

SECRETARIAT

PROVISION OF DATA CONNECTIVITY BELOW UNIT HQ LEVEL

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1. ISSUE PAPER THEME: Self-sustainment

2. SUMMARY / BACKGROUND / PREVIOUS HISTORY

Under the existing provisions, United Nations provides data connectivity up to Unit HQ level. There is no provision of data connectivity below the Battalion Headquarters (HQ) or Independent Company level. It hampers their capacity to perform basic reporting duties and prevent them from using technological platforms like Unite Aware, Telemedicine and other key online resources. Other than this, the provision of data connectivity to each individual for keeping in touch with their families is part of Internet self-sustainment category and is usually provided by the T/PCCs. A study was thus conducted on the provision of data connectivity below unit HQ level.

3. DETAILED PROPOSAL

It is proposed that the United Nations (UN) assume responsibility for the provision of data connectivity below the battalion level, including for sub-units and Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs), to support operational and individual needs in field missions. To account for operational realities, the proposal allows for flexibility whereby the UN may request the Troop/Police Contributing Country (T/PCC) to provide connectivity at specific locations particularly in environments where deployment or sustainment of UN infrastructure is not feasible due to security constraints or limited resources.

The proposed model does not differentiate between operational and welfare use of connectivity. The UN will provide data services where needed, and in exceptional cases may seek support from T/PCCs to ensure continuity of service.

- **Justification and Benefits**
 - **Operational Readiness:** Ensures that all units, including those deployed in dispersed or remote locations, have reliable access to data services essential for coordination, reporting, and situational awareness.
 - **Welfare:** The internet connectivity in far-flung areas is poor and not reliable. Lack of reliable internet connectivity and resulting inability to stay in touch with the family and may have a negative impact on the morale and conduct of personnel.
 - **Resource Flexibility:** Optimizes UN resource allocation by focusing on priority areas, while leveraging TCC capacity where available.
 - **Deployment Agility:** Allows for faster implementation in certain environments by utilizing existing or more rapidly deployable TCC infrastructure.
 - **Cost Management:** Offers a balanced model that contains costs while meeting mission requirements, avoiding the need for full-scale UN investment at every deployment site.
- **Risks and Considerations**
 - **Standardization Challenges:** Differences in TCC-provided systems may affect interoperability, network performance, or alignment with UN standards.

- **Oversight Limitations:** UN oversight of service quality, cybersecurity compliance, and data protection may be more limited on TCC-provided networks.
- **TCC Capability Gaps:** Not all TCCs may be equally equipped or resourced to provide reliable connectivity, leading to inconsistent implementation across missions.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The estimated cost of providing Starlink-based data connectivity for a standard infantry battalion (approximately 800 personnel, with headquarters and support elements at one location and four companies (150 personnel each) deployed at separate sites, based on a deployment scenario in MINUSCA, is as follows:

- **One-time setup cost:** USD 15,139 (equipment and installation).
- **Monthly recurring cost:** USD 75,000 for a 1 TB connection package covering all five locations and USD 195,000 for a 3 TB connection package covering all five locations.

The actual costs may vary depending on bandwidth requirements, availability of existing infrastructure, number of locations and the potential for colocation with other UN offices/ setups.

5. PROPOSED 2026 COE MANUAL TEXT

It is proposed to add a new sub-paragraph (d) to Chapter 3, Annex B, Paragraph 14. The text to be added is in bold.

(d) Data Connectivity: The UN will provide data connectivity below the battalion level, including sub-units and TOBs, to support operational communications, coordination, situational awareness, and internet connectivity to personnel. Where deployment of UN infrastructure is not feasible due to security, resources, or logistical constraints, the T/PCC may be requested to provide connectivity. In such cases, reimbursement will be made in accordance with the provisions of the COE Manual.