



International

U.N. Puts Female Peacekeepers on Display

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By Theresa Braine
WeNews correspondent

The U.N. visitors' lobby is showcasing some of its female peacekeepers through Aug. 4. India has deployed a 125-member female police contingent to Liberia, but women are otherwise scarce in peacekeeping operations.

UNITED NATIONS (WOMENSENEWS)--They are squatting down to speak to children, interviewing rape victims with concern in their eyes, wielding guns or a stethoscope with equal ease.

These are the faces and postures of female peacekeepers, brought to visual life in "Women in Peacekeeping: The Power to Empower," a multimedia exhibit in the visitors' lobby of the United Nations that runs through August 4.

About 113,000 people work in military, police and civilian capacities in 18 missions around the world, with 117 countries contributing people to these efforts.

But women are still only 8 percent of the U.N. police and 2 percent of its military personnel.

Some of the reasons advocates say more women are needed: Women in conflict zones tend to feel more comfortable confiding in other women, and children relate more easily to female peacekeepers. This is especially true when rape has been wielded as a tool of war.

Women are also expected to aid the expanding roles that peacekeeping missions play: fostering community dialogue and reconciliation, promoting human rights and the rule of law and encouraging citizens to participate in elections.

'Still Too Few'

"There are still far too few women peacekeepers," U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a May 29 ceremony memorializing the 132 peacekeeping personnel who were killed last year, 10 of them women. The date is also the anniversary of the 1948 founding of the peacekeeping mission.



Indian contingent arriving in Monrovia, Liberia, 2007

Credit: UN Photo/Eric Kimmins



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The exhibit's photos depict women peacekeepers in action, disseminating information to the public through the media or speaking publicly, interviewing refugees in Darfur, providing security in Sierra Leone, providing medical care.

Leila Zerrugi, deputy special representative of the secretary general for the Democratic Republic of Congo, is shown visiting a women's shelter in a camp for displaced persons. Jane Holl Lute is shown in her former role as assistant peacekeeping secretary-general for operations and field support in Congo. In 2000 the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace and Security, which underscored the need for expanded female participation.

Kudos for India

But only India earned kudos for its 2007 deployment of a 125-member female police contingent to Liberia.

Since passing the resolution, the U.N. itself has been working to increase the number of female officials on field missions as well as at peacekeeping headquarters by including gender-equality language in job postings, distributing job announcements to women's groups and networks, prioritizing female candidates and doing outreach at universities and professional conferences. It also urges member states to provide female military and police candidates.

"We have done a lot but we need to do a great deal more," said Alain Le Roy, the U.N. under-secretary-general for peacekeeping operations. "Peacekeeping has become more multifaceted."



To see the U.N. video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAuFQj9xBYc>

Le Roy said female peacekeepers can make a critical contribution to providing security, helping to reform state institutions and supporting political transitions. "Our women peacekeepers make a critical contribution in all of these areas and their work encourages others to participate in local peace processes."

Lena Burke, a 44-year-old nurse who looked at the photo exhibit on a

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recent afternoon while waiting for her child's class tour of the U.N. to start, was enthusiastic about the notion of female peacekeepers.

"I think it's fantastic," she told Women's eNews. "I think women are in a sense programmed to look at conflict in a different way. They are more peace-oriented. We rear children, so we are used to conflict resolution."

Freelance journalist Theresa Braine covers international issues from her base in New York City.

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Rwandan women in Ugandan refugee camps.

Credit: Refugee Law Project

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Finland's President Tarja Halonen, left, with Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

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Indian peacekeeper in Monrovia, Liberia, 2007.

Credit: Christopher Horwig, WFP

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Schoolgirls attend class in one of the refugee camps in Darfur.

Credit: Megan McKechnie/Women's Commission

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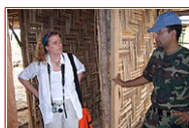
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Sarah Martin with a peacekeeper in Liberia
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