

Statement

by

Ms. Rachel Mayanja
Assistant Secretary-General
Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women
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Strategies for Enhancing Gender Balance among Uniformed Personnel in Peacekeeping
Missions
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Distinguished Chairpersons,
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for your kind introduction.

I am truly delighted to be here today and to be given the opportunity to join distinguished representatives of troop contributing countries on a topic that is central to the work of my Office and to the peace and security agenda of the UN. I would like to thank our colleagues from DPKO and in particular, Ms. Comfort Lamptey, Gender Adviser from the Best Practices Section, for the invitation and her excellent work on gender issues in peacekeeping operations.

In many respects, my entire career in the United Nations has been closely linked to the theme of our discussion. I have seen with my own eyes the difference made by the presence of uniformed women personnel in peacekeeping having served myself in two peacekeeping missions, in Namibia (UNTAG) from 1989 to 1990, and Iraq/Kuwait (UNIKOM) from 1992 to 1994. I have worked in the Office of Human Resources Management and FAO for many years and I know firsthand what a challenge the goal of gender balance can be to any organization. Finally, as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women my function is primarily to advocate for gender equality in the programmes and policies of the entire UN system with Member States and the United Nations as a whole, as well as to provide advice and strategies for the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations, and to foster a working environment that offers equal opportunities for career advancement for both women and men.

Why is gender important? Some may say that peace, food and shelter are more important needs in conflict situations than gender equality. Maybe the advancement of women is something that can wait until tomorrow, when we have peace, when we have more time and more resources.

The reports of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, of the Secretary-General “In larger freedom” and the Summit Outcome give a resounding “no” to that thinking. Security and development are interdependent, and that neither can be sustained without respect for human rights and the rule of law. Gender is an integral part of this equation. The lack of genuine gender equality hampers stability, sound economic development and social harmony. While women’s inclusion and gender equality may not be a guarantee against conflict and under-development, their absence virtually ensures it.

From all corners of the world suffering from armed conflicts - be they in Africa, Asia, Latin America or Europe - in both my capacities as peacekeeper and now, as Special Adviser, I have learned one powerful lesson which is without women’s participation in peace efforts there can be no peace and security. Women are principal stakeholders in peace and stability and must be well represented at all levels of decision-making, including in the United Nations peace-keeping and peace-building operations.

Making the Case

In September 2005, at the Summit Outcome, the world’s leaders have underlined the importance of women having the opportunity for equal participation and full involvement in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security.

Why the participation of women in peacekeeping operations is so important to the success of peacekeeping?

First, women and girls are most affected by conflict and they experience war and conflict in different ways compared to men. They often find themselves as single heads of households in the absence of men. They are the principle care givers in the communities and many times on the battlefield itself. They are victims of rape, domestic abuse, trafficking, sex slavery and forced prostitution. Women and children represent 75–80 per cent of 26 million internally displaced due to armed conflict. They are 80 per cent of 9 million refugees. Finally, women and girls are also perpetrators of violence and participants in conflict. Some may actively choose to participate in the conflict and carry out acts of violence because they are committed to the cause be it political, religious or economic, while others were abducted or coerced.

Second, participation is women’s human right emanating both from national legislation as well as international legal instruments to which their governments are parties. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been ratified by 181 countries, obliges States parties to eliminate discrimination against women and to ensure that they enjoy equality with men in the political and public life of the country.

Third, it is part of intergovernmental mandates:

- The United Nations Security Council, in its resolution 1325 (2000) of 31 October 2000, called on Member States to ensure increased representation of women in all

decision making levels in national and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict and expand the role and contribution of women in field based operations, and especially among military observers and civilian police.

- The Beijing Platform for Action called on member states to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power-structures and decision-making and increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Fourth, women Peacekeepers contribute to the improvement of the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. Allow me to examine this thesis in more detail.

In most post-war societies women constitute majority. In Rwanda, for example, they are 70 per cent of the population. During armed conflict, women take on many traditionally male roles as breadwinners and decision-makers in communities ensuring the survival of their families and communities even when livelihood systems are disrupted. Therefore, peacekeepers must engage and support those women. Yet in some societies in which peacekeeping missions operate the women cannot, for cultural or religious purposes, speak to the male peacekeepers. Very often women peacekeepers are the only chain of communication with local women. They listen to women's needs, complaints and praise. For that reason alone the presence of women in peacekeeping missions is essential.

Victims of sexual violence often remain intimidated by male soldiers, regardless of their status; the presence of women can alleviate this intimidation and act as a reassurance of the benign intentions of the peacekeepers.

I would also like to add another observation: experience has shown that having female and male peacekeepers working side by side in host countries can be catalytic in breaking down traditional views that discriminate against women and marginalize women from decision making processes. A substantive presence of female peacekeepers can be instrumental in motivating local women's groups to take action and participate in the fight for human rights, democratization and peace. Women peacekeepers become a role model for both, local women and men, in a more inclusive and democratic society - a case in point is the recent election of Ms. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, as the first democratically elected head of state in Africa!

I strongly believe that uniformed female peacekeepers have a positive impact on the day to day operational activities of peacekeeping missions. Let me illustrate this with some examples:

- *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*: the operational impact of having women military personnel participate in the DDR processes is positive for three very important reasons: Women peacekeepers are better equipped to provide security and services for women ex-combatants in demobilization

camps; they are key to support the screening of female combatants and; they are better suited to reach out to women at the start of the DDR process, making sure the women ex-combatants are included in the first place.

- *Elections*: The presence of female uniformed peacekeepers in the run up to elections and during the elections process itself contributes to creating a greater sense of security and confidence for the women electorate, encouraging them to participate in a process that traditionally has an under-representation of women. Women peacekeepers are also more likely to recognize the specific needs of women in the electoral process, ensuring, for instance, that pregnant women receive priority and special attention in long queues. A practical example from the DRC highlights this: the poor turn-out in the voter-registration process spurred the mission to approach the national authorities to ensure that the legislation for a 30 per cent quota of female electoral staff, stipulated in the Law on Registration, was adhered to, thereby ensuring the enhanced participation of women in the registration process. As a result 25 per cent of the national police personnel trained to provide security in the forthcoming elections are women.

Police: The participation of women in United Nations Police Forces is vital to the success of UNPOL's work with the most obvious area being in addressing gender-based violence, trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as all crimes that to a great extent affect women more than men. Female police officers are an absolute requirement for receiving women arriving at police stations to report incidents of sexual violence and abuse. The presence of women among the UN's police forces also motivates host countries to include women in the creation of their own forces. They also play an important role in the training of national police forces.

Where we stand on gender balance in peacekeeping missions .

Despite these demonstrated successes of women peacekeepers on the ground, I regret to observe that we are nowhere near the 50/50 gender distribution in military and police components of peacekeeping operations.

As of December 2005, women constituted, on average, a *mere 1%* of military personnel working in peacekeeping operations, *an actual decline* from 2000, when women represented 3%. The trend is very discouraging and needs to be reversed.

In preparing for this keynote speech and looking at DPKO's monthly summary of contributors of military and police personnel to peacekeeping operations, which is available on the DPKO website, I was surprised to find that the data was not sex-disaggregated. I would like to take this opportunity to strongly recommend that DPKO include sex-disaggregated data for military and police contributions in future summaries.

I did eventually manage to find the sex-disaggregated statistics regarding the deployment of military troops and military observers to Peacekeeping Operations for December 2005 show that out of the top 30 troop contributing countries:

- 13 contributed no women troops or military observers at all;
- For the six countries that contributed the most women, in absolute terms, women constituted an average of only 4.9 per cent ;
- And in terms of the peacekeeping missions themselves, 4 missions had no women serving in military positions ;
- While 4 per cent was the maximum number of women in any mission.

The data indicates that the percentage of women deployed is lower than their percentage among national uniformed personnel.

The Secretary-General's 50/50 target for civilian personnel might be overly ambitious for the military and police, which have been historically reserved for men in most Troop and Police Contributing countries across the world. However, I would like to challenge you to set a realistic target for improving gender balance among uniformed personnel as an outcome of this Policy Dialogue, one that would ensure that women are represented at all levels and in enough numbers to constitute a critical mass – at which point their presence can make a real difference [DPKO data for civilian staff on appointments of one year or more are 32.1 per cent, OCHA 51.2 per cent, OHCHR 55 percent as of December 2005].

Moreover, it is important to point out that the challenge does not merely lie in recruiting more women to serve in peacekeeping operations, it is also important to ensure that these women are given the same opportunities to advance their careers as their male colleagues. Women uniformed peacekeepers must not be relegated to support and administrative functions, but have the capacity to serve in a variety of functions, including operational ones, on par with men

Making change

Challenges and what can be done:

In spite of the recognized role of female uniformed personnel in peacekeeping operations, we need also to use this forum to review how we can best overcome some of the specific challenges which confront women in field, including for example how we deploy women – ensuring that they are deployed in pairs in some cases; ensuring the availability of sanitary facilities, appropriate clothing and footwear for women, for example.

These kinds of challenges can, and have been overcome: various peacekeeping missions and Member States worldwide have found various solutions to these problems and I expect you will reflect on some of the most effective strategies.

This is the reason why this policy dialogue is so important, it allows you as participants to share solutions, to identify good practice, and to share lessons learned, so that you can all benefit from the work done to date by some Member States, and thus solve the problems for others before they even arise. I would encourage those countries that have women in their military and police to make them available and even consider increasing their contribution.

So, for the two days that you are here, I would like to invite you to take advantage of your colleagues' experience, listen to the expert presentations, and challenge them to find solutions to problems your countries are grappling with.

I challenge you to look for innovative solutions. These may include for example, exploring the possibility of using women ex-combatants from ex-peacekeeping host countries as peacekeepers in other countries; creating mentoring and training programmes for potential women peacekeepers, thus better equipping them to take the challenge to serve in peacekeeping operations; or building rosters of women peacekeepers; developing specific profiles of peacekeepers, for example those with expertise in domestic violence or trafficking. Targeted recruitment, including through outreach to women's police associations, is one way. Also, in many settings a "special push" has been achieved through special measures – setting of specific quota, addressing seniority issues. Addressing issues of length of service, definition of what constitutes a family duty station, etc.

This way, you will all come away with new ideas, innovative solutions, and useful recommendations that can help each and every one of your countries see more women in the armed and police forces, and thus also as a consequence in peacekeeping operations. But we need also to act on these ideas and solutions. We cannot reassemble here next year or later to lament that we have failed to achieve our goals.

In closing I would like to remind you all that if we make visible progress on this issue, we have the opportunity to impact the lives of millions of women, girls, men and boys across the world, by effectively addressing the needs and priorities of both sexes, and empowering women to take up their rightful place in societies that are being supporting by UN peacekeepers to make the transition from conflict to peace and democracy. My Office stands ready to help you to take forward the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you.
