

## SOUTH AFRICA

# Gender-responsive defence reform

In 1994, during its transition towards democracy, South Africa embarked on an extensive SSR process. Given the strong militarism that characterised the former apartheid regime, reform of the defence sector stood out as an absolute priority. The African National Congress (ANC) began an inclusive and participatory process to define the new face of South African national security. The process started with the drafting of a white paper on defence followed by a national defence review, which sought to identify the military needs of the country. Between 1996 and 1998, ministerial advisors and members of the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Defence, as well as representatives of the academic community and defence-related non-governmental organisations (NGOs), formed a Defence Review Working Group, in order to discuss doctrine, force design, logistics, armaments, human resources and equipment.

Women were active during this process in demanding accountability from government and military institutions, an open and transparent system, and the engagement of civil society. It was at the insistence of women parliamentarians that the defence review was undertaken as a nationwide consultative process. A number of measures were put in place to ensure public participation, including the use of military planes and buses to transport religious and community leaders, NGO activists, and other civil society representatives to regional meetings and workshops. Using local facilities, such as schools, the Defence Secretariat organised public dialogues during which everyone was allowed to express concerns and needs. In this way, new issues emerged. Women representatives from rural communities, for example, highlighted the plight of dispossessed communities whose land had been seized for military use, the environmental impact of military use, as well as the problem of sexual harassment by military personnel.<sup>1</sup>

The participatory South African defence review process, which lasted more than two years, helped build national consensus around defence issues and generated public legitimacy for the new security structures. The inclusion of civil society, and in particular of women's organisations, as well as the involvement of women parliamentarians, contributed to the creation of relatively gender-sensitive security structures.

Particular efforts have been made to integrate a gender perspective into the defence sector. The appointment of Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge as Deputy Defence Minister from 1999 to 2004 was a strong signal of the Government's commitment to making the defence forces a more gender-equitable body. With an emphasis on equality and representativeness, a concerted effort continues to be made to increase the number of women in senior positions and at all decision-making levels in all the defence services. To this end, a range of different mechanisms have been established within the Department of Defence, such as:<sup>2</sup>

- A **Gender Focal Point** within the Transformation Management Chief Directorate, tasked with:
  - monitoring the advancement of women and ensuring that they are properly represented
  - promoting gender awareness in the Department of Defence (e.g. in relation to sexual harassment, gender-based violence, gender equity, and law)
  - conducting and coordinating gender training
  - monitoring Department of Defence statistics for gender representation
  - liaising with civil society and other international organisations
- A **Gender Forum**: to implement gender policies at the lower levels of the Department of Defence and to provide gender training to personnel at all levels.

<sup>1</sup> Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Negotiating the Transition to Democracy and Reforming the Security Sector: The Vital Contributions of South African Women*, (Washington D.C.: Hunt Alternatives, 2004), 23–24.

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the website of the South African Ministry of Defence, <http://www.dod.mil.za/> (accessed March 9, 2009).

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- A **Telephone Hotline**: to report cases of sexual harassment and gender-based violence within the defence forces.
- **Gender Sensitisation Programs**: to raise awareness and understanding of gender policies among all members of the Ministry of Defence.
- The **Women's Peace Table Initiative**: a forum that brings together more than 100 women from across the defence services and from civil society to discuss and define a common peace agenda. It is also an attempt to create ties and partnerships within the military and civil society.<sup>1</sup>

This gender machinery has greatly supported the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and programmes. Women's participation in the defence force has also been enhanced by changing social perceptions about the role of women in the armed forces. The defence force magazine *Soldier* has contributed, over the years, to challenging the stereotypes of women in the defence forces. Furthermore, the increased presence of women in the security sector has fostered the promotion and adoption of laws guaranteeing equal pay for equal work and access to the same incentives, as well as women and family-friendly policies such as allowing parents to work flexible hours and introducing maternity and paternity leave. In 2006, women constituted 23.8 per cent of the South African National Defence Force, and represented 11.6 per cent of its top management structure. The Ministry of Defence employed 17,780 women out of a total of 77,858 employees (22.8 per cent).

► Gender and defence reform are discussed in the *Defence Reform and Gender Tool*, and in the *Security Sector Reform and Gender Tool*.

► Gender-sensitive defence review processes are discussed in the *Defence Reform and Gender Tool*, pages 7–8.

► Policies and mechanisms for institutional reform of the defence sector are discussed in the *Defence Reform and Gender Tool*, pages 14–15.

► Integrating gender into defence reform in post-conflict countries is discussed in the *Defence Reform and Gender Tool*, pages 17–18.

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Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, *Negotiating the Transition to Democracy and Reforming the Security Sector*, 27.