



Women in MINUSMA

## FEMALE PEACEKEEPERS ARE VITAL FOR THE UN MISSION IN MALI

**Despite efforts to increase the deployment of female soldiers, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA) remains dominated by men. A focus on the operational relevance of gender integration and on strengthening existing capacities in the mission will be small, yet realistic, steps forward.**

Active involvement of women is key to sustainable and inclusive peace. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security prescribes that women can make a unique contribution to peacekeeping by virtue of their gender. It claims that women can enhance operational effectiveness by reaching out to local communities, preventing sexual

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- MINUSMA should use African nations with a solid focus on gender in their own armies as role models and mentors for all military staff across the mission.
- Practical examples of how gender is relevant in military operations are needed. Military personnel will only take gender seriously if the operational relevance is clear and proven.
- In the current context of asymmetrical war, MINUSMA should support female peacekeepers in reaching out to local populations to improve the protection of civilians and gathering of information and intelligence.

# In the MINUSMA force of 11,000 troops, only 1.8% of military personnel are women compared to the average of 3.8% for UN peacekeeping missions

In training of mission personnel, gender advisors and the MINUSMA leadership should provide practical examples of how gender integration can support intelligence analysis and strengthen protection of civilians.

and gender-based violence, and further the participation of women in peacebuilding and reconstruction.

Female soldiers constitute only 3.8% of UN peacekeeping troops. In the MINUSMA force of 11,000 troops, only 1.8% of military personnel are women. In spring 2016, MINUSMA recruited a senior gender advisor to coordinate gender mainstreaming across the mission and support the implementation of Resolution 1325. Moreover, the Force Commander appointed a gender advisor to raise awareness of gender mainstreaming in MINUSMA's military component.

Since July 2016, the mission has carried out dedicated gender training for the military contingents with a particular emphasis on conflict-related sexual violence. These are vital steps to ensure the integration of gender into training and general planning. However, considerable challenges still exist to ensure gender mainstreaming and women's participation in the implementation of MINUSMA's mandate.

## Is peacekeeping only for men?

Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, increasing gender awareness and the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations have been key priorities. The 2015 high-level review of 1325 led to the confirmation of women as both peacemakers and victims of war. Unfortunately, there is still a limited understanding of how gender shapes war fighting and peacekeeping among many Troop-Contributing Countries (TCCs) – also in MINUSMA.

African troop-contributing countries make up the majority of MINUSMA's peacekeepers, and countries such as Benin, Togo, Guinea and Chad have not deployed female soldiers. During our fieldwork in Mali in June 2016, African commanders explained that some of the reasons for this are the harsh climatic conditions in northern Mali, poor living conditions, and an asymmetrical threat environment in which more than one hundred, primarily African, peacekeepers have been killed. They lack support, equipment and training while operating in some of the most dangerous areas of the mission. Due to the death toll in

## THE MANDATE AND ORGANISATION OF GENDER INTEGRATION IN MINUSMA

The UN Security Council has mandated MINUSMA to support the Malian authorities in 'ensuring the full participation and representation of women' at all levels of the peace and reconstruction efforts.

The primary focus of MINUSMA's Gender Unit is to include gender perspectives in policies and strategies; promote the political participation of women, human rights and responses to gender based violence; and include a gender perspective in security sector reform.

The mission has a gender task force consisting of focal points of all substantive units in MINUSMA, and a working group that monitors and reports on conflict related sexual violence.

MINUSMA furthermore collaborates with UN Women and the Malian government to implement the National Action Plan for Security Council Resolution 1325.

Source: UN

MINUSMA of 109 soldiers, some sectors of the mission now spend an estimated 80 percent of their resources on force protection, which limits its ability to patrol and interact with local communities.

Two central functions of MINUSMA are to protect civilians and collect intelligence. The contribution of female peacekeepers is in both cases essential. This should encourage troop-contributing countries to increase the number of women in peacekeeping.

In MINUSMA, some nations work hard to raise numbers in their own armies, which is also reflected in the composition of soldiers that are sent to the mission. For instance, Sector West of the mission that centers on Timbuktu has a relatively high participation of female soldiers (2.9%), due to a generally higher percentage of female soldiers among troops from Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Sweden. Women primarily fill positions such as administrative personnel, nurses, dentists and other medical functions. Swedish female army unit soldiers participate in patrols and female

soldiers from Nigeria have engaged in projects to reach out to the local Malians.

There are several factors in Mali that hamper the anticipated contribution of peacekeepers – male or female. During patrols in northern Mali, due to the threat of attacks, peacekeepers hesitate to step out of their vehicles and engage with the population. In the context of asymmetrical war and the limited support of African soldiers in MINUSMA in general, it is essential to have clear expectations of what female peacekeepers can accomplish in virtue of their gender.

In some communities in northern Mali, for instance, gender is culturally central because women are not allowed to speak publicly in the presence of men. In order to increase the mission’s ability to protect civilians and gather information on women’s roles in the conflict, incidents of rape, sexual abuse, but also the broader needs and grievances of communities, female soldiers could help to establish relationships



Peacekeepers clear the area after a terrorist attack on the MINUSMA camp in Kidal in which six peacekeepers from Guinea were killed and many other injured © UN Photo/Marco Dormino

between peacekeepers and Malian women. Female soldiers from neighbouring African countries, in particular, have a comparative advantage because they know the local culture and often speak several of the local languages and dialects.

### **Gender Awareness Training**

In MINUSMA, gender mainstreaming as expressed in Security Council Resolution 1325 is a concept known by most, if not all, peacekeepers. However, levels of understanding and appreciation of gender issues and their implications for peacekeeping differ considerably. It often reflects experiences and challenges of implementing gender policies in the troop contributing countries themselves. According to one gender advisor in MINUSMA: 'some of the African soldiers have not reflected on why it would be good to raise the numbers of female peacekeepers. Many of them think it would be nice for Friday night, but not necessarily from an operational perspective.'

In April 2010, none of the 1,605 Senegalese troops deployed in UN peacekeeping operations were women. Since then, Senegal has incorporated gender perspectives into its operations by encouraging more

women to participate in peacekeeping. Nevertheless, women's participation remains a challenge. The male gender focal point of the Senegalese contingent in MINUSMA explained: 'Some men think of women as the weaker sex. Men and women receive the same military education, but there are still more women in the service divisions than in combat.'

In contrast, due to their experiences with addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during the civil wars in their own countries, Liberian and Sierra Leonean soldiers have crucial qualifications that other troops in the mission can learn from. A Liberian commander explained: 'Because of the terrible war [in our own country], where sexual violence against women and children was used as a weapon of war, gender is a big thing in Liberia. We have a female president, and she has promoted the rights of women and is an important role model.' In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, gender training is part of the pre-deployment training programme and the units often discuss how to avoid abuse and sexual harassment in the mission. To strengthen ownership, gender mainstreaming should build on this existing expertise in the African units.

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Cover photo: Rwandan MINUSMA peacekeepers patrol the streets of Gao, northern Mali © UN Photo/Marco Dormino



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