

# Event on Women, Peace and Security

*“Minimum standards, Harmonized Guidelines and common policies for the EU agenda”*

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for this opportunity especially our previous Sector West Commander General Poli and our current Sector West Commander General Del Col.

The Gender Unit in UNIFIL is only four years old with a very small team, however, with the great support of the senior leadership of UNIFIL, basically the HOM/FC made gender integration into all military operations a continuous and a very serious and effective process.

UNIFIL serves as an example of leadership commitment to integrating a gender perspective where two directives from the FC institutionalized the process of Gender Mainstreaming and taking into account the different needs of men and women in the area of operation and enhancing the different pillars of UNSCR 1325 as the mandate of UNIFIL permits.

Upon his arrival, the HOM and FC General Portolano, assigned a military gender focal point in his office as a special staff to support the Gender Unit, he allocated a seat to the Gender Unit in the FC daily briefing meeting and he is leading the Open Day even on Women, Peace and Security that will take place on December 1 and give women of the local area of operation to voice their messages around UNSCR 1325 and their concerns around their safety and security. Under the leadership and specific instructions, and with the support of Sectors Commanders we have all times, fully trained military gender task force representing all battalions and military offices. Based on that, the Gender Unit in UNIFIL was selected by the Gender Unit at DPKO HQ to pilot the project on integrating a gender perspective in UN military operations.

Constraints/Challenges:

- Although Troops Contributing Countries have the primary responsibility for predeployment training, the needs assessment and questions during our trainings always highlight that the levels of training vary from one country to another and

within militaries from higher to lower ranks. Many troops report that they never had predeployment training on gender.

- Research conducted by the DPKO Gender Team also highlighted that the content and delivery of gender training is delivered on ad-hoc basis, varies from mission to mission, and is dependent on the fluctuating support of Mission personnel and management.
- Cultural differences between the different missions the peacekeepers come from and the stereotypes formed which set the minds on preassumptions regarding women and whether it is ok or not to work with them, interact with them or even talk with them especially when coming from difficult situations.
- The mandate of the mission is limited and specific and does not have any reference to gender, however, UNSCR 1325 and the rest of UNSCR s on women, peace and security still mandate UNIFIL to ensure that women's needs and concerns are an integral part of the operation.
- The low percentage of female peacekeepers deployed (3% in a force of about 11,000 strength) is another constraint where some battalions do not have any female peacekeepers. Absence of female peacekeepers from crucial operations which has to deal with the locals and interact with them as an example patrols, check points, police, MCOU, CIMIC.
- The continuous rotation of Battalions and change of leadership is another challenge. In some Units like CIMIC and MCOU (6 months), by the time they familiarize themselves with the area of operation, local population, municipalities, NGOs, formal and informal influential groups, and build trust and credibility, it is time to leave and the whole process has to start again.
- Language barriers in extending the gender awareness into all levels of the military. Not all personnel speak or understand English.
- Gender itself is sometimes not considered an operational necessity and still linked to women special treatment.

## Best Practices:

To overcome most of the challenges accompanying the nature of rotation and change of personnel in peacekeeping the process of Gender Integration into UNIFIL was institutionalized by two Directives from the Head of Mission/Force Commander. The directives mandate the establishment of military gender task forces at the Sectors Level and Head Quarters. The FC started by appointing a special staff officer in his office as the military gender focal point. Currently we have three military gender task forces, one at HQ, one at Sector West led by General Stefano and one in Sector East.

We developed specific training materials for gender integration in military operations which are based on DPKO Guidelines on integrating a gender perspective into UN Military Operations and which are culture specific to the Lebanese situation and status of women and on case scenarios.

The military gender task forces are represented by all battalions and military offices and branches. Knowledge of English language was set as one of the criteria for nomination of the focal points. The military gender focal points attend a three day training of trainers workshop and then take the training materials and translated it into all languages of the battalions participating in UNIFIL and then a schedule is set through the military gender focal point in Sector West HQ with the battalions to conduct the training to all personnel of the battalions using their own languages. This guaranteed that everyone gets informed on gender mainstreaming and UNSCR 1325.

At the end of the training, we conduct an After Action Review where the military gender focal points give feedback on the gender integration process and suggest improvements. The translation of the training materials was one suggestion that came through the After Action Review.

At the beginning of each rotation, the materials are shared and revised with the new military gender focal points to comment on and give them ownership of the material they will be using. These training materials were tested with the local women for cultural sensitivity and guidance.

We developed TORs for the military gender focal points and we report directly to the Sector West Commander on achievements in terms of the gender mainstreaming. The top down approach ensures sustainability of gender training initiatives. Attendance by senior ranking officers highlights accountability and ordinance. For example, the previous Commander of Sector West, General Poli, attended the training with the Sector

West Commanders of Battalions on Status of Women in Post Conflict which translated the message that the training is compulsory for all and a requirement for operational efficiency.

By visibly demonstrating his personal commitment to the issues, the Commander created a precedent for the training, all troops were to take serious the trainings and issues presented.

Gender mainstreaming in CIMIC activities at the battalion level allowed a better understanding and planning of the activities. Sex disaggregated data enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of the outreach programmes to all members of the community. Regular dental and medical support is provided by a number of battalions especially in remote villages. The total numbers showed an overall good participations, however, when the data was disaggregated by sex, women were not using the services frequently. When women were consulted, opening times of the clinic were excluding women's access to the services and afterwards they decided on what times are best for them to participate.

Alternatives to women's peacekeepers presence in operations are sought at all levels. The importance of mixed teams in patrols and checkpoints is highly recognized. Almost all patrols have mixed teams now even by using language assistants as mixed teams and seeking support from Sector Headquarters in times of emergencies to use female peacekeepers from neighboring battalions of HQ.

MCOU integration of a gender perspective guaranteed that women are included in focus groups that examine the products that they distribute to the local community and enhance the quality and cultural sensitivity of these materials and make them more acceptable. A good example is also the awareness program that is being used in national TV on the blue Line. The MCOU has been using Mr. Blue Barrel to demonstrate to students in schools what the blue line is. Currently the MCOU added Mrs. Blue Barrel to accompany Mr. Blue Barrel in schools. Girls interacted more and the sessions are now highly attractive and interactive with both boys and girls.

Finally, to overcome the limitations of our mandate in working on gender in the local community, Senior management has supported the Gender Unit in creating gender working groups of local women in the area of operation. We meet with these women and invite concerned military colleagues in the Sectors to listen directly to women, we piloted with them the military gender guidelines in UNIFIL and we consulted with them on what security means to them and how they would advise military to deal with them in a culturally appropriate way. During the Open day on Women, Peace and Security these women relate directly to the FC/HOM and Sectors Commanders their perceptions on

Peace and Security, their suggestions and their recommendations around the four pillars of UNSCR 1325. UNIFIL will be observing this day on December 1.

UNSCR 1325 should be applicable in every mission to ensure full participation of women and girls, protection and prevention. How much we do depends on the mandate of the mission, however, it is our job as peacekeepers to ensure that a gender perspective is leading our operations.