

TIMOR-  
LESTEGender dimensions of  
establishing the PNTL

The *Policia Nacional de Timor-Leste* (PNTL) was established by the United Nations on 10 August 2001. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was initially given the mandate to “develop a credible, professional and impartial police service”. UNTAET focused largely on personnel recruitment and training.<sup>1</sup> Following the UNTAET phase, the UN extended the scope of the reform to include capacity building in human resources management, finances, community relations and field training.

After the 2006 crisis involving the police service and armed forces, the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) was given the responsibility for internal security and “reforming, restructuring and rebuilding the PNTL”.<sup>2</sup> Not until May 2009, with the improved security situation, did UNMIT and the Government of Timor-Leste agree to hand the responsibility for internal security back to the PNTL one district at a time.

#### Measures to incorporate gender issues in the development of the PNTL

From the outset, gender concerns were on the agenda in developing the PNTL. One of the first requirements established, for example, was that at least 20 percent of PNTL recruits were to be women.<sup>3</sup> Addressing gender-based violence was identified early on as an urgent need. UN police statistics in December 2001 counted gender-based violence as the most commonly recorded crime in Timor-Leste:

*... in December 2001 alone, a record 40 percent of all reported crimes were offences against women. They included crimes such as domestic abuse, rape, attempted rape and sexual assault, making violence against women being the number one reported crime in that month. CivPol further says that while 382 cases of domestic violence were reported last year, it was just the tip of the iceberg as the figure is believed to represent only 15 percent of total cases.*<sup>4</sup>

During the initial period of the development of the PNTL, UNTAET elaborated standard operating procedures for domestic and gender-based violence cases. Building the capacity of police officers to interview victims of sexual abuse received priority attention.

The PNTL training program lasts for three months (in the Police Academy) and is followed by a three to six month long Field Training Program.<sup>5</sup> UN agencies (including UNIFEM, UNDP and the Gender Affairs Unit of the UN mission) and external trainers conduct training on human rights, gender, children’s rights and gender based violence.

UNTAET set up a Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU) in March 2001, which eventually became a network of VPUs, one in each of the 13 districts. The VPUs are part of the PNTL Criminal Investigations Unit and mandated to deal with issues of rape, attempted rape, domestic abuse (emotional, verbal and physical), child abuse, child neglect, missing persons, paternity and sexual harassment. The VPUs represent an effort to bring such crimes into the realm of the formal justice system rather than the traditional justice system. VPUs are staffed by both PNTL and UN police. VPU officers receive 17 days of additional training to fulfil their special role.<sup>6</sup> Sustained efforts have been made to include female police officers in all VPUs to interview female victims, as well as female UN police officers to support the VPUs. The VPUs have also received support from the respective Gender Affairs Units

1 W. G. O’Neill, *Police Reform and Human Rights* (New York: HURIST, July 20, 2004), 20.

2 Y. Funaki, *The UN and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste: A Widening Credibility Gap* (New York: Centre on International Cooperation, 2009), 7-8.

3 UNFPA, “Gender-based Violence in Timor-Leste. A Case Study” (paper prepared for UNFPA Consultative Meeting, UNFPA: Bucharest, Romania, 17-20 October, 2005), 45, [http://www.unfpa.org/women/docs/gbv\\_timorleste.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/women/docs/gbv_timorleste.pdf).

4 UNTAET, *Gender Equality Programme*, 3, cited in: Henri Myrtilinen, “Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste,” Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) Policy Paper No.31: Geneva, 2009, 19.

5 Judicial System Monitoring Programme, “Police Treatment of Women in Timor-Leste,” January 2005, 7-8.

6 *Ibid.*, 7-8.

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of the UN missions and other UN agencies, and have co-operated with East Timorese women's organisations and the Association of Men Against Violence.<sup>7</sup>

#### Challenges

Barriers to women's full participation in the PNTL continue to exist. As of November 2009, the force had 608 female officers, which amounted to eighteen percent. Whilst this is a comparatively high proportion of women, the institution remains heavily male-dominated, especially in the leadership positions. A recent UN assessment mission identified the lack of career prospects for female officers as a major impediment to increasing the recruitment and retention of female police officers. Female officers have complained about the short maternity leave period of three months (as compared to six months in the armed forces), which makes it difficult for female officers to combine child-raising with their police career. Furthermore, cases of discrimination and sexual harassment in the force have not been adequately addressed. According to UNMIT, sexual harassment is a serious concern and a deterrent for women assigned to the field in the districts, especially if they are assigned as the only woman among male counterparts.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the VPUs' work is useful, it has been hampered by inadequate staffing levels and lack of technical and financial resources. In addition, female officers tend to be over-represented within the VPUs (although only three are headed by women), perpetuating the notion that working with gender issues is 'women's work' and therefore inherently seen as 'low status' work by male officers. An independent evaluation of the VPUs highlighted the need to deploy additional officers to UNMIT with the necessary training and experience to deal with gender based crimes.<sup>9</sup>

The PNTL continues to lack a proper system for recording crimes of gender-based violence. In its statistics, many crimes which should be classified as gender-based violence are classified in other categories, such as assault and battery and murder. There is no central database for gender-based violence, only a few, if any, sex disaggregated statistics and a range of different methodologies used to track cases of gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, the PNTL is attempting to develop its capacity to address gender-based violence with support from UNMIT, including through ongoing training. In 2008, PNTL and UNMIT collaborated to deliver a specialised "Train the Trainer" course on gender-based violence investigations.<sup>11</sup> In March 2009, a joint initiative of UNIFEM, the East Timorese government and the PNTL led to the organisation of a consultation between the national police and the different stakeholders from the community. The consultation brought together the heads of villages, civil society members and victims of gender-based violence in an effort to inform and improve law enforcement services.<sup>12</sup> Despite the many problems that persist, these are encouraging examples of measures taken to address gender issues in the provision of police services.

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

► Measures to incorporate gender into police reform are discussed in section 4 of the *Police Reform and Gender Tool*.

► The challenges of integrating gender into police reform in post-conflict countries are discussed in section 5.1 of the *Police Reform and Gender Tool*.

7 H. Myrntinen, "Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste," 26.

8 Ibid., 32.

9 Ibid., 26-27, 32.

10 Ibid., 20.

11 UNMIT, *Gender Quarterly Report*, 5-8 cited in: Myrntinen, "Poster Boys No More: Gender and Security Sector Reform in Timor-Leste," 32.

12 UNMIT Press Releases, "Female police officers work to end gender-based violence," 20 March 2009, <http://unmit.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=214&ctl=Details&mid=627&Itemid=3230> (accessed: November 25, 2009).