Chapter 10

The Contribution of Zimbabwean Uniformed Women in Peacekeeping in Africa: Experiences From Liberia and East Timor

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to assess the contribution of Zimbabwean uniformed women in peacekeeping in Africa with specific reference to Liberia and East Timor. The study found out that despite being a key ingredient for successful operational impact in any peacekeeping mission, the contribution was not greatly appreciated due to a variety of factors. The study also noted that uniformed women peacekeepers were grappling with a plethora of challenges ranging from language and cultural barriers, a low number of female peacekeepers, gender stereotypes, to a non-family status of most United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions. The study concludes that UN member states should vigorously conduct more sustained recruitment of women into national institutions such as military, police and prisons and correctional service to increase the pool of personnel for subsequent deployment to peacekeeping duties. The UN should look at the possibility of reviewing some of its policies to reduce the negative impact caused by the prolonged absence of peacekeepers away from their families.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, the practice of peacekeeping has become an increasingly important tool for international interventions (Behr, 2011). Peacekeepers were deployed into war zones, political uprisings, humanitarian crises and natural disasters. According to Boehme (2008) building lasting peace and security requires women’s participation hence modern peacekeeping has thus evolved into multidimensional peace operations. Resultantly, the number of female police officers in U.N. peacekeeping missions around the world has also increased. Noteworthy is the passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, which remains, landmark recognition of the significance of gender issues in peacekeeping operations (Vayrynen, 2004). The resolution emphasizes the need to mainstream gender into peacekeeping operations as well as increasing the participation of female personnel in all UN peacekeeping operations. According to Vayrynen (2004), women peacekeepers have proven in all aspects of peacekeeping to perform the same functions with men.

Uniformed women from the police, military, correctional services have been deployed in all areas of peace-keeping the world over. These women have made a positive impact in their operations especially in areas of peace-building and protection of women’s rights (Boehme, 2008; Odanovic, 2010; Dharmapuri, 2013; Jennings, 2011). Bridges & Horsfall (2009) noted that women peacekeepers have proved to be role models to other women. Women from Timor Leste and Burundi acknowledged that women peacekeepers act as their role models as they inspire them to either join the local police or the military. More interesting is that literature on women and multidimensional peacekeeping missions has found that the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations brings about numerous benefits which include improved support for the local population, an improved behavior of male peacekeepers; expansion of the mission’s skills, approaches, and perspectives (Boehme, 2008). For instance, the deployment of the first ever all-female Indian Formed Police Unit in Liberia in 2007 is touted as having scored remarkable successes.

BACKGROUND

Protracted intra-state conflicts in Liberia and East Timor were marked by widespread sexual and gender-based violence, which continued in the aftermath of the civil wars and was typically accompanied by impunity for the perpetrators (Kember, 2010). In 2004, a UN report peacekeepers in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti were criticized for sexual abuse of young women in return for money, food,
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