

Combatting sexual violence on the frontlines, UN peacekeeper in DR Congo honoured with award

United Nations peacekeeper Major Seitebatso Pearl Block was commended on Wednesday for developing a Mission-wide, short message service (SMS) campaign to combat gender-based abuse by connecting with women in remote parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"I'm very happy, I'm proud to have been recognized for the good that I've done in the DRC, and I'm very happy to be receiving this award, I'm ecstatic," said Major Block, an Information Operations Officer with the UN Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO).

During a ceremony at the [UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference](#), under way in Vancouver, Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix presented Major Block with the [UN Gender Military Advocate Award](#), for her outstanding work on the frontlines.

Mr. Lacroix called her "[an inspiration to us all](#) and a strong example of how peacekeeping is about our personnel taking personal initiatives and interacting with local communities to help find solutions to their problems, better protecting civilians and, in turn, saving lives."

Serving from July 2016 to July 2017, Major Block developed the SMS (text messaging) campaign on conflict-related sexual violence to reach communities difficult to access.

Based in Goma, Major Block interacted with Congolese women, girls, men and boys to better understand their concerns. She trained fellow staff officers and troops to be more aware of gender dynamics within the Mission, which led them to develop more inclusive community engagement projects as part of the Protection of Civilians strategy combating illegally armed groups in eastern DRC.

"I knew I had to take action from the many conversations I had with women's groups. As a peacekeeper, and as a woman, I think we have much to contribute to making the UN more inclusive and in tune with the communities we serve," she said.

Major Block said that her idea was to give women the opportunity to report gender-based violence and sexual abuses. She pointed out the campaign also targets men "to say that, sexual violence, specifically in conflict areas is a crime."

Created in 2016, the UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award recognizes the dedication and effort of an individual peacekeeper in promoting the

principles of landmark UN [Security Council resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) UN on 'women, peace and security.'

The UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial brings together defence ministers and other senior representatives from more than 80 countries and organizations to discuss the challenges facing UN Peacekeeping including the under-representation of women, and how to work together to find solutions.