

**WOMEN, PEACE AND POSTS---
IN UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS**

**by
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1:15-2:45 p.m.**

Madam Special Adviser,

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
Honoured Panellists, Dear Friends,

It is a pleasure to see that the momentum of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) generated six years ago still continues with no loss of commitment, energy or drive on the part of the international community. For this I commend those Council members who have consistently raised the issue of women's contributions to peace and security. I would also like to thank those Council Presidents who propelled the issue forward, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the Office of the Special Adviser (OSAGI), key UN agencies and bodies in the field, the non-governmental organizations and not least---the Inter-Agency Task Force on Women, Peace and Security.

My input to the debate on Women, Peace and Posts, will be in two parts. The first is challenges I faced as a woman Chief of the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSA), 1992-1994, and second, strategies I devised for achieving a high ratio of women on posts resulting in the final stages of the mission with women serving on 50% of the regional director posts. Here, I add some practical proposals for improving the current disappointingly low figure of 30% women in peace operations and especially those at higher levels.

It may be useful to recall that the apartheid system in South Africa had started to crumble with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990 and the subsequent talks between leaders of the ruling National Party and those of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and others about the future path of the country. This was a time of frequent murders, high incidence of rape, violence, both white-on-black and vice versa and black-on-black, train and taxi riots and bombings, public beatings, police brutality and arbitrary incarceration. At the same time, political refugees were returning to swell the ranks of the disaffected and unemployed. Above all there was crushing poverty among the vast majority of the population. Non-whites felt deeply bitter at years of injustice. Whites felt deep anxiety about violence, loss of status

and expropriations of property similar to what took place in Rhodesia and Kenya. Combined, these resentments created an atmosphere of palpable and dangerous tension.

The Boipatong massacre in May 1992 led to the breakdown of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). Followed closely by the Bisho massacre in September, the Security Council was finally obliged to take tangible action. The Council by resolution 772 decided to send a small mission to observe at first hand what was happening on the ground and to report back regularly. As South Africa was then under economic sanctions to end apartheid, there was no formal UN presence in the country except the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assisting with placing returning refugees.

The leaders of the ruling National Party and other conservative elements strongly opposed our mission. They considered that South Africans could resolve their own problems without external interference. Members of the ANC and others, on the other hand, who had regularly testified on the state of affairs before the Special Committee on Against Apartheid, wanted a mission comprised of at least 5,000 military and police. So they too felt deeply disappointed and resentful of the UN.

This was the somewhat tense and hostile atmosphere into which the first 13 members of UNOMSA, arrived in September 1992..

As a woman Chief of Mission I experienced three main challenges. The first was to convince national leaders (political, religious, unionists), that the UN had come to work with them on the road to sustainable peace and racial equality rather than to dictate terms. To do this I set myself the task of meeting with all 28 political entities. I met 24 including the leaders of the main parties, President de Klerk, Nelson Mandela, Chief Mangosutho Buthelezi, Clarence Makwetu, HM King Zwethilini of the Zulus and the heads of all ten Bantustans. I sought advice from various religious leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and leading academicians and writers.

We were assisted in settling in and determining targets by the peace structures set up under the Peace Accord signed by 27 of the parties in September 1991. Many of these structures to promote peace at national, regional and local levels, however, did not yet exist and where they did, they represented the ruling ethnic profile rather than the wealth of ethnic and political diversity, gender balance and youth. One of our tasks became strengthening and democratizing these entities.

As Chief of Mission, I was seen as a UN official, black, and from a very small island, Jamaica. (Apart from reggae, rum and the cricket), I thus had several counts against me. The most significant challenge, however, was being a woman. It was seen as a bit of a let-down, but in the Secretary-General's eyes perfectly in harmony with a "very low-key" mission. In South Africa, women, while at the forefront of the fight against apartheid, were still not generally aroused to fight for their own equal rights with men--- in parliament, the home and the workplace. As each of the entities gradually realized that we treated them equally: attending events where our presence was likely to diffuse

violence such as functions and funerals, marches, fearlessly challenging the police on the use of dogs and guns against marchers, and so on, our impartiality was accepted. Confidence in us grew, doors opened everywhere and the invitations from our warm-hearted, and curious hosts, became almost too numerous.

I soon found that with the substantial number of women observers and myself, as a woman Chief, we had a strong unforeseen affinity with the women of the community. They were impressed by the fact that more than men, we listened seriously to their needs, their views of the situation and their possible solutions. As a result they were more open than the men to accept and pass on to their communities and families, our suggestions for achieving peace. South African women became our strongest allies and collaborators for peace. Women often gave UNOMSA women early warnings of areas where violence was likely to break out. We could then either offset the threats or diffuse them, working with the other missions, the police or our Peace Accord partners.

I must emphasize that involving local women as equals in achieving peace was one of our most successful policies and should be an integral built-in mandate and concept of every mission. A spin-off, according to one of our regional directors, could be that in similar missions, local women treated equally, could gain a higher status vis a vis the mission and males particularly the military and police, might then regard them with greater respect than has been the case of several recent missions.

Another point of contention in been accepted was the term “observer”. The local population felt that we were there “to watch them being killed” rather than to stop the killings. We were held in great contempt until we proved that “observing” could morph effectively into low-key “facilitating”, “negotiating” and proposing viable options to achieve peace. We “lucked out”, however, with our acronym, UNOMSA, which means “She who brings mercy” in Zulu, the language spoken by the majority of South Africans.

As Chief of Mission the main aspect of this challenge was convincing people of our willingness to help and assuring them that the UN wanted them to succeed. We had to be scrupulously fair and impartial, whether in praising restraint or in condemning violence. Once this was established, I had no problems in gaining access to any of the leaders. Some of course were more gracious than others and I well remember when we visited Ciskei at the Cabinet’s invitation, we were held for an hour at gunpoint before being permitted to enter. I also recall our team being imprisoned in Bophuthatswana on Ascension Day 1993. We were finally vouched for by the head of the National Peace Committee and allowed to depart.

The second challenge as a woman Chief of Mission was dealing with Headquarters’ hierarchy. Then as now, there lingers in the minds of many male staff as part of the UN culture, the patronizing conviction, subconscious or otherwise, that women are not equal to men especially when it comes to sharing crucial political information. “Need to know” almost always excludes women. While irritating, women, forced to develop a counter-competency, always have a way of finding out what is really important.

I was asked to head the South African mission at 7.30 p.m. one night. I had 24 hours to decide. Having been a leader of a march of students from the University of the West Indies in downtown Kingston to protest the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, and as a Jamaican whose country had initiated the proposal at a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting to adopt sanctions against South Africa, I had only one answer. Yes. This mission proved to be the most challenging and fulfilling experience of my nearly 38-year career at the UN.

The team's briefing at Headquarters, prior to departure, was sketchy. Luckily on arrival, the National Peace Committee briefed us thoroughly on all aspects of our mandate and on the situation and the culture. We replicated this information to other observers as they arrived and had daily meetings to hear news from other duty stations. The UNOMSA team gradually grew to 500 in 60 locations and finally to just over 2,000 prior to the April 1994 first, non-racial, democratic elections.

There was very little by way of day to day or even weekly instructions from New York, and with a small team of advisers and biweekly reports from all the teams scattered at flashpoints throughout the country, with our team leaders, we learned to work together by intuition, knowledge and the seat of our pants.

As part of Headquarters strategy at the time to counter widely held criticisms that the UN's policy for achieving peace in Africa was just not working, the then Secretary-General brought his three heads of mission in Africa: Angola, Mozambique and South Africa together to a meeting in Maputo. I was included as an equal in all the closed meetings at which he firmly told the recalcitrant opposition leaders in Mozambique that they had to be reasonable or he would withdraw all United Nations forces and assistance. Ironically, I was nevertheless excluded from the Presidential Palace for a State Dinner for us that evening, as security decided that "women did not belong there". (I eventually made it before the dessert.)

In my opinion, whenever male chauvinism embedded in the Secretariat and in peace operations is totally eliminated--- and it must be---, women Chiefs or SRSGs already performing at top levels, will be able to devote even more quality time to their official jobs than to fending off petty slights and humiliations.

For me the third challenge as a woman Chief was how to mould into a coherent team, individuals from different departments and disciplines, different parts of the UN system, with those from outside of the UN ranging from former foreign ministers to students, innocent of the UN culture. I approached this challenge through orientation, personal knowledge of each staff, strict respect for local norms and customs and to their personal security. In order to deploy teams to major areas of conflict, we had teams of two or three, usually with a balance of gender, disciplines, and ethnicity. To offset the vast distances between headquarters and most of the teams and to heighten morale, the regional directors and I were in contact with each team leader as frequently as possible.

We tried as far as possible to recruit versatile staff with prior mission experience and knowledge of the political situation. Given the context of South Africa then, the mixed teams were particularly useful in demonstrating that a mix of race and gender could work harmoniously---an essential ingredient for achieving and maintaining peace. This factor was ingrained in me coming from a highly multiracial society, Jamaica, where racial prejudices existed, but which I had observed lessened, incrementally.

For the first time a Chief of a UN mission had to coordinate all three teams from the European Union (all male military or police), the African Union (all male) and the Commonwealth (mixed). Most of our pre-planning work for operations in the field was done jointly. The UN appreciated the additional military and police expertise in these teams which greatly enhanced our overall capacity and strategic approach.

We communicated with Headquarters mainly by regular bi-monthly reports for the Secretary-General and the Council. These were based on an overall analysis of what was occurring in all 60 duty stations drawn from their reports and on trends in the country as a whole.

There was a very human side to the mission as important perhaps as the political. As a non-family mission, there were men who pined for their wives, women who missed their husbands and children, staff with financial problems or those worried about the fidelity of significant others left at home. Others failed to take medications or turned to alcohol when under stress. We dealt with these on an individual basis and as quickly as possible as a single case could affect the morale of the entire mission. Luckily, I had the services of a very competent OHRM personnel officer at the beginning of the mission who helped me to recognize when an observer was over-stressed, disruptive or taking too many risks. We devised special Rest and Recreation packages for these instances. In some cases a recall to the parent duty station was the only solution.

Overall, joint participation and distribution of information on what strategies or innovative ideas succeeded or failed among other teams, drew the teams together and facilitated a common approach to our work. May I say that I had a truly outstanding group of people working with me whether as observers, electoral officers, spokespersons, radio operators, transport specialists or administrators. Whilst a dozen years have passed, members of the UNOMSA team still meet on the anniversary of the first elections for a celebratory dinner in New York. I may also say that this mission was judged in a 1993/4 mission of the International Peace Academy the first successful mission of preventive diplomacy in the context of Boutros Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace*.

The second part of my statement deals with strategies used for getting more women into UNOMSA where we had over 46% during the first 18 months and where 50% were Regional Directors in the final and most dangerous phase just prior to the elections. I cannot stress how important was the close collaboration I had with OHRM. As a former Director of Recruitment and of Staff Administration and Training I encountered many staff. I found that I knew people from all over the Secretariat including other duty stations. This knowledge was enhanced by my 3-4 yearly lateral

moves within several areas of the Secretariat (conference services, social development, women's equality, programme planning and evaluation). I not only knew of individuals, but had worked side by side with them.

My determination to ensure that women were fully represented at all levels originated with the goals of the UN and with being a founding member of the Group on Equal Rights for Women. I was also inspired by the leadership of Martti Ahtisaari, when he headed the UNTAG mission (Namibia) a few years earlier. For the first time in any UN mission, he placed women as regional office heads, and used international support staff ---mostly women --- on professional posts. Breaking with tradition, one of his appointments was our distinguished Special Adviser on Gender Issues and our Moderator, Rachel Mayanja, who on that mission, was the first woman to be appointed as Chief Liaison Officer with the Military—a non-traditional female assignment.

I also used my knowledge of individual women when inviting them to apply for the mission. Most did and felt it their most rewarding UN experience. I sometimes used the same knowledge to request men with experience or special skills, but men were far less shy of applying and getting posts in missions.

I believe that to date I am the only Chief of Mission who was also in Human Resources, and I used those resources to get the best. The mission rose from a handful to about 500. Later just before the elections in April 1994, we had over 2,000 working as election observers. We had to encourage interested people from outside the UN and permanent missions proved most helpful in supplying both men and women. The UN Volunteers also cooperated by supplying not only gender balance but many volunteers from Africa which was greatly appreciated by the local population.

In discussing strategies for increasing the number of women in UN peace operations in 2007 and beyond, we have to recognize that decentralization has increasingly shifted power from OHRM to DPKO and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs). In our annual assessments of the extent to which resolution 1325 has been implemented, the head of DPKO has consistently highlighted new developments and mechanisms, especially those for dealing with violence, exploitation and rape of local women and gender mainstreaming. I applaud the increase in the last two years of women serving in peace operations from 27.5 to 30%, somewhat higher than the increase in the Secretariat as a whole. Yet, I am appalled that following Carolyn McAskie's transfer after her outstanding leadership in Burundi and the resignation of Heidi Tagliavini in Georgia there is not a single woman SRSG. At the deputy level (DSRSG), there is only one woman, in Afghanistan.

I now wish to propose ten practical strategies which should accelerate the process of getting more women into peace operations:

- First, the incoming Secretary-General should appoint a woman with a gender-sensitive approach as the next Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations;

- Second, a generic profile of a Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSGs) or Head/Chief of Mission should be widely publicized and placed on the DPKO and Department of Political Affairs web sites;
- Third, a pool of at least 20 women should be selected for SRSG posts from the central high-level list kept by DPKO/OHRM and interviewed for suitability (language, managerial skills, region etc.).
- Fourth, a list of 5-8 of the 20 should be drawn up who are judged most suitable and who could be deployed at short notice (I believe that the new senior leadership policy unit in DPKO is scheduled to work on this aspect);
- Fifth, a letter from the Secretary-General or his Deputy should be sent to all Foreign Ministers, requesting women candidates for high-level civilian, military and police posts in peace operations;
- Sixth, no interviews or screening should be held unless a substantial number of women candidates (one third, at least) are included in the short list;
- Seventh, a search should be made of D-1 and D-2 staff of UN agencies and bodies to ensure that women as well as men are chosen to head missions. To my knowledge only three women have ever been selected from UN bodies for DSRSG posts (Ethiopia/Eritrea, Guatemala and Afghanistan) whereas there is a double-digit figure for retiring D-2 male resident representatives/coordinator who have been selected as SRSGs or their deputies;
- Eighth, women Permanent Representatives should be considered and selected to head missions. Over the years, from an excellent and increasing pool of women Ambassadors accredited to UN offices in Addis Ababa, Geneva, New York and Vienna, not a single one has been selected to head a mission whereas several of their male counterparts have;
- Ninth, DPKO's system for recruiting staff from within or outside the UN needs to be drastically revamped to fill the 21% vacancies rapidly and to take full advantage of women available to serve on mission;
- And tenth, if the DPKO Gender Adviser is to have any real access and influence on these selections, the post should be upgraded at least to the D-2/1 level..

Madam Moderator,

May I say how heartened I am by the recent pronouncement by our Secretary-General designate, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, that he was committed to having gender balance at the highest levels. He is also reported as saying that he was contemplating having a woman Deputy.

I would close by appealing to the new Secretary-General to extend his commitment to having women on high-level posts to peace operations also. I would then appeal to Member States to send more women candidates and to women staff to make themselves available for these exciting opportunities within the UN peace-keeping and peace-making operations.

Thank you.