she began her investigations, she found herself unconsciously spending more time listening to accounts from members of her own ethnic group and being more skeptical of reports from the other side.

The situation came to a head when the Force Commander's team was tasked with investigating a serious incident. Both ethnic groups accused the other of initiating an armed clash. After gathering testimonies and evidence, the Force Commander's report seemed to place more blame on the group she didn't share ethnicity with, despite some team members privately expressing doubts about this conclusion.

Word spread about the Force Commander's ethnic background, and the group not sharing her ethnicity accused her of bias. They claimed the UN was not impartial and threatened to withdraw from the ceasefire agreement. The situation rapidly escalated, with protests erupting in several towns and endangering the fragile peace. Alerted to the situation, UN headquarters launched an inquiry into the Force Commander's conduct and the overall impartiality of the peace operation in the region.

Questions to consider

- 1. How did the Force Commander's ethnic background influence her actions, and what are the implications of this influence?
- 2. Was this Force Commander the correct person for the job?
- 3. What steps could the Force Commander have taken to recognize and mitigate her potential bias?
- 4. How does this situation reflect on both the UN and the Force Commander's home country?
- 5. What are the potential consequences of this incident on:
 - » The credibility of the UN peace operation in the region?
 - » The ceasefire agreement between the two ethnic groups?
 - » The safety and effectiveness of other peacekeepers in the mission?
 - » The relationship between the UN and the Force Commander's home country?
- 6. What policies or training could the UN implement to address unconscious bias among peacekeepers?
- 7. How should the UN balance the potential benefits of cultural understanding with the risks of bias when assigning peacekeepers to missions?

Analysis and discussion of the case study

This case study highlights the complex issue of unconscious bias in peace operations and its potential to undermine the mission's effectiveness and credibility. Even well-intentioned peacekeepers can be influenced by their cultural background and personal experiences, potentially compromising their impartiality. In conflict situations, even the perception of bias can be as damaging as actual bias, eroding trust in the mission. While cultural knowledge can be beneficial, it must be balanced against the need for strict neutrality; peacekeepers must be aware of potential conflicts of interest arising from their personal backgrounds and take proactive steps to address them. This case study demonstrates perception in conflict-reduction scenarios. No matter how distinguished the Force Commander was, she was the wrong person for the job because if one's presence is likely to be perceived as biased, then friction and tension will inevitably occur.

End-of-Lesson Quiz »

1. The four values of the UN Values and Behavior Framework are _____.

- A. inclusion, integrity, humility, and humanity
- B. integrity, professionalism, respect for diversity, and loyalty
- C. impartiality, humility, respect, and loyalty
- D. impartiality, diversity, integrity, and humanity

2. Which of the following statements regarding retaliation is NOT true?

- A. Retaliation is direct or indirect action against a person who reports misconduct.
- B. All reports of misconduct and retaliation will be handled with confidentiality.
- C. Whistleblower protections only apply if someone is found guilty.
- D. Whistleblower protections guards against retaliation or threats of retaliation.

3. Consequences of misconduct do NOT include which of the following?

- A. criminal proceedings
- B. financial liability
- C. internal disciplinary action
- D. prison under UN custody
- 4. Demonstrating the conduct of the UN and taking prompt action when witnessing unprofessional or unethical behaviour, refers to which one of the following principles?
 - A. impartiality
 - B. integrity
 - C. respect
 - D. loyalty
- 5. Building positive relationships with others to advance the work of the UN refers to which of the following behaviours?
 - A. learn and develop
 - B. deliver results with positive impact
 - C. connect and collaborate
 - D. analyse and plan

- 6. An example of serious misconduct is
 - A. conflict of interest
 - B. complex fraud
 - C. sexual abuse
 - D. all of the above
- 7. Demonstrating flexibility, agility, and the ability to think and act in novel ways is a part of which of the following behaviours?
 - A. connect and collaborate
 - B. adapt and innovate
 - C. learn and develop
 - D. analyse and plan
- 8. Peacekeepers should _____ the values, objectives, and goals of the UN and the mission mandate.
 - A. remain loyal to
 - B. reject
 - C. try to change
 - D. completely ignore
- 9. A written censure, a reprimand, and retraining in a skill area are all examples of what type of consequence?
 - A. internal disciplinary action
 - B. criminal proceedings
 - C. repatriation or termination of contract
 - D. financial liability
- 10. Which of the following is NOT a part of the UN's three-pronged strategy to address misconduct?
 - A. prevention
 - B. enforcement of the UN Standards of Conduct
 - C. background screenings
 - D. remedial action

End-of-Lesson Quiz »

Answer Key »

- 1. A
- 2. C
- 3. D
- 4. B
- 5. C 6. D
- 7. B
- 8. A
- 9. A
- 10. C