

# FOREWORD

---

The UN remains the pre-eminent international organization with the authority to maintain international peace and security as mandated in Chapters VI and VII of the United Nations Charter. Since the end of the cold war, UN peacekeeping has become increasingly complex and multi-dimensional, requiring a variety of civilian, police, and military actors. Peacekeeping environments therefore necessitate interaction between UN personnel and civilian populations. As such, a successful operation should ensure the local population reports positive interaction with peacekeepers and other UN personnel.

Unfortunately, this has not always been the case, and allegations of peacekeeper misconduct have emerged from nearly every mission of the past two decades. There have been reports of, and investigations into, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) committed by those with the mandate to protect civilians and abide by the highest standards of integrity while in the service of the UN. However, the UN currently finds itself in a difficult position as it has limited capacity and authority to react. It remains a national responsibility to repatriate and judge those alleged to have committed acts of SEA. The Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Mr Jean-Marie Guéhenno, recently stated at the Open Meeting of the Security Council on UN Resolution 1325 that all missions would soon develop an active strategy to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse. Focal points would also be established in each mission to receive and pursue complaints of misconduct. To be successful, however, training, reporting and follow-up mechanisms must be in place to sustain and strengthen the UN's strategies.

There are a variety of key documents that highlight the importance of ensuring that gender issues be mainstreamed in all aspects of peacekeeping operations, from the earliest stages of a mission's inception through to its creation, deployment and closure. Gender mainstreaming, which aims to "ensure that the concerns of men and women are factored into the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and

programmes in all spheres of the mission”, can improve the effectiveness of operations, as women and men, boys and girls, experience conflict differently. Thus, they all bring different perspectives, experiences and strategies to identify and address the root causes of the conflict. However, the term ‘gender’ is still considered a ‘soft’ issue, as opposed to a ‘core’ function of a UN mission. Changing some of these attitudes has been, and will continue to be, a challenge. Importantly, increased support from the strategic and decision-making levels of the UN has encouraged a steady revolution within the UN system that aims to place gender at the forefront of its strategies, rather than include it as an afterthought.

The establishment of accountable and transparent response strategies, as well as effective institutional arrangements to protect and prevent SEA, are long overdue. Only when these mechanisms are in place will the UN be in a position to proactively prevent cases of abuse and exploitation, rather than react to allegations. It is up to the UN and troop-contributing countries to implement agreed standards and policies on gender mainstreaming and take rapid, remedial action against those alleged to have perpetrated crimes. As one of the most widely accepted sources of international legitimacy, the UN must take care to uphold and preserve its reputation by prosecuting perpetrators. Irrespective of current policies that call for ‘zero tolerance’ and upholding ‘codes of conduct’, exploitation and abuse continues. Tolerating these acts allows perpetrators to carry on with impunity. Local populations and host governments can therefore only assume tacit acceptance of such activities.

While sexual exploitation and violence has become a common feature in peacekeeping contexts among state and non-state actors, this monograph focuses on peacekeepers and the alleged abuse of power that they exert over the local population. Many of the findings are anecdotal and based on short visits in mission areas. Recommendations are based on extant UN policies and do not comprehensively reflect the views of civil society organisations, the host governments or local women leaders. The monograph does, nevertheless, represent an insight into the challenges faced by women in conflict and post-conflict environments, and highlights best practices aimed at stemming the on-going exploitation and abuse being committed by those with the responsibility to protect.

We sincerely hope that the ideas and perceptions of the author are taken in the spirit with which the research was conducted: to stimulate debate and discussion. While there exist many tools and mechanisms that aim to protect

and preserve the role women in society, the challenge remains to hold host governments, the UN, and armed groups accountable for the implementation of these recommendations. Women should be seen as stakeholders both during times of war, as well as in the peace. In fact, including women's perspectives and experiences can ensure a representative and sustainable peace.

Vanessa Kent

*Pretoria, November 2003*