



# PEACEKEEPING MINISTERIAL

UNIFORMED CAPABILITIES,  
PERFORMANCE & PROTECTION

**UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie**

**Speech at UN Peacekeeping Ministerial**

Under-Secretary General, Foreign and Defence Ministers, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is the third UN Defense Peacekeeping Ministerial I have attended, but the first on my home soil.

I am proud to speak here as an American.

I am a patriot. I love my country and want to see it thrive.

I also believe strongly in an America that is part of an international community.

Countries working together on an equal footing is how we reduce the risk of conflict.

It is how we avoid the need to send men and women of our militaries to fight and sacrifice overseas.

The UN was set up for that purpose. As a way of resolving differences peacefully, supporting each other's prosperity, and extending universal rights and freedoms.

It is in all our interests for the UN to be made effective, brought closer to the lives of citizens, and not ever misused.

At a deeper level, a country that believes that all men and women are born free and equal cannot be true to itself if it doesn't defend those principles for all people, wherever they live, regardless their circumstances, and no matter how desperate their struggle.

In fact, our support should be strongest where rights are threatened the most.

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We live at a time of blatant disregard for the laws of war that forbid attacks on civilians.

Whether it is missile strikes on schools or hospitals, families bombed in their homes, neighbourhoods gassed with chemical weapons, besieged areas deprived of aid, or mass rape of women, children and men, we seem incapable of upholding minimum standards of humanity in many parts of the world.

That this comes at a time when humankind is richer, and more technologically advanced than ever before, is all the more painful.

Eighteen years ago, when I first began working with the UN Refugee Agency, there were just under 20 million displaced people worldwide, and the numbers were falling.

Today there are over 65 million people displaced, and the numbers are rising.

More countries are experiencing some form of violent conflict today than any time in the last thirty years.

UN peacekeepers now comprise of the second largest group of forces deployed overseas, and are often required to serve where there is little or no peace to be kept.

Against this backdrop, it is easy to dismiss our institutions as flawed or ineffective.

My hope, instead, is that young people in particular will feel inspired to join the effort to improve them: to join the 'men and women in the arena', to paraphrase President Roosevelt, 'who strive – are striving-- to do deeds, and whose faces are marred by dust and sweat and blood'.

In that regard, I want to express my respect for men and women who serve as peacekeepers, and for those who have been killed or injured.

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The protection of civilians is the primary responsibility of governments. When UN peacekeepers are deployed, it is usually where a government is unable or unwilling to protect civilian life.

Those United Nations missions often represent the last and only hope for millions of people facing daily threats to their safety and their basic rights.

The need for peacekeeping troops to have the best possible training and equipment and the highest standards of personal conduct becomes obvious when measured against that weighty responsibility.

That is why this meeting is so important, because it is in the hands of the governments you represent to enable peacekeeping to live up to its ideals and the needs of our time.

So, as you discuss how to strengthen UN peacekeepers and give peacekeepers the capabilities they need to operate in today's dangerous environments, I ask you to take time to consider this question from the perspective of women.

Around the world there are countless examples of women rising, leading, taking their destiny into their own hands, inspiring us all.

But women and girls are still the majority of the victims of war. They are over half of all refugees, and the vast majority of the victims of rape and other sexual and gender-based violence.

Women are at the absolute epicenter of modern conflict, in the worst possible sense. But more often than not they are still on the outside looking in when it comes to [political] politics and decisions about their futures.

If we went by the principle that those affected by a problem should be in charge of determining the solution, then the majority of the world's peace negotiators, foreign ministers and diplomats would be women. We all know the reality.

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In Afghanistan, thousands of women have recently come together in public, risking their lives, to ask that their rights and the rights of their children be guaranteed in peace negotiations that so far they have been allowed no part of. Their stand is inspiring, but it should not be necessary and the international community's silent response is alarming to say the least. There can be no peace and stability in Afghanistan, or anywhere else in the world, that involves trading away the rights of women.

Worse still we see impunity for crimes committed against women and girls during conflict, or when women human rights defenders are attacked, or killed, or imprisoned.

Too often, whether or not we confront these human rights violations depends not on the law, on universal standards, but on how much our governments think that their business or political interests in that country might be affected.

This is as harmful to our long-term security and stability as it is unacceptable on a human and moral level.

None of this is to discount the efforts of the many men, great husbands, fathers, brothers and sons, who have been with us in this fight.

It is simply the reality of the unequal power relations, abuse of power, gender bias, violence and lack of justice that keep so many women in a subordinate, and therefore vulnerable, position internationally.

Fearing abuse at the hands of a peacekeeper is not protection.

Living with the fear your daughter might be raped by armed combatants, is not safety.

Knowing that if your children are harmed, no one will be held accountable, is not a basis for peace and security.

Denying half a population representation in peace negotiations or in government is not the route to long-term stability.

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As long as we continue to put almost every other issue ahead of women's rights and participation, we will remain stuck in a cycle of violence and conflict. We will have learned nothing. And our institutions will count for less than they should.

From my experience, a growing number of men and women in uniform understand this. When we are at our best, doing what we are called to do, we all share the exact same goals. The same mandate. A safer, more stable world. We fight to defend our freedoms and rights and the freedoms and rights of others.

I recently met a male peacekeeper, who had just returned from deployment as a gender adviser in the Central African Republic. He told me that when he had started his career serving in Afghanistan, he considered women's rights to be a "soft" issue and not what war was fought for. But his experiences had made him understand that it is exactly what should be fought for, and exactly what stabilizes a country.

His ability to contribute to this goal became a source of pride to him. He had made that jump in his thinking. And while he had been doing a great service to his country already, he had now added that understanding and that sense of partnership with the women he served.

There is progress. The number of cases of alleged sexual exploitation and abuse are down, although even a single case is unacceptable. The numbers of women peacekeepers is on the rise, with African nations in particular leading the way on this. There are more gender advisers on UN missions, although still not enough. And improved the training on the protection of civilians is starting to come into effect.

But there is still a long way to go to demonstrate that anyone who commits violations will not be tolerated and will be investigated and prosecuted without exception.

There is still much more to do to increase the number of women in the ranks of peacekeeping missions. Having met some formidable female peacekeepers this morning I think this change cannot come soon enough for the effectiveness and impact of missions.



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And of course, we cannot call for more women to serve, without making it safe and viable for them to do so, including ensuring that they themselves are not vulnerable to sexual harassment or abuse.

New actions by your governments in all these areas can make a huge difference. But they, I believe must be accompanied by commitments to ensure women's representation in peace negotiations. To be consistent in the defense of women's rights, in all places, and to address the deep-seated societal reasons for inequality and violence against women.

And above all we need an understand that women themselves are protectors: As mothers. As peacekeepers. As human rights defenders.

Women are already contributing to peace in theatres of war across the world without recognition or glory, because it comes naturally to them. It's important to them.

Think how much more we could achieve with women's equal participation in all aspects of society: not at the expense of men, but alongside men. Because we are all partners in this life.

We humans are capable of horrors, and unspeakable cruelty. But we are also capable of building civilizations, improving laws, demanding justice. We are willing to fight for people we've never met and for their families

We fall. We fail. We lose our way, often when we are made to feel afraid.

But in our moments of strength and clarity, we know that all people are in fact equal. We know that while we can and should be proud of who we are individually, we are a part of a global world. And we know that we are supposed to come together in defense of something greater than ourselves.

Thank you very much.

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