

**João Gomes Cravinho**

Ministro da Defesa Nacional

**Intervenção do Ministro da Defesa Nacional, João Gomes Cravinho, por ocasião da sessão de abertura do seminário “Promoção da participação plena das mulheres em operações de paz”, no âmbito da Presidência Portuguesa do Conselho da União Europeia**

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The six months of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU are nearing the end. We, at the Defence, have been actively engaged with all EU member states and institutions, as well as with partners of the European Union in developing the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. We have covered a great deal of issues, from the Strategic Compass, to relations with Africa, NATO and transatlantic relations, from the defence economy to the environment.

But our contribution to CSDP would be incomplete without this seminar on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. As we develop the Union's strategic vision for its defence, gender needs to be fully included in our reflections and actions, with a strong commitment to justice and equality. This is not an optional extra that should be added on to other dimensions, but rather a central part of the current process of developing a European Defence Identity that is fit for purpose.

For that reason, I want to thank the Office for Equality at the Portuguese MoD, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Diana Morais, for setting up this timely initiative. And I want to thank all of the speakers and moderators in today's event for sharing their views with this audience that is following us both here in Lisbon and online.

We have a great deal of valuable lessons from previous decades that we need to incorporate in the process of setting up more diverse and equitable defence policies. The terrain of war and peace is not gender neutral, as the landmark UN Security Council resolution 1325, recognised. For the first time, the leading institution with primary responsibility for international security acknowledged a longstanding neglect of women and girls in international responses to armed-conflict situations and committed the UN and its member states to developing global efforts to achieve equality for women and girls in this field.

Since then, the Women Peace and Security Agenda has provided the tools to transform peacebuilding and achieve sustainable

peace, by bringing women into the processes. Instead of relying only on the instigators of conflict to create peace, a more diverse participation, including of women, often has the power to disrupt the status quo that generates the conflict in the first place, by establishing a more inclusive vision of peace.

Portugal and other EU Member States are bound by these commitments. At this moment, as we are developing the EU's defence policy, it is essential that the Women, Peace and Security agenda remains at the top of our priorities, rather than just a symbolic topic we approach occasionally on official speeches.

The discussion about increasing the participation of female peacekeepers has been going on for more than two decades, yet it has not achieved the progress that was expected. In 2019, NATO Allies' average in the representation of women across all operations, under different mandates and institutions, was only 7%. At the EU level, by May 2021, the average representation in military operations was also 7%, whereas in civilian operations the figures were substantively higher, reaching almost 27%.

Looking at the achievements so far, there is evidently a great deal of work ahead and the recurrent obstacles for faster and more sustainable progress need to be understood and tackled.

Allow me to address one of the most complex and possibly controversial issues in addressing the participation of women in peace operations: the reasons why participation is needed in the first place.

Over the last decades, conflict has been profoundly marked by transnational terrorism and violent radicalization, as well as the return of territorial annexation and contested sovereignty in disputed territories, often with resort to hybrid warfare. As the conflicts in Ukraine, or more recently in and around Nagorno-Karabakh have shown, violent territorial disputes remain a feature of contemporary armed conflict. And all of this is taking place in a context of renewed geopolitical competition among leading world powers.

What this complex scenario suggests is that the preparation of our military forces increasingly needs to combine training for war with training for building peace, because they are different expressions of the complex social realities that we have to deal with. It also tells us, that the challenges to our peace and security are diversifying and growing in complexity, including through the intensive use of technology.

In this context, soldiers need to do more than just inflict force upon adversaries. They also need to build trust and gather intelligence, working side by side with societies and partners with different organisational backgrounds, to address the root causes of war and to create more favourable conditions for long-term peace.

Peace operations are an expression of international solidarity and a commitment to eradicating violent conflict. They are not a panacea for all our problems, but several studies have found that peace operations have made positive contributions to the countries they operate in, not only by helping to contain civil wars

and large-scale conflicts, but also by increasing the success and staying power of peace processes. Improving their efficiency and promoting their adaptability is in everyone's interest.

Military peacekeeping contingents still mirror the heavily masculine national-level military structures that deploy them. Historically, women have been excluded and waived from “hard” security issues. Many argue that this peacekeeping system is not working, particularly when it comes to community engagement. Nonetheless, discussions around increasing the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping focus on gender almost exclusively through the lens of the “added value” of women in peace operations. The burden continues to fall on uniformed women to prove their worth.

This is where we need to acknowledge that arguing for the inclusion of women in uniform to improve mission effectiveness in intelligence gathering, local outreach, and protection responses draws on and reinforces gendered stereotypes that female peacekeepers are supposedly more pacific or empathetic. Such a

view, despite well intentioned and committed to greater gender equality, may actually worsen gender relations within missions, potentially reducing the potential of female personnel.

The fundamental argument in favour of greater women's participation in peace missions and operations is one of human rights and diversity, and this is by no means incompatible with military effectiveness.

Meeting the complex demands of peacekeeping environments requires a diversity of skills, experiences, perspectives, and approaches. Making missions more diverse, ensuring equal opportunity for deployed personnel, and promoting a culture of cooperation and empowerment are factors that are crucial to improving operational effectiveness and protecting all local beneficiaries.



The UN Secretary General said earlier this year “gender equality is perhaps the world's greatest human rights challenge. Women’s equal leadership and representation is the game changer we need”.

Enhancing the leadership of women peacekeepers and ensuring their full, effective and meaningful participation is a moral duty, but it is also a major contribution to rethinking and improving peacekeeping missions.

Gender equality should not be an aspiration reserved for peaceful countries, one that is somehow too difficult or inconvenient for countries in conflict. The evidence shows that the participation of women in peace processes leads to better outcomes in the substance and quality of peace agreements, as well as their durability.

By failing to achieve the promise of Resolution 1325, we are depriving ourselves of the means to achieve peace. We need

direct, substantive and diverse inclusion of women, so that they can influence the outcome of missions and operations.

Overcoming this recurrent lack of women's participation requires a long-term commitment and bold steps at the highest levels — often where men are the decision-makers. We know that women are essential to identifying durable and inclusive solutions that can lead to sustainable peace. Yet overcoming the obstacles to their participation has no quick fixes.

Portugal is committed to playing its part, and we know that we must lead by example. Equality and Diversity are streamlined as guiding principles in the policies of the Portuguese Government and Defence is no exception. On the contrary. We want to be at the forefront of these efforts, as historically the military have been in many other topics. Likewise, we would like to see equality and diversity leading to defence policies that promote a more meaningful participation of women.

Portugal defends that equality and diversity are essential elements in promoting fair, responsible, credible and prosperous societies. Women and men have the same rights and responsibilities, and everyone, without exception, must have the same opportunities and the same access to power, based on human rights and democracy, to intervene in decision-making that shapes national and international politics.

That is why we envision Defence Policies that pledge and leverage gender equality. A Defence Policy that promotes gender equality and the implementation of the Women Peace and Security Agenda, by adopting egalitarian principles, moves from the commonly accepted gender mainstreaming to challenge existing institutions and their biases and assumptions on how “security” is made.

Decision-makers everywhere need to address this topic, to move beyond words to actions, and beyond scattered initiatives to a systemic policy that will sustain the necessary changes. This is the way to ensure coherence and sustainability of results.

We should see this initiative also as an opportunity to reinforce a much-needed dialogue between the EU and NATO on the Women Peace and Security Agenda, in line with the commitments made under the Joint EU-NATO Declaration of 2016, where this topic was included as one of the areas of cooperation. It is high time that we join efforts between the two organisations in elevating the standards on women's meaningful participation in peace operations and in supporting member states develop national policies that respond to this need.

This is not just about counting women, it is about making women count.

Thank you very much and I wish you a fruitful day of work, that will certainly inspire many others to join us on this important path.