

## NICARAGUA

# Gender initiatives in the National Police

Women are often reluctant to file complaints of abuse with the police for different reasons, including cultural practices that limit interactions between men and women, social norms that inhibit women to speak about violence in the home and failure of the police to process complaints. To address these challenges, women's police stations have been established in a number of countries. These stations are often staffed primarily with specially trained female officers in order to create an environment where women feel comfortable reporting violations and reassured that their reports will be properly handled.<sup>1</sup>

In a number of Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay), women's police stations have become a popular and successful instrument for fighting violence against women.<sup>2</sup> Although the types of women's police stations vary and serve different segments of the population, depending on each country's criminal and other legislation, they have characteristics in common: they deal with domestic, family, and sexual violence against women, boys and girls. Women's police stations aim to:

- Protect women against threats to their security, including implementing protection orders
- Provide access to justice
- Provide access to services that users, most often the poor, may not otherwise have access to
- Contribute to a gendered focus on security in general
- Collect data on the crimes they address.<sup>3</sup>

## The development of women's police stations in Nicaragua

Nicaragua's first *Comisariías de la Mujer y de la Niñez* (Women's and Children's Police Station, or CMN) was established in 1993 in response to pressure from policewomen and the women's movement. The then head of the National Police of Nicaragua Secretariat, Aminta Granera, noted that rape had increased disproportionately to other kinds of crimes over the previous few years. After participating in gatherings of the Nicaraguan women's movement and visiting women's police stations in Argentina and Brazil, Ms. Granera developed strong convictions and a proposal that later became the basis for the CMNs. In 1996, CMNs become nationally institutionalised through inclusion in the new Police Code, although it was not until 1999 that a national office for CMNs was established, staffed and funded.<sup>4</sup>

The development and establishment of CMNs resulted from collaborative efforts among the National Police of Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Women's Institute, and the NGO Women's Network against Violence, with the support of a number of international and regional donors. The Nicaraguan Women's Institute, representing the government's public policy institutions for women, performed functions that were necessary for institutionalising the CMNs, such as their monitoring at the national level and the creation of protocols that defined technical quality of service standards.

By 2008 there were a total of 32 CMNs in Nicaragua: one in each departmental/regional

1 Tara Denham, "Police Reform and Gender," in *Gender and SSR Toolkit* (Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW, 2008), 9, <http://www.dcaf.ch/gssrtoolkit>.

2 Nadine Jubb and Wania Pasinato Izumino, "Women and Policing in Latin America: A Revised Background Paper" (paper prepared for the 2003 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Dallas, Texas, March 27-29, 2003), 1.

3 Tara Denham, "Police Reform and Gender," in *Gender and SSR Toolkit* (Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW, 2008), 9, <http://www.dcaf.ch/gssrtoolkit>.

4 Nadine Jubb, "Gender, Funding, and the Social Order: Contradictions among the State, the Women's Movement, and Donors regarding the Nicaragua Women's and Children's Police Stations" (paper prepared for the 2006 Congress of the Canadian Political Science Association, Toronto, June 1-3, 2006), <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Jubb.pdf> (accessed: December 2, 2009); Nadine Jubb, "Enforcing Gendered Meanings and Social Order: The Participation of The National Police in the Nicaraguan Women's and Children's Police Stations" (document presented at the XXIII Congress of the Latin American Study Association (LASA), Washington, DC, 6-8 September, 2001).

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capital, one in each district of Managua and two in other cities.<sup>5</sup> The CMNs have a mandate to address sexual and domestic violence against adult women, children and adolescents. Cooperation with women's NGOs and other non-governmental and state actors (e.g. children's and human rights organisations, public health clinics and the prosecuting attorney) allows the CMNs to combine policing, medical, psychological, legal and other services, including emergency shelter. CMNs provide specialised services at two levels. On the one hand, they provide professional services to victims of violence, such as helping them gain access to legal processes and/or get psycho-social care. On the other hand, they engage in a variety of prevention activities such as training, visiting schools, organising door-to-door campaigns and maintaining a database that tracks the cases of domestic and sexual violence. CMNs are staffed by female police officers with specialised training, female forensic doctors and social workers who provide follow-up and referral services.<sup>6</sup>

**Awareness-raising on intra-family violence**

In September 2006, Police Commissioner Granera announced a "Break the Silence" campaign which aimed to raise public awareness of intra-family violence and help victims of domestic abuse identify themselves as crime victims and denounce perpetrators. With the assistance of the police, civil society and educational institutions, the campaign undertook approximately 1,400 awareness-raising media information and educational activities which encouraged women to speak out against situations of abuse. A total of 5,914 persons were trained to provide victim support, including 2,080 students, teachers and police who were trained by the CMNs to identify and handle domestic violence situations through 60 workshops. The CMNs also facilitated 129 discussions on related topics involving more than 4,500 persons. There was a significant increase in the number of recorded gender-based and domestic violence complaints.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, despite greater public willingness to report crimes to the authorities, impunity for the perpetrators of violence against women remains a problem in Nicaragua, as is the case in so many countries.

**Gender mainstreaming and women in the Nicaraguan Police Force**

The development of CMNs resulted and benefited from the internal gender-responsive reforms that had been initiated in the National Police of Nicaragua in the 1990s. A gender mainstreaming strategy was adopted as part of a broader commitment within the service to address human rights and social justice. Gender mainstreaming has been a gradual process aimed at including gender equity in the institution's policies, plans and strategies. A key factor accounting for the success of the National Police of Nicaragua in its undertaking of gender mainstreaming has been the involvement of the highest ranks of police forces in leading the changes, as well as the successful guidance and commitment of female leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Since its founding in 1979, women have constituted a relatively large proportion of the National Police of Nicaragua, reaching a high of 35% during the 1980s. In 2005, half of the senior ranks in the National Police Headquarters were held by women, 57 per cent of the Commissioners, 60 per cent of the Assistant Commissioners and 17 per cent of the Captains were women.<sup>9</sup>

5 Nadine Jubb, et al., "Regional Mapping Study of Women's Police Stations in Latin America," International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Quito, Ecuador, 2008, <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/SSR/MAPEO%20Regional-English.pdf> (accessed: December 1, 2009).

6 Nadine Jubb, "Enforcing Gendered Meanings and Social Order: The Participation of The National Police in the Nicaraguan Women's and Children's Police Stations"; Nadine Jubb, "Gender, Funding, and the Social Order: Contradictions among the State, the Women's Movement, and Donors regarding the Nicaragua Women's and Children's Police Stations."

7 US Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nicaragua*, released on February 25, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/wha/119167.htm> (accessed: December 2, 2009).

8 Carola Mittrany, "Women in Charge: Interview with Elizabeth Rodriguez Obando," *Comunidad Segura*, released on February 4, 2008, <http://www.comunidadsegura.org/?q=en/node/38108> (accessed: December 15, 2009).

9 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Sixth periodic report of States parties: Nicaragua," CEDAW/C/NIC/6, 5 July 2005, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/409/10/PDF/N0540910.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed: December 3, 2009).

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► The importance of integrating gender into police reform is discussed in section 3 of the *Police Reform and Gender Tool*.

► Women's police stations/specialised units are discussed in section 4.4 of the *Police Reform and Gender Tool*.