

# “IS THE GLASS HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY – WOMEN AND THE UNITED NATIONS POLICE COMPONENT”

BY

JUDITH THORN\*

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On 6 December 2017, Judith Thorn gave a talk on ‘Women and the United Nations Police Component’ as part of the Comparative Legal Gender Studies Network-Project.

Judith Thorn started her talk by defining the term *gender* as ‘to the social characteristics or attributes and opportunities with being male or female.’ She emphasised that the term is not to be understood as a synonym for women, but rather shapes the experiences of males as well as females. Ms Thorn also presented the UN Police Gender Toolkit, which is a training package aimed at mainstreaming gender into police activities in peacekeeping operations. Gender mainstreaming is defined as ‘the process of assessing the implications for women and men in any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. [...] The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.’ Gender equality, in turn, refers to the ‘equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.’

Subsequently, Ms Thorn gave a short overview on the topic of women in the history of the UN, which started in 1946 with the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In 1975, the UN announced the ‘International Women’s Year’, which was followed by the ‘International Decade for Women’ from 1975 to 1985. The first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City in 1975, later in Copenhagen in 1980, in Nairobi in 1985 and in Beijing in 1995.

In 2000, Resolution 1325 was passed by the UN Security Council. It was the first landmark resolution on ‘Women, Peace and Security’ and the first resolution to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women. It is now included in many binding resolutions. In 2009, the UN started a global effort to increase the percentage of women in the UN police component to 20% by 2014. This goal, however, was not reached.

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\* Judith Thorn is a Research Assistant at the Chair for Public Law and International Law, Prof. Dr. Thilo Marauhn as well as a member of the research group “UN Policing – Legal Basis, Status and Directives on the Use of Force, funded by the German Foundation for Peace Research, implemented by the Chair of Public Law and International Law at the Justus Liebig University Giessen in cooperation with the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF).

For a while, the UN used all-women Formed Police Units (FPUs), an already existing model in India. Today, the UN takes a different approach by employing specialised Police Teams (SPUs), which work on sexual and gender-based violence. They usually consist of five experts.

In total, there are now almost 1,200 police women from 70 countries serving in 15 UN Peace Operations. The countries providing the most women in peacekeeping missions are Bangladesh, Rwanda, Senegal, Nepal, and Nigeria. Today, women make up 9% of the police personnel. In the German Police Forces, between 16% and 33% are women depending on the federal state.

The UN Peacekeeping missions also include POC (protection of civilian) mandates. In these mandates, the police among others provide armed patrols to accompany women and girls along water supply routes and when collecting fire wood, or provide protection and security in IDP camps.

Ms Thorn also addressed the legal implications of UN Peace Operations. There are three different layers, which apply to these operations: the law of the sending state, the law of the host state and the UN Charter. Human Rights Law such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR, the ICESCR and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women are applicable as well as internal guidelines of the UN.

Furthermore, Ms Thorn presented three case studies: one on gender reform in Liberia, another one on the national consultation with female police officers for gender mainstreaming in the Sierra Leone Police and a third one on the PIERS Model in Chad.

She also brought up the biggest obstacle for the UN regarding introducing more women in UN Peace Operations, which is the dependence upon the sending states. The UN does not have its own troops and therefore needs to rely on troop contributions from its member states. However, Ms Thorn emphasised, quantity does not equal quality and that state specific solutions are needed.

Ms Thorn concluded by presenting new developments. The current UN Secretary General António Guterres pledged to appoint equal numbers of women and men to senior positions and committed to achieving gender parity in senior appointments by 2021. He also issued a global call for nominations for candidates destined to lead peace operations and strongly encouraged member states to put forward women nominees.

Stefanie Fahlbusch