

Title: "WPS and Gender Equality: A Mission for All"

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[Opening: Setting the Scene]

Good day everyone, and thank you to the UN Women Center of Excellence, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, for inviting me to speak today.

I want to start by sharing a story from my time as a UN peacekeeper deployed to South Sudan in 2015. It's a difficult story to tell, but it's one that must be heard if we are to truly understand the human cost of conflict—and the critical importance of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Her name was Mary. First, they killed her husband. Then the soldiers killed her two sons, ages 5 and 7. When the uniformed men yanked her daughter from her arms next, Mary didn't think it could get any worse... Five of them held her down, and she was forced to watch as three others raped her 10-year-old daughter, Nyalaat.

Mary said, "I couldn't even see my little girl anymore. I could only see blood." Nyalaat died a few hours later. Mary said, "I wanted to die too."

This is a story of unbearable loss and unimaginable violence, but it's also a story that illustrates why we need the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. Mary and Nyalaat were not combatants or participating in hostilities. They were civilians entitled to protection—targeted because of their gender.

Gender equality is not just a social justice issue; it's a peace and security issue. Put another way, **gender inequality is a threat to peace and security.** When we ignore the voices of women

in conflict, when we fail to protect them, when we accept discrimination and gender inequalities, we are exposing half the population to situations of sexual and gender-based violence, situations of vulnerability, to oppression and discrimination on the basis of their gender. We are failing to build sustainable peace.

[Section 1: The Origins of WPS]

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda, or WPS, was formalised in 2000 with the UN Security Council's landmark Resolution 1325.

This resolution acknowledges the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls—stories like Mary's and Nyalaat's—and calls for their full, equal, and meaningful participation in peacebuilding efforts.

It's about recognising that **women are not just victims of conflict; they are powerful agents of peace.** When we empower women, we strengthen communities and lay the foundation for a more peaceful future.

In 2020, at the annual debate on WPS by the UN Security Council, the Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, said, "**Gender equality is first and foremost a question of power, and wherever we look, power structures are dominated by men.**" In 2023, he expanded on this perspective in his new Agenda for Peace, emphasising the influence of patriarchal power structures. He called on the UN system and Member States to collectively address and dismantle these structures to prevent conflict and promote peace. He also emphasised the need to include the perspectives of women affected by the discrimination, marginalisation, and violence that contribute to gender inequality.

The Secretary-General's message underscores that gender inequality is a systemic issue that cannot be resolved merely by increasing the number of women or adding them to existing structures. Challenging these gendered power structures is crucial for modern peace operations and militaries.

[Section 2: Personal Experience: Gender-Responsive Peacekeeping]

In my 25 years of military service, I've seen first-hand the difference that gender-responsive peacekeeping makes. During my deployment to the UN Mission in South Sudan we worked to involve women from the local community in security discussions. These women offered insights none of the men, local or foreign, could provide, shaping our strategy in ways that improved both our relationships and mission effectiveness.

This is the essence of WPS. **It's not just about protecting women—it's about their full, equal and meaningful participation and ensuring they are active participants in establishing and sustaining peace and security.** Doing so makes our operations more effective and our missions more successful.

Operationalising WPS also means providing peacekeepers, both men and women, with the tools and training they need to understand the differential and disproportionate security concerns of women and girls, and men and boys, in conflict zones. This ensures that peace operations are responsive to the needs of the entire population.

[Section 3: Men's Role in Championing WPS]

As a man, I want to emphasise: **gender equality is not a women's issue.** It is a mission for all of us. Men have a crucial role in championing gender equality and ensuring that WPS is integrated into our organisations and our operations.

We must recognise the power of a gender-inclusive approach and gender-responsive leadership. We must recognise that diverse teams perform better, and that the empowerment of women is key to mission success.

As men, we cannot remain silent. We have a responsibility to actively support pushing this agenda forward. **Silence is complicity.**

[Section 4: The Broader Impact of Gender Equality on Peace and Prosperity]

Gender equality doesn't just benefit women—it benefits everyone. When women have equal access to resources, education, and decision-making, societies are more stable, economies are stronger, and peace is more enduring.

The world is more peaceful, prosperous, and just when women are empowered, and gender equality is realised. Stories like Mary's are painful reminders of the cost of inaction, but they also remind us why we must continue to fight for gender equality in every space, from boardrooms to battlefields.

Gender-balanced forces are more effective in building trust with local communities, especially in cultures with specific gender norms. Women peacekeepers can gain access to parts of the population that men cannot, allowing for more holistic and effective peacebuilding efforts.

[Conclusion: A Call to Action]

So, what can we do?

First, we must push for the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at every level of peace and security processes. It's not enough to simply acknowledge the need—we need to take concrete actions.

Second, men need to step up. This isn't about giving up power; it's about creating a world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Finally, each of us—whether in uniform or not—can be an advocate for this mission.

To truly operationalise WPS we must commit to integrating gender perspectives at every level—from strategy development to tactical execution. This requires training, accountability, and the willingness to challenge entrenched norms that have previously sidelined women.

Gender equality is not just a women's issue. It is a mission for all of us, and it's a mission we cannot afford to fail.

Thank you.

[End of Presentation]



The Battlefield and Beyond: Challenging Gender Power Dynamics in Armed Forces and Peace Operations

Jen Wittwer, CSM

International consultant on
Gender, Peace and Security

(Retired Australian Navy officer)

HMNZS Manawanui



Images taken by Profile Boats, who were involved in rescuing crew of NZ Navy Ship HMNZS Manawanui. (Source: Profile Boats)



Women's Military Peace Operations Course

HMAS Swan and me





OP 5

FORE FRONT

Women in the Australian Defence Force 2022-2023



Me over the years...because of gender equality!



1981 - Midshipman



1996 – Lieutenant-Commander
(Senior Logistics officer at sea)



2013 – Commander (Gender Adviser
– Afghanistan)



2013 – Captain (Adviser to Chief of
Defence Force on Women, Peace and
Security)



1991 – Lieutenant (junior
Logistics officer)

The Battlefield and Beyond: Challenging Gender Power Dynamics in Armed Forces and Peace Operations

Jen Wittwer

CSM, Commander RAN (Ret.)

[Slide 1]

Good morning, and thank you to UN Women, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, for inviting me to speak today.

I would like to specifically acknowledge and thank UN Women for their tireless support for progressing gender equality, which does not mean being the same, but rather, that women and men have equal access to power, resources, opportunities and decision-making, within the Republic of Korea's security and defence sectors.

I also acknowledge the points made by CMDR Tyson in his presentation on the importance of gender equality in peace and security efforts, and the role of women as active participants in creating peace. Notably, that their inclusion in conflict prevention and response makes military operations and missions more effective and successful.

While Tyson spoke more broadly to the gendered nature of conflict and its impact on women and girls, I want to speak to what the Women, Peace and Security (or WPS) agenda means to uniformed women in our security sector institutions.

Tyson spoke about gender equality, which is the goal of the WPS agenda, and this extends to our military women serving at home and in peacekeeping missions.

[Slide 2]

But first, I want to share some sentiments surrounding the recent sinking of HMNZS Manawanui off the coast of Samoa. You may have heard that the ship's commanding officer since 2022, Commander Yvonne Gray, was a woman with 30 years of naval experience.

She safely evacuated the ship's company without any injuries or death.

While the circumstances surrounding the ship's sinking will be subject to an inquiry, the court of public opinion has already judged Commander Gray.

Reports of gender-based attacks on her competence and leadership have emerged. She has been personally trolled on social media. This has led to abusive comments towards other uniformed women in the streets of New Zealand.

Critics accused Gray of being appointed to her role due to her gender rather than her qualifications.

Quite rightly, New Zealand's defence minister has publicly defended Gray, saying "The one thing that we already know did not cause the sinking is the gender of the ship's captain."

Sadly, these gender-based attacks stem from tightly held traditional views of women's roles in society. Comments about her competency and appointment based on gender rather than merit, are an attack on the professionalism and training standards of the military.

What they are suggesting is the appointment of a less qualified or competent officer just because she's a woman.

This kind of commentary fuels the views that women cannot do the roles once held exclusively by men. It also suggests that standards are lowered for women.

Nothing can be further from the truth. I speak from experience, as having served as a senior officer on a naval warship, that all personnel at sea are trained to the same exacting standards regardless of gender. That no leniency is given to women just because once upon a time they were unable to serve in combat roles.

There is no doubt that Commander Gray, who served in both the UK and NZ navy, has had the same warfare training and experience as her male colleagues, and was appointed to a commanding officer's role on merit, on equal terms with her male colleagues.

To suggest otherwise diminishes not only the efforts and progress of gender equality more broadly, but also the efforts and progress of advancing women's equal participation in our armed forces.

On a brighter note, we can take great delight and rejoice in the fact that in New Zealand, both the chief of army and the defence minister are women. Both women earned the right to be appointed to these roles. Both women are in these roles because of their equal access to opportunities, power and resources.

But not all uniformed women are in this position. Globally, armed forces are at various stages in the gender equality journey, with some quite advanced, as with New Zealand, others where women remain relegated to safe and less demanding roles because of traditional, gender-based views and attitudes on the abilities of women.

What this situation reveals is that gendered power structures and dynamics, that compromise progress on gender equality and limit women's participation on an equal footing with men, prevail in armed forces and peace operations.

First, let me define gendered power structures and dynamics.

Quite simply, they refer to the systems and hierarchies within institutions that are organized and maintained based on gender norms, and the ways in which power is distributed and exercised between genders. Gender norms dictate the behaviours and roles that are considered appropriate for individuals based on their perceived gender.

These structures and dynamics are influenced by cultural, social, economic, and political factors. They shape the roles, behaviours, and opportunities available to individuals based on their gender.

They are of course historical, based on times when only men worked outside the home and provided for their families. And while time has moved on, these behaviours and attitudes have not.

These gendered power structures and dynamics manifest in the military in several ways.

First, they prioritize aggressive behaviour, emotional suppression, and physical endurance as the key measure of military capability, which sideline other vital skills.

Second, they reinforce traditional gender roles, assigning women to support or administrative positions while reserving combat and leadership roles for men. This undervalues women's contributions and excludes them from key missions and decision-making.

Compounding this is an expectation that women should prioritize family and caregiving responsibilities over their military careers. This can undermine the career ambitions and financial independence of female personnel.

Third, they foster a hostile work environment marked by widespread sexual harassment and discriminatory behaviour towards women and other marginalised groups.

Fourth, they undermine women leaders' authority by subjecting them to greater scrutiny and harsher evaluations than men, forcing women to work harder to prove their capability.

And finally, they cause resistance to policies and initiatives aimed at integrating women into all aspects of military operations and leadership, with some viewing these efforts as a threat to traditional military values.

However, constant exposure to these structures and dynamics can undermine women's confidence and self-esteem, making it harder for them to assert themselves and pursue leadership roles.

[Slide 3]

This important aspect of military service underpinned the development of the Women's Military Peace Operations Course, a collaborative training program by DPO and UN Women, which was piloted here in Seoul last year.

This course includes the standard UN training for staff officers or military observers, as well as a week-long module on Leadership, Empowerment and Networking to empower women in their leadership roles.

In military contexts, gender power structures and dynamics not only perpetuate gender inequality but also undermine the effectiveness, cohesion, and ethical standards of the armed forces.

So, challenging these manifestations is essential for creating an inclusive environment where all personnel, regardless of gender, can contribute fully and equally to the mission.

Let me share some examples of how gendered power structures and dynamics affect women in armed forces and peace operations.

- There is a strong protection ethos amongst senior male leaders in mission that prevents women peacekeepers from leaving base and thus interferes with their capacity to carry out their duties equally with their male colleagues.
- Uniformed women are still required to use personal protective equipment designed for standard, masculine body types, which is not suitable for them to use safely.
- There are often unequal accommodations for sleeping or bathing on base, or they are difficult to access, impacts women's safety moving between the accommodations.
- There are high rates of sexual assault and harassment faced by women in the military, and in peace operations, and many armed forces still do not have policies in place to prevent and respond to these issues.
- Women peacekeepers are often perceived as "women first, soldiers second". This can lead to the siloing of women into softer, safer roles such as community engagement, rather than in their primary role.

- There is a perception that women bring their gender to military contexts which undermines their professional identity as a military officer, and they are often treated with disrespect regardless of rank.

There are too many examples to share here, but these few demonstrate the pervasive influence of gendered dynamics in military operations and in the treatment of uniformed women.

These ongoing dynamics are leadership failures. In the words of a male colleague of mine, ***“They are a violation of a women’s right to deploy, not a reason to avoid deploying women”***

These examples show why gender mainstreaming, as a strategy to counter the effects of these gendered power structures and dynamics, is needed in the context of peace operations and armed forces.

Gender mainstreaming integrates gender considerations into all policies, programs, and operations to ensure equal benefits for women and men. It promotes equal recruitment, training, and advancement opportunities, while addressing gender-specific challenges.

I emphasize that gender mainstreaming must go beyond tokenistic representation of women, especially in terms of just increasing the numbers. It must strive for substantive equality, where women’s leadership, skills and perspectives are valued and utilized to shape more effective and inclusive security outcomes.

I would like to be clear here that gender mainstreaming is not about ‘fixing’ women but rather about the institutional and organisational culture shift needed to accept the diversity that women bring; how can military institutions value women’s leadership styles and strengths in all contexts, at home and in operations.

Historically, military institutions have been traditionally male dominated, with women largely excluded from formal combat roles and leadership positions.

Despite this exclusion, women have contributed to military efforts throughout history, often in auxiliary or support roles. During times of war, women served as nurses, medics, spies, and in logistics and communication. While critical to the war effort, these roles were typically viewed as peripheral and were not recognized in the same way as combat duties.

By the late 20th century, societal shifts and the growing need for military personnel, led many nations to gradually increase the formal integration of women into the armed forces.

However, women often faced significant resistance, as traditional military cultures viewed their presence as disruptive to the institution's masculine identity.

Many countries have maintained policies barring women from direct combat roles, based on arguments related to physical capabilities, unit cohesion, and the perception that women needed protection. This has further restricted women's opportunities for promotion to senior ranks, where combat experience is often a prerequisite for leadership positions.

[Slide 4]

In recent decades, many military institutions have recognized the capabilities and contributions of women, leading to significant policy changes.

From the 1990s countries such as Canada, Norway, and Australia began opening combat and combat related roles to women.

In 2013, the U.S. formally lifted the ban on women serving in combat roles, following the acknowledgment that women were already engaging in combat situations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The British military officially removed all restrictions on women serving in any combat role in 2020.

I also note your 2021 National Defense White Paper references the need to increase the female military workforce and pursue policies to open previously restricted specialities such as artillery, air defence and intelligence to women.

So, it has been slow progress globally to remove these restrictions.

It hasn't been easy.

As I mentioned previously, I served as one of the senior officers of an Australian warship – HMAS Swan - in the mid-1990s. This was because of the Australian government lifting the gender restrictions on combat-related roles.

I was the senior logistics officer, even though I had not previously served at sea as a junior officer, although I had completed the same training and attained similar experience in shore roles to my male colleagues. This is me with the other officers – you can see I am the only female. I was one of only two women in a crew of 212.

Being one of a minority was very difficult, and I faced similar gender-based attitudes, comments, and even violence from men, merely because I was a woman in a job that they felt belonged only to men. It was of course a new and different experience for everyone and it challenged the gendered norms of the time.

They said women couldn't do it. They said we were not capable. But we did. We did not fail.

From these humble beginnings, women like New Zealand's Commander Grey, chief of army and defence minister, have sprung.

From these humble beginnings, gender equality for uniformed women began.

[Slide 6]

These changes have been largely driven by certain factors, not the least the global advocacy, commitments and legislation on gender equality, which provide for the equal right of uniformed women to serve alongside men.

But as a central factor for militaries, the evolving and gendered nature of modern conflicts and warfare, where women are disproportionately affected, as Tyson pointed out, necessitates more diverse forces deployed to peace operations to address the diverse security needs and concerns of the civilian populations.

Traditional military strategies based on large-scale, state-on-state warfare are increasingly being replaced by asymmetric warfare, including insurgencies, terrorism, cyber warfare, and hybrid threats.

They often take place in urban environments with civilian populations, where winning "hearts and minds" is as important as military victory. Today's armed forces are involved in a variety of roles beyond combat, including humanitarian aid, disaster relief, peacebuilding, and stability operations.

These conflicts and responses demand different leadership approaches, and require different skill sets, such as strategic thinking, risk assessment, and technological expertise—areas where women leaders in society more broadly are contributing significantly.

This leads me to share with you where gender mainstreaming has been effectively implemented.

The **Swedish Armed Forces** actively recruit and retain women through targeted measures. Gender equality is embedded in leadership development, and all personnel receive training on gender dynamics and discrimination.

The **Canadian Armed Forces** implemented gender analysis, as a policy, to assess how policies and programs affect individuals differently based on gender and other identity factors.

The **Australian Defence Force** have included initiatives to increase women's representation across all roles, enhance career and leadership development, implement targeted recruitment, and address sexual misconduct.

[Slide 7]

As we move forward, I urge each of you to take concrete steps within your respective organizations to challenge gender power structures and dynamics and promote gender mainstreaming. Embrace the principles of equality and inclusion, and commit to creating environments where everyone is respected, valued, and empowered to contribute their best.

To do this requires an institutional shift in culture, behaviours and values. Don't just "add women and stir" and hope it all works out.

To do this will allow women to advance in the security sector on the same basis as men, to demonstrate their competencies and skills on the same basis as men, and to achieve their full potential on the same basis as men.

I would not have had my journey, albeit challenging at various times, without these progressive and positive changes.

Your leadership and actions are crucial in driving meaningful change. Together, we can build stronger, more adaptive organizations that reflect the diverse world we serve and uphold the highest standards of respect and professionalism. This includes those standards expected of our peacekeepers.

Let us take these lessons to heart and act decisively to create a future where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality.

Thank you.

Voice from the Field: Breaking Barriers for Women in Peacekeeping

Lt. Col. Sungyeon Yi

Liaison Officer with United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)



Voice from the Field: Breaking Barriers for Women in Peacekeeping

Lt Col (s). Sungyeon YI, ROK Army, UNDOF



Distinguished guests, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, future peacekeepers—good morning!

I'm Major YI, currently serving as a Liaison Officer for UNDOF, in Golan heights. It's an incredible honor to represent both the Republic of Korea military and our mission here at this forum. First, I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to the Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea, UN Women, and our mission leadership for their unwavering support. Special thanks also to the PKO Center staff for their hard work in managing logistics, especially in these complex times in the Middle East.

As a mid-level army officer, I still feel like I'm in the process of learning and growing in both peacekeeping and the military. So today, I'm here to share what I've experienced and learned from my past and current peacekeeping missions as a kind of additional participant for the uniformed women peacekeepers' training.

Journey in Military / Peacekeeping



Graduation Picture of Military Course in 2006



Women peacekeepers of 11th Batch of Korean Contingent

I joined the Republic of Korea Army in 2006 as an intelligence officer.

Back then, I never imagined I'd be wearing the blue beret as often as I do now. But it was always a goal to join at least one peacekeeping mission, just to have the honor of working toward world peace. My first deployment came in 2012 with UNIFIL as a member of Korean contingent, following my time as a company commander on the Korean Peninsula's front lines. At that point, I saw peacekeeping as a one-time experience, something special and unique, but not necessarily a long-term career path.

Especially when you consider how few Korean women were in peacekeeping—only five of us were women out of about 350 personnel in ROKBATT, the Korean contingent in UNIFIL.

Evolution of UNSCR 1325



Appointment of Gen. Kristin Lund by SG Ban Ki Moon



Women Peacekeepers of 21st Batch of Korean Contingent

Then something remarkable happened in 2014, a year after I completed my first tour with UNIFIL. General Kristin Lund was appointed as the first woman to serve as Force Commander in Cyprus by esteemed (former) SG Ban Ki Moon, breaking barriers as the first female leader in UN peacekeeping. I proudly consider myself a “Kristin Lund kid.” Her appointment opened my eyes to what was truly possible for women in peacekeeping.

Since then, I’ve been fortunate to serve in several missions, including UNMOGIP, a second tour with UNIFIL, UNMISS, and now UNDOF. All of this was made possible by the resolutions like UNSCR 1325 that highlight the importance of women’s participation in peacekeeping, opening doors for more women, along with the strong support of the Korean government.

Looking back, I see myself as a reflection of the progress we’ve made. The opportunities I’ve been granted are a direct result of initiatives and the Korean government’s dedication to these efforts. In 2017, five years after my first deployment with UNIFIL, the number of female members in the same unit had grown to 20 among 250. This progress is significant, but it also serves as a reminder that we still have a long way to go.

Gender Advocate of the Year



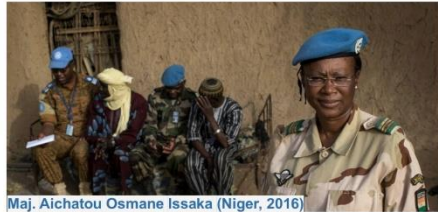
Maj. Radhika Sen (India, 2023)



Capt. Cecilia Erzuah (Ghana, 2022)



Lt. CDR Marcia Andrade Braga (Brazil, 2018)



Maj. Aichatou Osmane Issaka (Niger, 2016)

I'm sure we're all familiar with the incredible achievements of female peacekeepers, both past and present. The UN annually recognizes gender advocates, and many of those honored are outstanding female colleagues who have paved the way for others.

All these awardees demonstrated exceptional leadership during their missions, actively engaged with local communities, and worked to enhance women's rights and status within their areas of operation. Their contributions are prime examples of the critical role that female peacekeepers play in peacekeeping missions.

Women Peacekeepers in the field



Korean Observer in UNMOGIP



Austrian & Australian Observers in UNTSO



Nepali Contingent member of UNDOF



Fijian Contingent members of UNDOF

Additionally, numerous studies have proven that gender-balanced peacekeeping missions are more effective for several reasons. The participation of women peacekeepers helps prevent sexual misconduct within the units and towards locals. Units that include female peacekeepers are more aware of these issues and are better equipped to respond effectively. Moreover, female peacekeepers help create a more welcoming environment for local populations, particularly for women and children. This is especially important in regions where cultural norms limit interactions with local women. Lastly, female peacekeepers bring diverse perspectives to peacekeeping tasks, enabling more inclusive and effective operations. This broader viewpoint helps teams better understand complex situations and resolve conflicts.

The role of women in peacekeeping goes beyond gender—it contributes to the overall effectiveness of missions.

In my current mission, UNDOF, women make up 10% of total personnel and 20% of the staff officers. Female peacekeepers are actively contributing across all tasks, helping de-escalate tensions in a challenging region.

But despite these successes and the proven effectiveness of women in the field, there are still significant challenges we need to address.

Today, I want to focus on three main areas: balancing family life, improving living conditions, and addressing the lack of role models and support networks.

Balancing Family Life



Mother Peacekeeper & her daughter during farewell



Siro 8 years old dog

One of the biggest challenges faced by female peacekeepers is finding a balance between work and family life. Military life is demanding as it is, but when you add family responsibilities, it can be especially overwhelming.

Many friends have reached out to me for advice about joining peacekeeping. Initially, they're eager to join any mission, however, only a few have actually joined because most end up hesitating to leave their families behind. For those with spouses or young children, the prospect of an extended deployment away from home often becomes a major obstacle, making the decision to participate in peacekeeping missions even more challenging. Let me share a story. A close friend, an excellent officer, was eager to join a peacekeeping mission. Despite being fully qualified and ready, she ultimately decided against it, unable to leave her young children. This is a common sacrifice many women in the military face, especially during deployments. As for me, I'm single with only my dog, Siro. Even just having a pet has been challenging. I lived with him for only a year before deployments separated us. Without my mother's help caring for Siro, I couldn't have served these missions. This showed me how vital a strong support system is. Unfortunately, not all women in the military have such support, making it harder to pursue their career goals.

At last year's forum, many respected senior women highlighted how crucial their families were to their success. They shared stories of their families' sacrifices that allowed them to serve. This is a common reality for women in peacekeeping. So we must ask: How can we create an environment where women don't have to choose between family and career?

One essential solution is to enhance family support programs within the military and offer more flexible leave policies for family care. This could include establishing stronger family assistance networks and implementing policies that help balance work and family commitments. By addressing these issues, we can make it easier for women to take on peacekeeping roles without feeling like they're sacrificing their personal lives. Ultimately, this wouldn't just benefit female peacekeepers—it would improve the overall well-being of all military personnel. In the long run, such policies would also attract more talented individuals, regardless of gender, to choose peacekeeping, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of peacekeeping operations.

Living Conditions



Temporary Accommodation in UNMISS

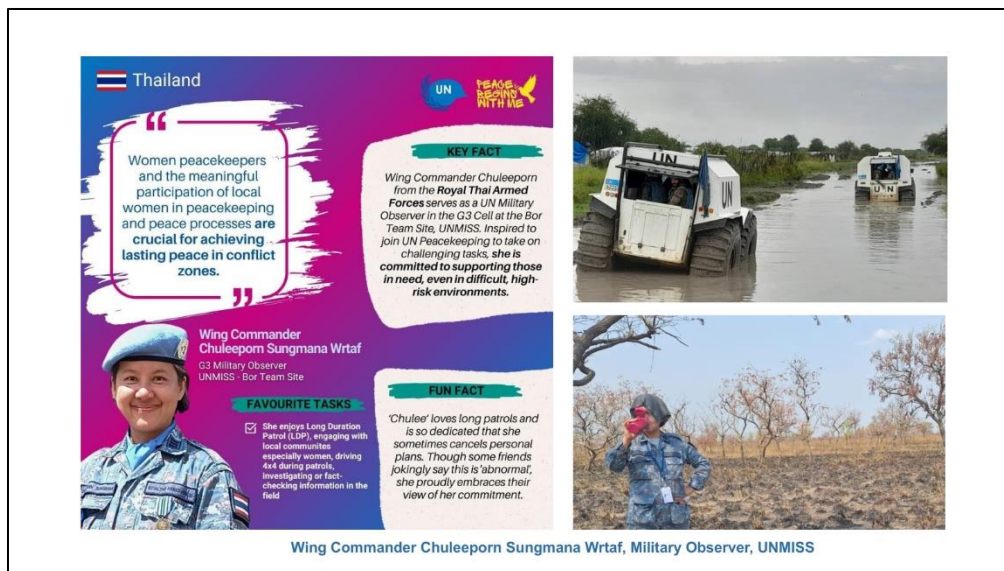


Portable Toilet for Long Range Patrol

Living conditions during deployments present a significant challenge, especially for female peacekeepers. Accommodations and facilities are often not designed with women's specific needs in mind. These issues can range from basic privacy concerns to more complex matters such as safety and hygiene. While all peacekeepers endure tough conditions, women face additional hurdles when their needs aren't fully considered during mission planning.

For example, I recall one mission where a female peacekeeper was the only woman stationed there. A conflict arose over room assignments—her team leader wanted a private room, while she was expected to share a room with a male colleague. This situation, caused by limited resources, left her feeling undervalued and isolated. Unfortunately, this isn't an standalone case. Many women have faced similar situations where inadequate facilities lead to discomfort and exclusion, directly impacting their morale and effectiveness.

Additionally, male colleagues may sometimes view these needs as added burdens or unfair advantages. For example, female peacekeepers require essential items like sanitary pads, which can take up space and weight during deployment flights. If they request extra space, it can be misinterpreted as a special favor, causing discomfort for everyone.



Of course, as military professionals, we are trained to adapt to tough conditions, whether it's sharing rooms with male colleagues or dealing with limited electricity or water or even lack of hygiene or security. One of my classmates from the Gender Planning course in Malaysia, who is just finishing her tour as an observer in South Sudan, faced similar challenges and expressed pride in overcoming them. However, if we want to encourage more women to join and stay in peacekeeping, improving living conditions is essential.

While this may require additional resources and planning, especially from Troop Contributing Countries, providing separate facilities for women is absolutely vital. A good example is the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, which has supported efforts like those of the Ghanaian Battalion in UNIFIL. By investing in proper accommodations, we ensure that women are not only included but can also thrive in their roles.

Although it's not feasible to accommodate every individual's specific requests, establishing and implementing a basic standard that considers the needs of both genders as much as possible will help overcome these difficulties. We need to set minimum standards to address various needs and implement them effectively.

For example, we could consider the following criteria:

1. **Mandatory women-only accommodations and hygiene facilities:** This ensures privacy and comfort for female peacekeepers.
2. **Proactive facility planning:** Instead of basing facility sizes on the current percentage of women peacekeepers, we should prepare facilities that accommodate the UN's target ratio of women peacekeepers. This forward-thinking approach will support the ongoing efforts to increase women's participation.
3. **Specialized medical services for female peacekeepers:** This ensures that women's specific health needs are met during deployment.
4. **Culturally sensitive facility design:** For instance, providing prayer rooms for Muslim women peacekeepers. This approach respects diverse cultural backgrounds and religious practices.

These efforts will enable more uniformed women to join peacekeeping missions and create an environment where they can showcase their full potential.

Role Models & Networking



Finally, there's the challenge of having too few senior female role models and mentors in peacekeeping. For many women, seeing someone who has successfully navigated both military life and peacekeeping can be incredibly inspiring. Yet, the number of senior women in these roles is still relatively small, and that limits the mentorship opportunities available to junior female officers.

I've been fortunate to have role models like General Kristin Lund and Colonel Moon, both of whom have shown me what's possible for women in peacekeeping. However, the impact of role models and mentors extends beyond just seeing their success. Last year at this forum, I had the opportunity to connect with Jen. Her support has been invaluable. Whenever I've felt discouraged in the field or within the military, Jen has been there to encourage me and remind me of the importance of our work. I'm deeply grateful for her efforts in helping me to persevere. This kind of mentorship and support is crucial for all peacekeepers, especially those facing unique challenges.

Despite these positive experiences, there's still a gap between the younger generation and the leadership positions. This gap is even more noticeable in missions where most of the young female peacekeepers come from Asia and Africa, yet very few role models from these regions are present at higher leadership levels.

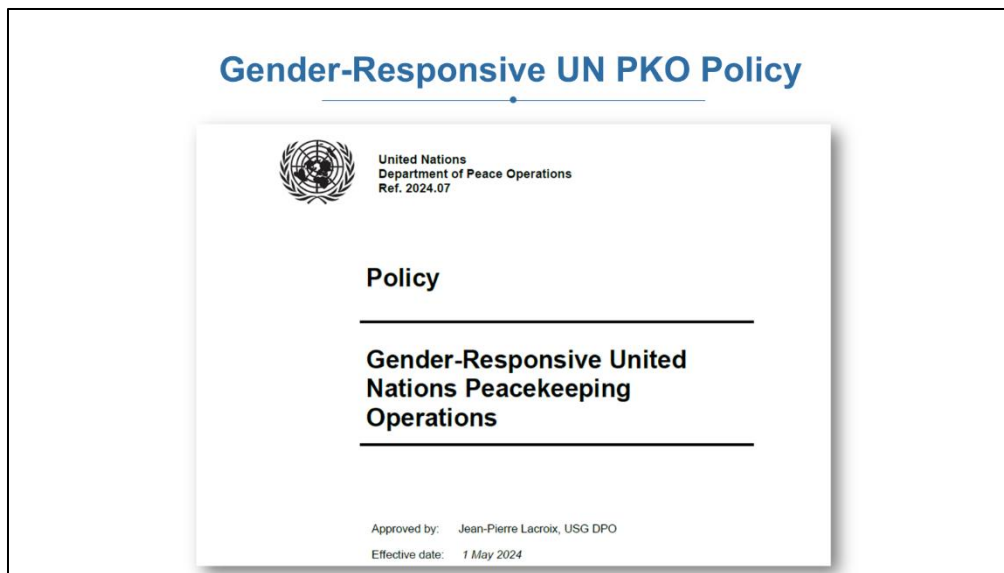
Strengthening networks among female peacekeepers is crucial in addressing this gap. Forums like this one are an excellent start—they provide a space where women can share experiences, support one another, and build connections that will last throughout their careers. Networking is not just about socializing; it's about creating a reliable support system that helps women navigate challenges and take on leadership roles.

Additionally, mentoring programs can have a substantial impact early in an officer's career. By pairing junior officers with experienced female leaders, we foster a culture of support and growth, helping them navigate the challenges of military life and peacekeeping. The Ministry of National Defense of the Republic of Korea has recognized the importance of such networks and pledged, during the PKO ministerial in 2021, to host training and workshops specifically for women. Initiatives like the Uniformed Women Peacekeepers Training Program, held here in Korea, not only provide essential skills but also create a strong sense of community and belonging among female members in military.

Furthermore, we can consider additional measures such as:

1. Establishing an ongoing networking and mentoring system through online platforms.
2. Regularizing meetings for women peacekeepers, organized by region and various leadership positions.
3. Hosting periodic webinars to share experiences of successful women peacekeepers.
4. Developing and implementing leadership programs specifically designed for women peacekeepers.

By continuing to expand these networks and increase mentorship opportunities, we can create an environment where women in peacekeeping are empowered to step into leadership roles and truly thrive in their careers.



As we reflect on the challenges that still hinder women's participation in peacekeeping, it's clear that we've made significant progress. A prime example is the new policy on Gender-Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations effected by the Department of Peace Operations this May. This policy is a testament to the UN's commitment to addressing the challenges we face and promoting gender equality in peacekeeping.

The policy reinforces many of the points I've discussed today, emphasizing the need for gender-responsive approaches across all aspects of peacekeeping. It stresses the importance of achieving gender parity and ensuring the meaningful participation of women peacekeepers - issues that, as we've seen, are vital to the success of our missions.

However, as with any policy, the real work lies in its implementation. While the publication of this policy is a significant milestone, it's important to remember that policies are only truly effective when put into practice. It's up to all of us - from leadership to every individual peacekeeper - to ensure that the principles outlined in this policy are applied in our daily operations and decision-making processes.

Despite this progress, there's still much work to be done. Balancing family life, dealing with inadequate living conditions, and addressing the lack of role models are not personal challenges one should face alone—they require attention from the UN, member states, and military organizations.

By addressing these challenges collectively, we can create an environment where all peacekeepers—men and women alike—can perform our duties more effectively. These efforts aren't just about supporting women; they're about improving the success and impact of peacekeeping missions as a whole. I firmly believe that efforts to create better environments for female peacekeepers will ultimately lead to improved conditions for all peacekeepers, regardless of gender.

A family-friendly mission structure will enable male peacekeepers to better care for their families as well. Likewise, living conditions tailored to meet the needs of female peacekeepers will benefit male peacekeepers by improving the overall quality of life in the field. Furthermore, I hope that the networks we are building for female peacekeepers will eventually expand to include all peacekeepers, similar to how the role of Gender Advisors has evolved in some missions.



In closing, I'd like to leave you with one thought: as Commander Nicholas and Jen emphasized previously, gender equality is not just a women's issue, it's an issue for all of us. When we work together—he for she, she for he, and everyone for peace—there's nothing we can't achieve. I hope that in the near future, we will see more uniformed female peacekeepers both in the field and at forums like this. I remember attending seminars on women's participation in peacekeeping about five years ago. Back then, all the speakers were male. But now, we're witnessing progress right before our eyes. Today, we have two female speakers and one male speaker. We're making strides toward our goals. Looking ahead to our next forum, I have an expectation that pushes us even further: to have a male peacekeeper from the field deliver a speech on the importance of gender equality. This would truly embody the idea that gender equality is everyone's responsibility and demonstrate how far we've come in changing mindsets and practices.

Thank you for your time, and for your dedication to making peacekeeping stronger and better for everyone involved.

Thank you. 감사합니다.