

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
BY CAPTAIN CECILIA ERZUAH
UN MILITARY GENDER ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR FOR 2022
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL
25 MAY 2023**

United Nations Secretary General, Under-Secretary General for Peace Operations, Under-Secretary General for Operational Support, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of Member States Present, Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning.

I am honored to have been recognized as the recipient of the 2022 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award. This award underscores the tireless effort and dedication of my platoon towards gender equality and inclusiveness, while accomplishing the Mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei.

The importance of gender parity and the deployment of more women in peacekeeping cannot be overemphasized. As the Engagement Platoon Commander of the first Ghanaian Battalion in Abyei, my regular community engagements through both the mixed and All-Female Engagement teams helped in building trust with all parts of the communities we serve. Despite the environmental challenges, we strive to serve as role models for the women, children and all members of the community. Our engagements fostered the communities' confidence in my Battalion and facilitated the timely collection and exchange of information between the local population and my Battalion, with this the mission could better support the diverse needs of these communities. Our conversations with the local population also resulted in an increase in the number of women enlisted in the Community Protection Committees, which is male dominated. I am convinced that the right approach to gender parity means deploying more women in peacekeeping, including to leadership positions such as Platoon Commanders, Officers Commanding, and Commanding Officers.

Now, I wish to express my ultimate gratitude to God Almighty for making this day possible, my appreciation also goes to Ghana's Military High Command for the trust reposed in me, to lead a platoon along with sisters serving other females in the first battalion to Abyei.

I am equally grateful to UNISFA's leadership, peacekeepers and colleagues, especially members of my Engagement Platoon for their support: I could not have achieved this feat without them.

Lastly, to my family, friends, well-wishers, and parents, I say thank you for always being my greatest support and for your constant prayers.

Mr. Secretary General, Ladies and Gentlemen, in a special way I dedicate this award to the beautiful people of Abyei whose fond memories will forever remain with me and to all peacekeeping personnel, particularly we women in uniform. May our dedication, commitment and love for humanity never go unrewarded. Long live the United Nations. Thank you.