

Women, Security Forces and Peacekeeping in the MENA region

—Marcela Donadio

Jordanian
contingent,
Haiti.



Beyond the MENA region, several Arab and Muslim countries have increased female participation in their police and military. The Bangladeshi Female Formed Police Unit is one of those experiences.



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Introduction

◆ On October 31st 2000, the Security Council unanimously passed UNSCR 1325, thus creating the Women, Peace and Security mandate that binds all Member States (and therefore establishes obligations on them). The Resolution represented the first time that the Security Council addressed the inordinate and specific impact of armed conflict on women; highlighted the importance of women’s equal and full participation as agents of change at all levels in conflict and post-conflict situations and; established the need for the incorporation of a gender perspective in post-conflict processes, UN programming, reporting and in SC missions and in UN peace support operations. The UN is working on doubling the number of women in peacekeeping within the coming few years. They are currently targeting 15% in the case of the military.

Since SCR 1325 was issued, many participating militaries around the world have taken it as a timely opportunity to strive to achieve gender equality, opening the door for more women to join services at home and abroad. And although this has aided the development of gender policies for armed and police institutions in these countries, it is also true that women’s participation in peacekeeping missions remains low (4% of

military and 10% of police¹) and that this constitutes an important point in the current international security agenda.

This policy brief seeks to further the development of a gender perspective in the military, with regard to the inclusion of women in the armed forces in general, and in particular their incorporation into UN peacekeeping troops deployed abroad, with a focus on larger troop contributors. It is rooted in the fieldwork undertaken by RESDAL, both on the ground and at the UN headquarters in New York, and the proceedings of a workshop organized for experts in the area in Morocco.

The report seeks to provide an overview of the major issues, and intends to be of particular use in the case of major contributors from the MENA region. It aims to bring the need to reinvigorate the women, peace and security agenda to the consideration of governments, international organizations and civil society representatives, and to encourage diagnostic work that leads to practical steps in this direction as a way of increasing the protection and welfare of women and the impact and effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations.

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The Women, Peace and Security Agenda as of 2019

◆ SCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, which are considered pillars of the agenda, make an important call on Member States to consider its inclusion within their national policies. Since 2000, the points covered have progressively increased, incorporating issues such as increasing the number of women who form part of contributions to peace operations, the importance of national plans of action, consideration of the role of women in peace processes, and links with counter extremism policies, among others. The meetings of the C34 (UN Committee on Peacekeeping) show dialogue and agreement among States regarding the relevance and necessity of the women, peace and security agenda, representing one of the international security issues in which a practically unanimous consensus appears to exist. Some 80 countries around the globe have drawn up national action plans on SCR 1325, and in 2015 a review of the agenda was undertaken by the UN through UN Women. In 2017, the UN launched the “System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity” with the target of increasing female employees at the organization as a whole to 50% by 2019.² And in 2018 the UN Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping Initiative, which has been endorsed by more than 150 countries and which incorporates the women, peace and security agenda as part of the commitments shared by Member States.³

¹ See Ghittoni M., Lehouck L. & Watson C. (2018). *Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations Baseline Study*. Geneva: DCAF. Available at <https://www.dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative-women-peace-operations-baseline-study>.

² United Nations (2017). *System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity*, 6 October 2017. Available at https://www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org/gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf

³ Particularly, “We collectively commit to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda and its priorities by ensuring full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process and by systematically integrating a gender perspective into all stages of analysis, planning, implementation and reporting. We further recommit to increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions” and “We collectively commit to support tailored, context specific peacekeeping approaches to protecting civilians, in relevant peacekeeping operations, emphasizing the protection of women and children in those contexts.” See UN, Action for Peacekeeping. Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations, September 25th, 2018. Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf>.

As far as the increase of women in peace operations is concerned, the situation has progressed, but still remains absent of significant changes. A presence of women that historically ranges from 3 to 4-5% in the case of military troops hardly allows for any kind of impact on the ground. One of the most relevant initiatives regarding this is the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, launched by Canada at the end of 2017, and supported by a core group of countries (Uruguay and Argentina among them). This Initiative aims to increase the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, and several actions are being designed, including a specific Fund to support it.⁴

The need to incorporate women within police and military peacekeeping personnel is also related to operational issues that have taken on an increasing urgency as the nature of missions has changed over recent decades. Interaction with local populations, demands for the protection of civilians - and especially women and girls - in conflict and post-conflict situations, interrelationships with personnel from other countries and cultures while on the mission, among others, translate into operational issues on the ground.

In this context, and taking into account the fact that a greater deployment of women is just one of the elements in the incorporation of a gender perspective, it is worth noting two issues where further diagnosis on current conditions in Member States are needed. Especially while promoting the advancement in practice of what has already been achieved in terms of political consensus:

- A) The interrelation between country missions to the UN and other capitals, especially the work carried out by foreign affairs and security institutions of each country.
- B) Internal and regulatory issues within security institutions, particularly the military.

On this occasion, we shall refer to the second issue, which directly addresses the incorporation of women into security institutions and, in particular, the armed forces.

The participation of women in peacekeeping operations is an item on the agenda for all regions of the world and its consideration can be addressed at different levels. The first level refers to the actual presence of female personnel in police and military forces and their possible participation in activities that involve national and international society (in this case, peacekeeping). This is, as has been previously suggested, closely linked to the incorporation of female personnel within police and military forces in each country. This level certainly is basic, but it is neither simple nor visible. In fact, data related to the proportion of women in security forces - including their ranks and deployment, among other issues - is scarce. Globally, this type of organized and contrastive data is available only via NATO or in Latin America,⁵ with the latter case of interest due to the fact that it constitutes a source of data managed by civil society in tandem with

⁴ See https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/elsie_initiative-initiative_elsie.aspx?lang=eng.

⁵ See Donadio Marcela and Mazzotta Cecilia (2009). *Women in the Armed and Police Forces: Resolution 1325 and Peace Operations in Latin America*. Buenos Aires: RESDAL. Available at <http://www.resdal.org/genero-y-paz/women-in-thearmed-and-police-forces.pdf>. Also, RESDAL (2016). *A Comparative Atlas of Defence in Latin America and Caribbean*. Buenos Aires: RESDAL. Available at http://www.resdal.org/ing/assets/atlas_2016_ing_completo.pdf.

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Arab and Muslim Women in Armies & Peacekeeping

governments. Little is known about other regions of the world, and working on the incorporation of women in security forces would constitute a significant development for the women, peace and security agenda, both for governments making deployment decisions and for the work of the UN.

◆ On November 2018, a conference inspired by the international initiatives mentioned above was organized by the Government of Egypt. The High-Level Regional Conference “Enhancing the Performance of Peacekeeping Operations: From Mandate to Exit” was held in Cairo, bringing together representatives from contributing countries in Africa and the Arab world to discuss the main challenges in peacekeeping. One of the key findings and conclusions of the Conference addressed increasing the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping, stating that “there is a need for greater commitment and measures to incentivize the recruitment and deployment of women in the military and police components of UN peacekeeping operations, and in particular, to increase the number of women taking on police/military combat roles, as well as leadership positions”, specifically recognizing that this need for women’s participation is crucial for “more effective performance, improved community-policing and protection of civilians”.⁶

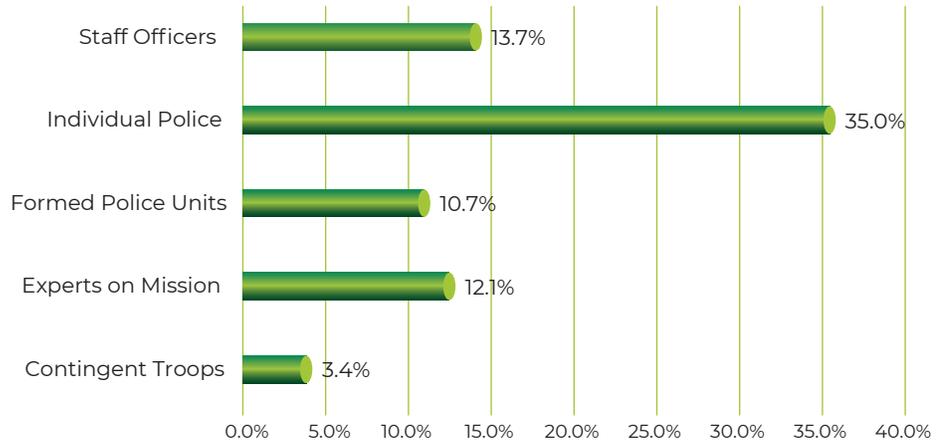
Participating countries highlighted what is the basic fact regarding the recruitment and deployment of women in combat roles, that is to say, the entire issue of incorporating women into national police and armed forces as the central point that would lead to a greater and more significant participation of women in peacekeeping. This acknowledgement is not insignificant, illustrating as it does the way in which countries perceive the situation when it comes to advancing the agenda. The requirements set out by the UN during the process of force generation for each mission are connected to the particular requirements set out in each force’s career (this is the case for the police, and even more strongly in the case of the military), which are regulated by their respective career laws. Such laws establish the times, processes, and personnel ranks that govern the possibility for women’s inclusion in these forces and, where women are incorporated, whether female personnel are within the parameters set out by the various UN missions.

In some regions, such as Latin America, this was a key point in designing policies that promoted women’s participation in peacekeeping, which were accompanied by the implementation of gender policies in domestic security institutions, gradually leading to a greater participation of female personnel.⁷ Analyzing data concerning female personnel in peacekeeping missions, issues regarding what kind of personnel are sent and in which proportions, it is observed that current contributions share certain general characteristics: a scarce number of female personnel in contingent troops, and a greater percentage of women within police personnel.

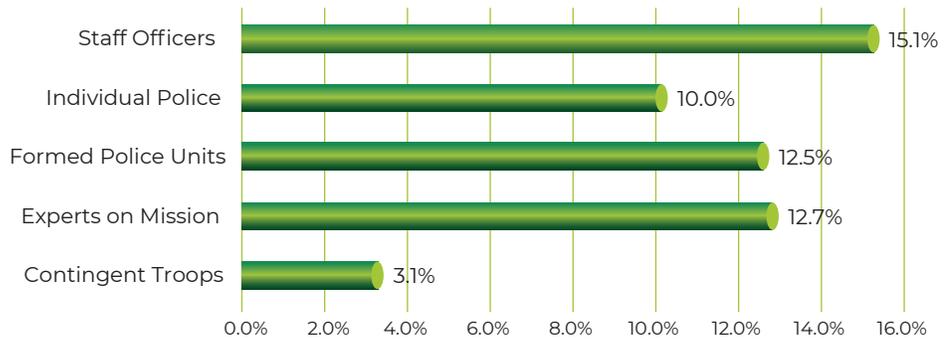
⁶ See Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding. High-Level Regional Conference Enhancing the Performance of Peacekeeping Operations: From Mandate to Exit. *Chairman’s Summary*. 18-19 November 2018.

⁷ See Donadio Marcela (2018). *A Gender Perspective within Armies: Missions and Internal Conformation*. Buenos Aires: RESDAL. Available at https://www.resdal.org/ing/assets/resdal-paper_marcela-donadio_ing.pdf

Percentage of female personnel by post. Top 20 contributing countries in the world (average)



Percentage of female personnel by post. Top 10 contributing countries in the world (average)

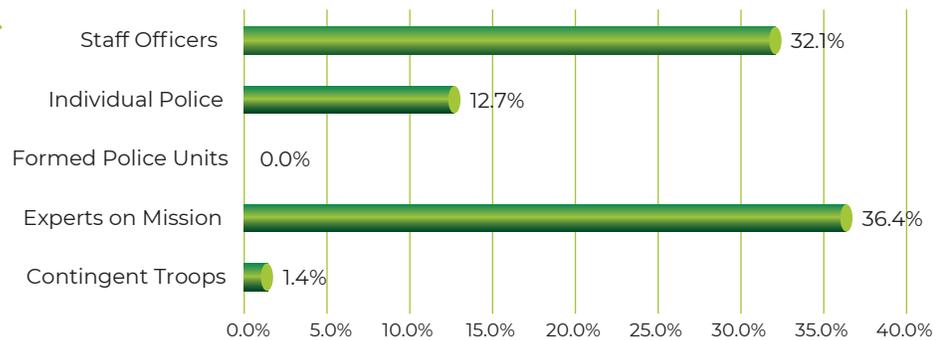


Source: UN DPKO. Summary of Troop Contributing Countries By Ranking Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troop as of 31/12/2018; Summary of Contributions to UN Peacekeeping by Country and Post. Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops as of 31/12/2018.

Taking into account the fact that the 20 leading countries represent 75% of the total contribution of peacekeeping personnel by Members States, it is useful for the regions to observe themselves in relation to those figures. In this case, in the MENA region - and taking into consideration the three main contributors by number in 2019 (Egypt, Jordan and Morocco) - deviations from the 20-country average in said ranking are as follows:

- A lower number of women in contingent troops (1.4%, representing less than half the 3.4% average)
- A higher concentration of women among office staff and experts in mission posts (more than twice the average).

Percentage of female personnel by post. Top 3 contributing countries from MENA region (average)



Source: UN DPKO. Summary of Troop Contributing Countries By Ranking Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troop as of 31/12/2018; Summary of Contributions to UN Peacekeeping by Country and Post. Police, UN Military Experts on Mission, Staff Officers and Troops as of 31/12/2018.

Both aspects directly refer to the issue of women's incorporation, especially within the armed forces. And this means that, in order to advance the women, peace and security agenda, attention must be paid to understanding the processes surrounding the recruitment of women and the kind of military career they are able to pursue.

Looking beyond the MENA region, several Arab and Muslim countries have increased the number of female officers in their militaries and set national goals to significantly increase the percentage of women they deploy to peacekeeping missions. These countries include Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and more. The presence of women in armed forces varies according to country. However, generally speaking, the same underlying issue can be observed, which is the same one that has and continues to form part of discussions regarding the incorporation of women in military forces in other regions: the role of women in domestic forces and whether they have access to a military career or not (especially as soldiers and as officers - commissioned or non-commissioned – in combat roles that not only allow them to participate in warfare activities but that also provide the possibility to reach command positions in the near future). This is one of the most difficult points to address due to the information being often scarce and confusing, even to local actors themselves, and focusing on the traditional bases of the military institution as historically conceived. Currently, most countries in the region recruit women only as civil servants, such as nurses, accountants, etc., who are incorporated into the military primarily for administrative and logistical purposes. When appointed as officers, it is for non-combatant duties such as doctors or media officers.

Possessing one of the oldest and largest military institutions in the region, Egypt represents one of those cases where pressure is being placed on the consideration of incorporating women into military academies, as career officers able to develop a military career from the outset as well as entering combat arms. In recent years, some Egyptian female activists, for instance, have campaigned to end discrimination against women, and to allow them access to the male-dominated military.⁸

Many Arab and Islamic countries recruit female personnel across various rankings (and at differing rates) into their forces. and are also seriously advancing a gender perspective in their militaries. Tunisia, for example, has reformed its legal system and state institutions towards women's equality. Tunisia's personal status laws forbid the practice of polygamy, it has recently reformed inheritance codes to grant full equality to women, and it ensures equal rights to divorce at court. Tunisia has an active army of 35,800 officers and soldiers, including 22,000 conscripts.⁹ According to officials interviewed, 5% of the Tunisian armed forces are women, with these found not only in support services but also as command officers, pilots, etc. while the state fully supports SCR 1325 and seeks to both include women on these missions and to increase their representation. It is esti-

8 N.A. Hussein, "Egypt Women Fight for Right to Army Combat Posts," *al-Monitor*, March 29, 2018. Available at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/03/egypt-women-join-army-controversy-recruitment-sharia-law.html>.

9 IISS (2018). *The Military Balance*. London: IISS. Volume 118, 2018 - Issue 1, pp. 365-366.

mated that they include 40 military pilots and 40 navy officers.¹⁰ The ministry of defense is considering a new law to draft women as conscripted soldiers in order to respond to calls to reach full gender equality, and also for women to contribute to combating the current wave of terrorism that erupted since the 2011 uprisings.¹¹ Although Tunisia is not a large contributor to peacekeeping missions, Tunisian women do participate in them. In 2018, Tunisia contributed about 174 army and police personnel to missions in Africa and Haiti.¹²

Jordan is another case of an Arab country that strives to incorporate a high percentage of women into its armed forces. Jordan has an active army of 100,500 personnel.¹³ Women first joined the military in Jordan in the 1960s, primarily in the medical services. In the 1990s, the state created a special authority for women's military affairs. In the 2000s, women were recruited as officers and were granted senior command positions in field units, the navy, military intelligence, military courts, and much more.¹⁴ In peacekeeping, Jordanian women participate in international missions. In 2018, Jordan contributed 863 troops to UN peacekeeping missions.¹⁵ According to officials interviewed for this report, Jordan will fulfill the target of 8 female officers in its peacekeeping missions in the near future, and the country is working on improving the situation of women in the armed forces, to increase the number of women in field units by 3-5% by 2020 - that's aside from women in the medical service, where they already constitute around 30% of personnel. One of the most interesting things when considering future research on SCR 1325 is that Jordan allows women to enter the Military Police – an area of high demand by UN missions- and the intelligence services. Jordan is working to increase its existing deployment of female police members, as well as female military personnel that could form part of field units.

Algeria similarly represents an interesting case in this field. Women played an integral part of the war of national independence against French colonialism from 1958 to 1962, and sought political empowerment in the post-independence state. In the 2000s, women were granted admission to the Algerian armed forces, and have consequently been appointed as high-ranking commissioned officers. In a recent study, Dalia Ghanem states that “the status of women in the [Algerian] military had been made legally equal to that of men in an ordinance on February 28, 2006, and the military's promotions of women from 2009 to 2015 broke an apparent taboo. The army has since put in place a formal policy framework for equal oppor-

¹⁰ Taoufik Habaieb, “Who Are These Female Pilots of the Tunisian Armed Forces,” *Pakistan Defence*, 14 June 2015.

¹¹ “Tunisia Mulls Women Soldiers to Face ‘New Challenges,’” *Al Arabiya*, 26 May 2015; “al-Qiyadat al-Nisa'iyya fi al-Jaysh.. Fakhr li-Tunis,” *Bab Nat*, 26 August 2015.

¹² See: United Nations Peacekeeping, Troop and Police Contributors: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed 24 December 2018).

¹³ IISS (2018). *The Military Balance*. London: IISS. Volume 118, 2018 - Issue 1, pp. 343-344.

¹⁴ See “Women in the Armed Forces” at the Government of Jordan website. Available at <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/government5.html>.

¹⁵ See: United Nations Peacekeeping, Troop and Police Contributors: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed 24 December 2018).

tunities, and efforts have been made to apply it.”¹⁶ The size of the Algerian military is around 130,000 active personnel, including conscripted soldiers.¹⁷ According to Ghanem “women are admitted to Algeria’s cadet academy, where they accounted for 18 percent of all recruits in 2013. Women are accepted by the National Gendarmerie Academy, the Special Military Academy, the Academy of Military Administration, the National Academy of Military Health, and the Regional School of Maintenance of Transmission Material. In 2013, the Naval Academy welcomed female officers for the first time. Out of 92 officers, 29 were female, representing 31.5 percent of the total.” However, she insists that women are still not allowed to occupy combat positions. She states, “women are excluded from units that perform combat missions such as the artillery, infantry, and armored branches as well as the air force combat units.”¹⁸ In terms of peacekeeping, Algeria makes limited contributions to UN missions, with only 3 personnel in 2018, none of which were women.¹⁹

Bangladesh stands as a celebrated example among Muslim countries, especially with regard to women’s participation in UN peacekeeping, because of the internationally recognized Female Police Units that the country deployed to MINUSTAH (Haiti) and MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of Congo). RESDAL was able to interview these units in the field; they were composed of women in different positions and they performed the same tasks that any other Formed Police Unit composed of males was fulfilling for the UN Mission²⁰. While many of them were married and some had children –an oft-used argument for why women supposedly do not want to participate in peacekeeping missions- those interviewed did not present it as a deterrent, in any way that differed from the estrangement expressed in that regard by male personnel from other contingents. Under a female prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, in 2000 the Bangladeshi armed forces admitted women as regular commissioned officers. The size of the Bangladesh army is 157,050 officers.²¹ According to a Bangladeshi newspaper report, “At present, thousands of female soldiers are serving in different units of Bangladesh Army while hundreds of them are undergoing training to be recruited soon. Similarly, a good number of female sailors have already been recruited to Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force has the plan to recruit soon”²²

Egypt is among the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, both historically and at present. According to the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peace-

16 Dalia Ghanem (2015). *Women in the Men’s House: The Road to Equality in the Algerian Military*. Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 4 November 2015.

17 IISS (2018). *The Military Balance*. London: IISS. Volume 118, 2018 - Issue 1, pp. 325-326

18 Dalia Ghanem (2015). *Women in the Men’s House: The Road to Equality in the Algerian Military*. Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 4 November 2015.

19 See: United Nations Peacekeeping, Troop and Police Contributors: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed 24 December 2018)

20 See Donadio Marcela (2013). *Engendering Peacekeeping. The Cases of Haiti and Democratic Republic of Congo. A Gender and Security Analysis from Latin American Perspective*. Buenos Aires: RESDAL. Available at https://www.resdal.org/genero-y-paz/Engendering_peacekeeping.pdf

21 IISS (2018). *The Military Balance*. London: IISS. Volume 118, 2018 - Issue 1, pp. 244-245.

22 Major Md Tariqul Islam, “Women Soldiers in Bangladesh Army,” *IndependentBD*, 21 January 2018. Available at <http://www.theindependentbd.com/printversion/details/133628> (accessed 24 December 2018)

keeping & Peacebuilding (CCCPA), “Egypt’s first contribution to UN peacekeeping was in 1960 in the Congo. Since then, Egypt has contributed to 37 UN missions with over 30,000 peacekeepers, deployed in 24 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. It currently provides more than 2,000 military and police personnel who serve under the flag of the United Nations in 9 peace missions, namely: UNAMID, MONUSCO, UNOCI, UNIMIL, UNAMI, UNMISS, MINUSMA, MINURSO and MINUSTAH. Egypt has lost 28 of its peacekeepers while serving the cause of peace.”²³ In 2018, the country contributed 3,031 troops.²⁴

Egyptian officials occasionally emphasize the country’s commitment to including women in peacekeeping missions and gender streaming issues as a whole. For example, in March 2016, an Egyptian diplomatic delegate participated in a Security Council on women, peace and security, where they asserted that Egypt believes in the great importance of women’s central role in building and keeping peace. They asserted that Egypt had strongly supported the aims of SCR 1325 since it was initiated in 2000. They added that the state-affiliated National Council for Women (NCW) drafted a national plan to apply SCR 1325.²⁵ In fact, NCW celebrated the 15th anniversary of 1325 the previous year.²⁶ In 2017, Egypt participated in the 4th UN Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial, held in Vancouver. At the meeting, Egypt’s diplomatic representative asserted the country’s commitment to the pledges given at all previous UN peacekeeping meetings. Such pledges included “encouraging the participation of women in the armed forces at the different peacekeeping missions, holding specializing training courses for female cadres in order to qualify them as candidates for leadership positions in the peacekeeping mission...and hosting a training course about sexual violence in peacekeeping.”²⁷ Further developments in this regard are to be expected.

Countries generally abide by provisions that require gender-oriented training;²⁸ pro-

23 “Egypt and Peacekeeping,” Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping & Peacebuilding. <https://www.cairopeacekeeping.org/en/egypt-and-peacekeeping> (accessed 19 December 2018)

24 See: United Nations Peacekeeping, Troop and Police Contributors: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors> (accessed 24 December 2018)

25 Amal Raslan, “Misr Tu’akid Amam Majlis al-Amn Darurat Ta’ziz Dawr al-Mar’a fi Itar ‘Amaliyyat Hifz al-Salam,” *Youm7*, 31 March 2016.

26 National Council for Women, “al-Qawmi lil-Mar’a Yahtafil bil-Dhikra 15 ‘ala Sudur Qara Majlis al-Amn 1325,” 15 October 2015, <http://ncw.gov.eg/ar/15-1325/> (accessed 20 December 2018).

27 Ahmad Jum’a, “Misr Tatrah Ta’ahhudat Jadida bil-Musahamat al-‘Askariyya wa-l-Shuratiyya li-Hifz al-Salam al-Umami,” *Youm7*, 16 November 2017.

28 In the case of Egypt, for instance, the Cairo CCCPA offers a training program titled “Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Operations.” CCCPA asserts that this program is in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. CCCPA also asserts that in training it “devotes particular attention to mainstreaming gender in peace and state building, tackling gender ethnic violence, protection of vulnerable persons especially women and children, and sexual and gender-based violence and provides trainees with relevant concepts, tools and skills to assist them in their peacebuilding work.” In 2015, CCCPA organized three training courses to Egyptian officers due to join the UN missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. The training program covered introduction to international law and human rights principles and fighting sexual exploitation. In addition, the state-affiliated NCW provides lectures at the Police Academy to officers on issues of “Women in Armed Conflicts and Their Role in Peacekeeping.” The lectures generally cover international conventions and principles of peacekeeping, women as victims of armed conflicts, and the importance of increasing the number of female officers in peacekeeping forces. Furthermore, the Arab Women Organization, based in Cairo and affiliated with the Arab League, collaborates with CCCPA on organizing training workshops (ToTs) for women – not officers—on relevant issues such as gender equality in peacekeeping.

See: CCCPA, Training Courses and Capacity Building. <https://www.cairopeacekeeping.org/en/training-center/training-courses-capacity-building> (accessed 24 December 2018).

National Council for Women, “al-Mar’a fi al-Niza’at al-Musallaha wa Dawraha fi Hifz al-Salam,” 19 January 2016.

Arab Women Organization, “al-Safira Mirvat al-Talawi Taftatih Dawrat Tadrib Mudarribat Hawal al-Maharat al-Tafawudiyya wa-l-Musawa bayn al-Jinsayn wa-l-Naw’ al-ljtima’i fi Hifz al-Salam,” 24 April 2016. <http://arabwomen.org/NewsDetails.aspx?ID=588> (accessed 21 December 2018).

viding more female personnel requires that the issues preventing them from sending women to peacekeeping missions be diagnosed and addressed, including those previously referred to. Supporting UN Security Council Resolutions and UN work on combatting sexual assault and exploitation is also included in the wider consideration of the women, peace and security agenda.

Finally, as developments in regions such as Latin America have illustrated in recent decades, changes within state institutions like the military are usually related to wider changes in society and to society's security needs. The question of women joining the armed forces and their subsequent meaningful participation in UN missions is thus necessarily related to the role of society more generally, and particularly the role that academics, media and civil society organizations might play in advancing the agenda. In this regard, this is placed in the context of three important political/cultural debates in the MENA region that may influence decision-making processes and societal perceptions:

- (1) First, it should be contextualized within the general debate on relations between the military and society and to the extent to which the military institution reflects society and opens itself up to it. This includes debates on women's rights under existing legislative frameworks.
- (2) Second, it should be placed within debates among feminists and women's rights advocates in particular about the necessity, or lack thereof, for women to join an institution that is perceived as masculinist and patriarchal, and to be subjected to further oppression by the male leadership of the armed forces. This is actually a global debate. Whereas mainstream women's rights advocates insist that women should enjoy equal access to all state institutions, anti-war and anti-militarization feminists assert that women shouldn't subject themselves to the patriarchal and repressive practices of a masculine institution like the military, and that this would bring women more harm than good.
- (3) Third, a cultural debate hinders women's recruitment into combatant positions. From a cultural point of view, a prevailing patriarchal culture in society as a whole and in the military institution in particular claims to be protecting women and their role in the family by excluding them from life-risking duties in the army.²⁹

4 Final Considerations

◆ Next year sees the 20th anniversary of SCR 1325. In order to better celebrate the resolution, states that are major contributors to peacekeeping missions could be more greatly encouraged to advance its provisions. Governments have not shown official objections to applying the resolution within their militaries, and official statements always support it.

²⁹ For instance, after the 2011 uprisings in Egypt, a women's campaign was launched in order to demand women's recruitment. In 2014 the campaign took momentum after the then newly elected President, ex-minister of defense Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, encouraged women to vote in elections and participate in politics. The campaign raised an intense religious debate among conservative Islamic law scholars in the country. Whereas many female Islamic law scholars supported the campaign and its goals, others harshly rejected it. In 2016, the highest religious authority in Egypt, the state-affiliated "al-Azhar's Authority for Grand Scholars" issued an Islamic legal opinion (fatwa) insisting that Shari'a doesn't permit female military service. It only allowed women to serve in administrative or medical positions within the armed forces.

Governments, congressional representatives, academics and practitioners could aid the advancement of the women, peace and security agenda within their countries, and from there generate international security developments in this regard. Some relevant issues for work, debates and consideration at this stage include:

- 1** The need for diagnoses on the situation of women in the armed and police forces, including exchanges among different actors about the inclusion of women as ranking military officers.
- 2** Female civilian professionals could be more greatly incorporated within the medical and administrative corps of UN missions. These include female doctors, nurses, social workers, accountants, etc.
- 3** In the case of police forces, diagnosis could also help in promoting the contribution of increased numbers of female police peacekeepers, since many police academies in the region already admit female officers.
- 4** The involvement of academics and practitioners and the promotion of exchanges between them and official institutions can also help in providing training and necessary expertise on gender issues. Civil society organizations that advocate women's rights could be invited to be an integral part of training male officers. They could design training programs in collaboration with international organizations that specialize in women and peacekeeping issues. This could take place in collaboration with national and Arab regional organizations.
- 5** Continuing interagency work between Foreign Affairs, Defense and Interior ministries would also be key to advancing the agenda.
- 6** Countries could be provided more support or incentives to implement the resolution through training programs and grants. This could also take place in collaboration with national and Arab regional organizations such as CCCPA, NCW, and AWO.
- 7** Regarding training and planning, countries could benefit from the experiences of other Arab and Muslim countries, for instance Jordan and Bangladesh.
- 8** Countries could also benefit from the experience of other countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America through south-south collaboration initiatives.