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The Participation of the AFP Women Peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

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INTRODUCTION

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 did not only call for the unequivocal participation, involvement, and leadership of women in peacebuilding, security, and development, but it reaffirms their crucial role, contribution, and importance in peacekeeping operations and conflict-resolution activities. The resolution recognized and urged member states to adopt a gender perspective and gender-sensitive training on the protection, rights, and specific needs of women during times of conflict towards both women peacekeepers and civilian personnel involved.

In the changing nature of warfare, the UNSCR 1325 further stressed that peace is not enough, but rather we should aim for sustainable peace and security which can be achieved when women are involved as equal partners in the prevention of violent conflicts. The UNSCR 1325 or the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda is a landmark resolution that integrates women and their perspectives in attaining development peace and sustainable security.¹

The Philippines is one of the first countries to have a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan in 2010 which opened opportunities to Filipino women to serve various roles in the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Department of National Defense (DND), and other agencies under the security sector. However, in terms of women's participation and involvement in the AFP's peacekeeping operations, they are at a minimum. Statistics show that in 2011, 89 out of 893 or 9% deployed Filipino peacekeepers are women. Similarly, in 2013, out of the 706 deployed

peacekeepers, only 72 or 10% are women.² While there are no policy barriers that hinder women from serving as UN peacekeepers, they may face gender-based challenges that would affect both their personal and professional lives.³

As an exploratory study, this paper intends to trace the development of the inclusion and participation of Filipino women not only in the security sector but in the AFP's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. It will further argue that the AFP women peacekeepers had crucial roles and gave important contributions towards UN peacekeeping efforts. The study will answer following research questions: (1) How did UNSCR 1325 affect women's participation and involvement in UN peacekeeping operations and then the Philippines' participation as well? (2) What are the roles of the AFP Women Peacekeepers and the challenges they face in peacekeeping operations? (3) What are the recent developments that both the DND and AFP implemented since UNSCR 1325 was recognized by the Philippines? (4) How can the Philippine defense establishment further optimize the role, participation, and involvement of the AFP Women Peacekeepers?

Aside from employing a descriptive-analytical-narrative method for assessing policies, the researchers conducted a focus group discussion to interview the women peacekeepers from the AFP Peacekeeping Operations Center (PKOC). The respondents are composed of officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) previously deployed in different UN peacekeeping mission areas and were then designated in the AFP PKOC.

BACKGROUND OF THE ISSUE

Since UNSCR 1325 was unanimously adopted twenty years ago, the whole UN system and its Member States started to incorporate a gender perspective in both peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts. Greater gender parity and mainstreaming is particularly seen as a contributing factor towards operational effectiveness in UN peacekeeping operations. By incorporating women in peacekeeping missions, they effectively contribute towards its overall mandate implementation. Moreover, they served crucial duties and responsibilities such as providing better community outreach and protection towards internally displaced women and children; ensuring higher reporting of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); effective intelligence gathering; and empowering local women to be engaged in their own country's peacebuilding efforts.⁴ Their actions further promote the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) in a male-dominated security sector.

While gender parity and mainstreaming efforts are laudable, in 2020, women only constitute 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units out of the 95,000 peacekeepers.⁵ UN officials and agencies failed to consider the professional and context-specific challenges that hindered women peacekeepers from fulfilling their tasks. These range from receiving inadequate peacekeeping training, discriminatory recruitment practices, difficulties in reaching local communities, and the scarcity of mandated provisions and under-resourced gender units.⁶ Women deployed in military contingent roles at peacekeeping operations were sometimes kept from the most dangerous missions where they are crucially needed. This is due to the perpetuating idea that women peacekeepers were "needed to be protected" from sexual and gender-based violence and deaths.⁷

In spite of these issues, both gender parity and mainstreaming efforts and expanding the role and contribution of women peacekeepers remains a priority initiative of the UN and its Member States. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres introduced the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018 - 2028 which aims to increase women's participation from 15 to 35 percent in 2028 and to create an enabling environment for women peacekeepers

both in the UN headquarters and their respective field operations.⁸ Various UN member states, including major troop and police-contributing countries, expressed support for the UN's efforts for increasing their meaningful participation and inclusion in peacekeeping operations and are seeking to increase women's presence in their respective national armed forces. The Philippines is one of the military and police-contributing countries wherein 50% of their troops are composed of women.⁹

The Philippines' first support to the UN was in the 1950 Korean War wherein they deployed the Philippine Expeditionary Forces to Korea (PEFTOK) composed of 7500 combat troops. However, the UN Operations in Congo (ONUC) in 1962 served as the country's first formal involvement in UN peacekeeping operations. Former President Diosdado Macapagal deployed the Philippine Air Force Contingent in February 1963 to conduct reconnaissance and persuasion flights, provide air support operations to ground security troops, and initiated medical and dental missions with health practitioners.¹⁰ Since ONUC, the Philippines gained international recognition not only as an active military troop, police, and civilian peacekeeper-contributing country but for providing a large percentage of women peacekeepers to UN missions and operations.¹¹

Even before the advent of UNSCR 1325, Filipino women had a long historico-cultural tradition of participation and involvement in socio-political and military affairs.¹² The formal inclusion of Filipino women in military and security roles started in 1963 with the establishment of the Women's Auxiliary Corps in which they provided non-combative, technical, and administrative services.¹³ Subsequently, the Philippine Military Academy started to admit women in 1993 which exposed them to combative roles such as being pilots, tactical officers, and infantry and special forces members.¹⁴ With the adoption of the Magna Carta of Women of 2009 (RA 9710) and various landmark legislations that upheld and protected women's rights, this created an enabling environment for Filipino women to be actively involved in the military and the security sector.¹⁵

In terms of peacekeeping inclusion and participation, the Magna Carta called for the elimination of gender-based challenges,

discriminatory policies, and institute the following measures for concerned government agencies: (1) To give equal consideration for both men and women in international peacekeeping duties especially its operational, combative, and administrative functions; (2) To provide women with both combative and non-combative training for their deployment in peacekeeping forces in compliance to UNSC resolution on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS); and (3) Qualified female officers and enlisted personnel shall not be denied admission to peacekeeping operations and entitlement to its relevant remunerations and benefits.¹⁶

The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2010-2016 and 2017-2022 and the Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016 and 2017-2022 ensured the continuous implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the Philippines by: (1) Protecting women's rights and prevent its violation during conflict and post-conflict situations; (2) Increasing the numbers of women participating in peace and security bodies, processes, and mechanisms; (3) Further create and implement policies that would not only empower women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and peacemaking efforts but to assume leadership positions; (4) Instituting a monitoring and evaluation system to enhance accountability for successful implementation and the achievement of its goals; and (5) Undertaking numerous policy studies and reports on women's roles, participation, and impact in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.¹⁷

MAJOR CASE ISSUES

The Roles and Responsibilities of the AFP Women Peacekeepers towards Peacekeeping Operations

The initial role of UN peacekeepers was to monitor and observe peace processes in post-conflict areas and assist signatories in implementing their respective peace agreements.¹⁸ With the adoption of UNSCR 1325 and various WPS resolutions, women are increasingly deployed and have proven their capacity to perform various peacekeeping roles such as doing technical, administrative, and operational duties in peacekeeping operations; engaging confidence-building measures and

providing a greater sense of security to local communities; observe political and reconciliation processes; improve access to and support from local law enforcement agencies; and ensure human rights protection and international humanitarian law implementation in post-conflict areas.¹⁹

Last November 2020, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO) stated that the Philippines deployed a total of 27 peacekeepers composed of 16 males and 11 females serving various roles as military experts, staff officers, and contingent troops.²⁰ According to the AFP PKOC Mission Support Office (MSO), there are 16 Mission Areas, finished and ongoing, that the AFP have provided contingent and individual deployment support since 1999. Currently, a total of 11,181 AFP personnel have been deployed, and some are still currently deployed since 1999. Out of the total 11,181 AFP personnel deployed to UN peacekeeping operations, 463 are women. Large deployment of AFP women were on the following mission area: East Timor, Liberia, Haiti, and Golan Heights.

Based on the results of the FGD conducted with AFP PKOC last 17 December 2020, women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations have been substantial in the accomplishment of their mission and even tasks beyond their missions. The role of AFP women in peacekeeping operations varies depending on the mission area. Some of the roles of the AFP women deployed in UN peacekeeping operations include military observers, staff officers, and welfare officers.

The AFP PKOC explained that the *UN specifies in its requests the need for women participation in UN peacekeeping operations based on certain mission areas*. The obligation of women peacekeepers in certain mission areas are crucial as women have natural skill sets that contribute to the accomplishment of the peacekeeping objectives. The respondents from the PKOC explained their experiences as UN military observers involved engagement with civilians that were maltreated by armed groups. The trauma caused by the armed conflict can be severe thus, engagement with civilians to ensure their protection is quite difficult. However, the presence of women peacekeepers have made this easier as women offer a greater sense of comfort and security.²¹

In security situations, women and children are more affected and most of the time put to a disadvantage. Civilian engagement is a crucial approach in peacekeeping operations of protecting civilians, particularly women and children. Victims of armed conflict not only suffer from the violence they have witnessed but there are also cases of forms of sexual exploitation and abuse. **Women peacekeepers have shown a natural skill set that contributes to the accomplishment of mission** such as better access to the population, specifically to women and children thus being able to get crucial information such as cases of gender-based violence and violence against children.²²

Women peacekeepers are also considered as essential enablers to building trust and confidence with local communities. Related literature on the participation of women peacekeepers argued the women peacekeepers are usually deployed at a later duration of the mission wherein risks are no longer a factor. The risk arises because of unfamiliarity with the local community. However, the participation of women peacekeepers is essential in the establishment of trust and confidence between the local communities and the peacekeepers. Further, women's ability to establish trust and confidence makes it easier for them to collect intelligence information from the local community.²³

It is further argued that the **women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations are limited because it is harder to accept women in uniform due to cultural factors.**²⁴ However, results of the FGD stated otherwise based on the experience of the respondents in engaging with local communities during deployment. Post-conflict communities would be composed of more women and children affected which women in uniform can easily access and build trust and confidence mainly due to their maternal instinct and general nature as women. This is also strengthened by the Gender Sensitivity training that both women and men in the AFP receive specifically in communicating with locals, and even sexually abused individuals in the post-conflict communities.

The UN DPKO noted that women peacekeepers will continue to give a positive impact on: (1) Improving the overall effectiveness of a peacekeeping mission; (2) Better protection

towards women and children from gender-based violence and discrimination (GBVD); (3) Enhancing communications outreach and high-level with locals; (4) Effective intelligence-gathering operations and higher reporting of GBVD-related crimes; and (5) Contributing towards long-term peacebuilding and peacemaking efforts in post-conflict areas and communities.²⁵

The Personal and Professional Challenges of the AFP Women Peacekeepers

Women that served as peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping operations described an overwhelming feeling of mission accomplishment after being deployed.²⁶ This is similar to the description stated from the results of the conducted FGD with the AFP PKOC. The participants explained an overwhelming feeling of being part of the contingency or individually deployed in UN peacekeeping operations as it is a noble job and an honor to represent their country in a global effort to maintain the peace in post-conflict areas. Nonetheless, they also faced different personal and professional challenges as AFP women peacekeepers deployed abroad.

Based on the results of the FGD conducted with the AFP women regarding their UN deployment experience, **one of the main personal challenges they have encountered was the separation from their families.** It is also one of the main reasons that make them rethink their UN deployment. The results additionally showed that it is difficult for women not to be able to perform their domestic responsibilities to their families. Most UN deployment would last for 6 months and can be extended up to a year or more depending on the mission area. However, most women in the AFP still continue to volunteer as they understand that their part in the UN peacekeeping operations will serve a lasting effect to global protection, prevention of armed conflict and sustainable peace for their family back home.

Another personal challenge based on the results of the FGD was the **difficulty for the AFP women was the kevlar vest as it is not particularly comfortable for the breast part of women.** Though this does not hinder the mission performance of the AFP women in peacekeeping

operations, it is uncomfortable, and it should have been a gender-based consideration.

In terms of professional challenges, the results of the FGD indicated that the AFP women did not encounter much challenge. The results explained that the UN deployment involved several training sessions that prepared both women and men for their deployment thus, having no professional concerns in the performance of their mission. The AFP PKOC ensured quality training and compliance to the UN standard skill set and capabilities for AFP personnel on their deployment.

The Philippines, as a largely English-speaking country also provided an edge in terms of communication during deployment abroad. However, AFP personnel still encounter minor linguistic challenges because they are trained on the minimum language requirement of the mission area which they will be deployed to. In terms of specifically being a woman in uniform deployed abroad on a UN peacekeeping operation, the results of the FGD did not identify any professional challenges encountered.

One of the most mentioned hurdles faced by women in uniform deployed in peacekeeping operations is the gender-based discrimination they encounter. Results of the FGD discussed a subtle case of expecting women to not be able perform technical skills such as to drive efficiently or as effectively as men. However, results of the FGD explained how this initial discriminatory perception was changed and proved otherwise by the capability of the AFP women peacekeepers not only on driving but also on other aspects such as changing tires and even more technical issues that are expected to be only addressed by men. Additionally, the strong and capable structure of the AFP women have gained respect not only for the women in uniform but for the entire Philippines.

Institutional Challenges and Recent Developments in Peacekeeping Operations

The Philippines' participation in peacekeeping operations purveys the country's enduring commitment towards international peace and security and foster cooperation and engagement with the UN. ***Continued participation will also***

entail improving the Philippine defense establishment's capacity such as gaining valuable knowledge and experience in peacekeeping, upgrading of its materiel, medical supplies, and transportation through the UN's reimbursements, and providing economic and substantive benefits towards military personnel.²⁷ However, the defense establishment faced certain challenges in maintaining its pledge towards peacekeeping operations.

Peacekeeping remains a low priority issue in the Philippine defense agenda due to the country's focus on addressing its internal and external security challenges. The AFP's capability and performance development for peacekeeping operations is hindered because there is no programmed source of funding and resources in its budget requirement due to primarily dedicating their time, finances, and resources in resolving important security issues.²⁸

Moreover, the DND and AFP heavily relied on operating the Philippines' international commitment to UN peacekeeping operations because Executive Order (EO) No. 97, s. 2002 primarily focuses on military participation. ***The defense establishment is dependent on the UN's reimbursements to cover the costs of participating in international peacekeeping missions.*** Aside from the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), the order excludes the involvement of other civilian government agencies in assisting the Philippines' contribution to more peacekeepers.²⁹

In spite of these institutional challenges, the DND and AFP have made recent developments to further strengthen the Philippines' capacity for peacekeeping operations. The National Council for Philippine Participation in UN Peace Operations (NCUNPO) was established in 2010 to assist the President of the Philippines in implementing EO 97 by streamlining policy direction and decision-making the country's participation in UN peacekeeping operations, mandated to periodically review its Policy Framework and Guidelines, and utilize the UN reimbursements to upgrade Philippine capacity to respond the DPKO's requests. An interagency effort is pursued by the NCUNPO wherein the Departments of Foreign

Affairs, National Defense, and Interior and the Local Government are involved in its policy formulation and strategic operations.³⁰

During the 2019 UN Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial, Defense Secretary Delfin N Lorenzana announced the Philippines' pledge by committing 90 military observers and peacekeeping staff, 1 Force Headquarters Support Unit composed of 180 personnel, and 1 Aeromedical Evacuation Team to the UN Peacekeeping Capability Readiness System (UNPCRS).³¹ He remarked that the Philippines is ready to increase its engagement in peacekeeping operations by allowing the deployment of military and police in any area, regardless of the security threat level. Lorenzana joined the UN's call for more women peacekeepers as he recognized their vital role in the success of peacekeeping operations. Moreover, he supports the holistic approach of the UN by committing to deploy more female peacekeepers.³²

In increasing the participation of women in uniform to peacekeeping operations, there is a need to first identify country-specific data on the barriers and challenges.³³ It is understood that increasing women's participation in peacekeeping is a global effort however, barriers and challenges faced by women are not solely due to the process implemented by the UN but by the Troops Contributing Countries (TCC).

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, one of the main factors in the low percentage of women participation in peacekeeping operations is the limited training given to serve in the UN. However, local barriers in increasing the percentage of women's participation lies within the Major Services and the dynamics in recommendation for the UN deployment. The AFP PKOC explained that there are a lot of women volunteers who would like to be deployed in UN peacekeeping operations. However, getting the recommendation from their commanders of their assigned units can be a struggle. One of the reasons for this is the limited number of women in the AFP thus, it would also be deemed unwise to let go of AFP women occupying crucial roles for their units.

The AFP PKOC as a training institution ensures equal training opportunities for both men and women in the AFP wanting to undertake UN

deployment also as part of each individual personnel in the AFP's career development plan. Relatedly, one of the common challenges faced by TCCs in increasing women's participation is the number of women in their local troops.³⁴ There is a correlation between the number of women participants in national security institutions to the number of women deployed in UN Peacekeeping operations.³⁵

STRENGTHENING AFP WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN UN PEACEKEEPING

Along with the global effort in increasing and strengthening the participation of women in UN peacekeeping operations, this paper puts forward some policy considerations to further strengthen the participation of the AFP women in UN peacekeeping efforts.

First, the defense establishment should consider pursuing executive and legislative actions that would institutionalize the Philippines' contribution to peacekeeping. The DND must create a permanent source of funding within their annual budget for peacekeeping operations. This can resolve the department's dependency for UN reimbursements to cover technical, materiel and contingent deployment costs, focus and expand peacekeeping capability development, and strengthen economic support for deployed peacekeepers. While EO 97 serves as the government's sole legal basis, DND must encourage lawmakers to create more meaningful legislation and policies that would strengthen the Philippines' commitment and capacity for international peacekeeping missions.

Second, an interagency effort towards peacekeeping is needed to alleviate the Philippine government's overreliance on the DND. If other agencies of the security sector are involved in helping the Philippines' commitment to UN peacekeeping efforts, then it will solve the defense establishment's funding problems, materiel acquisition, and can deploy civilian peacekeepers that could handle various roles in public health, socio-economic development, engineering, public services, and humanitarian efforts. Additionally, women peacekeepers must be considered for these roles due to their positive impact in peacekeeping missions.

Third, the DND should consider promoting the Philippines' efforts towards UN peacekeeping efforts within both the military establishment and the public. By doing this, it would encourage more applicants from the AFP Major Services to join peacekeeping missions, convince the defense and military leadership to invest substantial funding and resources in the AFP PKOC, and strengthening the country's role as a significant player in international peace and security. Additionally, women's positive impact in peacekeeping efforts must be recognized and advocated by the defense establishment. To encourage Filipino women in the security sector to join peacekeeping operations, the department must educate concerned agencies about UN Security Council Resolutions and national policies about the WPS agenda, strengthen support services and mechanisms for women peacekeepers, and implement gender mainstreaming efforts in the field of peacekeeping.

Finally, internal capability enhancement within the AFP should be considered to encourage more women volunteers to be deployed in UN peacekeeping operations. Gender-based concerns such as women's need in terms of uniform and other resources that would support them perform their missions better should be foreseen and considered. An AFP-Wide recruitment campaign could also be considered to ensure that every AFP women are made aware of their equal opportunity to participate in the UN peacekeeping operations.

CONCLUSION

UN peacekeeping operations aim to promote sustainable peace and security for the global community. This can be achieved more effectively and efficiently by incorporating and acknowledging the crucial role of women in uniform or as civilians. Women today are more empowered and eager to contribute to the overall welfare of the global community but many are not given the chance as they are unaware or they are hindered by technical or political challenges.

The AFP women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations is not hindered in terms of the usual gender-based challenges such as the preference of men over women in terms of skills and capabilities. But rather, they face challenges that need to be addressed both in the national and

global settings. Currently, the AFP can only fully comply with the UN's request for their additional participation in peacekeeping mission areas because the decision is controlled by the intergovernmental organization.

Though there are still local specific barriers that should be addressed, this paper draws policy recommendations for consideration that would address local barriers to women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations. The concept of increasing women's participation in UN peacekeeping operations offers a gender-responsive approach to global efforts for sustainable peace and security.

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<https://theglobalobservatory.org/2020/10/challenges-sustainably-increasing-women-participation-gender-equality-peacekeeping/>

³⁴ Lisa Sharland, "Challenges to Sustainably Increasing Women's Participation and Gender Equality in Peacekeeping," (IPI Global Observatory, 2020). Accessed 26 December 2020,

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³⁵ Martha Ghittoni, Lea Lehouck, and Callum Watson. "Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study," (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2018): 21-24, Accessed 26 December 2020, https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_GenderReport_2018_Final.pdf