

PEACE DIVIDEND

The Canadian blue beret holds sway at home—and abroad—through specialized training for peacekeepers.

For 50 years, Canadians have earned a worldwide reputation in peacekeeping, using skills and strategies honed in increasingly complex hot spots around the globe.

Now Canada is taking its peacekeeping traditions abroad. Officers from the Canadian Forces Peace Support Training Centre (PSTC) in Kingston, Ontario, earlier this year spent three weeks in Mali providing practical instruction to students from 11 countries across Africa training to be United Nations military observers.

“Canadian expertise in this area is valued,” says Major Lindsay Reinelt, the officer commanding the training section of the PSTC who led the program, which covered everything from gathering information from local people to investigating human rights violations. “We want to increase the capacity of peacekeepers to operate safely and effectively in demanding, high-risk situations.”

The Mali training, conducted at the Koulikouro Peace Support School and financed by Foreign Affairs Canada’s Human Security Program, the Canadian Forces Military Training Program and the governments of France and Mali, paralleled a course the PSTC currently delivers to Canadian military officers and others working in dangerous regions.

Wendy Gilmour, Deputy Director of the Regional Security and Peacekeeping Division at FAC, says that such programs help nations further develop their capabilities to conduct peace

operations. “In times of violent conflict, successful peace support missions are critical to relieving human suffering,” she says. “Canada is pleased to be able to work with the school at Koulikouro, along with other G8 nations, as part of our goal to assist in building global peace operation capacity, particularly in Africa.”

Norman Hillmer, a professor of history and international affairs at Carleton University who has studied how the UN blue beret “holds sway over the national imagination,” says that peacekeeping in its early days involved soldiers with combat experience maintaining negotiated peace settlements. In the post-Cold War era, training has been developed to meet the changing scope and nature of missions, he says. “Peacekeeping has become complicated. The definitions and the numbers of operations have exploded; it’s about intervention and nation building,” and goes well beyond the reach of the UN, he adds.

Officials from Canada’s Pearson Peacekeeping Centre have contributed to the teachings of the new Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana, in operational-level areas such as disarmament and demobilization. Maj. Reinelt says the PSTC, which was started in 1995 to provide tactical training, has provided training materials to more than 30 peace-support training centres around the world.

The 15-day military observer training program in Mali, the first of its kind, involved seminars and



Photo: Canadian Forces Peace Support Training Centre

on-the-ground exercises for 23 officers, delivered in English and French, in fields such as landmine awareness, first aid and hostage negotiation. In the simulations the observers—who operate unarmed—encountered trauma cases in minefields and heavily armed child soldiers at roadblocks, as well as finding themselves ambushed and robbed, “everything they might encounter in the real world,” says Maj. Reinelt.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bakary Kanouté, commandant of the Koulikouro school, said, “It was a good experience to see what Canadians are doing.” After the program, participants returned home with copies of the training materials to share with people in their countries and regions.

The PSTC intends to deliver more such programs overseas, with an upcoming training exercise planned for South Africa. 🍁

Achieving strategic effects: Peace support trainees learn practical techniques in “real world” simulations, such as caring for a soldier injured by a landmine.