

Transcript of an audio-interview with Sharon Wiharta, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Stockholm

Ms. Wiharta, what does the current peacekeeping map look like, with regard to major troop contributing countries, if we consider the North-South divide, if we consider the dominance of South-Asian actors in UN led missions?

Well, the current map, or if you like, the list of troop contributing countries for UN peace operations has looked pretty similar in the last two to three years. There is an over-dominance of Southern actors, in particular from South-Asia. Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India are all in the top 10 list of (troop-contributing) countries. Then you also have some representation from South-America and the Middle-East through Uruguay and Jordan. So, with regards to the North-South divide, as you can see, it is a lot of southern actors in the top 10.

What ambitions are there in Southeast Asia to become more active with regard to UN Peacekeeping, in particular in Indonesia but also on a regional level?

There are ambitions within Southeast Asia to be more active. First I should start by saying that Southeast Asian countries have contributed to UN peace operations quite a bit. One country in particular, Indonesia, is eager to be even more active. In the last two years or five years, it has gone from 200 personnel to over 1.800 personnel. It is currently in the top 16 and has desires to be in the top 10 list.

Are these ambitions limited to military and police contributions or do they also envisage a role for civilian experts and a stronger involvement in the conceptual debates and processes with regard to UN peacekeeping?

Well, the short answer is: No. We just take the case of Indonesia again. Indonesia is very keen to develop civilian experts and also to follow in the footsteps of other countries and develop a roster of civilian experts for UN operations, and also to be used at the regional level. As with regards to a stronger involvement in the conceptual debate, I think that is happening definitely in the region. Countries in Southeast Asia are debating more vigorously on norms like responsibility to protect, protection of civilians, which is very important in the whole socialization of norms. The international level, they are beginning to be more engaged, to shape and influence global dialogue, global debate and global policy.

How do you assess the prospects of actors from Southeast Asia to live up to these ambitions, and which obstacles for implementation are there?

It is cautious optimism. Southeast Asia or ASEAN, the regional framework in Southeast Asia, have taken a number of concrete steps in 2011 to further their plan for an ASEAN security community, which could see the potential for increased participation of Southeast Asian countries. So there is political will from some of the Southeast Asian countries. The main challenges I see, as with any other country, I think, is the national decision-making process. The political consideration to deploy personnel, regardless if it is military, police or civilian, is very political. And a more technical consideration is a question of resources. And if we are talking about the ability to deploy troops in large numbers, saying thousands, then Southeast Asian countries need also to develop capabilities or to have assets where they can deploy troops to UN operations.

Ms. Wiharta, thank you for the interview.