

British commander at UN Mission in South Sudan serves as role model for young women

9 February 2018 – Lieutenant Colonel Katie Hislop of the United Kingdom said she was happy to serve as a role model for young women considering a career with the armed forces. The mother of two was the only woman to head a military contingent at the United Nations Mission in South Sudan ([UNMISS](#)).

“I recognize that women are still a minority in most of the armed forces across the world, so in some ways it’s a privileged position,” she said in an interview.

“Fortunately, for me in the UK, it’s a fairly normal position I find myself in. So, if there’s anything that I could do to be a role model for young women who perhaps don’t think that a military career is possible, then I would be happy to do that.”

Lt Col Hislop commanded the UK Engineering Task Force at UNMISS, made up of peacekeepers who are electricians, builders, bricklayers, concreters and plumbers who worked across a wide range of construction projects.

As contingent commander, Lt Col Hislop supervised several projects, including the building of a hospital in the town of Bentiu, located in the north.

Its construction helped to ease the case load at a hospital run by MSF, the humanitarian organization which provides medical aid to people affected by conflict and natural disasters. The new hospital has a surgical facility as well as an emergency department which can treat catastrophic injuries and serious diseases.

“Prior to the hospital being there, there simply wasn’t a facility to treat UN staff,” she said. “If someone is particularly seriously injured, it may well be that they are then transferred to a bigger facility, maybe in Nairobi for instance.”

Other tasks performed by her contingent included building additional landing sites for helicopters and digging drainage channels, particularly during the rainy season.

The UK is among 125 countries providing military and police officers to serve at 15 UN peacekeeping operations worldwide. Over 600 British personnel were deployed with the UN as of December 2017; more than half in South Sudan alone.



Since 1948, thousands of troops from the United Kingdom have taken part in UN peacekeeping operations. More than 100 have paid the ultimate price while

defending civilians and supporting operations approved by the UN Security Council. Pictured, UK engineers in South Sudan marking Remembrance Day in honour of colleagues lost in the line of duty. *Photo: UNMISS*



Some 600 UK personnel are currently deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, the majority in South Sudan and Cyprus. Their largest presence is currently in South Sudan, where 400 troops, including 41 women, are deployed with the UN mission in the country in support of the Government and the South Sudanese people. Engineers and medical specialists from the UK have helped to construct a temporary field hospital providing medical care to more than 1,800 people. Pictured, Combat medic from The Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*



Corporal Heather McQueen is a vehicle mechanic and maintains all UN engineering vehicles in Malakal, South Sudan. Pictured, Heather speaks with Angelo, a local colleague who assists in maintaining the vehicles. Heather teaches Angelo about how to repair vehicles; he provides her with vital advice on how weather and road conditions in this area of South Sudan affect vehicle maintenance. *Photo: UNMISS*



The UK contribution to UN peacekeeping in South Sudan includes a UK C-130, which flies the Entebbe-Juba-Malakal route, moving humanitarian-enabling supplies, UN material and vehicles, including to the hard-to-reach base in Malakal. *Photo: UNMISS*



Besides contributing troops to South Sudan and Cyprus, the United Kingdom is the sixth largest contributor of financial assistance to UN peacekeeping. Pictured, the Black Watch, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland wearing the distinctive blue UN berets ahead of their deployment to the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus ([UNFICYP](#)). *Photo: British Army/Crown Copyrights*

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Peacekeepers serving under the UN flag work in difficult and dangerous environments, risking their lives to protect some of the world's most vulnerable people. As of 31 January 2018, the UK has lost 104 personnel in the service of peace.

Overall, 14,528 uniformed personnel from around the globe are serving with UNMISS; 718 of them are women. The UN encourages its troop and police contributing countries to deploy more women in peacekeeping operations; numerous studies have demonstrated the unique and positive role that women can play in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.

South Sudan is the world's youngest country, having gained independence in July 2011. The UN mission was initially mandated to support the Government in consolidating peace, thus fostering longer-term state building and economic development, among other duties.

However, political violence that broke out in December 2013 has resulted in thousands killed, with more than four million forced to flee their homes, either to other parts of the country or across the border, for example to Uganda, which is hosting around one million South Sudanese refugees.

UNMISS troops are protecting more than 200,000 civilians in six Protection of Civilian sites throughout South Sudan.

For Lt Col Hilsop, who has completed her deployment to South Sudan, serving under the UN flag was "an absolute pleasure."