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International

U.N. Official Calls for More Female Peacekeepers

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The number of women in the U.N.'s peace-keeping forces have risen in the year, but not fast enough, says an official in charge of peacekeeping strategy.

UNITED NATIONS (WOMENSENEWS)--The female ranks of U.N. peacekeepers are going up, but not fast enough, according to the organization's top cop in charge of peacekeeping strategy.

"For policing to be effective, it needs to be reflective of the society," said Andrew Carpenter, chief of the strategic policy and development section of the U.N.'s police division. "Do you know of a society that is 92 percent male?" Carpenter asked during a panel discussion Monday at the U.N.'s New York headquarters.

Carpenter used the 53rd session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women to appeal to member nations to deploy more women in peace-keeping operations around the world.

He also used his appearance on the panel to highlight some progress: One third of the 25 officers in the United Nations elite rapid reaction team are women.

An all-female Indian police unit is deployed in Liberia. Seven U.N. peacekeeping missions have specialized police units for women and children..

In 2007, 27 women served in senior leadership positions in U.N. peacekeeping operations. This number now stands at 45, with Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa and Pakistan among the countries that have made the most progress.

"You have to start at the top," said Carpenter. "You will see a trickle down."

Gains in Past Year

As of February 2009, 874 of 9,911 U.N. peacekeepers were women, a



Indian peacekeeper in
Monrovia, Liberia, 2007

Credit: Christopher Herwig, WPN.

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4-percent jump from the previous year.

But of 18 United Nations police commissioners, Carpenter said, only two are female. Seven more women in that list is needed to reach gender parity at the senior level.

The inclusion of female officers in U.N. peacekeeping operations, said Carpenter, gives the United Nations greater credibility in advocating the inclusion of women in national police forces, where they could handle cases of sexual violence in countries such as the Sudan.

Four U.N. peacekeepers were wounded in an ambush in West Darfur Monday, the AP reported. This is the first assault on U.N. troops since the International Criminal Court called for the arrest of Sudanese President Omar Hassan Ahmed Bashir on charges of war crimes in Darfur, where the U.N. estimates 300,000 people have died.

The United Nations has been deploying peacekeeping operations since 1948, with mandates ranging from the basic monitoring of ceasefire agreements to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants after a conflict.

Peacekeeping units have often drawn fire from women's rights advocates.

Sex-Abuse Allegations

During the past 15 years, allegations of sexual abuse have been made against peacekeepers in each of the U.N.'s peacekeeping missions, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, East Timor and Liberia.

The U.N. in 2005 published a frank report on the sexual abuses committed by its forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the last 18 months, Carpenter said, the United Nations implemented its first standardized pre-deployment curriculum.

Of 6,500 peacekeepers deployed to Darfur last year, only 10 percent had any pre-deployment police training, according to a U.N. survey. Using the curriculum pushed that number over 70 percent.

Last year, Asha Castleberry, first lieutenant in the U.S. Army, participated in peacekeeping operation exercises in Managua, Nicaragua, which drew police officers from 22 countries. Only 10 out of the 400 peacekeepers in training were women, just 2.5 percent.

"You could barely find us in the crowd," she said during a U.N. panel discussion Monday. "It was like where is Waldo in the puzzle? Women are outnumbered so it is very uncomfortable in the field."

Family-Friendly Policies

Theresa Kambobe, a gender trainer at the U.N., said family-friendly policies could help boost the number of female peacekeepers in tough assignment areas. An example: leaves of absence that are more frequent than every six months.

"These are hardship areas," she said. "Who takes the risk of bringing a baby into this environment? Our missions are constructed with the male in mind."

Most of the United Nations peacekeeping operations, she added, are



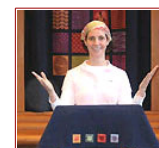
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non-family duty stations. Maternity policies are not in place for peacekeepers, limiting women's ability to participate. The peak age of women police officers is 30 to 34. After age 34, women's participation decreases.

"Women go away to others jobs with more mobility," she said.

Dominique Soguel is Women's eNews Arabic editor.

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