

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS AND WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF PEACE OPERATIONS

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The peace operations review is likely to hold extensive discussions on the Protection of Civilians, which has emerged as an overarching priority for all multidimensional peacekeeping operations since 1999 and an important pillar of the Security Council's thematic agenda. Below is a very succinct summary of our two main messages and concerns with regards to POC.

The first one is that missions are meant to implement their duty to protect civilians not only through the provision of direct physical protection, but also through dialogue and engagement and the establishment of a protective environment. **Women's leadership becomes a key protection strategy** in its own right. The connection is twofold:

- 1) **Women's empowerment** and the protection of women's rights **reduces women's vulnerability** and enhances their ability to protect themselves and claim their rights.
- 2) Women's representation, participation, and **leadership in protection mechanisms**, from political leadership and public administration to security forces, both military and police, refugee camp committees, community protection mechanisms, and accountability bodies among others are essential to **ensure better protection for women and girls**.

The second one is that in mission reporting and HQ deliberations on POC, women's protection issues are too often narrowed down to conflict-related sexual violence. The specific focus on sexual violence in conflict that has emerged over the last years and that has resulted in naming and shaming of parties and dedicated monitoring and reporting in the field, the signing of specific commitments with parties, and the establishment and deployment of women protection advisers in peacekeeping and political missions – a new staff category in peace operations, focused on monitoring and reporting on conflict-related sexual violence – is a very welcome development. But it also means that field actors and Council members must make sure that other protection issues that affect women particularly are not neglected or become invisible. It was never the intention of women, peace and security advocates to equate women's protection needs and gender-based crimes or violence solely with sexual violence. And POC normative and guidance documents have reflected this broader understanding as well. For example, as shown in Security Council resolutions on POC:

- OP 13 of 1265 asks for special **protection and assistance provisions for women in mandates** of peace operations.
- OP 14 of 1265 asks for personnel to receive **special training, including on gender**.
- OP 9 of 1296 speaks of the **impact of armed conflict on women** and reiterates the need for special mentions in mandates of peace missions.
- OP 10 of 1296 calls parties to conflict to make special arrangements to meet the **protection and assistance requirements of women**.
- OP 19 of 1296 reiterates the importance of specialized training on **gender-related issues**.
- OP 5 of 1674 speaks of **gender-based** and sexual violence.

- OP 11 of 1674 calls parties to ensure that **peace processes, peace agreements, and post-conflict reconstruction and recovery** have regard for the **special needs of women**.

Furthermore, the **POC Aide Memoire** makes reference to many areas that are important for women's empowerment or protection more broadly, including parties' obligations under international humanitarian law on the protection of women and girls; the importance of equal protection under the law and equal access to justice for women; the need to ensure that the protection, rights, and well-being of women and girls affected by armed conflict are specifically integrated into all peace processes, peace agreements, and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction planning and programmes; the need for governments to implement multi-sectoral strategies to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence; the inclusion of specific provisions for the protection of women and girls in the mandates of UN missions and specific sections devoted to the protection challenges faced by women and girls in the reports of the Secretary-General on countries in the agenda of the Council; the full representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict; the need to expand the role and numbers of women in UN operations; appropriate action against SEA and compliance with the SG's special measures; and the participation of women, including from civil society, in consultations and outreach activities.

The protection of civilians from physical violence as a priority for peace operations is crucial for women and girls. Sexual violence in all its forms deserves the special attention and focus that is increasingly receiving in peace operations. But women's protection needs also encompass, among others, conflict-related killings and injuries, threats and attacks against women political leaders, media personnel, women human rights defenders and civil society organizations, abduction and forced marriage of women and girls, attacks on schoolgirls or destruction of school facilities, enforcement of dress codes and restrictions of movement or other rights by violence, so-called "honor" killings and stonings, sex trafficking, elections-related violence against women, arbitrary detention, intimidation, and harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, and the increased risk and vulnerability experienced by women refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons and IDPs as a result of the lack of safety, services, and the existence of discriminatory gender norms.

This is important because the mission's protection tasks and activities must respond to the most prevalent threats against women and girls in the area of operations. A non-exhaustive list of these interventions may include:

- Special attention to women's protection risks or threats in joint protection teams and joint investigation teams.
- Consultation of women in threat assessments and community engagements (from the establishment of community protection mechanisms to alert networks, to the design of camp layouts).
- Tailor protection activities to women's mobility patterns and economic activity (firewood patrols, water-route patrols, field patrols, market patrols and escorts).
- Establishment of safe spaces in camps for women and girls.
- Appointment of female election monitors and special attention to gender-based electoral violence.
- Dial-in radio programmes for women to report threats and ensure the community is informed of risks.
- Provision of security umbrella for women's rights defenders and organizations working on women's rights or gender-based violence.
- Establishment of perpetrator profiling systems by the Joint Mission Analysis Centre that include patterns of attacks against women and girls, and sex-disaggregated tracking of civilian casualties.
- Public information campaigns to promote women's rights and help strengthen the capacity of state and civil society in promoting gender equality and women's rights.

- Special attention to women's protection in the implementation of mission's substantive areas, such as disarmament and demobilization activities, security sector reform, transitional justice, mine clearance, and small arms control.
- Evacuation of women and girls at risk from danger zones.

Both the whole range of women's protection issues and the interventions to address them, including women's leadership and women's empowerment, must be taken into account in mission planning, implementation, and reporting, as well as in policy discussions on the protection of civilians in the context of peace operations.