

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.

[**Afghanistan opium production jumps 87 per cent to record level – UN survey**](#)

15 November 2017 – A profoundly alarming trend in the cultivation and production of opium in Afghanistan reveals an 87 per cent production increase compared to 2016, the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime ([UNODC](#)) said Wednesday in its [Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017](#).

"It is high time for the international community and Afghanistan to [reprioritize drug control](#), and to acknowledge that every nation has a shared responsibility for this global problem," said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov.

According to the latest figures released by the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics and UNODC, in addition to an 87 per cent jump to a record level of 9,000 metric tonnes in 2017, the area under opium poppy cultivation also increased to a record 328,000 hectares in 2017, up 63 per cent compared with 201,000 hectares in 2016.

"For both Afghanistan, and the world, we are [heading towards uncharted territory](#) Additionally, the number of poppy-free provinces in the country decreased from 13 to 10 – and after more than a decade, Ghazni, Samangan and Nuristan lost their poppy-free status. The number of provinces affected by cultivation increased accordingly from 21 to 24.

"These frightening figures should give considerable pause for reflection on whether the calculus on the illicit drugs flowing from Afghanistan adds up to a workable and achievable solution," he continued, again urging the international community to revisit its engagement with Afghanistan, and to acknowledge that fresh assessments and policy revisions may be necessary.

Pointing to the multiple challenges the increase would pose for the country, Mr. Fedotov stressed, that Afghanistan, "already suffering from the opium produced within its borders, the increases will drive drug abuse, an increased dependency on the illicit economy, and rising levels of corruption."

Gains on governance and transparency in Afghanistan and surrounding countries

will also be challenged by more instability, insecurity, and increased funding to terrorist groups.

“New actors and markets are likely to emerge; some of these new actors may be terrorist groups attempting to use the drug trade to finance their global operations,” Mr. Fedotov explained.

Far greater amounts of opium in the world’s consumer markets would increase health and social problems – also placing added burdens on already stretched Afghan public health services.

The Executive Director called opium cultivation and production “a complex development issue and bound to the [2030 Agenda](#) on Sustainable Development,” for which partnership and coordination is also needed.

“UNODC has created initiatives-including the Triangular Initiative, the Paris Pact and the networking the networks activity-to assist, but engagement must be stepped up to increase effectiveness,” he stated.

All countries should benefit from fast-moving ICT revolution, urges UN agency

15 November 2017 – Revolutionary advances in technology have the potential to “fundamentally transform” billions of lives, but the threat that many people – especially in the world’s poorer countries – could be left out continues to loom large, a new United Nations report warns.

“Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have the [potential to make the world a better place](#) and contribute immensely to sustainable development,” said Houlin Zhao, Secretary-General of the UN International Telecommunication Union – the Organization’s specialized agency for matters related to ICT.

“However, despite the overall progress achieved, the digital divide remains a challenge which needs to be addressed,” he stressed.

According to the UN agency’s 2017 [Measuring the Information Society](#) report, harnessing the benefits of advances in the ‘Internet of Things’, big data, cloud computing and artificial intelligence, countries will need to create conditions and infrastructures that allow these next-generation networks and services.

At the same time, the substantial digital divides between countries and regions will also need to be addressed.

[The ICT] revolution will unfold over the coming decades with opportunities, challenges, and implications that are not yet fully knownITU report

For instance, least developed countries – which have, over the years, made progress in improving ICT infrastructure and connectivity – continue to lag behind on key indicators that can influence their position in the digital economy, such as having the lowest numbers among internet users (15.2 per cent on average).

Countries, irrespective of their development classification, will also have to adopt policies that that harbour innovation, as well as those that mitigate risks to information security, privacy and employment.

“This report will help to support countries to do just that,” expressed Mr. Zhao.

The report employs the ICT Development Index 2017, a unique benchmark of the level of ICT development in countries across the world.

This year, Iceland (score: 8.98) tops the rankings, followed by Republic of Korea (8.80) and Switzerland (8.66). United States, with a score of 8.18, ranks 16. However, the best performing African country, the island nation of Mauritius ranked 75, with a score of 5.88.

Measuring the Information Society, ITU’s flagship publication is recognized as the most authoritative repository of data and analysis on the state of global ICT development. It is extensively relied upon by governments, international organizations, development banks and private sector analysts and investors worldwide.

[In Vancouver, UN peacekeeping chief outlines ‘very serious challenge’ facing Mali operation](#)

15 November 2017 – The “very serious challenge” facing peacekeepers with the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) makes it vital that additional efforts are made for the four-year-old operation to fulfil its mandate, the UN peacekeeping chief has said.

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations made this assessment Tuesday as he addressed a packed Working Meeting for Member States, on the sidelines of the [UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference](#), which is taking place from 14-15 November, in the Canadian

coastal city of Vancouver.

Top military personnel and leading defence ministers – together with organizations and groups from more than 80 countries involved in peacekeeping – have joined UN officials to discuss the increasing challenges faced in the field, and how to address crucial funding gaps in equipment and expertise.

Of the 170 peacekeepers killed while serving in UN missions since the beginning of 2013 up to the end of September this year, 86 were with MINUSMA.

A June 2015 Peace Agreement was signed between the Government and various armed groups which it was hoped would bring a lasting ceasefire to the country, whose northern region was over-run by militant extremists in 2012.

Mr. Lacroix told the meeting of mostly uniformed men and women, looking out onto Vancouver's picturesque waterfront, that there were key gaps in equipment such as helicopters and robust armed personnel carriers.

He appealed for other troop contributing countries (TCCs) to come forward to help staff one of the UN's most dangerous peacekeeping missions.

"We need to do more in terms of training, how the force is organized, and modalities of how we protect ourselves and better-protect the population as well, against the threats they are facing," said the Under-Secretary-General.

UN Field Support chief Atul Khare told the meeting that while challenges remained, MINUSMA has made "significant achievements in terms of protection and training," and was fulfilling its mandate.

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MINUSMA Force Commander, Major General Jean-Paul Deconinck of Belgium, gave the meeting a frank assessment of the operational difficulties and deficiencies that he faced with deploying blue helmets and equipment, but in an interview with *UN News* after the 90-minute session, he said he was "confident but realistic" and if given the tools he needs, the mission "will succeed."

Overcoming the threats of continuing extremist violence against civilians was not only about MINUSMA he stressed, but about durable partnerships with the Malian army and international missions deployed in and around Mali, such as the regional counter-terrorism force known as the 'G5 Sahel,' which comprises Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mauritania, along with Mali.

The full plenary meeting of the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial takes place Wednesday afternoon, with sessions on "smart pledges" and pledge announcements; innovation in training and capacity building; protection; early warning and rapid deployment; and the Women, Peace and Security Chiefs of Defence Network.

We will have more from our news team in Vancouver later today.

Bonn: Secretary-General Guterres urges more ambition, leadership and partnerships on climate

15 November 2017 – Addressing the United Nations Climate Conference (COP23) in Bonn, Germany, on Wednesday, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres called for more ambition, more leadership and more partnerships to tackle climate change.

“Our duty to each other and to future generations is to raise ambition,” said Mr. Guterres at the opening of the high-level segment of COP23, which was also attended by Heads of State and Government, including President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Prime Minister of Fiji, Frank Bainimarama, who is also the President of COP23.

“We need to do more on five ambition action areas: emissions, adaptation, finance, partnerships and leadership,” the Secretary-General added.

The Bonn Conference, which opened on 6 November 2017, is taking place one year after the entry into force of the Paris Climate Agreement.

The Agreement, which was adopted by the 196 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)) in December 2015, calls on countries to combat climate change by limiting the rise of global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius and strive not to exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius. Today, 170 Parties have ratified the treaty.

We will have more from our news team in Bonn throughout the day.