

Gender Parity in Peace operations: the Elsie Initiative and the Asia Pacific Region

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Last month, Australia hosted the first ever Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Australia Women, Peace and Security (WPS) high-level dialogue in Melbourne. In her remarks to the summit, Australian Minister for Women, Kelly O’Dwyer, commented that “...we need to move away from the idea that the only role women have in conflict, security and peacebuilding is as victims. We know that when women are involved in finding solutions — when their knowledge and experience is harnessed — that we have a much better chance of achieving real and lasting change.” From the Australian perspective, she said, “We have also boosted the number of female military officers who serve in UN missions. They now make up a quarter of all our staff officers and military observers...gender equality is at the forefront of what we do to prevent conflict, respond to national disasters and contribute to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. But there’s always more to do, and we’re committed to working together with ASEAN to share knowledge and experience, and work towards improving outcomes for women and their communities’ right across our region ... For too long, the fields of national security, defence, peacekeeping and conflict prevention have excluded women’s voices.”¹

Building on the minister’s comments at the ASEAN dialogue, this policy brief suggests that Australia is well placed to advance recent international initiatives to promote gender equality and the WPS agenda by supporting the training and deployment of more uniformed women to United Nations peacekeeping operations, an issue both of interest to regional partners and within Australia’s sphere of expertise. In particular, Australia can commit further to the inclusion of uniformed women in peacekeeping roles.

Last November, the Government of Canada hosted over 500 delegates from 70 countries, the United Nations, the European Union, African Union and NATO in Vancouver for the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference.² At the conference the Canadian government announced the launch

¹ “Remarks to the ASEAN-Australia Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security”, 17 April 2018, available at:

<https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/2018/remarks-asean-australia-dialogue-women-peace-and-security>

² Initiated by the 2015 Leadership summit on Peacekeeping hosted in Washington, D.C., the first UN Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial took place in London in 2016. The conference held in Vancouver is the second such conference.

of the Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations.³ With this initiative, Canada has pledged to help bolster the number of uniformed women participating in UN peacekeeping operations by directly supporting troop contributing countries (TCC) to recruit, retain, and deploy female soldiers. This is the first time that an international initiative has sought to address the lack of female soldiers at the source country level in order to bolster the number of female soldiers contributed by nations to UN peacekeeping.

It is both in Australia's interest and within its scope of expertise to actively support the Elsie initiative. Australia has a long history of participating in peace operations, is championing gender equality in its own security services, and provides comprehensive training – including on gender – to regional partners. It is therefore in a unique position to leverage this experience to become a leader in supporting both gender parity in and contributions to UN peace operations. Australia's work with United Nations peace operations spans Indonesia's independence, the Korean War, Cambodia's peace process and resulting elections, and the emergence of Timor-Leste. While Australia's personnel contributions have tapered off recently, its assistance to the security forces of neighbouring countries remains strong, particularly programmes supporting the recruitment and retention of female officers. The Elsie Initiative provides an opportunity for Australia to scale up this regional experience to share best practice on the international stage while reaffirming its commitment to both UN peacekeeping and to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Australia can become a regional leader by financially contributing to the Elsie Initiative, supporting regional partners to deploy more women through training initiatives, and deploying more Australian female peacekeepers.

Female peacekeepers make peacekeeping more effective

Female contingents are shown to make peace operations – and military operations generally – more effective. They improve access and support for local women, help reduce conflict and confrontation, enhance feelings of security in the local population and act as role models for women in the community.⁴ Female personnel provide different perspectives on protection, peacebuilding, intelligence gathering and early warning initiatives. Uniformed women are more likely to make contact and establish linkages with women in mission areas, especially in, but not limited to, more conservative cultures or contexts significantly affected by Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Further, more female peacekeepers can reduce levels of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers. In addition to facilitating access to local women – 50% of the host population - ensuring gender

³ Named for Elsie MacGill was a Canadian women's rights pioneer and trailblazing aeronautical engineer who was responsible for making Canada a powerhouse of aircraft construction during WWII. See Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, *The Elsie Initiative on Women in Peace Operations*, November 15, 2017. CBC, "Canadian Elsie MacGill was the first female aeronautical engineer in the world," 6 May 2017. <http://www.cbc.ca/2017/canadathestoryofus/canadian-elsie-macgill-was-the-first-female-aeronautical-engineer-in-the-world-1.4099967>

⁴ United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, "Why We Need Women Peacekeepers." 23 February 2016.

parity makes peacekeeping more diverse and inclusive, bringing different perspectives to decision making processes which in turn increases efficiency and effectiveness. Most importantly, gender parity is the right thing to do. Ensuring security forces represent the makeup of the community they're serving makes sense: it is just in addition to being effective.

However, at a practical level, troop contributing countries simply do not have significant numbers of women in their military or police ranks to deploy.⁵ The scarcity of women in the security forces of troop contributing countries means they are unable to meet the targets set out by the UN, despite an evolving culture of gender inclusion.⁶ Only 18 TCCs have reached the target of 15% female deployment. It is important to note that while western countries have a stronger track record of women among their ranks, they rarely contribute enough soldiers to peace operations to make a significant change in the gender balance of a mission.

Despite their value added, uniformed female peacekeepers currently make up only 3% of troops deployed. Further, studies have shown that even when women are deployed, they are often given subordinate or peripheral roles to men, despite holding the same qualifications. This underscores the need for greater commitment to getting women's boots on the ground, and in more substantive roles. Member states have already committed to target of at least 15% women in their uniformed deployments, but both this target, and a sustained effort to meet it, has remained elusive. The United Nations is keenly aware of the value of female peacekeepers but has struggled to make substantive inroads in increasing their numbers. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security was the first to highlight the specific role of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It has since been followed by seven other resolutions on the importance of engaging women in conflict resolution. One of which, UNSCR 1960 (2010) was co-sponsored by Australia and encourages member states to deploy more uniformed women to UN peace operations. However, the UN has struggled to overcome several key challenges, including lack of political will, and the funding that accompanies it. Some progress has been made to highlight the importance of gender in peace operations but the number of female peacekeepers still lags far behind aspirations. In 2015, the UN Security Council set a five-year goal of doubling the number of uniformed women deployed. At the current rate of improvement, it would take 37 years to achieve.

⁵ For more on this see Kathleen Kuehnast and Shannon Zimmerman, "No Will; No Way: Women, Peace, and Security in Peacekeeping Operations," *Peace & Stability Operations Journal Online*. 3:1 (2012).

⁶ Several of the core troop and police contributing countries, such as Ethiopia, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, have an evolving but limited culture of women in the security services. Bangladesh only allowed women to join the military after 2003 and only began recruiting women in 2013. India has had some success with women in peacekeeping, deploying the UN's first all-female peacekeeping force of 105 Indian policewomen who deployed to Liberia. Currently the number one contributor to UN peace operations, Ethiopia, is an exception in this regard with roughly 16 of the soldiers it has deployed being women.

Current Australian Initiatives

Australia has already made high-level commitments to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.⁷ Through the 2015 High-level Review on Women, Peace and Security, Australia committed to implementation across its military forces. This has included the Defence 2023 of target recruiting 25% women for the Navy and Air Force, and 15% for the Army. There is also a particular push to recruit women in non-traditional roles, such as Air Force pilots.⁸ Australia has shown both rhetorical and practical leadership on this issue regarding domestic targets, but could do more to advance the number of women deploying more generally, as recommended in UNSCR 1960. In addition to Australia's high-level work on the WPS agenda, Australia boasts two female ministers directly involved with the peacekeeping portfolio – Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Defence Minister Marise Payne – and has recently secured a seat on the UN Human Rights Council.

Australia has also endorsed the Vancouver Communiqué, which recognizes that “greater women’s participation in peacekeeping is directly linked to improved operational effectiveness”. The Communiqué calls on Member States to deploy at least 15% (military) and 20% (police) female personnel to meet the 2020 commitment of doubling the number of female peacekeepers.⁹ The Communiqué further outlined the need for female recruitment, training, promotion and retention strategies, as well as access to leadership positions.¹⁰ In Vancouver, Australia also offered to fund the attendance of women at peacekeeping training. By endorsing this Communiqué, Australia commits to the aim of greater gender inclusion in UN peacekeeping, an aim served by supporting the Elise Initiative.

Domestically, Australian Defence Force leaders have already recognised the important, practical contribution female personnel make to force efficiency and mission achievement.¹¹ Women represent 12.4% of the full-time Army and 13.5% of the part-time force,¹² and all roles in the ADF became open to women on 1 January 2016, completing a 20-year process.¹³ Australia has successfully attained the 15% female target with its military deployment to UN missions in the

⁷ See 2016 NAP progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

⁸ See: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

⁹ See the Vancouver Communiqué at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2017-11-16/note-correspondents-un-peacekeeping-defence-ministerial>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Brendan Nicholson, “ADF Women are already ‘in combat’”, *The Strategist*, 24 March 2017. Available at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/adf-women-already-combat/>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

difficult contexts of the Middle East and South Sudan. Australian military women have additional deployment experience both with the UN and as part of other alliances in Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands, Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁴ Australian security forces are able to deploy women into austere conditions as part of effective teams, and can share this expertise with other nations.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) is 36% women¹⁵ and has implemented several management tools to assist with achieving meaningful gender parity. As part of Australia's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (NAP), the AFP has developed International Operations policies and guidelines around supporting capacity development of regional partners, including advancing gender equality and the need for/utility of gender perspectives.¹⁶ Further, in 2014 the AFP launched its International Deployment Group Gender Strategy, which has set employment targets, including at senior management levels. Two years later, it set up the Gender Board of Management to oversee the strategy. Initiatives such as these can be adapted and shared with regional, and indeed global, partners.

Australia has also supported or participated in several key gender-focused initiatives in the region such as: Malaysian Defence Ministry and UN Development Program 2014 and 2015 Seminars on Gender and Child Protection in Military Operations (including UNSCR1325); the 2015 Special Female Military Officers' Course in India¹⁷, supported the Japanese Self Defense Force in implementing their own National Action Plan and creating a Gender Advisors Network (2015-6), including examining the possibility of Japan deploying Gender Advisors and Female Engagement Teams to UN Missions. In the Pacific, Australia has supported and mentored women policing and gender activities in Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands, PNG, Tonga, Vanuatu and more generally through the Pacific Police Development Program – Regional (PPDP-R).

Australian Security Forces are also members of peacekeeping communities of practice. The ADF is a member of the Peacekeeping Capability Building Technical Working Group (PKCB TWG) which aims to ensure that peacekeeping training in the Asia Pacific is complementary. This group prioritises a common understanding of, and standard for, UNSCR1325 training materials. According to the 2016 NAP progress report, Australia leads the development of such training materials for the group.¹⁸

¹⁴ In Afghanistan, the ADF adopted the practice initiated by other alliance members of deploying women in "Female Engagement Teams". This practice has since been proposed for implementation by UN Peace Operations, and demonstrates another avenue for sharing of Australian experience.

¹⁵ See AFP staff statistics at: <https://www.afp.gov.au/news-media/facts-and-stats/afp-staff-statistics>

¹⁶ See 2016 NAP progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

¹⁷ A training course for 40 women serving in the militaries of the major TCCs to help them operate effectively in UN peacekeeping missions.

¹⁸ For further information on available training, see: 2016 progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

Similarly, the ADF Peace Operations Training Centre plays a leading role in the Association of Asia Pacific Peace Training Centres.

The ADF Peace Operations Training Centre was tasked to develop a Gender and Protection Office and regional centre of excellence in 2016.¹⁹ A resulting Military Gender and Protection Course has since been developed and is offered annually to both relevant Australian and partner personnel.²⁰ On the international stage, an AFD technical expert on Women, Peace and Security has been seconded to UN Women,²¹ and it began deploying a senior officer as the Gender Adviser to the NATO International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan in 2012. Further, in Afghanistan Australia formed Female Engagement Teams (FETs) of female officers to liaise with Afghan community members. This experience, and lessons learnt, can be drawn on and applied as relevant to the UN peacekeeping context.

Finally, in 2016 the ADF hosted a Multi-national Force Standard Operating Procedure Workshop in Brisbane, which included a working group to incorporate Women, Peace and Security. These are used by the 30 regional countries which make up the Multi-national Planning Augmentation Team and the Asia Pacific Network.

Australia clearly has an interest, and expertise, in supporting the application of gender perspectives within military operations. Gender advisors, as referred to above, are an important part of this and are deployed on most operations. Australia is well known in the international community for contributing Gender advisors to international efforts.²² Australia is also highly engaged in the region, particularly in training and supporting uniformed women from regional neighbours. The Australian security services are ideally positioned to build upon current undertakings to more specifically address the lack of women deploying to UN peacekeeping missions. Targeting interventions to further this goal would assist Canberra's neighbours in deploying more women, should they wish to, as well as bolster Australia's own credibility on peacekeeping and gender issues. Partnering with the Elsie Initiative would be an efficient way to do this.

Australia's peacekeeping commitment gap

Peacekeeping experience is gaining prestige in the Asia Pacific region, with Australia's neighbours becoming increasingly engaged. Indonesia is now the 10th largest troop and police contributor to UN peace operations, and China contributes more than the other four permanent members of the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For more information, see: <http://www.defence.gov.au/adsc/acsc/peacekeeping/pos.asp>

²¹ Until recently, this position was held by Jennifer Wittwer, see: <http://www.leadershipforwomen.com.au/home/about/jennifer-wittwer>

²² A further example is the USNS Mercy, a US Navy medical ship deployed as part of the Pacific Partnership 2018 has an Australian military Gender Advisor serving on board.

Security Council combined.²³ In Vancouver, many countries in the Asia Pacific region offered new pledges to increase their contributions to UN peacekeeping. Further, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka all made or advanced pledges related to increasing uniformed women's participation in UN Missions.²⁴

Australia itself has a long history of supporting UN Peacekeeping Operations. From invoking Chapter 7 for the first time in 1947 regarding conflict over Indonesia's bid for independence,²⁵ to leading the engagement in Timor-Leste in the early 2000s, Australia has frequently ranked among the top ten military and police contributors.²⁶ However, Australia's standing in this regard has fallen considerably over the past decade. Now Australia is no longer counted among the top 80 contributors of uniformed officers to UN operations, sending only 32 troops to the Middle East and South Sudan.²⁷ This has reduced Australian influence in the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C34) and undermined Australia's credibility as a leader in the gender dimension of peacekeeping. Though technically Australia has met the 15% target for female military personnel deployed, one of whom is UNMISS' first ever Military Gender Advisor,²⁸ with so few troops – and no police – deployed this has very little impact on the composition of missions as a whole.

²³ For details, see: "Troop and Police Contributors", at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

²⁴ China pledge to train an additional 100 female peacekeepers to serve in UN Missions, India advanced its pledge of deploying 15% female staff officers/military observers and providing a UN Female Officers Course, and Indonesia advanced its commitment to deploying female police officers. Japan will provide funding for the UN Women Female Military Officers Course, gender advisors to training centres, and is considering deploying female peacekeepers to UNMISS HQ. Pakistan has pledged to increase the number of women deployed as staff officers (50 new female staff officers pledged) and medical staff, and advance gender parity in peacekeeping training. The Philippines has pledged 90 new military observers/staff officers, one third of whom will be women. Korea made a new commitment to exceed the 15% target for women staff officers/military observers, and to establish a dedicated human resources mechanism to manage female police deployment. Sri Lanka's new pledges included an all-female Military Police Company and a female Force Protection Company. See: <http://www.providingforpeacekeeping.org/capabilities-summits/united-nations-peacekeeping-pledge-counter/>

²⁵ Australia considers this the first peacekeeping mission, whereas the UN does not. See: <http://www.defence.gov.au/adsc/acsc/peacekeeping/aipo.asp>

²⁶ Lisa Sharland, "Australia and UN peacekeeping at 70: proud history, uncertain future", The Strategist, 14 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australia-un-peacekeeping-70-proud-history-uncertain-future/>

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. See also: Filip Andersson, "UNMISS Military Gender Advisor Creates Network of Female Troops", 8 February 2017. Available at: <https://unmiss.unmissions.org/unmiss-military-gender-advisor-creates-network-female-troops>.

Policy Recommendations for Australia

Australia is in an ideal position to support efforts to boost the numbers of women in the military and police of UN Member States, and to support their deployment into UN peace operations. Further, we can lead by example by contributing more troops and police officers, and by meeting – or exceeding – UN gender targets in these deployments. Below are several recommendations on how the Australia could increase its own involvement, and further support current regional initiatives:

Lead by Example: Australia should provide more troops to peace operations – specifically more female troops and police officers. This would not only bolster Australia’s regional and international standing on peacekeeping issues, it would also represent a good development opportunity for its own service personnel.

Continue to Support Regional Training Efforts: In the latest NAP progress report (2016), Australia achieved the impressive goal of 100% of Defence personnel deployed receiving training on Women, Peace and Security.²⁹ Australia can take this experience to build on it’s proven track record by further supporting the training of regional security forces, so that they are more able to deploy uniformed women to peacekeeping operations, as well as men who understand the value of their female counterparts’ contributions.

Leverage Existing Resources: The AFP International Deployment Group Training Centre is ideally placed to host regional peacekeeping training for both military and police personnel and is currently underused. Joint training with regional partners could help to build relationships, and targeted training could help to boost the capacity of neighbours who are willing to deploy more troops.

Open Existing Training to Regional Partners: Australian diplomatic and uniformed personnel currently undergo, or have the opportunity to attend, a vast array of training related to UNSCR1325. Australia could open up this training to regional partners, or share resources beyond the eLearning platform.³⁰

Contribute policy and best practice around recruitment, training, retention and career planning for uniformed women: Barriers to the deployment of female uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations include a lack of procedures for deploying women in austere conditions,³¹ alongside men. Not only does Australia deploy uniformed women itself, it has also helped regional partners address these issues, particularly in their national police forces. The Australian security services therefore have policies and best practice around the recruitment, deployment, career planning and retention

²⁹ NAP 2016 progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

³⁰ For further information on available training, see: NAP 2016 progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

³¹ E.g. need for specific hygiene facilities.

of women that could be further shared with regional partners, and adapted to their own needs, with the specific aim of increasing UN contributions.

Play the long-game: Increasing the number of female military and police personnel available for deployment to UN PKOs will take time. It took Australia almost 30 years to open all positions in the ADF to women,³² and Canberra can support other countries to also undergo such lengthy processes. To ensure that women are meaningfully represented across all facets of United Nations police and armed services work gradual increase over the next 5-10 years is recommended.

Conclusion

As this brief has demonstrated, and as already acknowledged by the Australian government and security services, including women at all levels of uniformed service improves efficiency and effectiveness: it makes for better operations. Further, gender equality ensures that the community is reflected in national security forces and provides equal opportunity across genders. Australian domestic policy reflects this, as does the current support Canberra offers to regional partners, particularly police forces. As Australia already supports efforts to increase the contribution of uniformed women to peace operations, and practices this philosophy bilaterally with neighbouring states, it would be easy to parlay this support into assisting neighbouring countries to ready female uniformed officers for UN deployment. This would not take significantly more resources on Australia's part, but could both help to re-establish Australia's peacekeeping credentials and enhance the prestige of both Canberra and regional partners.

The ultimate way of re-establishing Australia's position as a leader on peacekeeping and gender issues would be to send more Australian troops and police to support UN Missions. Leading by example and deploying significant numbers while adhering to (or surpassing) gender targets would signal that Australia is back on the modern peacekeeping agenda. Not only would this gain Canberra credibility, prestige and a greater voice in UN affairs, it would also be a platform for Australian forces to gain further operational experience. Should this not be an option, Australia could leverage the experiences of its security forces in gender mainstreaming to assist other nations and the UN peacekeeping agenda more broadly. Currently, developing countries take the brunt of peacekeeping duties. The skills, expertise and resources Australia could bring – including on gender issues – could not only value add but lead best practice.

Then-Minister for Women Michaelia Cash stated in the introduction of the 2016 National Action Plan progress report that 'Australia is one of the leading nations on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.'³³ She states that she looks forward to working to protect and empower

³² The first committee to explore the integration of women into the Australian armed forces was established in 1975. The Keating government opened all positions excluding direct combat roles to women in 1992. All roles, including Special Forces, opened to women in 2014. For more information, see:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-21/timeline-of-women-in-the-australian-defence-force/6398388>

³³ 2016 progress report: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/progress-report-nap-women-peace-security.pdf>

women in conflict and post-conflict settings, and that Australia will continue to seek opportunities to exercise influence in this regard. As Australia is beginning the process of consultation towards our second National Action Plan, so should our ambitions for actualizing the WPS agenda be advanced. Using the momentum of the Elsie Initiative to supply more female uniformed personnel in meaningful roles, and assisting those in the region to do the same, is a concrete, practical and effective way to achieve this. Australia should build on Minister O'Dwyer's remarks to this month's first Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Australia Women, Peace and Security high-level dialogue to commit to both leading and supporting regional peacekeeping contributions in this regard.