

The practical implications of a gender perspective in UN Peacekeeping Operations.

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Introduction

First I would like to thank Ms Marcela Donadio the Executive Secretary of the Security and Defense Network of Latin America (RESDAL) for the invitation to speak at this seminar. I will speak as a practitioner, from my experience as a former military commander in the field. I had the privilege to be the first FC in UNMEE, The Military Adviser to DPKO and SG Kofi Annan and my last job was General Officer Commanding Eastern-Division in MONUC in DRC.

The aim of my presentation is to increase your awareness and understanding of the challenges for the military component to mainstream the gender perspective in UN PKO.

Give example of people fleeing when violence breaks out and where do they run to: UN compounds for.....?? PROTECTION.

The military component is the largest in most UN PK Missions. And not so long ago, hardly any women were part of those contingents. Fortunately that is changing but unfortunately slowly. The police component is doing better in that respect. Their core role stems from the SC mandate and is to *“ensure a secure environment so that political processes can develop and humanitarian assistance can be provided”*. Furthermore since 1999 the missions as a whole, and not only the uniformed people, have the objective *“to protect civilians under imminent threat including all forms of sexual and gender based violence “*.

Let me address how the environment looks like where those military and police will be deployed to? The majority of the present UN PK

missions in Liberia, DRC, Ivory Coast, South Sudan, Abyei, Darfur or in Haiti or observer mission in Syria are deployed in countries whose political and security situation is unpredictable, volatile, dangerous, with vast area's of responsibility (AORs) with many times little infrastructure, with sometimes host government forces acting as one of the major perpetrators of violence including sexual violence, where criminality and gangs are terrorizing the local population, with child soldiers operating in militia groups, and where as usual women and children are the main victims; in short a challenging environment.

Are the UN troops and police and their commanders prepared for this environment? Are they prepared for a deployment to an environment where gender issues should also be addressed. Where a pro-active posture is required. The answer is unfortunately insufficient. Let me explain.

When I was deployed to MONUC in the DRC in 2005 and formed my division of 15.000 troops I was confronted with serious violence against the local population by various spoilers such as militia/former genocide Hutu's from Rwanda, criminal groups, dissident government soldiers and with serious cases of conflict related sexual violence. The Division carried out an average of 15 operations per day. The majority of the troops were physically and mentally insufficient prepared to implement the mandate of PoC including sexual violence and had insufficient knowledge of the ROE's. Some senior commanders had no will to work together with civilian colleagues and certainly not with female colleagues from the UN or NGO's.

Language was and still is a serious problem. Understanding the problems of the population, to prevent atrocities to happen means at least that one can talk to local leaders in the villages, to the female community leaders, to the teachers and the village elderly. Information is key in addressing the safety and security challenges. Interpreters or language assistants in particular females are crucial.

The normal traditional, conventional way of peacekeeping to address these challenges was simply not enough. We in MONUC had to be innovative in our “modus of operandi”, but that meant also a change of thinking at UN HQ. Different ways to use the military helicopters to really increase mobility of the troops, stay closer to the local population by introducing mobile operating bases based in villages reaching out to the local population in particular to women moving on foot. Gathering as much information as possible where the next hotspot or flash point of potential atrocities would be and then act swiftly and decisively.

Developing SOPs how to address problems in IDP Camps, working closely with local authorities but taking firm protection actions even if the local authorities, are not willing, or are not capable of taking action are simply not present. **Example** husband DRC. Or in Haiti no action if HNP not available whilst immediate action is required.

Back to the innovative measures to take; Deploying by night and unexpectedly showing up at village entries before the market took place to secure the area so that locals, most of the time women, could not be harassed or raped. Introducing patrols consisting not only of male soldiers but also female soldiers trained how to reach out to traumatized people. Deploying mobile medical clinics in inhospitable areas with female doctors to treat locals, a formula that I already used in my time as battalion commander in UNTAC in Cambodia and as Force Commander in UNMEE in Ethiopia/Eritrea. This was a very successful formula that resulted in building trust and confidence of the local population in the UN.

Civilian, military and police colleagues had to work much closer together than ever before, learning and understanding each others responsibilities, limitations and boundaries. Female human rights workers, female military observers formed with UN military patrols Joint Protection Teams to work with the local population. And of course it is absolutely vital that the troops and their junior and senior

leaders had to learn what it means to deploy to a UN PK Mission that is authorized to use force under Chapter VII of the mandate. That should be done during the pre-deployment training. There they must learn that **COMMANDERS SHOULD not be AFRAID to USE FORCE** if the **SITUATION REQUIRES IT. THEY SHOULD AVOID the TENDENCY to MINIMIZE the RISKS RATHER THAN MAXIMIZE the RESULTS.**

For all these issues in 2005-2007 when I was the GOC we had to learn on the spot. The majority of my time was spent teaching, encouraging, explaining, kicking and pushing my troops to what they had to do: take action to PoC including Conflict Related Sexual Violence. It meant also to explain to UN HQ what support I needed from them in order to make this happen.

Let me in general terms focus on four points: 1) change of mentality of military personnel, 2) practical and operational implications of gender mainstreaming, 3) pre-deployment training and last accountability of the implementation of the mandate.

Change of mentality. Gender mainstreaming anno 2012 is still an issue that is not always well understood by military personnel in several Troop Contributing Countries; How to treat women, understanding that in a UN (and not only UN), multinational military unit women nowadays are a vital part of the organization with equal rights as men. Senior commanders serve already under a female SRSG or maybe in the future under a female FC or work closely with a female HoO and female civilian colleagues from gender, child protection, Conduct and discipline, political human rights sections.. This lack of understanding should change quickly at all levels from soldiers to junior and senior commanders.

Practical and operational implications of gender mainstreaming. In everything the UN does in the field in preparing for tactical operations or deployments, gender issues should be taken into account, ranging

from force generation at UN HQ to patrol composition to women accommodation in the construction of camps. In gathering information and intelligence the gender perspective is vital. In DRC last year it was clearly demonstrated after a serious incident of mass rape that the lack of communication to the local population and the lack of female reach out to the females in the communities caused the unawareness of UN troops of potential flash points.

I also would like to mention the importance of the implementation of the PPP concept: Presence, posture and profile with regards to women.

Presence. The impact of mere presence of UN troops cannot be underestimated. Deploying to the right place at the right time can have a deterring effect and add credibility to messages being delivered through other channels. Female presence increases that credibility.

Posture. Posture is the “body language” of the force, of the mission as a whole, which should say: “one does not mess around with the UN.” Posture can affect the perception of both rebels/opponents and the local population. That posture should also send the message of treatment of women and girls. It should show a behavior of respect and equal treatment.

Profile. The public profile of commanders at all levels also impacts perceptions. Their role must be analysed and opportunities used to transmit key messages. Messages amongst others how important it is to have female military and police personnel who are very skilled in defusing sensitive situations.

Pre-deployment training. During the pre-deployment training military personnel must be prepared for what they can expect in the AOR of the Mission where they will deploy. They should be trained in civil military relations including women. They should know the mandate and the ROEs in and out. They should be trained using scenario training case studies. Yesterday I had the pleasure of providing a day

training at the Peace keeping Training Center here in Buenos Aires on scenario training for peacekeepers on conflict related sexual violence I will give you an example of such a scenario:

“A UN patrol (30 soldiers) on foot, at last light, encounters a young girl (13 years) who has been raped by four uniformed and armed persons at a nearby checkpoint. She is in a very bad state but is able to accurately describe the perpetrators. The checkpoint is only a five-minute walk away.”

So what is the patrol commander going to do? One should realize that the patrol commander is not the colonel or the general. It is the young lieutenant, captain or sergeant of 24 years old who must take those decisions.

During pre-deployment training cultural issues very specific for the country where the troops will be deployed, should be discussed. For example: in some societies it is difficult for female local interpreters to stay overnight in a UN compound with male personnel. It is culturally not accepted so solutions have to be found to make it work. When deployed on the job training should continue to improve the operational standards.

Finally, accountability. Junior and senior commanders have responsibilities for the implementation of mandate, ROEs, direction, guidelines, SOPs and policy of the UN also with regards to gender issues. So all should be **accountable** for their actions and non actions for compliance and implementation of the mandate, the use of ROEs and also for the implementation of guidelines on gender.

Let me conclude by saying that I hope that you have a better understanding now what gender perspective means on the ground from a military point of view. That you are more aware of the challenges that missions and in particular military personnel face during peacekeeping operations and what can be done, should be

done on an equal base to make better use of the huge potential of female civilian and military personnel deployed in those missions.