

Taking action on conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence

19, 2016

NATO's Military Guidelines on the Prevention of, and Response to, Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence were discussed at the Royal Military Academy in Brussels on 19 October 2016. National representatives and subject matter experts from NATO, the European Union, the United Nations and non-governmental organisations gathered for the workshop, which aimed to raise awareness of the Guidelines as well as discuss progress and mark the way ahead.

Recognising the need to prevent and respond to such violence, the North Atlantic Council – NATO's principal political decision-making body – adopted the military guidelines over a year ago, in June 2015. It was a necessary step towards the operationalisation of official commitments on this issue made by Allied leaders at the NATO Summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016).

NATO supports UN-led efforts to end these atrocities and is fully committed to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security as well as related Resolutions.

Lieutenant General Jan Broeks, Director General of the International Military Staff, opened the workshop together with Ambassador Mariët Schuurman, the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. *"This kind of violence slows down the peacekeeping processes and obstructs the post-conflict recovery of the society. In the end, this affects the success of NATO missions. Therefore we, as NATO, need to take an interest in conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence,"* stressed General Broeks.

Representing the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Tonderai Chikuhwa stated that sexual violence in conflict is a tactic of war and it is also been increasingly used as a tactic of terrorism. He underlined that NATO made a strong commitment as a key actor in the security sector by adopting the military guidelines as a practical tool for commanders in operations. He added that *"NATO can help the UN to build a more structured approach to address conflict-related sexual gender-based violence."*

In her closing remarks, Ambassador Schuurman pointed out that this issue falls under the Women, Peace and Security agenda and that the Military Guidelines demonstrate a strong commitment by NATO against sexual violence in conflict areas. Ambassador Schuurman additionally reiterated the importance for NATO to lead by example in the field of prevention and response to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.

The workshop was the first gathering organised by NATO Headquarters to discuss the Military Guidelines, which came into effect June 2015. Member countries recognised the

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importance of the Guidelines and the need to further operationalise them. They remain committed to the implementation of gender perspectives in the planning, execution and evaluation of operations at strategic and operational levels.