

Leveraging the Total Force – Military, Civilians, and Locals

One of the main priorities of overseas military legal offices is to provide support for all victims – regardless of national origin or language. Regional Legal Service Office (RSLO) Europe, Africa, and Southwest Asia (EURAFSWA) consistently leverages diversity in the form of staff language skills, employee background, and external partnerships with the host nation criminal justice system to accomplish this mission.

Diversity of Language

In RLSO EURAFSWA, there are four major languages: Spanish, Italian, Greek, and Arabic. However, many of the legal forms for witnesses and victims were only in English, limiting the team's ability to support local citizens. Seeing this barrier, and recognizing their ability to help, host nation employees took it upon themselves to translate these documents into their native languages. These volunteers spent hours ensuring they captured the proper translation, content, and legal integrity of the documents. Now, this victim support information is accessible to all witnesses and victims, regardless of language background.

In Bahrain, military and civilian counsel and legal specialists seek out engagement with local Bahraini legal offices to pursue cases and emphasize each entity's commitment to prosecute cases involving all U.S. personnel and local citizens. This collaboration, facilitated by the unique language skills in both offices, led Bahraini prosecutors to prosecute eight sexual assault cases involving U.S. Navy victims. Regular and recurring meetings between U.S. and Bahraini legal professionals ensure that this relationship continues to be beneficial and valuable to both governments.

Diversity of Origin

Offices like RLSO EURAFSWA handle cases involving military personnel and local citizens, offenders and victims alike, and the host nation employees at these legal offices are indispensable when it comes to accomplishing this mission. In Bahrain, a local employee was instrumental to mission accomplishment when two military members assaulted a 60-year-old Bahraini cab driver. A local national paralegal at the Bahrain detachment assisted in the case, translating legal documents between Arabic and English and working closely with trial counsel to translate information about the case for the victim and the victim's attorney. The paralegal also helped set up witness and victim interviews and provided all necessary translations for the trial counsel. By using her unique skills and serving as an intermediary between the military counsel and local victim, this host nation employee ensured that the local victim got the same level of attention and support as would any U.S. military victim.

Diversity of Partnerships

On 6 November 2015, three U.S. Army soldiers allegedly assaulted some Italian soldiers while celebrating the end of a training exercise. The U.S. soldiers then proceeded to allegedly assault the Italian officers who intervened in the assault, and the Italians sustained several injuries. The responsible Navy Foreign Criminal Justice (FCJ) division in Italy could not find any information on the case's proceedings for more than four months, and the trail went cold in the complex inter-workings of the Italian justice system.

Finally, FCJ heard about the case from Dr. Enrico Peluso, Italy's Deputy Prosecutor for Military Prosecutor's Office in Rome, while discussing unrelated full time training on the U.S. Military Judicial System. Dr. Peluso was able to explain that the delay in case registration was due to a lack of recent precedents of a criminal case involving both U.S. and Italian military members, as Italy was unsure if this case fell under military or ordinary criminal jurisdiction. FCJ partnered with Dr. Peluso to monitor the case through the judicial channels, where it eventually ended up in the Criminal Court of Cagliari as a criminal case against the three soldiers.

This unique relationship and collaboration between the FCJ and the Italian Military Prosecutor's Office permitted greater understanding of each country's judicial system and allowed for greater mission accomplishment by FCJ. By leveraging the language and cultural diversity within the FCJ office and engaging with Italian counterparts, FCJ built a partnership and bilateral cooperation between legal professionals at the local level improving their ability to accomplish the mission.