

“What Is a Gender Adviser?”

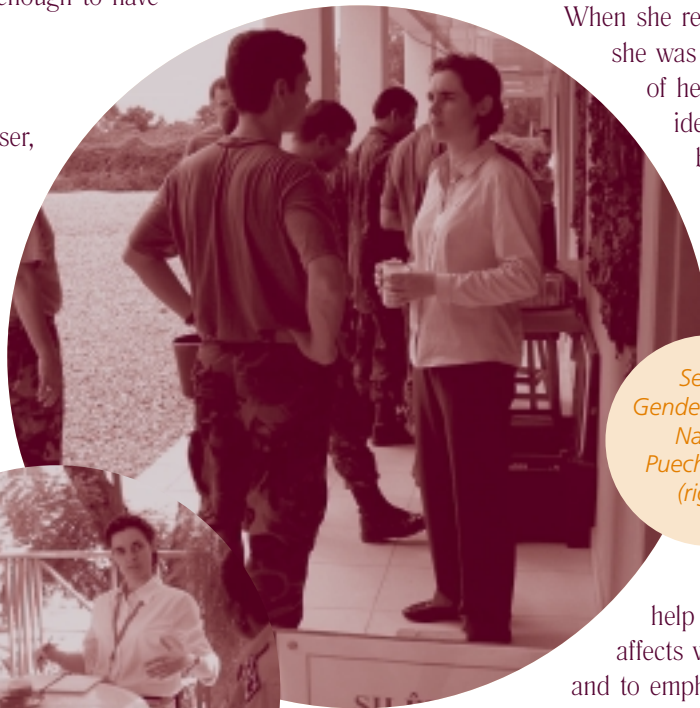


Haiti

When the Haitian crisis built up to the collapse and change of government in early 2004, Nadine Puechguirbal’s experience in the country was needed more than ever.

A native of France, Nadine had worked in Haiti in 1995 and again from 1998 to 2000. She was familiar with the country, had worked with the people long enough to have learned Haitian Creole and was determined to make a difference.

In her role as Senior Gender Adviser, Ms. Puechguirbal went into the country in June 2004 as part of the advance team of the new United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Her experience as a gender adviser in the peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo had prepared her to confront this new challenge, which might become the most difficult in her entire humanitarian career.



When she returned to Haiti this time around, she was wearing a different hat – and many of her colleagues and friends had no idea what her mandate was. From the beginning, she had to constantly answer their question: “What is a gender adviser?”

Senior Gender Adviser Nadine Puechguirbal (right).

Time and again, Nadine patiently explained that it is the gender adviser’s role to raise awareness of the different needs, concerns and contributions of women and men, girls and boys, in building a new Haiti; to help everyone be aware how the conflict affects women and men in different ways; and to emphasize the roles they need to play in the tough challenges ahead to ensure peace comes to stay. It is also about ensuring women’s full participation in all aspects of the peacekeeping mission.

Peacekeeping

FACES

Nadine's arrival in Haiti represents a significant move by the United Nations. This is the first time that a gender adviser has been deployed at the very outset of a UN mission. Her task is to place a gender perspective into the mission's programmes and activities as they are developed and implemented, instead of having that viewpoint painfully added at a later stage.

Through her training sessions for international staff, the international civilian police (CivPol) and military peacekeepers, she has helped to break the ice and demystify her role, creating what she calls a "gender-friendly approach". Now mission staff seek her advice as they attempt to come to terms with what gender awareness means in the context of the Haitian crisis.

One of the many areas where she hopes to make a difference is violence against women. The level of violence against women in all forms – physical, sexual, psychological and domestic – is reported to be very high in Haiti. When a woman is brave enough to go to a police station to lodge a complaint, she is often mistreated, further humiliated or simply ignored. There is a critical need for the Haitian National Police to be trained in dealing with cases of violence against women that are reported to them.



“What Is a Gender Adviser?”

Nadine is currently contributing to a training curriculum for the Haitian National Police on HIV/AIDS and gender issues. She is working in collaboration with CivPol, the HIV/AIDS adviser, UN agencies such as UNAIDS, the UN Population Fund, the UN Development Fund for Women and national partners. The aim is to improve the police response to cases of violence against women and strengthen services and shelters for victims.

A male Haitian Programme Officer has been recruited to work in the Mission's Gender Unit. “The importance of involving men is critical in building up a more egalitarian society,” Nadine says.

Her hope is to see her small team demonstrate the benefits of integrating gender perspectives into peace operations – as urged by the Security Council in resolution 1325 – from the outset, and that lessons learned from the Haitian experience will be incorporated into future UN field operations.