

MONROVIA, LIBERIA - Behind rows of razor wire, a machine gun peeking over the sandbags is trained on the road below. This is just one of many fortified compounds in the Congo Town suburb of Liberia's war-ravaged capital, Monrovia. But this compound is different, because everyone inside from the armed guards to the cooks responsible for the inviting scent of curry that wafts around at lunchtime is female.

() Liberian and UN officials hope their presence will help inspire Liberian women to join a fledgling police force struggling to recruit female officers. The all-female unit also signifies a revolution in UN peacekeeping, which has been rocked by rape and abuse scandals in recent years, notably in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti. Analysts say an increase in female peacekeepers will help limit abuses perpetrated by the very people sent to safeguard the rights of those already traumatized by conflict.

The 103 Indian women who have called this compound home since January make up the United Nations' first-ever all-female peacekeeping unit.

() Commander Seema Dhundia says she recognizes that the presence of her officers will also help raise awareness of and respect for women in Liberia, and in peacekeeping. "Seeing women in strong positions, I hope, will reduce the violence against women," she says.
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0321/p06s01-woaf.html>