

## Women, Peace, and Security: Equal Access to Justice

As peacekeeping and political missions work to incorporate gender sensitivity into the many facets of conflict and postconflict societies, 2012 drew particular focus on women's access to justice. In September the Secretary-General unveiled a three-point plan for developing a gender-sensitive justice framework, which entails repealing all discriminatory laws, involving more women leaders in the justice system, and investing to help women overcome obstacles. The latest report in the UN's Progress of Women series, *In Pursuit of Justice*, also served to highlight the many barriers women face in access to justice.

Early and effective support for gender-sensitive rule of law and transitional justice will pave the way for a more equitable approach for women to pursue claims in a postconflict society. Increasing women's participation in peace agreement negotiations can help ensure gender sensitivity, thereby preventing a future environment of impunity for sexual and gender-based violence. Through concerted efforts, the UN Department of Political Affairs increased the number of women negotiators on its rosters in 2012 to 36 percent, while also providing

guidance on making mediation efforts more inclusive and addressing sexual violence in peace talks.

The need to strengthen postconflict justice processes, ranging from reporting through prosecution, was underscored in 2012. The presence of an entirely female UN police brigade in Liberia has lowered social barriers for reporting on sexual and gender-based violence, with notable increases in report filing in operating areas. UN missions are also working to improve the capacity of the judicial sector to investigate and prosecute crimes. The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) and the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) are reforming police procedures and strengthening protection capabilities by training police officers on the prevention and investigation of sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite the progress made in increasing reporting by women and training police to better handle cases, state courts often have low capacity to try suspects. In Liberia, a significant gap between reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence and trials still

persists. Limited resources, public lack of knowledge of judicial procedures, and the shortage of prisons and courthouses all contribute to institutional barriers. However, with the assistance of UN missions, the inclusion of women in the justice sector of postconflict countries has increased, though proportional representation remains low. In Timor-Leste, a quarter of national judges are now women, and the number of women national prosecutors has increased as well. In Sierra Leone, women compose over a quarter of all judges, and the four principals of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, including the president of the court, are women.

Ensuring the reestablishment of the rule of law for women by addressing social and institutional barriers and strengthening the justice chain is crucial in conflict and postconflict environments. Mission mandates that address these concerns with a gender-sensitive approach will allow UN operations to assist host governments in building stronger civil societies. Justice does not stop after conviction, however, and will require a long-term commitment by all stakeholders to end impunity and achieve gender equality.