

SOUTHCOM's Podcast Transcript Episode 2

Guest: Ambassador Jean Manes

Women, Peace and Security

October 26, 2020



(Instrumental music) (electronic music) - Hello listeners and welcome to the SOUTHCOM podcast. I am Rich Crusan and it's an honor and privilege to have on the podcast today, the Civilian Deputy Commander for United States Southern Command, U.S. Ambassador Jean Manes to tell us about Women, Peace and Security, welcome to the SOUTHCOM podcast, Ambassador Manes.

Ambassador Manes - Thanks Rich it's great to be here with the SOUTHCOM family this morning and particularly to talk about Women, Peace and Security, an issue near and dear to my heart and I think one that is impactful across the globe. –

Rich Crusan - Thank you ma'am. Before we get started on today's topic, could you tell us a little bit about yourself, your job here at SOUTHCOM, your role at SOUTHCOM and some of your responsibilities, so the listeners can get to know you a little bit better?

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, so I have the privilege to be the Civilian Deputy Commander here at U.S. Southern Command. At this command, there are two deputy commanders, one is military, obviously, Lieutenant General Plehn and then myself as the civilian deputy. And so, part of that is looking at how we leverage the full interagency apparatus to move foreign policy. The military is obviously a key institution, as is the State Department and so I actually work for the State Department and have for the last 28 years. And served in a variety of countries from Syria and Afghanistan, to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Portugal and El Salvador.

And, so working together between the State Department and the military really makes us much more powerful as a nation and able to really move foreign policy. Also at this command, you have other agencies represented, including the U.S. Agency for International Development, again, it's almost like our own mini interagency process here at U.S Southern Command, so we can look at the challenges and opportunities from every angle and make sure that we're leveraging the assets and the unique authorities, that each part of the U.S. government has. My specific responsibilities also include, the Office of Human Rights, as well as Women, Peace and Security.

Rich Crusan - Ma'am this sounds so incredibly important of a position to have in a geographic combatant command and I'm not sure if any other geographic combatant commands have a similar role or position, if you know of one and why isn't it that all of them actually have such an important role, that

ties and this, really to me, creates a great synergy between Department of State and the Department of Defense?

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, there is one other command that has this setup, I actually believe it should be at every command, because it really combines the power of two of the main institutions in our foreign policy apparatus. And so a lot of what I spend day to day is really working with our ambassadors, in each of the countries in the hemisphere, listening to what their priorities are, bringing that back and then how can you leverage DOD assets to really help move the ball on those priorities.

Rich Crusan - Wow, it really sounds tremendously important and a great position to have in a geographic combat command. We could probably spend a whole podcast on this topic alone- - Well, absolutely love it. (laughing)

Let's get going into Women, Peace and Security, could you tell us about the origin of Women, Peace and Security? How the U.S. got involved? And how SOUTHCOM has gotten involved in this?

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, so we've been at this for... We had the UN Security resolution and that's been a couple of decades in the making and at SOUTHCOM has really taken it to a different level and I say that because when I came into this job just a year ago, Admiral Faller, he gives everybody a letter in the senior position about what he expects you to do in your position and he said, look, I want Women, Peace and Security to be at the forefront, I don't want it to be a program, I want it to be integral to everything we do and I am moving it, so I'm moving it directly under you as Civilian Deputy Commander, to take that, I don't want a conference, I want it to be fully implemented.

And so, we took that and moved out and what that means is now we have somebody full time, Lieutenant Colonel Turner, who focuses full-time on Women, Peace and Security in the hemisphere, as well as a contractor position. Prior to that, it was an add-on duty to somebody's job and I think we all know what happens when something is an add-on duty, right? You can't make it through your day and then get to an add-on duty and really put the time and focus and attention. So we try to focus on both the structural changes that need to happen in order to be inclusive with women and we can get at why that's important later in the podcasts and then we look at the cultural significance of that and also just raising the profile of women across the hemisphere.

Rich Crusan - Tremendous ma'am. And you're right about the additional duty, it never becomes in the forefront if you have it as an additional duty. Does this impact on national security? And can you describe how it impacts on national security?

Ambassador Manes - It's absolutely essential to national security and I'll just give you an example, so as we look at improving security in the hemisphere working with our partners, if you're not including 50% of the population, okay, well that should be a red flag right from the beginning, right? And when you look at the population, generally, the population trusts women more and they have more credibility,

they're seen as less corrupt and so when you tie that to an institution, whether that is a policing institution or military institution involved in security, it gives that institution more credibility with the population and that's a key component, that trust, that a population has with their own institutions, women bring that.

And when you look at improving the security of a country, having women be at the forefront at every level, really increases the productivity. So when we talk to ministers of defense, chiefs of defense, ministers of security, police chiefs, in each of our engagements when we travel in the region, if they want to be successful, the inclusion of women is a must. And I think that's more and more becoming common knowledge and so Jamaica is a good example and they've really taken this and applied it directly to what they're doing at every level, in terms of recruitment, in terms of promotion, in terms of recognition, they really feel if they don't have women in, that the chief of defense is not going to be successful. And that's a key component, because everybody wants to be successful at their job and I think now we've gotten from the thought maybe 10, 15 years ago, oh, these programs are doing a favor for women, women don't need any favors, right? Women bring credibility and trustworthiness to your institution and have a lot to offer, you need women. And the ministers and chiefs of security I think, for the most part in this hemisphere, have absolutely come to realize that.

Rich Crusan - So you mentioned Jamaica and then you mentioned in general terms some of the other countries, mods and shards, is there any other specific country where you've seen some success or successes for WPS?

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, so I will mention El Salvador, as you know, I was the U.S. ambassador to El Salvador and, we were working with the Salvadorians to reduce the homicide rate as it was the homicide capital of the world outside of a war zone. And so the U.S. government is very focused on improving security as a form to reduce outward migration and we were doing all kinds of programs to do that and one in particular, we were looking at... Okay, we were making progress and the homicide rate had gone down by 40%, yet the perception of security hadn't moved and we all know that usually perception of an issue lags behind the facts that are changing on the ground. But we began to look into that, why do people not feel more secure? And we were collecting a bunch of data and I'm a big believer in data and I took home over the weekend about 300 pages of data, about every factor of where people feel secure, the breakdown of men and women and suddenly about page 150 as I was sitting on the floor, reading this on the weekend, I got to public transportation and the level of insecurity in particular for women, in public transportation and I looked at that and it was something like 95% of people feel insecure on public transportation and I went back to all of our programs we were doing and we weren't doing a single thing in public transportation.

And of course, if you're listening to this and you're female, every female knows that feeling of sitting there waiting for the bus or walking to the bus stop, during the winter when it's dark or all of those feelings of insecurity, just trying to get to work. And when the vast majority of a population takes public transportation and that has not been addressed, that security, of course they feel insecure and of course that affects the perception. So I went back to my team, and shame on me, went back to my team who was working these programs and we didn't have a single woman in that working group, we had missed

it. And we had missed it and again, not moving out on a key objective and so, but again, data tells you that, also it shows the value of having a diverse working group, who's working on security issues, because men don't have that same feeling at a bus stop, right? It's just one of those things. But by not having a diverse working group, that led to a less optimal decision, on the part of the United States, in our support of a country to improve security.

Rich Crusan - I appreciate your example ma'am, El Salvador is near and dear to my heart, being that my mom's from El Salvador, thank you for calling out some of the success in El Salvador. I'm sure the initiative isn't without some hurdles, have you seen some of the challenges and could you describe any of the challenges?

Ambassador Manes - There's always challenges when you're trying to, in some ways change culturally how society looks at women, how society looks at women involved in security. And a lot of that I think, leadership matters and so the leadership of the United States matters and I can share with you a simple thing, it's about making the invisible visible and what does that mean, making the invisible visible? It is shining a light on women who are doing incredible things in the security sector. So we actually work very hard across social media, in-person engagements, to really shine a light on what women are doing in these critical roles and every time you do that, that's one more piece that's changing a perception, that's changing the perception of do women belong in these roles? And that happens over generations -- that happens over time. But you can do specific things, so I'll give you an example.

Every trip we make and you have both military and police normally that are part of our delegation or providing security on our additional stops. I look quickly, scan the room, scan the perimeter of a building and I find a woman in uniform and I walk right up to her, I shake her hand, I thank her for her service and when I do that, guess who follows? The media and something near and dear to your heart, right? (laughing) They follow where a principal goes. And so while you're doing that, you're getting that woman on camera in a security role, that's going to people's living rooms, that changes perceptions on... Hey, look at that... And the more you see that, the more it becomes normalized. When you make the invisible visible, you start to really make it routine to see woman in all of these different roles. And, we highlight the first woman who gets a certain rank or the third woman, all of those things play into the public perception about do women belong here? And yes they do, is the answer to that and are they successful? Yes they are. - You said two decades or so since the U.S. Security Council resolution, where we have come, seems like we've come a long way, but where do you think we're going in the future? We've got so much more emphasis being put on Women, Peace and Security ma'am? - Again, I think that the shift has changed in the sense that people see it, not as a program, but as if I want to be a successful police chief or if I want to be a successful minister of security or chief of defense, then I need to utilize the full talent of this population and I need to take advantage of the unique perspectives that women are going to bring to make my institution stronger. And so now you're looking at really what are the structural barriers?

So I'll give you an example, was out at the border in a country and I was looking for the women who were on the border, either military or police and didn't see any and I thought, well that's odd, right? Usually there's at least a handful. So I actually asked the minister of security who was traveling with me

and I said, 'Mr. Minister, why is it there are no women?' And he looks around, he had not noticed that, of course men don't notice that there are no women, only women do and so, he was like, 'why are there no women?' And then they come back and they said, there are no women because there's no separate sleeping quarters and there are no separate bathrooms. Uh-huh okay, that's interesting, we can help you with that, right? We're actually working on a lot of assistance for this country, we can help put in a 20 person sleeping arrangement and a separate shower to help with the incorporation of women at the border. So sometimes those barriers, they're not that big, right? They just haven't been looked at or nobody's called attention to it. And then you have more structural change and that's to look at, how women's evaluations are written, how promotions are done, what training opportunities are through the course of the career, those jobs that set you up for the more senior jobs, there's all sorts of things that you have to look at every step of the process, but sometimes it is a matter of simple things like, dormitories that are separate and a separate bathroom.

Rich Crusan - Madam ambassador, you are a wealth of knowledge, I appreciate your time, spending your time with us here today. I know that there's something coming up on October 29th, it's some sort of a book launching, could you just give us some description about it and what's going on?

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, we have the launch of the book "Twenty Years Twenty Stories: Women, Peace and Security". And so it really is featuring women across the security sector, cyber, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and so that book launch will be actually Thursday, October 29th, from 9:30 to 11. And so it would be great to have as many of you as possible and I wanna thank our Women, Peace and Security team, Lieutenant Colonel Turner, as well as the rest of our team who's been working to get this production in place with the Perry Center. And it will feature women who have made incredible contributions and we can't wait for the next 20 years. - Ma'am I'd love to have you back in the future to tell us about the successes of Women, Peace and Security and this initiative, if you'd be okay with that.

Rich Crusan - Absolutely. - Ma'am I can give the listeners the web ID, it's our zoom, if they wanna participate in the book launch at 9:30 on the 29th of October, that webinar ID is 16149014881614901488 and the passcode is 716289, the passcode is 716289. Thank you for joining us today, madam ambassador.

Ambassador Manes - Absolutely, thanks Rich, appreciate it. - Our next topic will be the humanitarian assistance projects and COVID relief efforts, within the SOUTHCOM geographic area. Thank you for joining us on the SOUTHCOM podcast. (instrumental music)