

[FEATURE: A woman's strength is unlimited, says award-winning UN peacekeeper](#)

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“Being a girl child, I dreamt of occupying a powerful position to influence and create change in the community. It was the segregation of women that I experienced in my childhood that gave me the strength to add my voice in everything I did.”

These are the words of Annah Chota, who last month was honoured as [International Female Police Peacekeeper](#) for her service and achievements with the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei ([UNISFA](#)).

Growing up in Harare, Zimbabwe, Ms. Chota's awareness of the inequalities that existed between girls and boys began at an early age. The way society groomed boys for professional careers and steered girls towards domestic chores led her to start dreaming of a more equal world.

“My father had originally been disappointed by having only girl children [the four daughters were later followed by sons], but then he began to appreciate us more through the discipline and tenacity to succeed displayed by myself and my sisters. At the time of his death in 2007, he had sacrificed all to ensure that we were educated and, as he used to say, we did not need to depend on a man for survival,” she told *UN News*.

Through her life, Ms. Chota fought to “remove the fixed stereotype on the limitations of women and girls.” She left Zimbabwe to study accounting in South Africa, but had to drop out of university at the end of her second year because her father could no longer afford the fees. She was then encouraged to join the Zimbabwe Republic Police by her brother-in-law, because that would give her the opportunity to work and fund her education.

Since 2006, Ms. Chota has been developing her passion for policing. In 2014, having graduated with a degree in Business Administration, she started leaning towards gender mainstreaming. And in November 2016, she was deployed to Sudan, where she was appointed as head of the Gender and Children Affairs Unit in the police component of UNISFA.



Annah Chota (holding flag) with the UN Police Delegation during the parade of nations at the International Women and Law Enforcement Conference in Cairns, Australia, on 18 September. Photo: UNPOL

“When I arrived, there was no institutions or a government that would make the work of advancing gender equality easier, so we had to look for initiatives that would allow us to have the support of the communities, not only to promote gender equality but also to help us with prevention and protection of women from gender-based violence,” she recalled.

Through training workshops and campaigns with local communities, Ms. Chota contributed to a shift in how communities deal with rape, domestic violence, child marriage and forced marriage, by recognising marital rape as a criminal offence.

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That was the reality confronting Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota when she got to Abyei to take up her post. In response, she helped to start a new network that would allow women to speak out. The idea of creating that network came with Ms. Chota from Zimbabwe, where “women also had to find a way of disseminating the message of equality.”

Since she arrived in the field, her main concern was always to protect women and girls and that is what motivated her to start lobbying to find support. “We needed to create a space for women to speak to their leaders. We needed to empower them, through community dialogues, to report and record the crimes,” she added.

Today more women are reporting gender-based violence, and in the absence of a police service, community protection committees can now record and recognise sexual and gender-based crimes.

“The success story of Abyei is that community policing models such as the problem-oriented approach and involvement of the community in policing have really helped to build confidence in the society to report cases of sexual and gender-based violence.”

Ms. Chota was recognised for her key contributions towards restoring the public’s trust in the police and encouraging children, women and men to become partners in preventing and detecting crime.



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota with Abyei Central Women’s Network Leaders. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota speaks with students in Abyei,

Sudan, as part of a campaign against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).
Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota assisting the community protection committee with follow-up in a rape case in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota engages with the community in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota speaks with the community in Abyei, Sudan. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka



Assistant Inspector of Police Annah Chota training the community protection committees on policing SGBV. Photo: UNPOL/UNISFA/Mthokozisi Makeka

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In her opinion, gender equality is not an issue that only Abyei has to deal with. “Issues of gender equality are global. The world at large is male dominated, and without empowering women, gender inequality remains solidified in the society.”

Ms. Chota is the first police officer from Zimbabwe to receive the award, which recognises the outstanding accomplishments of female police officers serving with the UN and has been bestowed annually since 2011.

“To be honest, representing my country is a dream,” she said. “When people watch athletes or world leaders representing their nations, they have this feeling that they want to also do something to raise the flag of their country high. I aspired to do it.”

Upon receiving the award, Ms. Chota said that it underscores “the value of hard work, professionalism, teamwork and discipline, which every peacekeeper must exhibit.”

The UN is working to attract more policewomen to join the 1,098 female police officers from 69 countries, who are currently serving in UN peacekeeping missions. In 2009, the world body launched the “Global Effort” and has worked with Member States and national police services to recruit more female police officers into UN operations. The goal is to reach 20 per cent women in the UN Police by 2020.

Zimbabwe provides 85 police officers to UN operations in Abyei, South Sudan

([UNMISS](#)), Sudan ([UNAMID](#)), and Guinea-Bissau ([UNIOGBIS](#)), 31 per cent of whom are women.

Ms. Chota called on other women to join her in the fight for gender equality. “Strength within women is unlimited. As women, we already play multiple roles, which indicates that also in peacekeeping we can do it and we can do more. What’s important is to believe in yourself, because if we advance women, everyone will succeed.”

“Peacekeeping gives unmeasurable feelings of joy when you are able to put a smile on the face of someone whose life was ravaged by war, abuse and poverty,” she added, noting that this is what keeps her going when she misses her husband and two small boys.