

Session 5: The armed forces as peacekeepers and peace-enforcers: implications for ombuds institutions

The evolving role of the armed forces in peacekeeping & peace enforcement:

In today's globalizing world, the armed forces operate in an ever more diverse environment, carrying out missions in culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse regions. In particular, overseas military interventions under the guise of maintaining or promoting peace have increased both in the number of operations undertaken and the amount of soldiers deployed. Among these, peacekeeping operations (PKOs) represent one of the most important categories of international missions, making them particularly relevant to the study of the evolving role of the armed forces in multinational operations. As of today, fourteen UN Peacekeeping operations around the world and three peace operations conducted by the AU in the African continent illustrate the growing relevance of this mechanism as a tool of international crisis response.

As demand for international military cooperation increases, however, the armed forces have not always been able to respond efficiently and effectively. Mandate implementation can be hindered by slow, unresponsive service delivery, a lack of trust with Member States and with staff, inadequate resourcing, ineffective implementation of mandates, and a lack of transparency and accountability. Additionally, national differences between the armed forces can strongly affect international military cooperation. Cultural and institutional differences, as well as variations in language, rules of engagement and logistics, have the potential of hampering the efficiency of these operations. This can ultimately result in tensions and divergences which risk undermining the cohesion of a multinational force and the conduct of its operations.

Ombuds Institutions:

Ombuds institutions can play a meaningful role in ensuring that challenges to international military cooperation are overcome, with positive implications for the well-being of their armed forces individual members and for the overall successful implementation of the international missions that their personnel are deployed for.

- ❖ *Technical support:* As the armed forces are met with new mandates and expectations, they may find themselves unable to deliver results due to inadequate expertise and technical support. Ombuds institutions for the armed forces should monitor the personnel's ability to carry out these new functions, and intervene to ensure that the personnel are provided with adequate training and equipment to fulfil these roles. For example, promoting trainings that are designed in parallel with the ones undertaken by the armed forces of other countries can help prevent situations of imbalance in technical knowledge and expertise between personnel carrying out peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations. To further harmonization, opportunities for training in foreign languages are also desirable, as claimed by the German armed forces in a complaint to the German Parliamentary Commissioner regarding the lack of such opportunities.

- ❖ *Enabling dialogue:* In any kind of international operation, with forces drawn from a variety of societies and thus from a range of different strategic, doctrinal and military cultures, one of the conditions for success will be the meshing of these cultures into a coherent whole. A source of tension for the coordination of the multinational coalition against the Iraqi forces in the Gulf War, for instance, concerned whether women should be allowed to participate in military operations and, if so, in what roles, leading to a situation of tension between divergent cultural understandings of women's position in society. In addition, mutual understanding of concerns, mandates, rules of engagement as well as different interpretations of the meaning of the terms used is essential to succeed in international missions. Ombuds institutions can play a key role in ensuring that these differences are overcome and that the cohesion necessary in these operations is maintained.

- ❖ *Complaints function:* As members of the armed forces of different countries find themselves operating side by side in difficult and complex environments, the possibility of misconduct cannot be excluded. For this reason, ombuds institutions should ensure the presence of well-functioning mechanisms enabling members their own armed forces to file complaints against personnel of other nationalities, and vice versa. Cooperation with ombuds institutions of the other countries concerned on how to handle the complaint is critical to guarantee a solution which leaves all sides satisfied. Germany and the Netherlands have paved the way for the integration of their respective armed forces. As part of this process, the Dutch Air-Mobile Brigade has been placed under the German Rapid Forces Division, while the German Naval Protection Battalion has been integrated into the Royal Netherlands Marines Corps. An effort in this direction was undertaken by the integration of the German and Dutch naval units,

Questions for discussion:

1. How are the armed forces trained before being deployed to peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations?
2. Can members of the armed forces of other countries file complaints with your office for the behaviour of your armed forces personnel during joint operations? If so, what course of action does your office have the mandate to take?
3. Does your office consult with other existing ombuds institutions on matters of common interest during international missions? What are the main challenges?