Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations
South Africa Case Study

By
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“In my work in Alexandra township and in Africa, I have become convinced that what we as Africans need is to go back to ubuntu, a philosophy common to all our peoples, regardless of language or ethnicity. This philosophy says that no matter what a person has done wrong, there are no dustbins for people. At worst they must be disciplined. At best they must be redeemed and rehabilitated.”

-Patience Pashe, Chairperson, Women for Peace, South Africa
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to all those whose names are listed at Annex A, for giving generously of their time, in South Africa, and at the United Nations headquarters to participate in this research. I am especially indebted to Angela King, United Nations Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, and former UNOMSA Chief of Mission, for her support and encouragement. Thenjiwe Mtintso, Deputy Secretary General of the African National Congress (ANC) has been a constant source of ideas and inspiration in the field of gender and peace. I am fortunate to have served on the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa at the same time as UNOMSA. For this I thank the former Secretary General of the Commonwealth, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, and former head of the Political Affairs Division of the Commonwealth, Max Gaylard, for the trust they placed in me. This report would not have been possible within the tight time frame without the assistance of my colleague at Gender Links, Zohra Khan, who helped to trace and set up appointments with those interviewed in South Africa. The research is dedicated to my late mother, Joy Lowe, who spent her life working with other women for peace and development; and who fulfilled her life wish of living long enough to witness the transition to democracy in South Africa.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The peace process in South Africa defies neat categories. In the first instance, apartheid - the system of legislated discrimination by a white settler minority against the indigenous black population, though it had variations in other countries of the region - was unique to South Africa. Inherent in such a system were the seeds of untold civil conflict and violence.

The fact that South Africa did not erupt in a bloodbath is partly due to the military might of the state, and its intimidation of neighbouring countries, which made it virtually impossible to wage a guerilla war.

But the South African “miracle” is also in large measure a tribute to its diverse peoples who, recognizing that for better or for worse they were destined to live together, devised sophisticated conflict resolution mechanisms at national and local level. While the roles of such well known figures as the country’s first democratically-elected leader Nelson Mandela and former president F.W. De Klerk will find a lasting place in world history, the peace processes at local level, through the National Peace Accord, have not received the same recognition for providing the foundation without which the “miracle” could not have happened.

A key lesson for peace making is the fact that at all levels, it was a South African owned and driven process. Thus, despite the prominent place that South Africa occupied within the United Nations, where apartheid had been recognized as a “crime against humanity”, when the time of reckoning came, only a small group of fifty United Nations “observers” were deployed in the country under United Nations Resolution 772 of 17 August 1992 to work in coordination with structures set up under the National Peace Accord. Observers deployed by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), the Commonwealth and the European Community complemented the United Nations Observer Mission to South Africa or UNOMSA. But, until about a month before the elections in April 1994, there were less than 200 observers in a country of 40 million people. In the run up to the elections, when the United Nations deployed an election observer mission, its presence and that of other international observers fits more the category of a preventive diplomacy exercise rather than a peacekeeping mission.

This had important implications for the composition of UNOMSA. It was deliberately low key and low budget. It is the only completely civilian United Nations mission to date. It is one of only three United Nations peace missions led by a woman, Angela King. The mission is the only one that to date has achieved a gender balance: during the first sixteen months of UNOMSA women comprised between 46 to 53 percent of the mission staff (1). Half of UNOMSA’s team leaders were women, including in the two most politically volatile provinces of KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng.

South Africa is one of the few countries where, through the local peace structures, women played a significant role in the peace process. At the political level, thanks to lobbying by the Women’s National Coalition (an umbrella of civil society organizations) and women in the political parties one out of every three delegates to the multiparty negotiations had to be a woman. The constitution has strong gender provisions. As a
result of the one-third quota of the ruling African National Congress, women comprise one third of the legislature and of the cabinet. South Africa is especially unique in the variety of non-traditional posts held by women in the cabinet: including the foreign affairs, and deputy minister of defense portfolios.

Because of the strong gender links that run through the peace making, peace keeping (or preventive diplomacy) and peace building phases, the country is a relevant case study for the “Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations Study”, despite the fact that South Africa does not fit the traditional peacekeeping mold. The research is based on an extensive literature search as well as 24 interviews (see Annex A). Sixteen of these (nine with women and seven with men) were conducted in New York, with Ms King and former UNOMSA members still working at the United Nations. Eight interviews (three with men and five with women) were conducted in South Africa with a cross section of political representatives and former officials of the peace structures. Among the key findings are as follows:

- At the time that the mission was mounted, the United Nations had no clear policy or guidelines with regard to the gender composition of peacekeeping operations. The fact that the mission was entirely civilian played an important enabling role in terms of achieving gender balance, given the paucity of women in the military. The fact that the mission was largely drawn from the middle ranks of the United Nations bureaucracy (P3 and P4) was also a factor, as there is a greater preponderance of women at these levels in the United Nations. Although the Deputy Head of Mission, Ismat Steiner, says that gender was not a conscious factor in the selection, King maintains that it was because she had seen the positive effects of gender balance in the Namibia mission. Several women in the mission confirmed having been personally contacted by King to join UNOMSA.

- Women members of UNOMSA commented that the mission drew strength from “feminine” traits which—though by no means exclusive to women may more readily be found in women because of their socialisation. These include a concern for the wider needs of the community; shedding symbols of status and power; networking; sharing information; making intuitive decisions; and a hands on approach. South Africans interviewed were impressed by the low-key nature of the UN observers (for example the fact that they drove simple cars and did not have drivers).

- King's leadership style played a decisive role in shaping the mission; and some of these traits were attributed to gender in the interviews. On the one hand, she was regarded as strict and she concedes that she probably was not seen as a “warm” person. However, she commanded the respect of her team and of South Africans across the political spectrum: being seen as hard working, committed, a good listener, and bringing to bear a consultative style. King interacted closely with observers, attending the daily briefing meeting. This gave her a “hands on” reputation and grasp for what was happening on the ground, while still delegating considerable responsibility to team leaders. Initially nervous about the interpretation of the “observer” mandate King became more at ease with this and her leadership style as time went on. Observers (and especially those who have been on other UN missions) saw UNOMSA as far less hierarchical than the usual UN operation,
providing space for personal growth, especially among the women observers, many of whom were involved in routine administrative jobs back at headquarters.

- Several interviewees commented on the contrast between King’s style and that of Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi who led the final phase of the mission and the electoral operation. An entourage of male advisers surrounded Brahimi and he and seldom attended staff briefing meetings. Many interviewees felt that the appointment of a male head in the final phase was a personal slight to King; and had gender connotations.

- Within South Africa, there was an interesting gender divide on the significance of having a female head of mission for the United Nations operation. Men cited the fact that King was black as being far more significant than her sex; while women saw King as a role model.

- The gender balance in the mission was seen by UNOMSA observers as helping to bring “normality” within the mission; as one observer put it: “locker room talk was not tolerated.” Among South Africans, there are few of the negative connotations of indiscipline and abuse of local women that have tarnished peacekeeping operations elsewhere.

- In the work of UNOMSA, King deliberately paired observers according to race and sex. Given the South African context, many observers said they felt the pairing along racial lines probably had a more significant impact than gender. In general, they felt that they were seen first and foremost as blue jackets; then as white or black; then as male or female. This observation is corroborated by the perceptions of local interviewees. A further complication is that the UN teams tended to work in teams with largely male dominated OAU and Commonwealth observer teams.

- However, both observers and local monitors believed strongly that the women from the UN, and women peacekeepers generally, bring important strengths to bear to such operations. Local women, for example, felt more comfortable talking to women observers than to men about violence in general and specifically about the less publicized but rampant gender based violence that they experienced.

- Observers interviewed differed in their approaches to consciously seeking to draw out the views and participation of local women. Some said that to do so would have been going beyond their brief as observers. But those who came from activist backgrounds gave themselves more latitude in the interpretation of the mandate and made it a point to raise gender issues: for example, when the voices of women in the local peace structures were scarcely heard.

- This dilemma underpins a more fundamental issue: the fact that observers received limited and, in their view and that of South Africans, inadequate briefing. What briefing they received had no gender component to it. To the extent gender arose at all in discussions during the mission, it was incidental, rather than integral to the processes. King and Steiner believe that if the mission were to be repeated today, when there is a far greater awareness of gender issues in the United Nations and in the world generally, there would be a different approach. Gender may have been systematically built into selection criteria, training, the interpretation of the mandate and evaluation of the mission.
For the reasons cited above, it is difficult to assess with any degree of precision the extent to which gender balance in the UNOMSA mission impacted on the longer term. King notes that while she addressed a number of women's gatherings, she was conscious of the need to maintain her profile in the mainstream as her task demanded. South African women were certainly in the frontline of lobbying for representation at the multiparty negotiations; for strong gender provisions in the constitution and (in the case of the ANC) for a quota for women in the elections. In all these processes, however, South African women drew inspiration from developments at an international level, and UNOMSA was tangible evidence of the emerging new world. Thus, even if only at a symbolic level, having gender balance in UNOMSA, and having a woman head of mission helped to bolster the women’s movement.

The findings support the importance of systematically building gender considerations into peacekeeping operations: from devising the mandate; to the briefing and training of peacekeepers; to engagement with the local population; through to post conflict reconstruction. The paper ends with a series of recommendations on how this may be achieved. It also strongly recommends further research on the local peace processes in South Africa, and especially the involvement of women in these. Quickly forgotten once peace was achieved, the National Peace Accord, which has no precedent anywhere else in the world, yet laid the foundation for sustainable peace in South Africa, is surely one that deserves further inquiry by those grappling with the challenges of world peace.
INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At the dawn of the new millennium, nothing is as important- or as elusive- as world peace. The single most important objective of the United Nations, peace has been recognised as central to the attainment of gender equality, and gender equality as central to the attainment of peace, in both the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

Five years after the adoption of the BPFA at the Fourth World Conference on Women:
- The interstate wars of the Cold War years have been succeeded by gruesome intra state wars of the kind witnessed in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola and Somalia.
- The increased intimacy between aggressors and victims has witnessed a frightening increase in sexual violence as a weapon of war.
- Women involved in liberation struggles in many developing countries have literally and figuratively gone back to the kitchen. They seldom stay in the military or in the decision- making ranks that determine matters of war and peace in their country.
- Participation of women in decision- making remains lowest in the areas of foreign affairs, diplomacy, defense, and the military.
- The representation of women in UN peacekeeping missions remains dismal, with a close correlation between the extent to which the mission is of a civilian nature, and the extent of representation by women. There have only been three women heads of UN peace missions: Margaret Anstee in Angola; Angela King in South Africa and Elizabeth Rehn in Bosnia. To the extent that UNOMSA is not regarded as a peacekeeping mission, there have only been two women heads of peacekeeping missions.

Gender and peace: some theoretical considerations

Two reasons have been put forward as to why women should be involved in matters of war and peace:
- Basic principles of equality, citizenship and non- discrimination.
- The distinct perspective that women bring to peace and security, which can serve to enhance those processes and therefore make them more effective.

There are controversies inherent in both these arguments. With regard to equal participation by women in the military, some women's groups have argued that this is simply buying into the male war culture. Many women's groups are campaigning for reductions in military expenditure. On the other hand, the military is a major employer in many countries. For the most part militaries are not at war and could be contributing to peacekeeping and development objectives. The counter argument is that unless women involve themselves in the military, its culture and orientation is not likely to change.

With regard to the distinct perspective that women bring to matters of war and peace, there are those who question if, by assuming that men are aggressive and women are pacifists we are not simply reinforcing gender stereotypes. There are empirical studies
that show that "women are less militaristic than men, more concerned with the preservation of peace, and more opposed to increased militarization or nuclear energy" (Report of the Secretary General: "From Nairobi to Beijing").

Perhaps a more useful approach to this matter is to say whether or not non-aggression and peace are feminine qualities, they are qualities that we desperately need. The stereotypes of

- men = aggression = war = killing and those of
- women = conciliation = peace = prosperity need to be collapsed into a human equation of
- people = strive for conciliation = search for peace = work for prosperity.

To quote Ann Tickner in her book "Gender and International Relations": "Even if a better future is not female, a human future that rejects the rigid separation of public and private values and the distinctions between women and men requires that the good qualities of both are equally honoured and made available to all."

**Access, participation and transformation**

The experience of lobbying for the increased participation of women in politics has shown that the numbers game is important, but not enough if we are to genuinely transform institutions and societies. To analyze women's involvement in peace processes this paper borrows from the work of Thenjiwe Mtintso, Deputy Secretary General of the African National Congress in South Africa; former Chair of the Commission on Gender Equality; and former Commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the liberation arm of the ANC. In a Chapter on "Women in Politics: A Conceptual Framework" contained in the book "Redefining Politics: South African Women and Democracy", Mtintso distinguishes between access, participation and transformation.

**Access:** Mtintso endorses the UN view that women must comprise a critical mass of at least thirty percent, especially at decision-making level, if their voice is to be heard, but cautions that "access only delivers numbers."

**Participation:** Women's participation in male dominated institutions is often inhibited by their patriarchal norms - for example, meeting times, language and the old boy networks. Thus women may enter such institutions only to find themselves marginalised; in the case of the military, by being cast in supportive rather than action roles. It thus becomes necessary to identify the barriers to effective participation by women to assist them in overcoming these, either through empowering the women or transforming the institutions.

**Transformation:** Effective participation by women paves the way for transformation of two kinds:

- **Internal:** Gender sensitisation of the institution transforms its patriarchal character.
- **External:** The transformed institution becomes an instrument for transforming the rest of society; in the case of parliament through legislation; of the military and peacekeeping, through gender sensitive operations that help to give birth to a more equitable society in the post conflict era.
Peace processes
Our understanding of peace has evolved from one of simply stopping wars to working towards preventing them through preventive diplomacy and holistic approaches to reconstruction, that strive to create a lasting peace.

- **Preventive diplomacy:** Involves using early warning systems that make it possible to diffuse tension before it erupts.
- **Peace making:** Negotiating peace settlements is invariably backed by the power (or threat) of military enforcement; rather than building on indigenous peace movements. The weakness of this approach is that military force, though sometimes inevitable, often exacerbates the vicious cycle of violence.
- **Peacekeeping:** Requires the consent of all parties, whereas peace enforcement does not. In peacekeeping, force is minimal and used for self-defense; peace enforcement employs coercive force. Peace keeping has been expanded into activities such as election monitoring and humanitarian relief, without excluding the use of military force.
- **Peace building:** This is in two phases: immediate reconstruction, repatriation of refugees, demobilization of combatants etc; as well as the longer term processes of elections, establishing democratic institutions and culture. Moving from conflict to reconstruction and linking this to sustainable development is a key thrust of the UN in the new millennium.

Framework for bringing a gender perspective to all peace processes
The framework below applies Mtintso’s access- participation and transformation arguments to the different phases of the peace process.

**TABLE ONE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN IN PEACE PROCESSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>TRANSFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY</strong></td>
<td>Women not represented in foreign service or UN missions; need for targets to address this</td>
<td>Practices not conducive to participation by women, eg regulations on spouses in the foreign service, need to be reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEACE MAKING</strong></td>
<td>Women not well represented in diplomacy</td>
<td>Culture of secrecy; horse trading; bargaining excludes women; needs to be reviewed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEACE KEEPING</strong></td>
<td>Few women in the military; UN battles to get troops for peace keeping- let alone women</td>
<td>Sexual harassment; UN peacekeepers guilty of VAW; Macho culture; Negative side effects of UN missions- prostitution, HIV AIDS, UN babies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEACE BUILDING</strong></td>
<td>More women involved- but often on voluntary basis; reinforces the unpaid labour of women in the “care” economy.</td>
<td>Women not represented in the decision making structures therefore can’t participate effectively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from the work of Thenjiwe Mtintso in “Redifining Politics”, Commission on Gender Equality, 1999*
UNOMSA aimed to quell violence so that internally driven political negotiations could continue. It was thus an exercise in preventive diplomacy.

Access for women observers was facilitated by the fact that it was a civilian mission; that selection and recruitment took place at the middle ranks where there are more women; and by having a woman head of mission. Participation was encouraged by the leadership style of the woman head of mission which allowed women observers to serve in leadership positions regardless of their rank and to realize their full potential; as well as through having a critical mass of women which created a healthy and non-sexist working environment. Transformation came about internally, in the creation of a conducive working environment for men and women; and externally, in strengthening the hand of the women’s movement, even if only in indirect ways by showing that men and women could work together in the traditionally macho area of peace making. While it would be impossible to attribute the tremendous strides that have been made in South Africa during the peace building phase to the mere presence of a gender balanced UNOMSA team, this is viewed, especially by South African women, as a contributory factor. These links are illustrated in the table below:

### TABLE TWO: WOMEN IN THE PEACE PROCESSES IN SOUTH AFRICA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEACE KEEPING/ PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY</th>
<th>ACCESS</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>TRANSFORMATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UN mission all civilian; initially all UN staff; woman Chief of Mission; 53 percent women until actual election when this dropped to 25 percent with secondments from member countries; worked alongside local peace structures</td>
<td>Equal number of women and men team leaders; women played vital and visible role; helped to encourage participation by local women.</td>
<td>Mission illustrated the value of “feminine traits” eg patience, caring, sharing information, networking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PEACE MAKING</strong></td>
<td><strong>PEACE BUILDING</strong></td>
<td><strong>TRANSFORMATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA women pressed for quota in negotiations</td>
<td>Women constituted 10 percent of the armed forces</td>
<td>Initiatives in place to transform the patriarchal nature of parliament, the armed forces, cabinet: eg meeting hours, family friendly policies; sexual harassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical mass of women facilitated active participation</td>
<td>Women constitute 24 % of cabinet and 61 % of Deputy Ministers; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Deputy Minister of Defence are women</td>
<td>Reduction in Defense spending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong gender provisions in the Constitution</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adoption of gender budgeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from the work of Thenjiwe Mtintso in “Redefining Politics”, Commission on Gender Equality, 1999.
The central theme of this paper is that South Africa provides strong evidence that systematically building gender considerations into all phases of peace processes, in a way that transcends mere access to transforming gender relations, is a powerful tool both for securing peace and advancing gender equality in conflict situations.

**CONTEXT: PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY**

The deployment of UNOMSA in South Africa has been described by its Chief of Mission, Angela King, as the "first true example of preventive diplomacy" (2) that the United Nations has engaged in. Preventive diplomacy in the case of South Africa involved quelling politically-related violence so that negotiations could proceed: a kind of parallel combination of peacekeeping and peacemaking. The role of the United Nations and other international observers was to work with local peace structures in a visible way to keep the peace; while providing behind-the-scenes support and encouragement to the political negotiations. In practice it was difficult to separate these two processes into neat or sequential categories: lasting peace could not precede a political settlement, yet high levels of political violence were frequently used as an excuse for walk outs from negotiations by political parties. Repeatedly, the observer missions emphasized that they were a mere holding operation and that talks had to proceed at all costs.

As will be apparent in the following paragraphs, while the preventive diplomacy mission was headed by a woman and had a strong gender balance, the UN initiatives relating to political negotiations, for example the Vance mission, and the final electoral observer mission, were headed by men. Whether by accident or design, this sort of division reinforces the gender stereotypes around women not being fit to engage in high-level negotiations. However, to the extent that the United Nation's role in the political negotiations themselves was so peripheral it is difficult to make a meaningful assessment of what difference this made.

This section provides a brief sketch of the political background and context for UNOMSA. International pressure in the form of sanctions; mounting internal resistance and the indirect reassurances to the white minority government in South Africa as a result of the successful, United Nations-led transition to independence in Namibia, contributed to the release of Nelson Mandela in February 1990 and unbanning of political organisations by the last white minority leader, F.W. De Klerk.

A series of agreements and legislative reforms paved the way for the first multiparty negotiations called the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) that ended in deadlock over the composition of the proposed constitution making body. Further negotiations stalled over mounting political violence between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party, with evidence of state complicity.

**Violence in South Africa**

Although white South Africa's military might precluded a full scale civil war by the black majority population, violence was endemic to apartheid. In 1992, the Human Rights Commission, an independent non-governmental organization, estimated that politically motivated violence accounted for 3,600 deaths, or an average of ten deaths daily; 6000 injuries and tens of thousands of displaced and homeless persons. With a homicide rate
of 50 to 100 000 (compared to 9 homicides per 100 000 in the US; and 1 per 100 000 in Netherlands) South Africa had the reputation of being one of the most violent countries in the world. The first report of the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa identified several sources of violence (3):

- A deeply rooted culture, in black and white society that uses violence to resolve conflicts within the family.
- The huge gap between rich and poor (South Africa is often described as first and third world living side by side in microcosm and claiming one of the most uneven distributions of income in the world).
- Crime committed by unemployed youth.
- Easy access to fire arms.
- The complete breakdown in the criminal justice system; and the lack of credibility of the South African Police seen as an arm of the oppressive state.
- A rise in organized crime in areas like drugs, gambling, prostitution, weapon procurement and taxi wars.
- Political rivalry and electioneering which fed on the underlying discontent breeding an atmosphere of intolerance and one in which violence is seen as a legitimate way of resolving problems. These included various armed formations that often threatened to destabilize the peace: the ANC’s guerilla arm Umkhonto we Sizwe; IFP war-lords or vigilante groups, the Pan African Congress’ Army for the People’s Liberation (APLA), and right wing groups.
- State-sponsored violence. A report released in March 1994 by the Goldstone Commission (see below) implicated top South African police officers and members of the IFP in gun running and political violence. Both reports appeared to confirm suspicions concerning the existence of a “third force” and its involvement in instigating political violence.

Seventy percent of the political violence occurred in the densely populated Wfitwatersrand/ Vaal region around Johannesburg and Pretoria; and the IFP stronghold of province of Kwa Zulu Natal.

The National Peace Accord
In a bid to end the violence, 26 parties and concerned groups signed the National Peace Accord (NPA) in September 1991. This consisted of a 33-page document with a preamble and ten chapters signed by leaders of a cross section of South Africans with a vision for a new democracy and peace. The National Peace Accord set out the principles of the accord; codes of conduct for political parties and security forces; issues of socio-economic reconstruction; the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry into Violence and Intimidation (or so-called Goldstone Commission); National Peace Secretariat (NPS); regional and local dispute resolution committees.

The NPA had no precedent internationally. While special forums have been created to settle disputes peacefully elsewhere in the world, none have had the same country-wide reach and formal endorsement of government and major political parties as the NPA. UNOMSA member Kevin Kennedy observed: “what kept South Africa afloat was that everyone had too much to lose if it went off the rails. Down to the most deprived township there was this implicit understanding that South Africa was too great an asset to throw away- if only for selfish reasons.”
For all its shortcomings, which will be explored in greater detail later in the paper, the NPA structures provided a local framework and counter-part that were critical to the success of the mission. As Antonio Cubeiro, a UNOMSA member put it: “we were able to be successful because South Africans were ready to make a leap to find a peaceful solution. The infrastructure was geared towards peace.”

**International involvement**

South Africa had a complex relationship with the international community. On the one hand, the United Nations, Commonwealth and OAU had championed the sanctions campaign. The ANC, the main liberation movement, viewed the international community as a friend and ally. The white minority government led by the National Party (NP), and the IFP, the main black rival party, viewed the international community with suspicion, seeing them as “friends” of the ANC. On the other hand, all South African parties were under economic and psychological pressure to free the country from its international isolation.

Given the extent of suspicion and tension, South Africa needed outside sources to turn to for advice. Yet the one unifying feature of South Africans, borne out of recognition of a common destiny and a discomfort with foreign involvement across the political spectrum, was the desire to ensure that South African remained in the driving seat.

In mid 1992, following the Boipatong massacre and related incidents of violence, the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali dispatched Cyrus Vance and Virendra Dayal, former Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, to hold talks with the political parties in South Africa on how to end violence and create conditions for negotiations. On Vance’s recommendation, he also dispatched a small team of United Nations staff members to observe a week of mass action organized by the ANC that August. Based on the Vance report, the Secretary General recommended to the Security Council that the United Nations make available 30 observers in South Africa to work closely with the National Peace Secretariat, to further the purposes of the Accord.

UNOMSA was established in terms of Security Council resolution 772 of 17 August 1992. This authorized the Secretary General to:

> “deploy, as a matter of urgency, United Nations observers in South Africa, in a manner and in such numbers as he determined necessary to address effectively the areas of concern noted in his report to the Council, in co-ordination with the structures set up under the National Peace Accord.”

The resolution further invited the Organisation of Africa Unity, Commonwealth, and European Community to consider deploying their own observers in South Africa in co-ordination with the United Nations and the structures set up by the National Peace Accord.

The advance team of the United Nations observers authorized by Security Council Resolution 772 arrived on 13 September 1992. The Chief of Mission, Angela King, then Director, Staff Administration and Training Division, Office of Human Resource
Management, arrived on 23 September 1992 and was followed by the full initial contingent of 50 observers. This number was extended to 100 in early 1994 to serve as the nucleus for the activities of UNOMSA in the South African electoral process.

In a book on the South African transition entitled “The Small Miracle”, Chris Landsberg comments: “the dispatch of observers is a low level of international involvement in domestic conflicts... Thus, while the observer mission did reduce to some extent the South African government’s sole control over domestic peace keeping, it largely recognized the primacy of domestic agencies such as the National Peace Accord, and therefore sought a secondary role in maintaining public order.” (4)

In September 1992, the Secretary General appointed Dayal to undertake a second visit to South Africa as his special envoy; followed in December 1992 by Ambassador Tom Vraalsen, Assistant Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and former Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations. The two held discussions with a range of political parties and reviewed the work of UNOMSA.

With the indirect nudging of the international community, but again responding largely to internal dynamics, 26 political parties regrouped at Johannesburg’s World Trade Centre in April 1993 to resume negotiations that, for want of a formally agreed name, came to be known as the Multiparty Negotiating Process (MNC). In July 1993, the Conservative Party and IFP withdrew from the talks, protesting against the “sufficient consensus” mechanism used to take decisions. They were later joined by the nominally independent homelands of Ciskei and Bophuthatswana in an alliance called the Concerned South Africa Group.

While bilateral talks continued to woo these parties back to the table, the multilateral talks continued, culminating in agreement on transitional arrangements to South Africa’s first full democratic elections. These provided for two phases: a transitional period in which the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) would supervise key arms of government with a bearing on free and fair elections scheduled for 27 April 1994; and elections to a Constituent Assembly that would finalise the constitution and serve as the country’s parliament until elections in 1999.

At its first meeting on 7 December 1993, the South African Transitional Executive Council requested that the UN provide a “sufficient” number of international observers to monitor the electoral process. On 13 December 1993, the Secretary General advised the President of the Security Council of his intention to appoint Mr Lakhdar Brahimi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, as his Special Representative to South Africa. King became Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General.

The Security Council extended UNOMSA’s mandate in January 1994 to include observation of the elections, including the actions of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC); freedom of organization, movement and expression during the electoral campaign. In the period January to April 1994- the month of the elections- the number of observers rose to 2527 including 102 observers from the OAU, 322 from the EU and 118 from the Commonwealth (5). The main task for running and monitoring the
elections rested with the IEC; as one UNOMSA member put it, “the IEC was referee while the UN was linesman.”

The Concerned Group of South Africa, which was holding out for a more federal constitution, remained outside the TEC. But Ciskei broke ranks and joined the TEC in early 1994. In a bid to woo the other members, and at the urging of the government and ANC, the MNC’s negotiating council reconvened in February to approve a series of amendments including strengthening the powers of the nine provinces. The right wing Freedom Front yielded and registered a party to contest the elections minutes before a midnight deadline. Violence erupted in Bophuthatswana when right wing forces went in to prop up the tottering regime against popular uprisings. The violence was contained and responsibility for the territory assumed by the TEC.

Until days before the elections, mounting tensions between the ANC and IFP, further fuelled by the independent findings that the government had been fanning the violence, seemed destined to derail elections in the troubled Kwa Zulu Natal province. In an attempt to break the deadlock, and in the only time during South Africa’s transition to democracy that foreign mediators stepped in, seven (all male) international mediators including Henry Kissinger and Lord Carrington arrived in South Africa on an abortive mission.

Following a further intense round of consultations, this time involving a Kenyan mediator assisted by well placed business sources in South Africa, the IFP made a dramatic turn about just a week before the elections and decided to contest the elections. This entailed some bending of the rules and hectic last minute preparations by the IEC, including placing an IFP sticker at the bottom of the ballot papers that had already been printed.

Fears of a resurgence of violence rose when a car bomb exploded in Johannesburg near ANC headquarters on 24 April 1994, followed by a spate of cross country bombings in which 21 people died and 200 were injured. On 26 April 1994, the day of special voting, a bomb, in which no one was killed, went off at Johannesburg airport. Bar these incidents, the accommodation shown to the IFP at the eleventh hour paved the way for a relatively calm election and for the advent of democracy in South Africa.

This research is concerned with the gender dimensions of the “preventive diplomacy” phase of UNOMSA and with its role in “observing violence”, rather than the electoral mission, which does not fall within the terms of a peacekeeping operation. However, to the extent that there were differences in gender dynamics between the two phases that raise issues relevant to the research, these are examined in the paper.

ELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

Because of the non-interventionist and non-military nature of UNOMSA, this was an entirely UN staff and civilian mission. Due to time pressures, UNOMSA was a case of “crisis recruitment”, as one member put it. Several of those who served on the mission recall receiving urgent requests giving them less than a week to prepare. A core group of about seven observers had been involved in working on the anti apartheid campaign within the UN, but the majority had no knowledge of the
country. However, as Gertrude Blake, a UNOMSA member from Sierra Leone, and later team leader for KwaZulu Natal, put it, for most UN staffers, and Africans in particular, “being asked to serve in South Africa was like a once-in-a-life dream”.

At the time, no rules existed with regard to the gender composition of the team. Ismat Steiner, Deputy Head of Mission assisted Angela King in selecting candidates. Noting the pressure he is under now to balance the gender scales in the section of the UN that he heads, Steiner says he cannot remember gender ever being talked about, or being a conscious factor in the selection process. King concedes that if such a selection were taking place today, gender would feature far more prominently- “over the last five to six years the UN has greatly evolved its strong mandate with regard to gender equality, and introduced gender sensitivity training for peacekeepers. We see the UN Security Council not as a victim but a positive actor. Gender features in the Terms of Reference for missions; as well as selection and recruitment procedures.”

The gender break down of UNOMSA by gender and rank is illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
<th>% FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P5-USG</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1-P4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>41 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS1-6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>42.9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN Field Operations Division, 1993

Two factors facilitated the comparatively high level of women on the team. Apart from the civilian nature of the mission, the decision that observers be recruited from the P3 and P4 “middle ranks” of the UN, where- as one UNOMSA member put it “the talent pool (between men and women) is more easily balanced” - paved the way for a strong presence of women.

King maintains that this strong presence of women was also “a conscious policy on my side. I had seen it work in Namibia. I had been director of recruitment for six years. I knew a lot of staff in all the duty stations. At the beginning, up to 1994 when the election observers started to come in (and Brahimi took over) I was able to influence the gender composition of the team.”

A woman member of UNOMSA said she had been more conscious of gender as a factor in her being chosen to serve in Namibia than in South Africa. But three former UNOMSA women members confirmed that they had personally been approached by King and asked to serve. “I had worked with King on a recruitment mission (in her UN headquarter job),” one noted. “She hand picked women that she trusted.”

The contrast between the gender composition of the first phase of the mission and the electoral observer mission, in which only 21 percent of recruits were women, and where King had no direct hand in selection, lends credence to the argument that having a woman at the helm helps to ensure gender balance.
Certainly, the choice of team leaders - the area in which King had complete discretion - supports this view. Those interviewed, and especially those who have since served on other missions where women are relegated to lower ranks, believed that it is no coincidence that half the UNOMSA team leaders were women and that women headed the teams in the two most difficult areas: the East Rand in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal or PWV area; and the troubled Kwa Zulu Natal province. King’s political advisor Muna Ndulo said of the women team leaders: “they were chosen purely and deservedly on merit. But the difference is that the head of mission gave them the chance to prove themselves which they may not have had on other missions.” This is certainly the view of Jan Thompson, a UN conference editor who distinguished herself as team leader of the explosive East Rand (see box one).

**BOX ONE: FROM CONFERENCE EDITOR TO PEACEKEEPER**

When Jan Thompson, who had worked for 37 years in the conference editing section of the United Nations, received a call asking her to join UNOMSA she responded: “you must have got the wrong person, the wrong Thompson.” She was wrong: King had specifically earmarked her. According to the UNOMSA Chief of Mission: “I knew Jan as an editor and I knew her to be a calm, thoughtful, professional person, and I believed these would be useful qualities, albeit in a very different setting.”

“Observing” violence in the politically volatile East Rand was to prove, in Thompson’s words, “miles away from editing conference papers in New York. I came straight from my desk. I had no training; I had to rely on my instincts.”

Piroshaw Camay, Chairperson of the Thokoza Peace Committee, one of those served by Thompson and her team recalls that she was, “totally unprepared” and initially “had no understanding of the complexity of the mandate.” Thompson, however, proved to be a quick study, gaining respect from the local community and her team for her solid judgement, bravery and commitment.

Eighty percent of the violence in the heavily urban Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal area occurred in the East Rand, and much of this in just two townships: Thokoza and Katlehong. The area has the largest number of hostels- grisly male residences that are a sad relic of apartheid and the migrant labour system. Violence was rife in and around these hostels, with dwellers sometimes unable to go to work for fear of their lives. Large parts of the townships were no go areas; IFP and ANC supporters had been forced to desert their dwellings. Relations with the police were especially tense with numerous allegations of secret torture chambers.

In the time that Thompson served in the East Rand, the Chairperson of the Thokoza Peace Committee Kathleen Jansen was stabbed; ANC and IFP representatives who served on the committee killed and Thompsom herself shot at, saved only by a bullet proof vest. Asked why she stayed on, in the same area, she said: “I felt that I owed it to the community to be out there. I could not just walk away.”

Gertrude Mzizi, the self- styled “firebrand” representative of the IFP on the committee, and one critical of the passive mandate of observers, said of Thompson: “She was a
woman I could relate to. She showed more interest in our plight than anyone else. When she left the country, she left a friend.”

“There was only one thing in common between my regular work and UNOMSA: I like to get things done,” Thompson reflects. “I had the opportunity to prove myself in an area I had never dreamed of. I surprised myself. It was the best part of a 37 year career.”

While male members of UNOMSA spoke of their excitement at being posted to South Africa because of the historical import of being involved in the epic ending of apartheid, several of the women interviewed spoke of the personal growth, empowerment and satisfaction that they derived from being a part of UNOMSA- a door opened, in their view, because of a woman head of mission. As Cubeiro, who works in the personnel section of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) put it: “in 35 years of working for the UN, this was the first opportunity I had to be involved in such a mission. I had no Africa experience. I had no advanced degree. The mission was a turning point in my life”.

Ching-Man Lee, a Chinese translator added: “Most women in the United Nations are in the general services and lower echelons of the UN where they do very regular work. UNOMSA gave them the opportunity to do something else. The mission was a great equalizer of people.”

Leadership

King herself is reluctant to say whether gender played any role in her appointment. The phone call asking her to head the mission came as a complete surprise: “It came out of the blue. I knew they were looking for people. Up to that point, there was only one woman, Margaret Antsee. It was honestly the last thing I thought of. Was gender a consideration? I don’t think so, but I have told myself that one of these days I will pin down Boutros Boutros-Ghali and ask him.”

A senior colleague of King’s on the mission said that initially her lack of experience in diplomacy was, a “source of concern”. For those knowledgeable of UN systems in South Africa, the fact that the top post was pegged at D2 level was read as a sign of the then UN Secretary General’s diffidence in matters South Africans. This, and South Africa’s heavily macho culture, meant that King began at a disadvantage.

“I did not feel disregarded per se,” she reflects. “But there was a time when people felt it was an insult to have sent a woman. It meant the mission was not taken seriously. There were instances of rudeness, people not showing up.” A member of the National Peace Secretariat recalls at times sexist jokes being made about King playing on her initials AK, in a land then and still awash in AK 47 guns. But political advisor Ndulo also recalls how many black South Africans assumed that she must be Corretta Scott King, and would begin their greetings with references to how they admired her late husband. In the South African context, race probably played a far more important role in the way King was perceived by men than gender. And, as will be explored further in the section on local impact, among black women King was regarded as a role model.
Among UNOMSA cadres interviewed, there was considerable consensus on what constituted King’s strong and weak leadership qualities. These are summarized in the table below:

**TABLE FOUR: PERCEPTIONS OF KING’S LEADERSHIP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capable</td>
<td>Mood swings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>Cold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanded respect</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely hard worker</td>
<td>Vindictive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courageous</td>
<td>Strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Too disciplinarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showed personal understanding and compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to listen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took good advice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: interviews with UNOMSA members

King’s self-assessment of her leadership style resonates with these observations: “I have a relationship with people, though I’m not necessarily seen as a warm person. I tried to detect any personal stress (among observers) and to alleviate it. I listen to people. If I feel they give solid advice I go back to them; I don’t care about rank; I have this consultative thing. We worked as a team; there were no frills; we shared things. If I got a newspaper from the Caribbean it did the rounds and so on. We had to hang together, to be open to ideas. At the same time, there had to be discipline. The UN was under pressure and its image was very important to me.”

There is a general consensus that King relaxed as she became more comfortable with her role. “In the beginning, she seemed insecure and she was hard on staff,” one observer noted. “As time went on and she became more confident it was easier to talk to her. It was possible to change her mind if you knew how to go about it.” Another member of the mission who worked closely with King recalled: “She missed her step a few times but she was a fast learner. She got a firm grip on the situation as we went along.” One of the team leaders added: “Angela grew and changed from a very forceful individual to a super diplomat. It was a very different Angela at the end.”

King’s commitment, hard work and integrity were her strong points. As one observer put it: “she was dedicated to a fault. At times this led to micro management.” Some saw a gender dimension to this trait: as one observer put it, “you had the sense that she had to work twice as hard just to be recognized.”

For the South Africans that King worked with closely, she is remembered both for her commitment and strong belief in nonviolence - a passion that some linked to her gender. As the former chair of the National Peace Secretariat Antonie Gildenhuys put it: “She was objective and brought emotional strength to her work. She had a strong commitment. She was not your typical diplomat in that sense. I believe she had a stronger commitment to non violence than a man in her position would have had.”

Suzanne Vos, the IFP member on the National Peace Secretariat spoke of King’s accessibility, night and day, over week ends, and for whatever reason. In her
assessment: “I don’t think anyone could have done a better job. Angela was a true professional. She never compromised herself.”

Internally, UNOMSA differed from the typical hierarchical UN operation. Observers had a high degree of access to the Chief of Mission, a fact they attributed to her being female. While they sometimes felt she took too much interest in details of their personal life, they also recall their appreciation for the interest she took in their work and welfare: as Savitri Butchey put it, “she used to be in touch three or four times a week. Sometimes she just left a message saying, ‘I just called to see how you are doing.’”

According to UNOMSA members who have served on other missions, this contrasts sharply with the other UN missions where mission heads interact with a few advisors and have limited contact with those on the ground. King’s hands on approach had the advantage that it gave her a firm and detailed grasp of the issues at hand. In meetings with the National Peace Secretariat she is remembered for bringing information, insight and precision to the discussions.

Once King had appointed trusted team leaders, she also delegated easily, and that in turn contributed to a non-competitive, supportive approach within the teams. To quote Cubeiro: “Men’s version of team approach more often than not distributes work so that while each player contributes something to team effort, no player plays a different position than that assigned to him by the coach. Our coach, Ms King, allowed each UNOMSA team to settle into a work pattern and this proved rather successful.” (6)

Jim Bradley agreed that there was a gender dimension to this approach: “The military is not known for delegation, and it is most well known for its macho culture. If King trusted you she let you get on with the job. She brought a high degree of integrity and ability to make decisions.” Blake added: “Angela was willing to bend the rules. She trusted us, our judgement. She used to say: ‘It’s better to do the right thing than to have people getting killed.’ But she was also concerned about our safety, and about the credibility of the United Nations.”

In the notoriously rank conscious UN, nothing could have proved King’s greater concern with getting the job done than with status than the fact that on at least one occasion she made a member of staff team leader over someone of a higher rank. Raymonde Martineau recalls how, when she was joined by a team member of a higher rank than herself, King kept Martineau as team leader for the Vaal, an area in which she had developed considerable experience. In contrast, when Martineau served in Namibia, a man who was ten years her junior age wise, but senior in rank, was placed in a supervisory position over her despite the fact that she similarly had far greater experience of the situation on the ground in that particular locality.

King frequently accompanied UNOMSA team members to church in Soweto, South Africa’s largest black township, on a Sunday. “A tremendous source of strength was that South Africa is a very religious country,” Kind recalled. “I come from a religious background. Many of us not only went to church, but were caught up in this whole spirituality. We drew strength for ourselves and for the mission. The spirit you could relate to made you believe that this miracle could happen.”

22
The gender differences in management style became starkly apparent with the arrival of Brahimi whose appointment over King in the final, high profile phase of the mission was viewed by many of those interviewed as at best unfair, and at worst a case of subliminal discrimination. Officially, the reason for the appointment of a former foreign minister as Special Representative four months before the election was the need to upgrade the expanded mission.

But one UNOMSA member points out that in other instances where this has happened, the person over whom someone else is appointed normally gets transferred. This observer argues that relegating King to second fiddle was insensitive at a personal level; led to tension in the mission and confusion among South Africans.

By that stage, observers say, King had proven her capability. The “demotion”, according to this perception, showed the Secretary General’s gender biases coming in through the back door. As one male observer put it: “It was a slap in the face for King. What this said was: this is a man’s job; move out of the way. Now that it is time for the curtain to raise on the biggest media show on earth, you Angela, are not the star anymore.” A woman observer said: “Gender may not have been an overt consideration but I would not exclude it. To bring someone in, to start from scratch, at the eleventh hour, is not a very intelligent way of functioning.”

A strongly held view among both male and female UNOMSA members interviewed is that unlike King, Brahimi did not seek to cultivate relationships with the observers on the ground. He came with a team of advisers - most of them Arab men. Observers at headquarters had to vacate their offices to make way for the new team. “We went into a very macho phase,” recalls one of the women team leaders. “There was little time for Angela. It became a ‘man’s mission’. Compared to the first phase of UNOMSA we were treated like cattle, shuffled around. We were not seen as valuable by the leadership. There was no caring or feeling. It was not a happy end to the mission.”

A male observer described Brahimi as “heavy handed, bureaucratic and hierarchical.” Another male observer added: “Brahimi came from a certain generation of older male leaders. His style and his comfort zone was the old boys club.”

INTERNAL DYNAMICS

Other than the last part of the mission, which lasted only four months, UNOMSA’s gender balance is seen by members of the team as having played a critical role in creating a working environment in which respect for women prevailed. Female UNOMSA members, who have subsequently undertaken other missions, commented in the interviews on the absence of sexual harassment or innuendo in UNOMSA.

Equally, male observers interviewed commented on the healthy culture of the mission. As Kennedy put it: “We did not have military sex fiends. There was civility in the way relations between men and women were conducted both within and outside the mission. Locker room talk was simply not on. It was not forbidden; but it was not appropriate.”
“The presence of women in the mission had a sobering effect,” added political adviser Ndulo. “There were few cases of sexual harassment. Having women on the team definitely makes men behave better.”

The contrast later in the mission when the Special Representative arrived with a male entourage and tight security highlighted the difference that a strong male presence makes. “The whole culture changed,” a male observer noted. “Brahimi’s advisors used to hang around with local women. There was a very distinct change in the attitude towards women, one that saw them as objects rather than as partners.”

INTERPRETING THE MANDATE

UNOMSA’s mandate of “observing violence” was vague enough as it stood, let alone providing any guidance or clarity on gender matters. Numerous observers complained about either scant or non-existent briefing before embarking on the mission. Indeed, one observer who happened to have Resolution 772 found herself inundated with phone calls from fellow prospective observers regarding the mission. There was no training in conflict resolution, and certainly no gender training.

Deputy Head of Mission Ismat Steiner points out that “South Africa was very different from Namibia, where the United Nations took over the whole administration.” A further frustration for UN staff was that other observer missions like the Commonwealth, that did not have the same lines of accountability, chose to be more liberal in their interpretation of the mandate; engaging in active mediation and training. Local peace functionaries defined themselves as monitors; distinguishing between observers and monitors in that the latter see, record, but are also ready to intervene.

The frustration of being obliged to be only the eyes and ears of South Africa was felt both by observers and local counterparts. Blake, who later headed the UN mission in KwaZulu Natal noted: “you could be in a meeting while someone was being killed and all you could do was write and report. You could be in a march and police could set dogs on the crowd, and you had to say: ‘just observing’. UNOMSA political advisor Ndulo recalls that reports were sent diligently to New York, but with little feedback: “you wondered if anyone took any notice.”

Gertrude Mzizi, IFP member of the Thokoza Peace Committee said: “I used to ask myself what happened to all those reports. We never had a chance to comment; for all we know the reports may have just been saying that Africans are prone to violence. Inputs should result in outputs.”

King reflects: “The Secretary General basically said: ‘you are the eyes’. At the same time our presence was supposed to reduce violence and stimulate the constitutional negotiations. Part of this was done by going around to the parties and hearing their views. I think we realized as we met we could see where we could make suggestions. You were an observer, but you could also pass on information, ideas and make suggestions. But what you could never do was say: this is what you should do.”
Ironically, it was in this role of interpreting the mandate that women observers in UNOMSA felt that traits normally associated as being “feminine” had enormous advantages.

Cubeiro, who served in the area around Pretoria said that while she had not been on any comparative mission: “I have come to the conclusion that UNOMSA drew from the feminine traits that at other times in my career I was made to view more as liabilities than as assets. These traits, while not being limited to women, are those that are most readily learned by women (as part of their upbringing) and that one can say more readily motivates and reflects values most owned up to by women.” (7)

Women members of UNOMSA identified the following “feminine” qualities as key to the success of this particular mission:

Community values: Cubeiro notes that: “the need for the UN team to be accepted and respected by the communities to which we were attached required an ability to emphasise interrelationships and connective values and work to tighten them. As we were invited to tour community facilities such as schools and care centers the feminine principles of caring and sharing personal experiences helped forge the bonds that facilitated our integration into the community….women’s empathy towards the disenfranchised is definitely a strong point in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions.”

Intuition: Ching Man Lee, who served in Soweto noted: “there was no job description. You were a negotiator, affiliator, investigator and journalist all wrapped into one. You had to survive on instinct.”

Being non-threatening: Lee adds: “I was small, physically non-threatening; distinctly different from any other ethnic group. Men and women were eager to talk to me, especially at community level.”

Listening: Lee noted: “women and men approach things in different ways. They may achieve the same thing but the process is different. Women are better listeners; they draw people out more; they draw out the anger; they analyse the situation. At a local level women do a great job. They are more approachable.” King added: “in general, the women were good listeners and this was important because you have to be a good listener to give advice and suggestions. Some of the men got impatient. Women had more patience for this kind of mission.”

Informality: Three women observers mentioned the important role that informal “out of the office” contact played in bringing parties together in a way that would not have been possible in formal meetings. These contacts were largely made at the homes of observers, “over a beer” and may have contributed more in the long run, than the formal processes, to holding the fragile peace. As Blake put it: “there is nothing like having as cup of tea and recognizing that you are all quite human.” Interestingly, only women respondents raised the value of informal contact, supporting studies that show that in general, women tend to be less formal in their approach, and more innovative in trying alternative approaches to problem solving.
Sharing information: To quote Cubeiro: “information is power. Men tend to keep information and power to themselves. Sharing information was vital to the success of a mission such as this.”

Shunning status; taking a hands-on approach: Teams were small; responsibilities were interchanged; there was no office to work from and no drivers. As Cubeiro put it: “this promoted a “just-do-it” environment (women are great “just do it people”), where no concern was given to who got the credit.

OPERATIONS

In a report to the Security Council in January 1994, the UN Secretary General enumerated the activities that UNOMSA had been involved in as follows:

- Attending numerous marches; rallies and funerals and other forms of mass action; including 832 informal bilateral meetings.
- Attending an estimated 9000 meetings of local, regional and other structures of the National Peace Accord.
- Attending hearings and offering objective commentary on the role of the Goldstone Commission.

King elaborates: “The whole idea was that South Africa had come up with this peace accord and we had to foster a sense of ownership. We were there as a catalyst.” In a society as fraught as South Africa, it was a difficult task. The government and IFP were naturally suspicious of the international community. The ANC had, on the other hand, placed huge expectations on the tiny mission with its limited mandate: as ANC Deputy Secretary General and former MK commander Thenjiwe Mtintso recalled: “it had to work. If we laid down our arms and the peace monitoring did not work, we would be in trouble. We would burn our bridges.”

The National Peace Accord suffered from lack of commitment on the part of its signatories; lack of credibility as a result of the National Peace Secretariat being a statutory body funded by government; and difficulties in ensuring representation both along race and gender lines.

The chairpersons of the National Peace Accord, National Peace Secretariat and Goldstone Commission were all white men; as were the chairs of many of the eleven regional and 87 local committees, often because they were the only persons willing to serve on the committees who had acceptance by all parties. The structures were fragile; sometimes suspending operations for months on end due to disputes; other times spending hours in seemingly fruitless debate.

“When we arrived,” King recalls, “there was a lot of walking out. We had quite a lot of influence on ensuring that the representatives of the peace committee became more representative of the country as a whole and also of gender and young people than when we got there.”

“For many,” reflects Gildenhuys, “the peace structures were the first ever contact they had with a democratic structures. It created rules and traditions that never existed
before, for example around tolerance and hate speech. The structures kept the lid on the boiling pot long enough for the new structures to take root.”

Local peace monitors, who defined their mandate as being more interventionist, at times found themselves impatient with the observers. Says Camay: “they did their best, but they did not stick their heads out...part of the ethic of a peacemaker must be that cometh the moment, I will lay down my life. We did not see that in UNOMSA.” But Camay believes, along with all the South Africans interviewed that “the presence of UNOMSA played a very important moderating role. It made parties think and re-think their position and views. No one wanted to look foolish. The blue jackets inspired hope and confidence in the ordinary folk.”

Chair of the Alexandra Peace Committee Patience Pashe put it this way: “Africans have a tendency to respect visitors. We don’t like to wash our dirty linen in public. What I could pick up when the observers were around was that here are people who care. They have come all the way to our township Alexandra, when our own white people next door cannot be bothered to come here. They must be here to help us. That meant a lot.”

Anecdotal evidence suggests that on countless occasions the presence of local and international observers helped to calm tension, even if it did not lead to a complete lid being put on the political violence. Oft cited examples include a march on 21 March 1993 on Sharpeville Day, the commemoration of the killing of 69 black protestors by the South African Police. Traditionally an emotive day for the ANC, this particular day was made potentially volatile by the fact that the IFP announced that it would be holding a rally addressed by its leader, Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi in Vosloorus, six kilometers away. Careful planning by the Regional Peace Committee, in collaboration with the four international observer groups, ensured that both parties were able to hold their rallies without incident.

Similarly when the popular leader of the South African Communist Party Chris Hani was shot in cold blood by right wing vigilantes in April 1993, the marches and a massive funeral drawing a crowd of 200 000 passed with barely an incident.

UNOMSA women were active participants in all these events, and indeed were often at the forefront (see box two).

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**BOX TWO: THE LOVED ONE**

When Gertrude Blake, a Sierra Leonean, arrived in South Africa’s political hot pot of KwaZulu Natal to begin her tour of duty, a member of the IFP who met her at the airport christened her Thandiwe, which in Zulu means “loved one”. One of UNOMSA’s longest serving members, Blake rose to be team leader in South Africa’s most politically charged province; and is still remembered with affection by South Africans across the political spectrum.

In Namibia, Blake had excelled herself by gaining the trust of conservative white farmers. Partly for this reason, King and Deputy Head of Mission Steiner hand-picked her to serve in KwaZulu Natal.
The complexities of the province are described as follows in the first report of the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa: “The present spate of killings in KwaZulu Natal has been described as “black on black violence”, “inter-tribal warfare” and or “party political conflict.” It is all of that and more. In a subtle way it is a clash between traditional authorities and values and advancing ideas of egalitarian democracy, accountability and change.”

Blake carefully studied the various interest groups in the province and looked for the most effective way of getting though to them. “White South Africans accepted me due to my experience in Namibia,” she recalled. “Black women could identify with me easily; as a black woman I could talk to them and they listened. I used humour with black men; with the war- lords. I would tell them I was their wife number two and they needed to listen to me. I used to tell the chiefs that I was their daughter. As an African, I showed respect for age; I showed respect for tradition and this struck a chord. I did not try to antagonize them; I tried to reason. With the ANC, who are more modern, we referred to each other as brother and sister. I found every way that I could to identify, because then I could be helpful in making peace.”

Blake built alliances with the other observer missions, such as the head of the Commonwealth mission in the province, Ghanaian Dr Moses Anafu, who gained a reputation for his mediation efforts in some of the most rural and difficult areas of the province; as well as Victoria Chitepo, a woman former minister from Zimbabwe in the Commonwealth team who spoke Zulu and gained instant acceptance in the province.

Blake recalls an occasion when the IFP had taken over a stadium that the ANC planned to use for a rally. A message arrived saying “we want Ms Blake and Denis Nkosi (the ANC representative from the peace committee.)” Despite the risks, Blake went and spoke with the IFP leaders and urged them to leave the stadium under police escort. She accompanied the escort. The disbursal led to a potentially explosive situation being averted.

Blake stayed in the province through to the elections. Six years later she still communicates both with the former IFP mayor of Umlazi township, and a white ANC member now in the KwaZulu Natal legislature: a mark of the depths of the relationships that “Thandi” cultivated during her tour of duty.

Evidence from UNOMSA suggests that at worst women are as capable as men in the full range of peacekeeping functions; and at best they may be better peacekeepers. To quote Kennedy: “Very often when a situation was tense, when there was a possibility of violence, when there was a standoff by the South African Police or South African Defense Force, it was best to have a woman observer as part of the group to talk people down. The male reaction is quite different to a woman’s. This mission required a different kind of response. If one had been faced with an all male United Nations mission, going toe to toe with the macho hot heads in the political parties, the police and the military, it would have just been a vicious circle. Very often (those who would have caused violence) found themselves wrong footed by the presence of female
observers. The presence of women peacemakers gave them pause. I repeatedly saw that happen.”

Among comments made by women members of the mission on the effectiveness of women peacekeepers were:

- “Women are capable of the full range of peacekeeping functions and more. They have an ability to empathise with those who don’t have power and that is essential to peacekeeping. They tend to identify with the downtrodden and they don’t have a need to shine” – Cubeiro.
- “Women are as capable if not more capable than men. We are peacekeepers, not combatants” – Masithela.
- “It is an advantage not to be too aware of physical danger. If you think too much about it your head would get the better of your heart. Women are more intuitive than men, and that was extremely important for this mission” – Ching Man Lee.

**IMPACT OF UNOMSA ON SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN**

As a rule of thumb, King paired all her teams to give a good mix of race and gender. Women, as we have seen were as active, if not more active than men on the frontline. Yet, assessing the impact of UNOMSA on local women is complex for a number of reasons:

- The small size of the mission (no more than 100 observers for much of the time, as against a population of 40 million).
- The deliberately low profile nature of the mission (for example, only the head of mission was authorized to make media statements).
- The fact that the mission set down no specific gender criteria either in terms of recruitment, mandate or operation, which means that there are no yardsticks by which to measure its performance. In other words, whatever gender impact it had was by accident rather than by design.
- South Africa’s racially charged background, which makes it difficult to separate out race from gender as a factor in people’s perceptions.

Non-the-less, this section will attempt to gauge the impact of the mission on local women in two ways: through the mere fact that UNOMSA had a gender balanced mission and the effect of this on perceptions; as well as through direct engagement with, and empowerment of, local women.

**Perceptions and role models**

Among UNOMSA members, and male South Africans interviewed, the general consensus is that UN peacekeepers are most likely to be seen first for their blue jackets; second for their race; and third for their gender. “No one made me feel uncomfortable because I was a woman,” recalls Hannah Yilma. “I had a job to do; whether I was black, white or purple. The UN flag came first.” Jim Bradley added: “South Africans saw the UN logo on our face. We were the UN, not black men, or white women or white women and black women.” Being “politically correct” in the make up of the teams, adds Kennedy, “meant no easy shots for criticism of the UN; we made sure we checked off all the boxes.”
When asked if they had ever been struck by the gender mix of UNOMSA, the South African men interviewed were somewhat taken by surprise. Camay answered: “I never thought about it until you raised it. Race is likely to have been more significant than gender.”

South African women interviewed generally had a greater consciousness of the gender mix of the observers that they worked with; and to believe that this did indeed have a sub-conscious effect. Recalling the Alexandra Peace Committee, where the two most regular UNOMSA members were team leader Angela Masithela and Jim Anderson (black female and white male) Patience Pashe, the former chair of the committee said: “the gender mix did not register at the time, but I think that sub- consciously, seeing men and women working together so well somehow rubbed off on us. The comraderie between Jim and Angela was exemplary and it came through. As stressed as we were, it was a wonderful antidote. In our highly politicized community, it was good for people to see.”

The ANC’s Mtintso added: “The symbolic impact was important, even if it was not immediate or articulated, especially to a woman from disadvantaged community. It would register: that here are women doing something unusual. It then starts to shift stereotypes in the minds of those women.”

King echoes this view: “I think (having mixed teams of men and women) made a difference; that all women were not secretaries; that they were not all white. I think given South Africa’s background this was a powerful message that said: this is an international team, all working together and this represents the way things could be in South Africa.”

The specific impact of having a black woman head of mission also sparked an interesting debate among respondents. King herself notes that she had to be wary of being sidetracked from her mainstream responsibilities: “I felt I had to be careful because a lot of the invitations to speak came from women’s groups. I think we did a lot from the wings to encourage this, but I had to be clear about my primary responsibility. I tried to think of myself as a person. I was aware of two things, one that I was a woman, and the other that I was black. I was never sure if the reaction was because of gender or colour. I was also aware that I was from a rather small island. I spoke the cricket lingo; I could draw on a common colonial tradition; I had seen huge changes in Jamaica around race and class. So I could say with conviction: if it can change in the Caribbean, it can change anywhere.”

Camay believes that in the perception of South Africans, race was more important in the case of King than gender, adding: “what we saw was a fairly erudite articulate person who could reflect on the situation.”

But UNOMSA’s Ndulo notes: “for a woman coming from an oppressed background, King was a role model; a black woman wielding power. It was a powerful symbol.” Mtintso added: “women in the township frequently saw King on television and she became a talking point. They were confident that the Queen King could do something.”
Pashe is even more forceful on this point: “Angela had a tremendous impact on the women of South Africa. She was a role model, being who she was and how she carried herself and work for the UN. She made women think about the possibility of their own involvement. I remember in 1995, on International Women’s Day, after UNOMSA had gone, local women cited her at an event here in Alexandra township. They could not remember her by name, but she had made a lasting impression. During this time, we saw a lot of women coming up, asking what are women’s rights, talking to each other, saying we are no longer doormats.”

Pashe, who has maintained contact with King, (see box three) says it is a particular source of pride to black women that Angela went on to be advisor on gender issues in the UN Secretary General’s Office. “I know that she has spoken about my organization, Women for Peace, at many important UN gatherings and this has put us on the map,” Pashe says.

**Bringing out the voice of women**

Among the arguments for gender balanced peace operations are that local women are more likely to be at ease talking about their problems with other women. As Yilma put it: “Women and men think differently about a lot of things. A woman is not going to go and tell a male officer that she has been gang raped by fifteen men. Sometimes local women were more able to talk to UNOMSA women about certain things.”

Despite the fact that some local peace structures had active participation by women (see box three) women were generally under-represented in these structures- a fact commented upon in an evaluation of the NPS by the UK- based International Alert. The report recommended that “the National Peace Accord establish a Gender Advisory Commission to advise on steps to implement affirmative action on gender and race in all peace structures; and ensure that the voices of women were heard at all levels of the peace structures though networking with women’s organizations and providing opportunities for leadership, training and placement within the peace structures.” (8)

Within UNOMSA opinion, observers had mixed views on whether it was part of UNOMSA’s job to facilitate the active participation of local women- underscoring again the importance of specific gender guidelines for peace operations. As one male observer put it: “To encourage women to speak would not have been proper. It was not part of our mandate as observers.” But several women who were on the UNOMSA mission said they exercised their discretion. Butchey, who had worked for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) said: “although we were only observers, if women were being treated unfairly, we could not stay quiet.”

**Local women and the peace movement**

The only specific reference to gender in the formal reports of the United Nations on UNOMSA concerns engaging local women in the peace process. The report of the Secretary General to the Security Council on 22 December 1992, says: “Women’s organizations emphasise their concern over violence and intimidation directed against women from a variety of sources, including the police. I would strongly urge that special attention be given to this question, especially in view of the crucial role women can play in maintaining cohesion and stability in their communities. One aspect of
democratization that should not be overlooked is the need to bring the country’s women into the political process as full partners. Political violence, intimidation, poverty and dislocation of families and communities are among the factors currently preventing their full participation. Future democracy, reconciliation and development in South Africa cannot take place without the contribution of all its people.” (9)

On the ground, observers and their South African counterparts recognized the advantages of an active involvement by local women in the peace process because of the fact that they continually bore the brunt of conflict. Gertrude Mzizi, IFP representative on the Thokoza Peace Committee in the East Rand said she had elected to serve on the committee because “I was the person in need of peace more than any other. I was displaced from my house in the political violence. I had four children to feed.” Described variously as a shinning star and firebrand on the committee, Mzizi was one of the most regular participants and contributors. Despite her political disagreements with the ANC representative, Mzizi was able to say, “he is a good person, a decent person.” Mzizi and UNOMSA team leader Jan Thompson also had a good relationship (see Box One). These personal lines of communication became critical in diffusing tension in the simmering East Rand.

Mzizi lists several attributes of women that she says enhance their ability to be peace keepers. “Women are born analysts and assessors. They see things quickly. Further, as mothers, women are inclusive. You do not have a girl child or a boy child. You have children.” The IFP’s Faith Gasa added: “It is true that women can be more vicious than men; but it is rare that they go all out. There is a tendency for women to quickly find each other, before destruction comes. There is always the mother in me that says: that could have been your son.” Of her own negotiation ability she said: “I am gifted with a cool head. When they are hot, I become the cool one.” She points out that although her husband is in a wheel chair, leaving her personally vulnerable, and despite the volatility of the area she lives in, “I have never been attacked because this is home to everyone.”

According to Camay, Chair of the Thokoza Committee, the committee made a decision that in monitoring large gatherings, at least one in four of the monitors had to be a woman, because of the ability of local women peace monitors to “bring down the temperature.” NPS Chair Antonie Gildenhuys added: “Women can send out a stronger message on the effects of violence than men.”

Cubeiro recalls an incident concerning Lily Daniels, a South African of mixed race origin who sat on the Regional Peace Committee for the Northern Transvaal, and member of the Labour party. The dispute concerned a group of “squatters” illegally occupying land. When it became apparent that none of the male officials of the peace committee could stem the tide, Daniels got up onto a platform and spoke directly to the men in the group. She implored them to consider the well being of the women and children above scoring political points. She then spoke to the women, lamenting the additional hardships they would have to endure for the sake of the male egos. “This personalized approach, that showed honest concern for the well being of the people, worked where less personal, power or control oriented approaches had failed. The struggle to get on top of the heap ofen dams the flow of concern for others but every once in a while a woman’s approach can put caring back into focus.” (10)
The ANC's Mtintso notes that the military is the antithesis of everything that women have been socialized to be. She believes that women are not necessarily inherently more caring; nor is there such a thing as a “natural peacekeeper.” However, she says, “it is a fact that women are socialized in a particular way and so they bring special insight and perspectives, as well as behaviour, in situations of conflict. For example, women are not likely to be party to raping other women or raping men for that matter in a situation of war because they do not have that sexual behaviour, no matter how abnormal the situation is. Men on the other hand use their malehood to show hate; as a weapon of war. Women have been negotiating so many conflicts in the family; conflicts between them and their male partners. Women are able to use these skills in negotiations within the community. This doesn’t mean that the stereotypes of women being emotional and caring necessarily hold. It simply means that women bring a different approach.”

**BOX THREE: WOMEN LEAD THE PEACE IN ALEXANDRA**

May 2000: twice Patience Pashe cancels an appointment and the third time she is late. That morning, she had been with a young woman who, upon discovering that she had an unwanted pregnancy, was bent on taking her life. The woman arrived at Pashe’s home at 5 am. By 11 am, Pashe had calmed her; taken her for counseling and left her in the care of a friend so as to make the scheduled meeting. Each day, she reflects, in the modest office of “Women for Peace” at the Oliver Tambo community center in Alexandra there is some kind of violence in the home, in the community, on the streets of the tightly packed black township next door to Johannesburg’s plush Sandton suburb.

But there is some consolation in the fact that the worst of the politically motivated violence has subsided, thanks in large measure to Women for Peace, the Alexandra Local Peace Committee that existed between 1993 and 1994, as well as the support provided by the UNOMSA team whose consistent members throughout this period were Angela Masithela from Lesotho and Jim Anderson from Ireland.

Pashe chaired the Alexandra LPC, one of the few that had a gender balance. The area was politically fraught: IFP and ANC supporters had been driven from their homes, all within close range, and refugees lived in a church hall, where they were cared for by Women for Peace, a non racial NGO that took flak from all sides in South Africa’s charged political environment: “we were called sell outs, arse kissers, you name it,” Pashe recalls.

Regarded as a model local peace committee by the National Peace Secretariat and the international observers, the Alexandra LPC met regularly and had representation from the full political spectrum, as well as the police and defense force.

The impact of the LPC is reflected in the following excerpt from the Commonwealth Observer missions third report (August to December 1993): “Since our last report, the tide has perhaps turned in Alexandra from trying to prevent acts of violence towards solid peacemaking. A year and a half ago, a near war was raging between ANC and IFP supporters in the community. “No go” areas were controlled by one or other of the parties and thousands of people were forced to flee their homes. Today, the burnt out
shells of their homes remain in the area known as Beirut. Returning displacees to their homes has been the most intractable problem being tackled by the ICC. Progress in the area has been painfully slow but there has been progress. Committees are hard at work and discussion has reached a stage where demolition and reconstruction are under active consideration.”

UNOMSA team leader for the area Angela Masithela is convinced that “women are what made the committee effective. With men it was war all the time. Patience brought a voice of calm.” Pashe recalls how she had to plead with one of the political parties to allow a woman representative on to the committee. “The women were really keen to have a peaceful resolution. The nature of women made it easier for me as chair to seek peaceful resolutions. The presence of women also helped to get men to buy in.” This was particularly so with the young men, the source of much of the overt violence in the community. “Sometimes I would hear them talking among themselves during a break and saying, ‘We need to show respect for our mothers’.” Many times members of the peace committee, with UNOMSA and the police, formed a human chain along the streets and outside hostels to enable marches and processions to proceed peacefully.

The Alexandra peace committee had a number of sub committees, including one on security. Masithela is convinced that it was because of the presence of a critical mass of women on the committee that the high incidence of rape in the community was a standing item on the agenda. Despite the fact that South Africa has one of the highest incidences of rape in the world, gender based violence scarcely featured in the deliberations of other peace committees.

Pashe believes that the UNOMSA observers played a key role. Masithela spoke the local languages, and Anderson came from a security background: “Their advice was very helpful. The way they treated people, spoke and interacted was exemplary. You could watch people relaxing in their presence.”

During the 40th anniversary of the Economic Commission on Africa, Pashe was appointed to the Organisation of African Unity’s Women, Peace and Development Committee. She has been on peace missions to Sierra Leone and Rwanda; and is busy working on a manual on indigenous approaches to peace keeping.

Asked if she believes she served as a role model for the women in Alexandra Masithela is quick to respond: “they served as a role model for me. I learned a lot; I took a lot from their courage. At the end of each day I had the luxury of going back to my comfortable hotel. These women were fighting. They did not need me as a role model! But to the extent that UNOMSA validated their efforts; that we could be supportive; that they took some encouragement from that, I believe we may have made a small contribution.”

UNOMSA and the broader women’s movement
While peace was being negotiated in communities, South Africa’s political future was being negotiated at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park. On 8 March 1993, the observer missions attended the launch of the Women’s National Coalition, a broad based movement that cut across party lines, and aimed to place the concerns of women firmly
on the agenda of constitutional negotiations. The WNC went on to conduct a research campaign described as one of the most participatory ever to have been conducted in South Africa to solicit the views of women on what they wanted for their future. These were compiled in a Woman’s Charter, presented to the negotiators at Kempton Park.

Largely as a result of an informal cross party caucus of influential women involved in the negotiations, including the present Speaker of Parliament Frene Ginwala and the IFP’s Sue Vos, women demanded that one of our every three delegates to the Multi Party Negotiations be a woman. This and the Charter are credited with having a decisive impact on the inclusion of strong gender provisions in the Constitution, including the explicit outlawing of gender discrimination, and the creation of a Commission on Gender Equality as one of six structures in support of democracy.

UNOMSA, the WNC and the Commonwealth Observer Mission to South Africa had offices in the same building in central Johannesburg. Informal contacts between the women on these missions and the WNC were common. Raymonde Martineau, team leader for the Vaal and NGO liaison officer in the lead up to the elections says: “we need to be honest in saying that our contribution to this initiative was small. But we were probably an encouragement to some women in the Coalition and had regular contact with them. I remember that on International Women’s Day, there was a discussion on rape, and I was able to obtain information from the UN to share with our colleagues. We had no specific brief to engage in the broader issues around gender equality. But there were many of us on the mission who were interested in these issues and did so when they came up, through the Women’s National Coalition or in meetings of the local peace committee.”

Faith Gasa, the IFP representative on the WNC recalls meeting with UN observers at workshops of the coalition. “I was touched by their lack of arrogance. Their interest meant a lot to us.”

THE AFTERMATH: PEACE BUILDING

On 27 April 1994, despite all odds, South Africa held its first democratic elections which proved more than just a casting of ballots but a deeply emotional equalizer of all people as young and old, black and white, men and women, took their place in the queues that sometimes snaked for miles around blocks.

Despite a strong argument put forward by the Regional Peace Committees for the peace structures to be maintained, the new government was anxious that these not become a stop gap for the creation of legitimate structures, especially local government structures. Soon after the elections, the act establishing the National Peace Secretariat was repealed and the Act itself placed in the parliamentary museum in Cape Town. In retrospect, NPS Chair Antonie Gildenhuys, now a judge on the land claims court agrees that it was “the right thing to do”- building the peace needed to be mainstreamed in all structures of government.

UNOMSA also packed up shop, King believes too hastily. “We had gathered a huge amount of information, material and understanding of the situation on the ground.
There was no proper debriefing with the UN agencies that rightfully followed.” The mission itself was also not allowed to engage in any development projects: “I feel that in the rebuilding of any society there has to be a holistic view. The mission was handicapped in that regard.”

Many of the South African women involved in the peace process went on into political pursuits. Mzizi, for example, is a member of the Gauteng legislature. In this capacity, she has been influential in a project for the reconstruction of the East Rand townships. The 1500 homes along a street once called “Snipers Alley” are being rebuilt. A unique SOS system, not found even in neighbouring white suburbs, links residences to an ultra modern communications center where police and staff are on call 24 hours a day. A flying squad, the first of its kind in a township, has also begun operations. While problems remain, Mzizi notes, an air of normality is returning.

South Africa’s struggle for gender equality has also progressed steadily. In the elections, thanks largely to an ANC quota of thirty percent for women, South Africa had a 27 percent representation of women and this increased to close to thirty percent in the 1999 elections. The 1999 elections also witnessed a new cabinet in which thirty percent of ministers are women. 61 percent of South Africa’s deputy ministers are women. Many of the ministers and deputy ministers serve in non-traditional posts such as foreign affairs, the public service, and minerals. The deputy minister of defense is a woman. The critical mass of women in parliament and the executive has been a decisive factor in spearheading legislative reform including a Choice of Termination of Pregnancy Act; Domestic Violence Act; Maintenance Act and legislation regarding customary law.

The Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women in parliament, chaired by the former Executive Director of Women’s National Coalition, Pregs Govender, working with civil society has spearheaded a gender budget initiative aimed at using the budget as an instrument for advancing gender equality. A report from the Minister of Finance to the Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women in 1999 pointed to some important achievements. For example, the Minister noted that:

“Following a cabinet meeting in February 1996, the “Department of Finance committed itself to considering the reallocation of military expenditure to support women’s economic advancement. The Department has reduced expenditure on defence from 9.1 percent of total government spending in 1992/93 to 5.7 percent in 1997/98. The priority has shifted instead to the social services, which benefit predominantly women and children. Spending on social services increased from 43.8 percent of total spending in 1992/93 to 46.9 percent in 1997/98.”

While South African women must take the major credit for these achievements, the support of the international community during the run up to the elections and in the aftermath of elections has been important. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, its follow up five year review this year, and the ratification by South Africa of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1995 have also been important lobbying tools.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender makes a difference to peace

Among those interviewed, there was a strong consensus that gender is a critical factor in peace processes as reflected in the following comments by observers and South Africans:

- “There is no peace process that can succeed without women. I feel that deeply in my heart” - Faith Gasa, IFP.
- “There are no winners in conflict” - Gertrude Mzizi, IFP.
- “For me it’s a matter of citizenship. If women are citizens, then they must be involved in all spheres of life” - Thenjiwe Mtintso, ANC
- “I would like to see more women, especially black women, on UN missions” - Patience Pashe, Women for Peace.
- “It’s a human rights issue, and there are certain things I would be sensitive about because of my gender” - Angela Masithela, UNOMSA
- “It is very important that UN missions be gender balanced. If we are there as the international community we must reflect that balance” - Jim Bradley, UNOMSA.

Gender needs to be systematically mainstreamed in peace processes

King concedes that the progressive gender perspectives reflected in UNOMSA were by accident rather than design: “There were no instruments in the UN on gender. This was five years ago. The UN has since undergone a major transformation. We have strong mandates to include a gender perspective in all the work of the United Nations and this must be applied to peace keeping.” While King’s instincts, those of women observers, and the synergies developed between South African women and the international community helped to create linkages and a cascading effect as a result of the gender balance in the mission, this could have been enhanced if UNOMSA had a specific brief and training on gender. Areas in which specific gender considerations need to be built in are:

- The mandate should make it clear that the UN cannot be “neutral” on gender matters and that encouraging participation by local women is part of a peacekeepers brief.
- There should be gender targets for selection and recruitment. The importance of this was underscored by the halving of the proportion of women in the electoral mission as opposed to the observer mission.
- Briefing and training for peace missions is inadequate and does not presently include gender training. This is critical to ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into field operations, where UNOMSA shows that only some women activists felt it to be their duty to take an active interest in gender matters.
- Planning and operations need to include the involvement of women.
- Peace building should draw systematically on the strengths of women, for example through ensuring that they are located in strategic decision making positions, rather than adding to the exploitation of women’s unpaid care contribution to post war reconstruction.
Women bring a different style to leadership
UNOMSA demonstrates the special qualities that women’s leadership can bring to bear on such missions. The case provides a strong argument for specific targets by the UN Secretary General in the appointment of Special Representatives for peace missions.

The balance between civilian and military components
South Africa illustrates how having a civilian mission can open the door to more participation by women. While it is accepted that there are missions in which a military component will be necessary, the issue of balance between civilian and military operations is an important one. UN observers in South Africa were exposed to dangerous situations; but were probably more effective in their task as unarmed civilians than they would have been as soldiers. The fact that men and women alike were exposed to these dangers puts paid to arguments around peacekeeping work being too dangerous for women. Indeed, the general perception among both the observers and the people they worked with is that women had an important calming influence in potentially explosive situations.

Peace making and peace building: making the links
The abrupt disjuncture between the peace making, peace keeping and peace building phases that the United Nations is expressly trying to avoid are apparent in the South African case study. This is an area that needs strengthening in future.

Lessons learned: the need to learn more from South Africa
Many South Africans feel that because the United Nations was not in the driving seat of the peace process in South Africa, it has no interest in documenting in detail how these structures functioned at a local level.

With all their weaknesses, former NPS Chairperson Gildenhuys notes that the peace structures succeeded in getting South Africa, with its huge divisions between people and communities to realize that “the enemy is also a person- security forces do not have forked tongues, the ANC are not terrorists and so forth.” Such structures, he concedes, cannot necessarily be replicated unless “all sides want them to work... peace doesn’t happen on paper; it is in the hearts of people.”

Yet, to quote King, as the only real example to date of a successful preventative diplomacy initiative- the direction that the United Nations would like to be moving in- peace efforts in South Africa warrant far more in-depth study. The strong gender dimensions, and the extent of engagement by the United Nations with local people are important dimensions for further exploration.

For, as Woman for Peace Chairperson Patience Pashe puts it: “It is only when you walk in the same mud, and breathe the same dust as the community that you can say: I know the people. And until you can say you know the people, you have no claim to being a peacekeeper.”
Footnotes

7. Ibid
ANNEX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

UNOMSA
King, Angela; Chief of Mission
Steiner, Ismat; Deputy Chief of Mission
Ndulo, Muna; (Political Advisor)
Kline Thomas, Randy (Media and Information)
Kennedy, Kevin; (Media and Information)
Martineau, Raymonde (Team Leader, Vaal; NGO liaison)
Thompson, Jan; (Team Leader, East Rand)
Blake, Gertrude (Team Leader, Kwa Zulu Natal)
Minta, Ike (Team leader, Soweto)
Bradley, Jim (Cape Town)
Cubeiro, Antonio (Team Leader, Northern Transvaal)
Wilke, Detlef (Kwa Zulu Natal)
Butchey, Savitri (Team leader, Eastern Cape)
Yilma, Hannah (Northern Transvaal)
Lee, Ching Man (East Rand)
Masithela, Angela (Team Leader, Alexandra)

SOUTH AFRICA
Gildenhuys, Antonie, Chair, National Peace Secretariat
Vos, Sue, IFP representative, National Peace Secretariat
Mtintso Thenjiwe, Deputy Secretary General, African National Congress
Camay, Piroshaw, Chair, Thokoza Peace Committee
Harris, Peter, Chair, PWV Regional Peace Committee
Mzizi, Gertrude, IFP representative on the Thokoza Peace Committee
Patience Pashe, Chair, Women for Peace and Alexandra Peace Committee
Faith Gasa, IFP Member of the Provincial Legislature, Kwa Zulu Natal