

Box 3.4.1 Gender and Policing in UN Peace Operations

Addressing gender disparities in UN peace operations has been a major preoccupation for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. But in the seven years since adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which mandated greater female representation in all categories of UN peacekeeping, progress has been limited. By July 2007, women still accounted for only about 2 percent of military and 6 percent of police of the over 83,000 uniformed personnel deployed under UN command, with even greater disparities at the senior mission-management level. During 2007, however, there were several promising developments in the UN's attempt to achieve balanced gender representation, especially with respect to civilian police in peace operations.

In February 2007, the police component of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the third largest in the field, was supplemented with the first all-female formed police unit, from India. The 103 armed policewomen were trained in India's often tumultuous northern regions, and thus are well suited for the law enforcement challenges in Liberia. While the presence of the unit is viewed as a milestone in the UN's efforts for balanced gender representation among its uniformed and civilian personnel, it has had an even greater impact on public percep-

tions about the role of the police, especially among Liberia's female population. This is especially crucial because the Liberian National Police were seriously discredited during the country's civil war.

Thus, in postwar Liberia, the country's national police force was viewed with a great deal of skepticism. This was more pronounced among Liberian women, who were often the victims of police abuse during the civil war. The arrival of the all-female formed police unit appears to have reversed some of these negative perceptions, given that, one month after the arrival of the contingent, three times the usual number of females applied to join the Liberian National Police. Six months later, 115 female recruits had begun training in the country's police academy. Encouraged by these results and in order to deal with the high levels of illiteracy among Liberia's female population, UNMIL began a special program of public education to prepare aspiring female candidates to join the Liberian National Police.

Along similar lines, the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) also began an initiative toward a more gender-balanced police force. In support of the Haitian National Police, MINUSTAH began a large-scale registration program in August 2007, aimed at recruiting about 150

women for the twentieth graduating class of the police academy. But much work still needs to be done, as only about 5 percent of Haiti's approximately 8,000-strong police force are women.

The continuing efforts to build the UN's standing police capacity also include a strong focus on gender. Approved in 2006, a staff of over twenty-five police experts, once fully operational, will assist in the startup of new missions and provide rapid technical and operational support to existing UN operations. The UN Police Division has emphasized that this vital component of UN peace operations will be gender-sensitive: 24 percent of staff officers will be women, and gender considerations will be central in all of the division's plans and activities, both when conducting assessments and when starting up new missions.

Finally, October 2007 saw the Security Council renew its support for the role of women in peacekeeping operations. Citing the encouraging success of the all-female formed police unit in Liberia and the progress in Haiti, the Security Council called on the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the full implementation of Resolution 1325, including information on the impact of armed conflicts on women, their protection, and their role in peace processes.¹

Source: United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section.

Note: 1. United Nations, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," UN Doc. S/PRST/2007/40, 24 October 2007.