

Gender Mainstreaming Loses Out Under UN Peacekeeping Budget Cuts

NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

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The implementation of the women, peace and security agenda is the responsibility of a range of actors including by Member States and across the UN system, in particular UN peacekeeping and political missions. UN peacekeeping missions have been the target of budgetary cuts over recent months, resulting in cuts to staff positions responsible for overseeing the implementation of the WPS agenda at the mission level. These decisions are regressive and go against evidence-based findings, UN leadership commitments, and Security Council resolutions.

The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, along with our WPS colleagues around the world, have long called for gender to be mainstreamed across all peace operations including peacekeeping missions and for Senior Gender Advisers to be systematically deployed and report directly to the head of the mission to ensure gender perspectives are integrated into all facets of a mission. Previously, gender units in peacekeeping missions were often marginalized, considered low-priority, and located outside of senior decision-making structures. It took years of advocacy from within the UN Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO), by individual Security Council members, and civil society from conflict-affected countries and in New York, to change this.

We therefore welcomed the recommendation in the 2015 High-level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations (HIPPO) that gender expertise be integrated into all mission components and that the *'Senior Gender Adviser should be located in the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, reporting directly to the Special Representative and advising him or her and senior mission leadership at the strategic level on integrating a gender perspective into mission activities.'*^[1] The then Secretary-General committed to this in his HIPPO implementation report,^[2] and subsequently, this commitment was also reflected in [Security Council Resolution 2242 \(2015\)](#) (OP 7).

In 2017, there has been over [\\$600 million cut](#) from UN peacekeeping budgets, resulting in all components across the 15 UN mandated peacekeeping missions being reduced including posts relating to [human rights monitoring](#); protection of civilians; [gender](#); and child protection, among others. Of particular concern, is not only the reduction in number of positions focused on gender, but a concurrent loss of seniority, which will result in a marginalization of gender in senior decision-making processes due to the lower rank. The Senior Gender Adviser roles in missions to Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)), Liberia ([UNMIL](#)) and Haiti ([MINUJUSTH](#)) have been downgraded to posts requiring only 5 years of experience, and those in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) and Darfur ([UNAMID](#)) remain unfilled. It is unclear whether the team-leaders in other areas of missions have similarly been affected or if this only within gender functions.

We do not believe that it is realistic to expect someone at a lower rank and with only 5 years of experience to have the authority, expertise and seniority to fulfill the strategic advisory role to leadership in such complex and multifaceted missions, as is prescribed in HIPPO and committed to in the SG report.

<http://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/gender-mainstreaming-loses-out-under-un-peacekeeping-budget-cuts-august-2017/>

For instance, Central African Republic (CAR) has been engulfed in violent armed conflict since 2013 and the UN is **now warning** of a possible genocide. There is widespread displacement, grave human rights violations and high rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women who lack necessary services and judicial recourse in many areas of the country. Women in CAR continue to be largely excluded from peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts and have been subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. There have also been **documented cases** of perpetrators targeting women and girls suspected of interacting with people on the other side of the sectarian divide.

In Haiti, the newly configured peacekeeping mission (**MINUJUSTH**) focuses on the rule of law and efforts to reduce community violence. The Security Council has instructed the mission to consider gender as a cross-cutting issue. This must then include ensuring women's participation in addressing SGBV through legislation and policy reform, conducting training on the issue for justice and security sector professionals, hiring qualified women at professional levels in both sectors, and establishing protections for witnesses and survivors of SGBV.

At the recent national peace and reconciliation talks in Mali, there were originally only 6 women out of 60 delegates. As well as promoting women's meaningful participation in these reconciliation processes, the UN peacekeeping mission MINUSMA must fulfill its mandated obligations and work to promote women's participation in all efforts to counter violent extremism; across disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration strategies; and in human rights institutions and training for Malian security forces, police, gendarmerie and legal authorities on SGBV.

The responsibility for implementing WPS provisions in mission mandates should not lay solely with Senior Gender Advisers, but their presence should facilitate the implementation of those provisions by all mission staff, and support training and capacity-building. We do not understand the rationale behind the downgrading of Senior Gender Adviser positions or how, in light of these changes, DPKO will ensure gender is considered as a cross-cutting issue, or reported on comprehensively, as is mandated by the Security Council for peacekeeping missions in Mali, CAR, Darfur, Haiti and Liberia. We are also concerned as to whether this downgrading will also occur in other missions including in the Democratic Republic of Congo (**MONUSCO**) or in South Sudan (**UNMISS**). Both of these countries have seen increasing political violence, attacks on civil society leaders and pose significant participation and protection challenges for women.

Although the driving force for the budgetary changes was not from within the UN system, UN leadership is still responsible for ensuring peacekeeping and political missions have the political, financial and technical support they need to carry out all duties related to implementation of the women, peace and security agenda and gender mainstreaming.