

## **End impunity for “Blue Helmets”**

At the Leuven meeting, Women in Black vigils agreed to take part in a joint action, initiated by Zene u crnom (Women in Black), Belgrade, to end impunity for sexual exploitation by UN peacekeepers (“blue helmets”).

We are asking WiB groups to take action, during the 16 days Against Violence against Women (26 November to 10 December).

If your vigil is taking part, please let us know: Stasa, Belgrade, [office@zeneucrnom.org](mailto:office@zeneucrnom.org); Sian, London, [WiBInfo@gn.apc.org](mailto:WiBInfo@gn.apc.org)

### **Ideas for actions**

- Write letters to your Ministry of Defence, (see further information, below)
- Hold a vigil on impunity and Resolution 1325 (see further information, below)

### **Background Information**

Since 1995 there have been repeated allegations that UN peace-keepers (Blue Helmets) have raped and sexually exploited women and girls in countries where the UN is supposed to be there to protect civilians.

The first cases were reported in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1995 and in the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1999. By 2012, there were reports of sexual exploitation from across 10 UN peacekeeping missions. Very few of these reports were properly investigated; many were covered up. Even when individual soldiers were investigated, they were more likely to be sent home, than prosecuted.

In October 2000, the UN passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. One of the aims was to protect women and girls during and after war, recognize women’s rights and identify the gender-specific crimes they faced during and after war, including to protect women and girls from rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and end to impunity for these crimes.

Resolution 1325 focuses on: (1) the participation of women in peace processes and indecision-making on peace; (2) the incorporation of gender in peace processes and training on gender perspective in “peacekeeping missions”; (3) the protection of women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations; (4) the incorporation of gender perspective in the UN reports and in the mechanisms used in the implementation of peace agreements.

However, the implementation of Resolution 1325 has far from reached the expectations of women’s organizations that worked so hard to get the UN to adopt it. The problem is not just the failure of UN member states to apply Resolution 1325, but the military character of the resolution itself. It militarizes feminist requests for equality: it prioritises the recruitment of women into the military and the security sector, places military power ahead of human security, and regards war and military conflict as a lasting, natural and inevitable state. Also, because Resolution 1325 has mainly been applied in countries of the south, and post-conflict “transition states” women in those countries can experience it as colonial and hegemonic.

Despite Resolution 1325, despite the UN’s “zero tolerance” policy, its groups of experts, its further resolutions, “Guidelines for Peacekeepers” and gender focal points to support the victims, women and girls in conflict or post-conflict zones are still raped, sexually assaulted, trafficked or sexually exploited in some way by the very people who were put there to protect them: UN Peacekeepers.

The main problem about the prosecution and punishment of peacekeepers is that all UN Staff, contractors and members of UN peacekeeping missions, enjoy immunity from prosecution. Although this immunity can – and has been – lifted, very few peacekeepers responsible for sexual exploitation have been tried and prosecuted; in some cases, there will only be an internal disciplinary inquiry, and in some cases no action will be taken.

In 2007 NATO agreed that their member states should adopt National Action Plans on implementing 1325, including by providing training on the status of women in war and post war situation, human rights and international law, the prevention of sexual violence and trafficking, and good conduct.

## **Take Action**

Write a letter to your Ministry of Defence, and let them know that Women in Black are campaigning for an end to immunity from prosecution for rape and sexual exploitation by UN Peacekeepers. Here are some suggestions for questions you could ask:

- What has the government done to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325?
- *[If you live in a NATO country, ask them what they have done since 2007 to implement NATO's decision on 1325]*
- What training do troops receive about their responsibility to protect, and prevent sexual violence against, women and girls?
- How does the Code of conduct cover possible sexual exploitation by soldiers on UN peacekeeping missions?
- How many of the country's troops are currently on UN peacekeeping missions and in which countries?
- Since 2000 how many soldiers have been reported as suspected of rape or other forms of sexual violence or exploitation?
- How many of these reports resulted in a criminal investigation?
- How many were prosecuted? What was the outcome?
- If they were not investigated, was there any internal disciplinary inquiry, and what were the outcomes?
- What is the government's position on immunity from prosecution for UN peacekeepers, which results in impunity - for the majority of peacekeepers suspected of sexual exploitation of women and girls they are supposed to protect?

*Other points you could make:*

- Your government, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and other
- UN resolutions, should hold all UN peacekeepers and civilian personnel to account for any form of sexual exploitation in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- UN immunity should be removed for international civilians and military personnel involved in any form of gender-based violence, especially the trafficking of human beings and sexual abuse of women and children.
- Where there is reasonable evidence of sexual exploitation, authorities should waive any provisions for immunity and open an immediate criminal investigation, with a view to prosecution in fair and transparent prosecutions;
- Training should be provided for peacekeepers in UN standards/NATO regulations which prohibit sexual exploitation and abuse, including all forms of sexual violence, and in their duty, under UN SC 1325, to ensure the protection of and respect for the human rights of women and girls, and set out in UN SC 1325.
- Ensure women's participation at all levels in peace-making processes and in post conflict societies

## **Hold a special vigil:**

*Here are some suggested messages for banners/placards for Vigils*

- Stop sexual exploitation by peacekeepers
- End immunity/impunity for Blue Helmets
- Stop rape and violence against women by peacekeeping forces

If you want to make a leaflet to give out to the public, use the articles and resources in the *further information* section.

You could also make a shorter and simpler version of the letter and print out copies for members of the public, and - during your vigil - one or two women could ask people to sign them; afterwards send them to your Ministry of Defence.

## **Further information**

*Against impunity! For the abolition of the immunity of members of peacekeeping missions of the UN*, Women in Black Belgrade, prepared for Leuven workshop.

*Immunity and Impunity for UN Peacekeeping Forces*, Notes for workshop at Leuven. Includes details of allegations against peacekeepers in different countries since 1999, and measures taken by the UN to prevent and protect women from sexual violence.

*NATO and 1325* Notes for workshop at Leuven. Includes details of European NATO countries and the implementation of UN SC 1325.

*NATO and 1325 (talk)*, Notes for talk given at NATO counter conference, Cynthia Cockburn.

*Women say no to NATO!*, Statement at NATO counter-conference, Women against NATO, September 2014.

*Immunity and impunity in peace keeping: the protection gap*, Madeline Rees  
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/madeleine-rees/immunity-and-impunity-in-peacekeeping->