

## Women Less Safe Than Soldiers In War: Professor

Written by Rudi Prinsloo  
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It is more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in armed conflict, sociology professor at Unisa, Carol Allais, said on Wednesday.

"Women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate and instil fear," she told a Pretoria seminar on sexual abuse by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers.

She said conflict-related sexual violence took place in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites and camps for refugees and displaced persons.

"It occurs at the height of armed conflict, during population displacement and continues after conflict," she said.

She explained that although the majority of victims of sexual violence were women and girls, men and boys were also targeted.

Peacekeepers were often part of the problem.

Sexual misconduct in the form of human trafficking, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse had long been linked with peacekeeping operations, she explained.

"Military personnel deployed away from their home have been a long-standing source of demand for sexual services from the local population."

She said peacekeeping soldiers trade sex for food or money with women and girls as young as six-years-old.

Research conducted by Save the Children in 2007, revealed 23 cases of abuse associated with humanitarian efforts, peacekeeping and security in Haiti, the Ivory Coast, and southern Sudan.

The Save the Children report also identified a range of sexual acts performed by children on staff associated with the international peacekeeping community, she explained.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, accusations of sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers led the Office of Internal Oversight Service to investigate 72 allegations of sexual exploitation.

The investigation developed into 19 cases involving military personnel, six of which were fully substantiated. All the substantiated cases involved children under the age of 18.

Allais said there was a perception among peacekeepers that they were immune from prosecution for crimes they committed while deployed.

"A major underlying problem is the limited control the UN has over individual peacekeepers.

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"UN staff are a small minority of the membership of peacekeeping missions... most peacekeepers are soldiers on loan, with respect to them, the UN has no disciplinary authority."

She said the soldiers served under the operational control of their own national establishments and were subject to discipline only by their national authority.

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