

Policing with Compassion



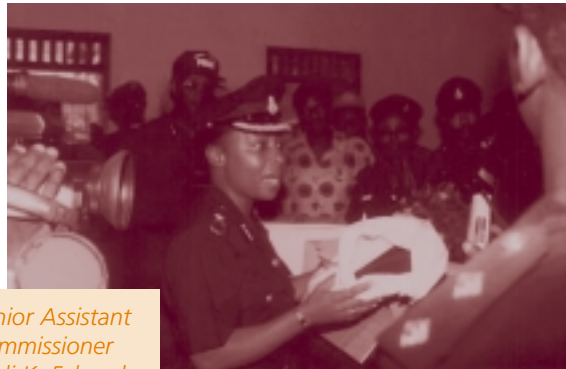
Sierra Leone

She is a beacon of hope for the aspiring women of Sierra Leone. Senior Assistant Commissioner Kadi K. Fakondo is the highest-ranking female police officer in her country, and a strong voice advocating for more women in the Sierra Leone Police.

Commissioner Fakondo is playing a crucial part in rebuilding the national police service in a country that has been devastated by more than a decade of civil war.

During her own twenty-year career, Commissioner Fakondo has seen the benefits of recruiting women into the police service. And she has stood up to the challenge of commanding police teams in a traditionally male-dominated profession.

Commissioner Fakondo believes policing is not a muscle-flexing profession. “Policing is about brains, not brawn,” she commented. “Policing is a lifetime job for a woman as well as a man – recruitment is only the beginning. The police service needs to demonstrate consistently that it values women officers by including women in influential policy and decision-making meetings, and by providing women with equal and challenging career opportunities such as in combat units, specialized areas or command roles.”



*Senior Assistant
Commissioner
Kadi K. Fakondo.*

The presence of female officers in Family Support Units of the Sierra Leone Police means that victims of rape, domestic violence or sexual crimes who were previously reluctant to come forward and seek help from the police can now be assured compassionate, humane and appropriate assistance. A network of trained local doctors provides free medical attention to victims who are referred from these Units. Victims can also be referred to providers of free legal advice.

The Family Support Units, which were established with the assistance of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), are key to combating a previously unchecked area of crime in Sierra Leone. During 2003, these Units received more than 3,000 reports of sexual and physical violence, with women and girls estimated to make up around 90 per cent of the victims.

Similar units focused on improving assistance to women and children who are victims of crimes of this nature have been established in other peacekeeping missions where the United Nations Civilian Police (CivPol) has been given executive responsibility. These include the National Vulnerable Persons Unit in Timor-Leste and the Victims Advocacy and Assistance Unit in Kosovo, the latter of which particularly focuses on victims of trafficking.

Policing Faces

In Sierra Leone, women currently represent 13 per cent of the national police service. It is expected that this figure will increase as a result of training and recruitment programmes run by UN CivPol in conjunction with the Sierra Leone Police. Training programmes for new recruits have a target for female participation of 30 per cent.

In other post-conflict countries such as Timor-Leste and Kosovo, where UN involvement has consisted of training and building a police service from scratch, the figures for female

representation in the police are 22 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. It is encouraging that these female police officers are not only participating in administrative functions but are often taking on leadership roles in policy and management or are involved in operational responsibilities.

There is clearly still a long way to go, and the challenge remains to heed Commissioner Fakondo's call: to provide equal opportunities for women like her to succeed in this traditionally male-dominated sphere.

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In Sierra Leone, a woman police officer (centre) directs traffic.

