

Understanding the Perspective of Women in UN Peacekeeping Missions

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Women in conflict throughout the world are taking significant risks to contribute to peace and security and their participation in peacekeeping operations has enhanced their role in peacebuilding and defending the rights of women. Women peacekeepers have proven themselves equal of their male counterparts in the execution of jobs under tough circumstances in all disciplines of peacekeeping. However, their contribution in UN Peacekeeping has been under-reported and given little attention, and failure to address this weakens not just the Security Council's responsibility in all aspects of peace and security, but also its primary objective. We must recruit and maintain women peacekeepers as a matter of operational need.

It is a well-known fact that heavy-duty conflicts impact women, exacerbating a prejudiced outlook towards gender. Women play an important role as peace representatives in armed strife. "In 1993, women made up 1 per cent of deployed uniformed personnel. In 2020, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women constitute 4.8 per cent of military contingents and 10.9 per cent of formed police units and 34 per cent of justice and corrections government-provided personnel in UN Peacekeeping missions".¹ However, their work as major peace representatives remains largely unacknowledged. Recognising and incorporating women's diverse perspectives, experiences and talents into

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all elements of UN peacekeeping missions is therefore crucial. “The 2028 target for women serving in military contingents is 15 per cent, and 25 per cent for military observers and staff officers respectively”.²

The increased presence of women peacekeepers makes a substantial contribution in securing long-term peace and well-being of women in conflict areas. They have varied duties and capabilities, from leadership to frontline roles, thereby adding value to military operations. Their troops bring a vital viewpoint to operations and crucial choices, particularly those that have a huge impact on civilians, particularly women and girls.

Furthermore, female troops contribute certain unique tactical talents to this profession, such as screening women and performing searches in locations where it is culturally not right for men to enter spaces meant for women. Communities in different nations find it easier to communicate and exchange information with military units that comprise both men and women. This helps in getting more information which ultimately helps in maintaining peace and security.

Moreover, major steps have been taken by the United Nations towards increasing the role of women in peacekeeping missions, considering that the need to encourage women empowerment in various peace and security processes has increased at the global level.

MAJOR STEPS TOWARDS PROMOTING WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

1. *Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)* was the first UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution that emphasised the role of women in the resolution of conflicts.³ It makes us aware of the repercussions of military strife on women and girls. In addition, women peacekeepers’ role as peace-builders showcases their active participation in UN peacekeeping operations. Various initiatives have been taken that signify the active role women play in peacekeeping. “The bringing of Women Peace and Security (WPS) priorities is a political commitment in the Secretary General’s Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative focusing on women’s active participation in conflict prevention through amicable political solutions which are significant for peacebuilding”.⁴
2. *Female Military Peacekeepers Network*: The Female Military Peacekeepers Network was initiated by the Office of Military Affairs (OMA) in 2015, to bring together female military personnel who are serving or have previously served in UN peacekeeping operations.⁵

The project enhances women's presence in peacekeeping operations, and provides a forum for mentorship and empowerment of women as UN military personnel.

3. *Guidelines for Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations*: These guidelines were issued by the OMA of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and were developed with the assistance of the Gender Unit of the DPKO's Policy, Evaluation, and Training Division (DPET).

The guidelines improve the operative efficacy in peacekeeping operations by integrating gender diversity in the conduct of various peacekeeping missions. The recommendations are designed to assist peacekeepers to ensure the security of the public at various levels such as strategic, operational and tactical.

These guidelines are likely to increase women's role in decision-making at the post-conflict levels. In addition, it will help peacekeepers in gaining gender perspectives in field missions, and promote strong presence of women peacekeepers.

4. The DPKO approved a *Policy Directive on Gender Equality in Peacekeeping Operations* in 2006, which elaborates the significant instructions on UN mandates on women, peace and security in all peacekeeping operations.
5. *The DPKO and Department of Field Support (DFS) Policy on Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*: This policy is formulated to direct the DPKO and Department of Field Support (DFS) in implementing gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) mandates.⁶ The policy outlines the framework on women and peacekeeping that cultivates a strong institutional culture like accountability and leadership in peacekeeping operations.
6. *Gender Advocate of the Year Award*: The Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award, created in 2016, recognises an individual peacekeeper's devotion and effort in advancing the ideals of UNSC Resolution 1325 within a military milieu.⁷ The award also generates awareness about what it takes to mainstream a gender viewpoint in a military environment in a peacekeeping deployment. Table 1 mentions the awards given to women for their valuable service in various missions.

Table I Gender Advocate of the Year Award

<i>Year</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Served in (Missions)</i>
2020	Major Steplyne Nyaboga	Kenya	UNAMID
2019	Commander Carla Monteiro de Castro Araujo and Major Suman Gawani	Brazil and India	MINUSCA and UNMISS
2018	Lieutenant Commander Marcia Andrade Braga	Brazil	MINUSCA
2017	Major Seitebatso Pearl Block	South Africa	MONUSCO
2016	Captain Aichatou Ousmane Issaka	Nigeria	MINUSMA

Source: Data taken from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender-advocate-of-year-award>, accessed on 11 January 2022.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

There are many instances of how peacekeepers are striving to empower and support women, for instance, in Darfur, the Gender Advisory Unit has established a committee under UNSC Resolution 1325 to carry out the state's implementation of the promises made in the resolution and to assure that women's perspectives are taken into consideration in peace and security efforts.⁸ Moreover, the European Union is implementing a joint project with UN peacekeeping to help women of different ethnic backgrounds improve their capacity for political leadership in Kosovo.⁹ In South Sudan, several national-level forums were organised to develop strategies for gender compliance. These are some instances of countries focusing on women empowerment and their role in peacekeeping operations.

India is also proactive in assigning women to the UN peacekeeping operations. "In 2007, India had the opportunity to send an all-women contingent to a UN peacekeeping mission for the first time. The Formed Police Unit in Liberia provided 24-hour guard duty and conducted night patrols in the capital Monrovia and helped to build the capacity of the Liberian police".¹⁰ Moreover, Major Suman Gawani, an Indian woman officer who served as a peacekeeper in the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), was honoured with the Military Gender Advocate of the Year award in 2019. Gawani worked to conflate gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations. She also shared her insights on various gender perspectives at several UN gatherings. In addition, she instructed South Sudanese soldiers in issues concerning Conflict-related Sexual Violence

(CRSV). These stories from the field emphasise the significance of and the need for women peacekeepers at the global level.

CONCLUSION

Women peacekeepers have proven the value of equality for all. It is important to ponder on the necessity of more women peacekeepers, as it signifies more concrete peacebuilding.

Women peacekeepers contribute to the all-round efficacy of peacekeeping missions. By 2028, the UNSC Resolution 2242 aims to increase the number of women serving in uniformed components of peacekeeping operations. At present, women make up just 6.6 per cent of all uniformed military, police, judiciary and correction personnel working in various peacekeeping operations. Despite the fact that significant progress has been made since the implementation of the several unified gender parity policies discussed earlier, more work is needed to meet the objectives set for 2028 and beyond, as well as to maintain those that have already been accomplished. The diversity and skills that women peacekeepers bring lead to better decision-making, planning and delivery of results, which in turn increases operational efficiency and productivity.

Women peacekeepers have greater influence on communities, promote human rights, protect the public and inspire other women to play a greater part in the peace as well as political process. By conducting interviews and helping the victims of gender-based violence and child abuse, women peacekeepers can not only gain greater influence on the public, especially women and children, but also provide valuable information that cannot be obtained otherwise. Women peacekeepers play an important role in building confidence and trust in societies.

In a nutshell, women peacekeepers serve as great torchbearers for women in post-strife conditions, advocating for their rights and setting an example for doing non-traditional work. Gender equality will add more weight to make peacekeeping missions more comprehensive.

NOTES

1. United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Women in Peacekeeping', available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>, accessed on 10 January 2022.
2. Ibid.

3. United Nations, 'Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)', available at [https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)), accessed on 10 January 2022.
4. United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Action for Peacekeeping (A4P)', available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-for-peacekeeping-a4p>, accessed on 10 January 2022.
5. Facebook Group, 'The Female Military Peacekeepers Network', available at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/UN.female.military.peacekeepers.network/>, accessed on 11 January 2022.
6. United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Gender Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy', available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gender-responsive-un-peacekeeping-operations-policy-en.pdf>, accessed on 11 January 2022.
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8. United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Gender Advisory Unit', available at <https://unamid.unmissions.org/gender-advisory-unit>, accessed on 17 January 2022.
9. United Nations Missions, "'Changing Mindsets" women leaders support each other to lift their voices', available at <https://unmik.unmissions.org/%E2%80%98changing-mindsets%E2%80%99-women-leaders-support-each-other-lift-their-voices>, accessed on 20 January 2022.
10. United Nations, 'India: A Long and Deep Tradition of Contributing to UN Peacekeeping', available at <https://news.un.org/en/gallery/541602>, accessed on 22 January 2022.