

**Helena Carreiras**

Ministra da Defesa Nacional

**Intervenção da Ministra da Defesa Nacional, Helena Carreiras, por ocasião de briefing sobre a participação de Portugal em missões de paz da ONU**

*(antecede inauguração da exposição sobre os 65 anos de participação de PT em missões de paz da ONU, na sede das Nações Unidas em Nova Iorque, no dia 26 de fevereiro)*

ONU, Nova Iorque, 26 de fevereiro de 2024

I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation for the opportunity to hold this debate and to highlight what Portugal has done in the past sixty-five years in the context of the United Nations missions and operations. I thank the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support for facilitating this event, and for the close collaboration throughout the years.

I am especially thankful to our Armed Forces General Staff – in the person of Portugal’s Chief of the General Staff, General José Nunes da Fonseca, present here today –, to the National Defence Policy Directorate – here represented by the Deputy Director, General Ana Baltazar –, as well as to the Portuguese Permanent Representation to the UN for the excellent work done, in collaboration with my team, in facilitating and supporting this debate as well as the exhibition.

Since joining the UN, Portugal has been a diligent contributor to international security, with a significant participation in UN peacekeeping missions. In fact, at the beginning of the century, Portugal ranked number ten out of eighty-two troop contributing countries, in demonstration of our strong commitment to the UN's collective efforts. During the sixty-five-year period in which Portugal has taken part in UN peacekeeping missions, there are a few notable cases that I would like to highlight.

**Firstly, Timor-Leste**, a country with profound links to Portugal that remain solid to this day. The various UN missions there, in which we were deeply involved, represent one of the most substantial and successful cases of UN peacekeeping in its history. I am sure that both the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support would agree, as well as many

of you here today who recall the UN's profound engagement in the country.

From the launch of UNAMET in 1999 following the decision of the people of Timor-Leste to become an independent country, to the role of the UN's Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste in supporting the electoral process, post conflict peacebuilding and capacity-building as well as human rights reinforcement, Portugal has participated in every UN-led peace effort in Timor-Leste through the deployment of 14 Military Observers, 380 Police Officers, and over 5800 Military Personnel.

**Secondly**, I would like to emphasize the Portuguese presence in the Central African Republic, under **MINUSCA**, one of the UN's most complex missions to date, with over thirteen thousand military personnel deployed.

For Portugal, this is the largest troop contingent presently deployed, with 225 military personnel on the ground, which will soon be reinforced with the integration of two additional Romanian military personnel.

Our involvement in MINUSCA began in 2017, primarily with a Quick Reaction Force, during a particularly tense period in the country and in the region, which led to the need to reinforce both the mission's mandate and its troop contingent.

The notable performance of the Portuguese troops operating in some of the most difficult areas of the country has been publicly recognized on several occasions. This recognition came not only from the UN and from Central African authorities, but also from the local population, something which represents the most

important recognition that peacekeepers can aim for. This is, after all, the ultimate goal of our presence: to protect the population and meet their needs, all in accordance with the mission's mandate.

In addition to having troops on the ground since 2017, Portuguese military officers have assumed the role of Deputy Force Commander on a constant basis since 2018, further signalling our robust commitment to this mission. In fact, we have with us today General Maia Pereira, a former MINUSCA Deputy Force Commander whose outstanding performance deserves due recognition.

General Nunes da Fonseca will have the chance today to further explore some of the most relevant logistical aspects of this mission

– a presentation that will certainly benefit from General Maia Pereira’s firsthand account of his experience on the ground.

**Thirdly**, I would like to bring your attention to the work being done in the context of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, the **CPLP**. This international organization is active in several areas including in defence, where our cooperation has been growing. In this context, it is worth mentioning the recent set-up of a Civil-Military Cooperation Cell, as an initiative put forward by Portugal to maximise the potential of cooperation between Portugal, Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Timor-Leste.

The Cell will promote the standardization of doctrine and operational procedures, as well as training and capacity-building of the Armed Forces of the participating countries, enabling them

to jointly participate in deployments of forces taking part in UN peacekeeping missions.

While this project is still in its infancy, we consider it to be very promising since it has the potential to contribute not only to ensure greater cohesion among members of the CPLP but also to the UN's role in peacekeeping. The idea is that this unit will be geared towards deploying and supporting UN missions, while prioritizing deployment in high-profile missions where CPLP countries have a significant presence.

**Fourthly, the participation of women** in UN missions is another key topic for us. Since MONUA, in Angola, in 1998, Portugal has systematically deployed women to take part in UN missions. This reflects the acknowledgement that their participation is crucial for



enhancing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

While progress has been made, challenges remain. We have been developing strategies to promote an even more meaningful participation of women, which include all targets established in the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, namely actively encouraging women to participate, providing adequate training and support, and maintaining mentoring programmes. These efforts have already produced concrete results, as we have reached one third of women deployed as staff officers and military observers in 2023.

Internally, the establishment of an Equality Office at the Ministry of National Defence in 2020 and the adoption of a Defence Action Plan for Equality, among other initiatives, have further reinforced

these aims, which have garnered positive results. For instance, we have been steadily increasing the number of women in the armed forces for the past few years, which is currently at 15% of the total personnel.

**Finally**, allow me to bring up the vital importance of **environmental sustainability** and how climate change has become a relevant factor in the worsening of conflicts and natural disasters. Portugal's sustained effort is visible not only in the recent adoption of a National Defence Strategy for the Environment, Security and Climate Change, but also in theatres where Portuguese soldiers take part in peacekeeping missions.

The contribution to the deployment of a renewable energy production system to our Quick Reaction Force in MINUSCA, which I announced at the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting in

Ghana last December, constitutes an example of the importance we attach to this subject.

In all these tokens of our participation, one aspect is crucial to the success of peace operations: **Trust**. Without gaining the trust of local authorities and of local populations, peacekeepers will not be able to do their job. Of course, they also need the proper equipment and logistics, a realistic mandate and adequate financing. But trust is key. That is actually one of the key ideas I had the chance to convey last week at the Munich Security Conference in the panel on peace operations.

Overall, the Portuguese commitment to UN peacekeeping efforts is undeniable. Through the deployment of over twenty thousand troop contingents, military observers, and security forces to different missions across the globe throughout these past sixty-

five years, we have demonstrated our firm resolve to effectively contribute to international peace and security. In this context, allow me to pay tribute to the fallen peacekeepers, not just from Portugal but from all Member States.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Recent and protracted conflicts are unequivocally changing the international security architecture. We must be able to respond quickly and effectively to the challenges and threats ahead. In this sense, ensuring the preservation of a multilateral rules-based order, with the United Nations at its centre, in full respect for international law and our democratic values and principles, is paramount.

Forward-looking endeavours such as the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and its implementation strategy, A4P+, will hopefully allow us to further strengthen and improve the UN's peacekeeping efforts. I am confident Portugal will keep on contributing to international peace and security – particularly if we manage to deserve your trust in our candidacy for a non-permanent member seat of the Security Council, for the 2027/28 biennium.

In an increasingly complex and dangerous environment that demands more from us – not less –, Portugal will continue to do its part, now and in the future.

Thank you very much.