

<p>AFRICAN UNION MISSION IN SUDAN (AMIS II)</p>		<p>EUROPEAN UNION POLICE ASSISTANCE TEAM</p>
<p>الاتحاد الأفريقي</p>		

I am Chief Superintendent Kristina Bonnez of the Belgium Police

I joined the police service in 1982 after completing law school and achieving a Masters of Law degree.

I was posted to West Brussels Police, an area of multi-cultural and ethnic diversity, as the first female assistant Chief of Police, with responsibility for the operational performance of police personnel.

I later became the Chief of Police of Overijse District, just outside Brussels, and after completing my tour was appointed as the Chief of Staff for the National Office of the Inspectorate of the Federal and Local Police Forces

In 2006 I was the first female Belgian officer selected for International Policing Missions and completed the pre-deployment training. In July 2006 I joined the European Union Police Assistance Team (EUPAT) who were working as advisers in support of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). I was the sole Belgian officer on the mission and one of the few senior officers deployed. In addition the number of female officers in country was never more than four.

I arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for my initial briefing and was soon off to Sudan as the Senior Adviser to the African Union (AU) Police in Khartoum.

Although I have travelled abroad and visited many countries, it is very different when living and working in a place for many months. (In fact due to the unusual status of the Mission I eventually spent 19 months in Sudan and 3 in Ethiopia).

My arrival in Addis provided me with a good insight into that part of Africa and a more basic style of life, as I relocated to Khartoum and subsequently travelled to Darfur, so the conditions deteriorated, both in terms of comfort and potential risk.

My attitude, and that of the majority of my EU Police colleagues, was that I had volunteered for an overseas posting and accepted that Sudan was not the same as Brussels.

From living in a comfortable European city to a tent in the heat of the desert, with unpredictable basic amenities such as electricity, water, and

poor communications, as well as a meagre diet, was in my opinion, all part of the job. In addition was the increased health risk and the unpredictable security situation but with the correct approach and attitude, these remained at an acceptable level.

The work itself was a new experience for me and one which I relished. Being an EU International Police adviser to a multinational African police force, which was tasked with monitoring another country's police in a post conflict situation, required considerable tact and diplomacy plus lots of patience and resilience.

Sudan is a Muslim country and generally retains traditional views on the role and position of women in society. Whilst Khartoum accommodates a degree of acceptance to Western influence, in the main this is yet to reach Darfur, where even female victims of crime have to obtain permission from the local Umda (Village chief) before speaking to police. Other activities also illustrate the differences between the status of men and women.

You see in the news the stories of the plight of the people of Darfur but this does not prepare you for the reality when you visit a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and realise you are seeing only a small percentage of over 2.5 million persons. Reading the daily situation reports that recount the deaths and serious crimes adds to the overall scale of the tasks facing you.

As I was the Senior EU police Adviser to the AU police in Khartoum I was soon involved in a variety of projects and regularly the focus for advice. I also found myself dealing directly with senior officers (all male) of the Government of Sudan Police (GoS). I was able to develop sound professional relationships though my regular contact with these officers and established a good rapport with them all. In addition I was also coordinator of all EU police activity in Khartoum liaising, as necessary, with mission personnel in Darfur and Addis Ababa.

The African Union handed over the mission to the United Nations at the end of 2007 and with that the EU Mandate was concluded. I was tasked with ensuring all EU personnel left Sudan and then closing down operations there, before transferring to Addis Ababa as member of the end of mission report writing team. This enabled me to contribute to the debrief and lessons learned process to assist in future missions.

Working with police officers of other nationalities in three different contexts, namely EU personnel acting in advisory roles, AU as monitors and GoS as the executive local police, provided me with valuable insights into how others perform their duties and also a degree of commonality that exists in policing. The cognizance of policing that was built up, although it had obvious differences, provided the cohesion that enabled us to achieve effective understanding and recognition of each other's perspectives.

Serving on this mission enabled me to gain the experience of being in a completely new environment in terms of culture and policing. I was able to both offer advice from my own experience but equally benefit from the knowledge of my colleagues and enhance my own ideas. It is also relevant

to comment that despite the diversity of the groups of police and other officials I dealt with, at no stage did I encounter difficulties that might have been expected by being a woman. Any problems I did face were no different to those experienced by all international staff.

The question people often ask me is whether I would do this again and my reply is always yes, without any hesitation, if there is a job to be done. Likewise I would recommend other women officers to undertake such ventures if they feel they are right for the challenge.

The experience I gained and the memories I hold will always remain with me.

Looking forward to my next mission