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al-janoub

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 UNIFIL magazine

Maintaining operational tempo
Despite COVID-19

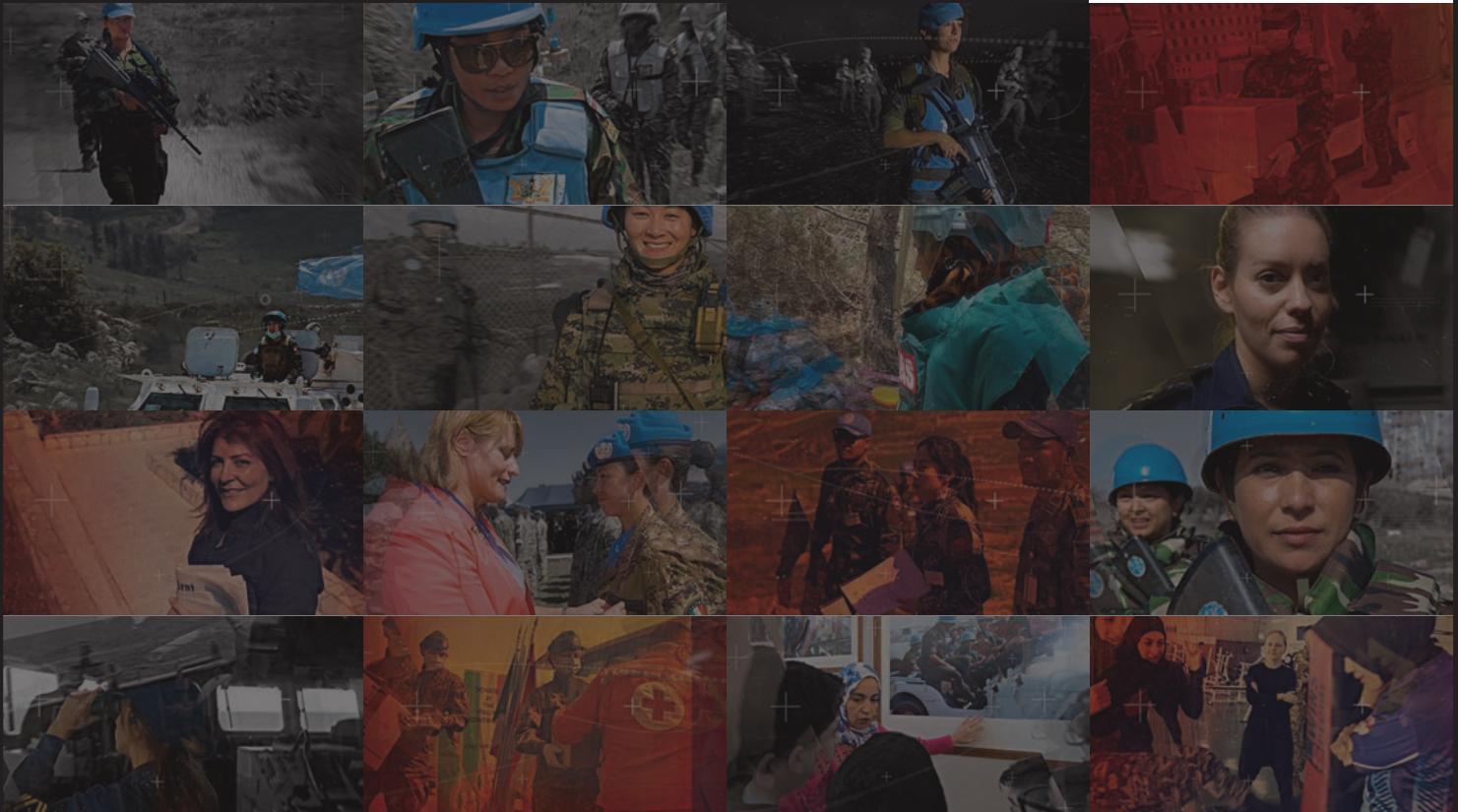




The contribution of **women in peacekeeping** has reinforced UNIFIL's ability in preserving stability in south Lebanon. Our female peacekeepers carry out operational activities - day and night - by land, air and at sea, as part of the mission's efforts to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1701.



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Message from the Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Stefano Del Col

A nation reeling under economic and political crisis - further compounded by the **COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic**, Lebanon was already on the edge when the **tragic Beirut Port explosions on 4 August 2020** shook not only the capital but the entire nation.

The days, weeks and months following the outbreak of the COVID-19 Coronavirus had already been daunting. Each one of us serving UNIFIL – both military and civilian personnel – has demonstrated through actions and commitment that no challenge can deter us from our core mission.

Although a lot of our efforts during the pandemic were geared towards containing the virus spread and later offering support in the wake of the Port explosions, we have not strayed an inch on our core mandated tasks. As usual, our peacekeepers continued to conduct patrols and assist Lebanese authorities while adhering to the measures and protocols established to contain the virus spread. We also channeled some of our funding to assist communities in their fight against the pandemic. The crucial support various national contingents provided to our host communities and the affected people in Beirut is especially commendable.

The multiple crises crippling the country would of course not spare UNIFIL area of operations. With the backing of the UN leadership in New York as well as the Security Council, our peacekeepers have gone out of their way in supporting not just the people of south Lebanon, but also the authorities and the people affected by the Port explosions. In the immediate aftermath, UNIFIL offered a complete package of support including heavy engineering machinery and logistics to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as part of the emergency response, our Crisis Management Team was activated, and a stand-by task force was established. In addition, hundreds of our peacekeepers donated blood for the victims of the blasts and they also joined the "#UN4Beirut" initiative to support the affected people by cleaning devastated streets of Beirut.

While we endeavour to return to the pre-COVID work routine, we also know that it's not possible immediately. At the same time, we always take extra precautions while delivering on our mandate.

Be it in the day or the night, in icy weather conditions or sweltering heat, UNIFIL peacekeepers have always maintained the robust operational tempo while acting in solidarity with the people and the authorities of Lebanon in times of crises. The challenges posed by COVID-19 could be just a bump in the road in the Mission's journey spanning more than 42 years; but it's not insurmountable.

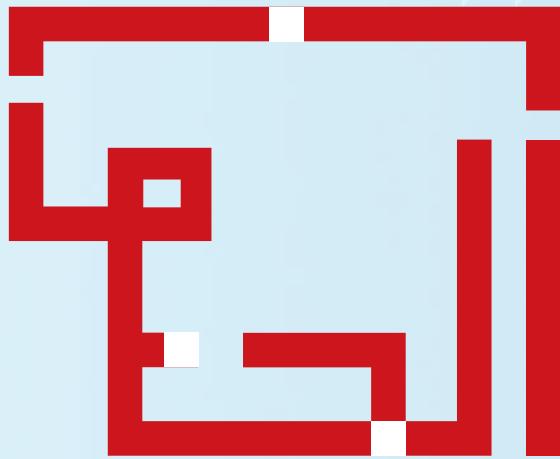
As we navigate through numerous challenges while keeping with the operational pace, it's become increasingly evident that more than 450 activities our peacekeepers carry out every day on land, air and at sea have been a strong deterrence for escalations.

This is further demonstrated by the Security Council on 28 August 2020 while renewing UNIFIL's mandate for one more year through the unanimous adoption of resolution 2539. The Council's continuous support for UNIFIL strengthens our resolve to pursue mandated tasks with renewed vigour together with the parties. The continued support UNIFIL can always count on the parties for is a vital prerequisite for the success of its mission.

It's particularly timely that this issue of the *"Al Janoub" magazine* offers some insight into the work of one of our core military pillars, the Liaison Branch.

I thank the editorial staff for their work on this edition and I look forward to continuing to engage with you all in the coming months.

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Publisher Jack Christofides	Aiobheann O'sullivan UNIFIL Chinese Contingent Irish-Polish Battalion UNIFIL MTF PIO
Editors-in-Chief Andrea Tenenti Tilak Pokharel	Infographic Zeina Ezzeddine
Editor (Arabic) Joumana Sayegh	Photo Editor Zeina Ezzeddine
Production/Design Zeina Ezzeddine	Contributors Tilak Pokharel Eugene Friel
Editorial Assistant Adib Al Moussa	Major Arshil Muheet Lt. Col. Stephen Morgan
Photographers Pasqual Gorriz Marcos	

"Al-Janoub" contact

Tel. +961 1 926 441
+961 1 926 442 Email pokharelt@un.org
Fax +961 1 827 016

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UNIFIL naval peacekeepers rescue 37 stranded at sea



On 14 September 2020, UNIFIL naval peacekeepers with the Mission's Maritime Task Force (MTF) rescued 37 people stranded at sea.

In the morning, one of UNIFIL ships located a distressed boat outside Lebanese territorial waters with 37 people onboard. Unfortunately, one of them had already passed away and UNIFIL peacekeepers immediately rescued the 36 survivors: 21 men,

10 women and five children. A second MTF ship deployed to recover the boat later found another survivor in the waters and subsequently rescued him.

The main priority for our peacekeepers was to rescue the survivors and ensure their safety by providing immediate assistance.

UNIFIL MTF transferred all the survivors to the Beirut Naval Base,

where they were received by the Lebanese Red Cross and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), as well as the local authorities who followed up on the case.

UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major General Stefano Del Col said: "This is a very tragic incident and our UNIFIL MTF peacekeepers did their utmost to save the lives."

The first naval force to be a part

of a UN peacekeeping mission, the UNIFIL MTF was deployed in 2006 at the request of Lebanon to assist its navy in securing the territorial waters and to help prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related materiel by sea into Lebanon. In addition, it works with the Lebanese Navy to strengthen the latter's capabilities.

UNIFIL MTF has also taken part in humanitarian efforts in the past when called upon.

UNIFIL, LAF sign MoU on humanitarian demining



UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 30 January 2020 allowing for the two forces to enhance cooperation, after a decade, in humanitarian demining within the UN Mission's area of operation in south Lebanon.

The MoU – signed by UNIFIL Chief of Staff of the time Brig. Gen. Frédéric Boucher and the Director of the Lebanon Mine

Action Centre (LMAC) Brig. Gen. Jihad Al Bechelany – sets out a framework of cooperation for UNIFIL assistance to LMAC's humanitarian demining operations within the UNIFIL area of operations in south Lebanon.

In the wake of the 2006 war and till 2010, UNIFIL deminers conducted humanitarian demining in order to protect civilians and to facilitate safe access to dwellings and

agricultural land. These activities were suspended in 2010.

"Now, after 10 years, the operational situation allows us again to resume our efforts in the area of humanitarian demining," said Brigadier General Boucher after signing the MoU in the LAF's Regional School for Humanitarian Demining in Hammana.

Despite progress, large swathes of land in south Lebanon are still contaminated with landmines.

UNIFIL currently has peacekeepers from Cambodia and China undertaking the deadly task of clearing contaminated areas along the 120-km Blue Line and around UN positions in south Lebanon. In 2019 alone, they cleared more than 42,000 square metres of land, and destroyed 3,358 anti-personnel mines.

Polish troops join UNIFIL



Poland has become UNIFIL's newest troop contributor, with more than 200 soldiers joining the Mission in November 2019.

They are operating together with Irish peacekeepers in south Lebanon. With this, Poland has become UNIFIL's 45th troop contributor.

Polish troops had served with UNIFIL for decades before their withdrawal in 2009.

Their deployment to UNIFIL is significant as this is the only UN peace operation with a sizeable number of Polish troops. As at 31 March 2020, they have six military staff officers serving in other UN peace operations.

UNIFIL response to COVID-19 pandemic

As the news of the highly contagious and deadly but invisible enemy, **COVID-19 Coronavirus**, spread in the beginning of 2020, UNIFIL started taking necessary precautionary measures to shield its personnel from infection. This included initial measures applying to those traveling to or from affected countries.

Following the designation of COVID-19 as a pandemic on 11 March and as per the guidelines and directives from World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Headquarters and the Government of Lebanon, UNIFIL started implementing more stringent measures. Such precautionary measures – at times even exceeding the standard requirements – sought to curtail the

infection amongst UNIFIL personnel and the host communities.

Rigorous and effective quarantine regime was enforced. All UNIFIL positions implemented social distancing protocols, temperature-checks, sanitization of facilities and alternate work modalities. The roles of civilian staff were reviewed and alternative measures,

including “working from home” were swiftly implemented. All military rotations were suspended until the end of June.

These strict measures ensured that the virus could not make any significant inroads into the Mission and helped limit the number of confirmed cases within the Mission’s area of operations at low.

Force Commander's visits to contingents



In late March, UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major General Stefano Del Col personally visited all the contingents in order to make sure that the peacekeepers are taking all the precautionary measures and strictly following guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus.

“The unprecedented situation we all are facing today warrants exceptional measures, and your maximum cooperation and understanding are an essential prerequisite,” he told the fellow peacekeepers. “We are currently passing through trying times. This is not business-as-usual, and your willingness and steadfastness to adjust according to the unfolding situation is truly commendable.”

The UNIFIL head also lauded the peacekeepers, both military and civilian, for

maintaining the operational tempo despite the pandemic and continuing with all operational activities in accordance with the Security Council resolution 1701.

Support to host communities ramped up

At the same time, as the number of positive virus cases went up and following requests from the host communities, UNIFIL actively supported local communities in their fight against COVID-19. A significant amount of support came from the peacekeepers themselves through fundings from their own countries.

The peacekeepers ramped up support to local authorities with establishment of triage clinics, donation of swab testing machines, various personnel protective equipment, sanitary kits and critical medical supplies to local dispensaries and veterinary support to farmers. Working in coordination with local authorities, UNIFIL also provided funding for random PCR tests on local residents.

As warranted by the evolving situation, UNIFIL head Maj. Gen. Del Col ordered channeling of some of our funding for certain local projects to assist communities in their fight against COVID-19. In the end, 11 such projects were



implemented in support of local COVID-19 response and five additional projects aided local food security efforts.

The UNIFIL head said: “The existence of normal lives in our area of operations is the measure of our collective success with 14 years of overall peace and stability in the area. We don’t want to see any factor, including COVID-19, unsettle the calm.”

He also appreciated the strong support of troop-contributing countries to the local communities in order to address their immediate needs.

“I would like to stress that we are all going through a very challenging period and to care for one another is an imperative duty for all of us,” he added.

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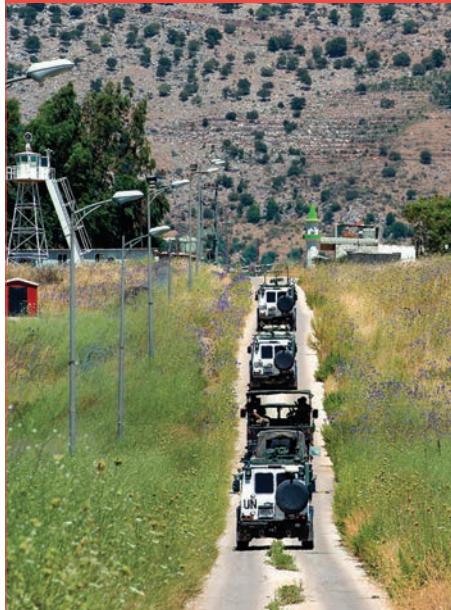
Crisis Working Group

As the COVID-induced crisis unfolded, UNIFIL swiftly established a crisis working group in order to streamline its response to the pandemic.

The former head of the working group, Craig Goodwin, said, with the enforcement of stringent protocols and precautionary measures, the Mission was far ahead of official directives.

"We were very lucky in that we had these protocols in place when our only case recorded within UNIFIL was of a military staff member coming back from an overseas trip," said Mr. Goodwin, referring to the Mission's first positive case confirmed in late March.

Operational activities continued unabated



Despite the pandemic, UNIFIL's mandated tasks on land, along the Blue Line and at sea continued unaffected. Despite adverse and changed situations, the Mission's some 11,000 military and civilian peacekeepers continued their work round the clock in the implementation of resolution 1701 and subsequent relevant resolutions.

They continued to conduct patrols and assist Lebanese authorities while adhering to the established measures and protocols to contain the virus spread.

However, some other activities had to be reviewed during the pandemic. Enforcement of strict quarantine regime and social distancing meant UNIFIL's community engagements and face-to-face interactions were affected.

Tilak Pokharel - Strategic Communication

Targeted support to host communities



Besides donations of PPEs, general sanitary and medical supplies throughout the UNIFIL area of operations, UNIFIL peacekeepers have also launched targeted assistance to hospitals, clinics and vulnerable populations. Here are some highlights:

- Indian and Indonesian peacekeepers have supported village dispensaries facing acute shortage of medicines in their respective areas of responsibility in south-eastern Lebanon with requested medicines, training and equipment.
- Indian peacekeepers have distributed different varieties of veterinary medicines to the shepherds and farmers across their areas of responsibility.
- Italian peacekeepers have donated hundreds of COVID-19 testing and diagnostic kits and several PCR testing machines to public hospitals and local municipalities. They have also supported Red Cross efforts in establishing two triage centres in the Tyre district.
- In order to limit the potential exposure of regular patients visiting hospitals to the Coronavirus, Italian peacekeepers have also donated to the Red Cross of Tyre a portable echo ultrasound machine and various types of paediatric medicines, enabling the medics involved in the emergency interventions to visit patients' homes instead.
- UNIFIL peacekeepers have also conducted hundreds of random PCR tests among local residents of five south-western Lebanese villages.
- In the south-eastern village of Khiam, UNIFIL Spanish peacekeepers extended material and training support for mask production to women of the region. Among the donated items included sewing machines, cutting boards, electric scissors, manual scissors, single use fabrics and washable fabrics, while the training for the members of the Khiam Women's Association for Development focused on enabling them to produce masks in a mass scale.



Liaison Branch:

Prescription during tension

During one of the regular Tripartite meetings, held on 11 December 2006, all of the three sides – UNIFIL, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) – agreed to establish a liaison and coordination arrangement. The aim was to establish a mechanism to ensure a more effective implementation of relevant military and security provisions of Resolution 1701 in order to prevent the resumption of hostilities.

The decision subsequently led to the creation of the UNIFIL Liaison Branch (LB) with corresponding arrangements with both Parties: the deployment of UNIFIL liaison officers (LOs) in IDF Northern Command and the deployment of LAF LOs in UNIFIL Joint Operation Centre, for the purpose of liaising with respective military headquarters. Recognizing the importance of liaison arrangements to the overall success of the mission, the LB was put under the control of the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander in 2010.

Structure:

The Liaison Branch is commanded by a senior French military officer (Colonel) and comprises staff officers from 16 nations. It has a HQ element of six personnel.

Among the six teams deployed along the Blue Line, four are on the Lebanese side and two in Israel. Liaison Branch also maintains a Quick Reaction Team with the capability of deploying another team when and where a need arises. Each team is supported by language assistants.

Bridge between parties:

As the point of contact between UNIFIL and the parties, UNIFIL LB plays a wide-ranging role both administratively and operationally. Its administrative team is responsible for the processing of all documentation and correspondences between the parties.

Liaison Branch is also responsible for the coordination of all cross-Blue Line travels in cooperation with the LAF and IDF. As with all roles within UNIFIL the hours of work can be long and are frequently irregular due to the requirement for prompt communication between HQ's.

It is the operational focus of Liaison Branch that is the most important aspect of our role. As is the case in all efforts at conflict resolution, the development and maintenance of dialogue channels is paramount. Since we are deployed on both sides of the Blue Line our unique perspective is a key tool in the armoury of the UNIFIL head. The duties of a Liaison Officer range from a mediator to a problem solver, from an investigator to a coordinator of solutions to the problems arising between LAF, IDF and UNIFIL.

Language assistants, who possess the corporate knowledge of the unit and can quickly interpret the ground realities, are especially helpful in absorbing the facts, disseminating the information, coordinating with the various strands of UNIFIL, taking the initiative to ease tensions and ultimately mediating between the parties. They must always be aware of the issues that pertain to the sector/area within which they are working. In 2018-2019, when we saw one of the most heightened tensions since the 2006 war, Liaison Branch was crucial in assisting the

UNIFIL Force Commander with his efforts to maintain calm along the Blue Line.

Times of heightened tensions:

On 4 December 2018 the IDF launched what they called Operation "Northern Shield" targeting suspected tunnels along the Blue Line. Throughout this operation LB officers reported impartially to the UNIFIL head from both sides of the Blue Line and were able to give him real time information, thus maintaining his situational awareness at this critical time. This period of sustained tension, as the IDF increased its presence on the Blue Line bringing them into very close proximity with the LAF and Lebanese protesters, saw UNIFIL Liaison Officers to the fore on 17 December in Meiss Ej Jebel when both Parties cocked their weapons and took up firing positions.

This was a point not lost on the head of UN peace operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, in his address to the UN Security Council on 19 December when he stressed: "The potential for miscalculation, however, cannot be underestimated. The Parties have both been reminded that provocative activities along the Blue Line and heightened rhetoric contribute to an environment of increased risks." This incident proved the effectiveness of UNIFIL Liaison Officers in de-escalating the situation as they intervened to restore calm.

At the beginning of 2019, the IDF started building T-walls in the vicinity of Misgav'Am, an area along the Blue Line disputed by the parties. Once again the role of Liaison was crucial in de-escalating tensions. This required constant engagement with the parties at the tactical level as both sides accused each other of pointing weapons and other provocative acts. Through their calm approach and development of relationships on the ground, the Liaison Officers acted in an impartial manner in maintaining calm.

The perception of Liaison Branch as an impartial entity was to prove exceptionally useful in March 2019 as the removal of a section of the Technical Fence in Kfar Kela was negotiated with the parties. This operation saw the IDF erect T-walls around a reservation area identified by the Lebanese authorities and then allow UNIFIL's Spanish engineers remove the section of the Fence that violated the Blue Line. The most successful aspect of this entire mission was that – through constant liaison, planning and coordination – both parties worked towards achieving a mutually beneficial outcome.

Road ahead:

Through engagement at various levels, the Liaison Branch tries to prevent possible violation of the Blue Line, assisting both parties clarify the Blue Line prior to any work. This aspect of our work is done in close cooperation with our colleagues from the Mission's Joint Geographical Information Section. Other roles of the branch include: coordination around the repatriation of civilian personnel arrested by the IDF and being released through the crossing at Ras Al Naqura, and partaking in technical investigations into Blue Line violations.

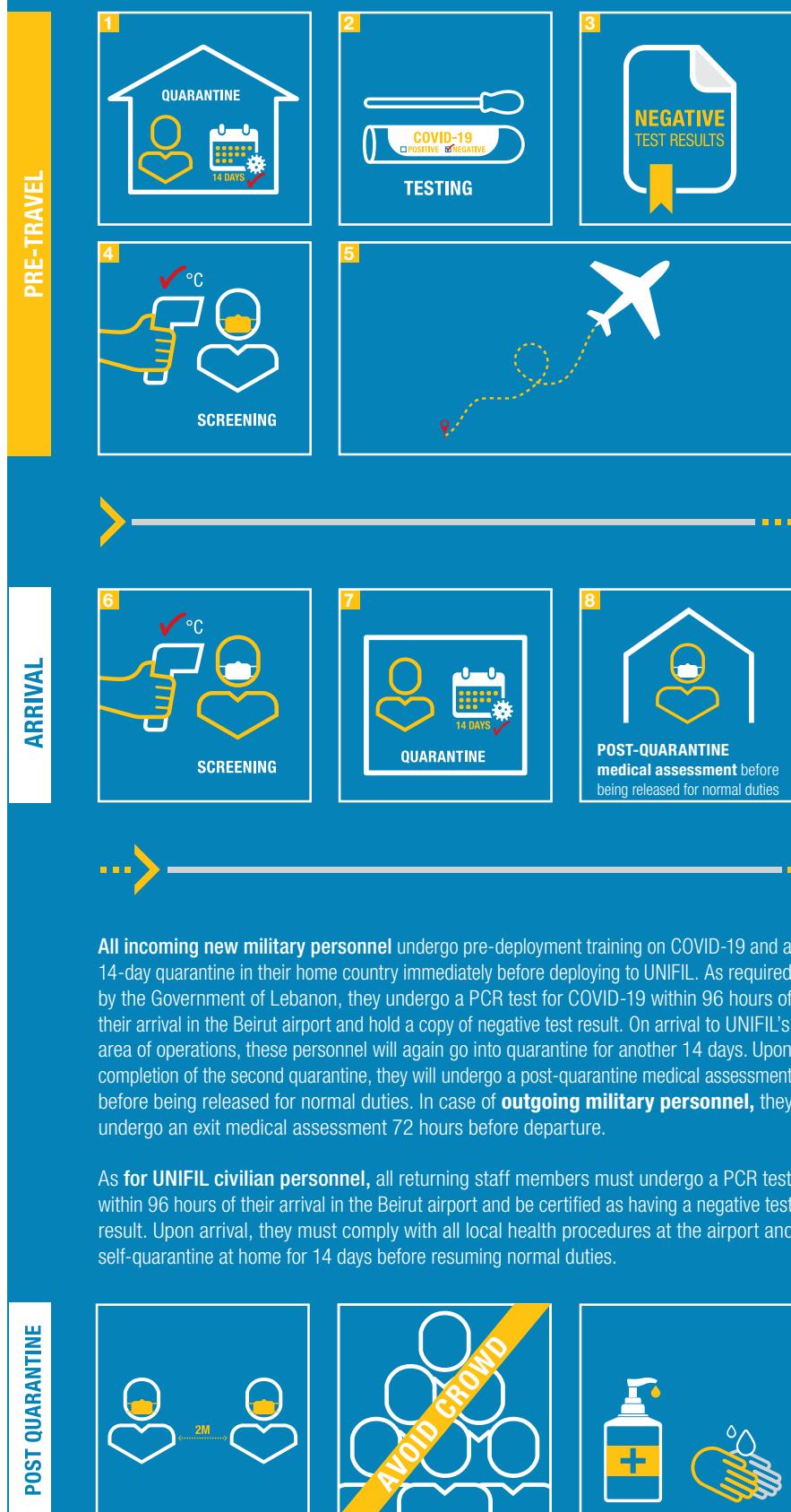
Overall, through constant dialogue and the passage of unbiased information in a timely manner most situations can be and have been resolved, and misunderstandings addressed.

As has been stated by the UN Secretary-General on a number of occasions, the possibility of the establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Israel continues to be raised with Israeli authorities. Despite their agreement to a UNIFIL proposal in 2008, the establishment of such an office remains pending.

With UNIFIL operating in a complex political and security environment, it is essential that its Liaison Branch is staffed with the highest quality staff officers. Recognizing such a need, the contributing nations have consistently deployed such officers.

Lt. Col. Stephen Morgan -
Former Deputy Chief Liaison Officer

Rotation of UNIFIL personnel during pandemic



Joining hands in support of victims of tragic Beirut blasts

Lebanon was already on the edge with multiple crises - from the unprecedented economic freefall to the COVID-19 pandemic - when the **tragic Beirut Port explosions** of **4 August 2020** shook not only the capital but the entire nation.

In the wake of the explosions, which also damaged one of UNIFIL ships docked about 200 metres away and injured 23 naval peacekeepers from Bangladesh, the Mission's civilian and military peacekeepers stepped in immediately with a wide range of support for the victims and affected communities.

UNIFIL immediately offered a complete package of support including heavy engineering machinery and logistics to the Lebanese Armed Forces as part of the emergency response, our Crisis Management Team was activated, and a stand-by task force was established. In addition, hundreds of our civilian and military peacekeepers donated blood for the victims of the blasts and they also joined the "**#UN4Beirut**" initiative to support the affected people by cleaning devastated streets of Beirut.

Expressing its solidarity with Lebanon and its people in the aftermath of the explosions, the UN Security Council on 28 August 2020 authorized UNIFIL to take "temporary and special measures" to provide support to Lebanon and its people.

Following the Council authorization and in coordination with the LAF, UNIFIL on 27 September deployed a detachment of multinational force in order to assist Lebanese authorities with their efforts to deal with the aftermath of the explosions.

The UNIFIL assistance is operational at the port as well as in the city centre with an engineer-centered task force. The main areas of support are clearing of debris and construction work in order to facilitate the rapid resumption of operations in the Beirut harbour, and also working with Blue Shield International (an international organization with the mission to protect the world's cultural heritage from conflicts and natural disasters) to secure and protect damaged heritage sites from further devastation.





Working as a UNIFIL liaison officer

Al-Janoub tags along an officer from Malaysia

It might be long, gruelling hours on dirt roads in rocky mountains in the isolated hinterlands of southern Lebanon. But UNIFIL liaison officers, coming from 17 different nations, are always there.

At the heart of their work lies the UNIFIL mission to maintain the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel as stipulated in the UN Security Council Resolution 1701, and to ensure security and stability along the 120-km Blue Line. In doing so on the ground, they perform a range of crucial – and at times risky – tasks: acting as a buffer during heightened tensions, mediators and problem solvers.

They work round the clock to help prevent misunderstandings, decrease tension, maintain stability and preserve the calm that southern Lebanon has witnessed since 2006.

Their commitment to the implementation of

the UNIFIL mandate is also recognized by the parties, who continue to engage actively with UNIFIL liaison officers.

"Al Janoub" team tagged along **Lieutenant Colonel Gopalan Balam**, a special forces officer of the Malaysian Armed Forces, as he led one of six UNIFIL liaison teams on the ground. Assisted by another liaison officer from Armenia (Major Aram Simonyan) and a Lebanese language assistant, Lt. Col. Gopalan's mission for the day was in the eastern sector of UNIFIL. Two of these teams are always on the Israeli side south of the Blue Line.

"We don't stay in one place; we are constantly

on the move," said Lt. Col. Gopalan as he sat behind the wheel. He was setting out from the UNIFIL Sector East Headquarters in Ibl el-Saqi on a routine mission of the day that would take him and his team to a number of hotspots and sensitive areas along and near the Blue Line.

During what was to become an eight-hour trip along more than 50 kilometres of rough roads – crisscrossing mountains and wadis – Lt. Col. Gopalan shared his experience as a UNIFIL liaison officer, narrating both challenges and accomplishments alike. He sometimes drives more than 200 kilometres a day.

Lt. Col. Gopalan Balam, (second from right) pauses for a moment during a routine visit to a temporary UN post.



"Although the regular working hours in the field are from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., but incidents on the ground define our working hours," he continued, as he was driving along a narrow and dirt road cutting through olive fields in Rachaya Al Foukhar, east of Shab'a. "We sometimes start at 4:00 a.m. depending on the activities of the day; sometimes we have to stay up to midnight to monitor incidents and relay to the HQ."

Notwithstanding the number and nature of incidents along the Blue Line, all the teams – four in the north of the Blue Line and two in the south – should visit their assigned areas, monitor and report round the clock.

"If we receive any information about any incident happening in the Blue Line area, within 15 to 20 minutes we will be at the location from where we are patrolling or from the base," said Lt. Col. Balam. "Every liaison officer must know all the routes and be familiar with the area."

One of the locations his team visits every week is a secluded UNIFIL position (1,600 metres from the sea level), which is manned by Indian peacekeepers, in the Hermon mountain range in the village of Shab'a which is not connected by the road. "We have to climb the hill on foot which takes between 30 to 40 minutes," he said.

While visiting their assigned areas throughout the day, UNIFIL liaison officers pop by UNIFIL positions on the way. During our trip with Lt. Col. Gopalan, his team also stopped by three positions manned by Indian peacekeepers.

An Indian officer, Major D. Kakoti, said: "They (liaison officers) always pass by us and exchange latest information (situation on the ground and the activities of both parties along the Blue Line) that are mutually useful for both sides."

One of the most common incidents in Sector East is the inadvertent violation of the Blue Line, which are not marked in large part in this sector, by shepherds and their herds. If they are apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), UNIFIL liaison officers launch "repatriation operation" in order to bring them back to Lebanon.

"Liaison Branch (LB) coordinates with both sides, and we facilitate their return in the Mike 1 area (Ras al Naqoura)," he said. "LB is always present when such releases happen."

The next stop was a UNIFIL observation post tucked in a hilltop, which was manned between 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

"We just checked if there has been any IDF movement. Indian peacekeepers informed that there was one IDF vehicle routine patrol (south of the Blue Line) and went back," said Lt. Col. Gopalan as he was leaving the observation post.

His next stop was a small pond in the Shab'a village. The interesting thing about this pond is that the Blue Line goes through it, leaving two-third of it in the Lebanese side and one-third in the Israeli side. On several occasions, Lebanese civilians gather here and stage demonstrations.

"Every time such things happen, Indian peacekeepers always do the human shield in order to prevent them from going to the other side (crossing the Blue Line)," he said, adding that liaison officers monitoring the situation coordinate with their teams south of the Blue Line. Such contacts help prevent provocative actions, thereby de-escalating tensions.

As he was approaching another hotspot, in Wazzani, he saw some IDF activities

south of the Blue Line. It didn't take long before he found out that it was a routine IDF activity.

Some activities on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line also raise tensions on the other side and vice versa. For example, just a day before our trip with Lt. Col. Gopalan, a cross-Blue Line incident, which reportedly originated from the Lebanese side the previous day, kept him and the team awake till midnight.

UNIFIL liaison officers wrap up an average day after submitting reports to the Headquarters in Naqoura.

"After daily patrols, all liaison teams submit daily reports to the Liaison Branch Headquarters in Naqoura." Lt. Col. Gopalan said. "Also, if applicable, we provide visual proof of incidents (with photos or videos)."

During his 24 years of career in the Malaysian Army, UNIFIL was Lt. Col. Gopalan's first UN deployment. And he is content with what he has already accomplished here.

He says UNIFIL liaison officers should possess high morale and high skills, with little time for entertainment or even to connect with their families and friends back home.

"You have to find a way to entertain yourself because you have a tiring job stretching long hours," he continues. "You have to be well prepared yourself. Incidents happen sometimes in the evening, sometimes late nights."

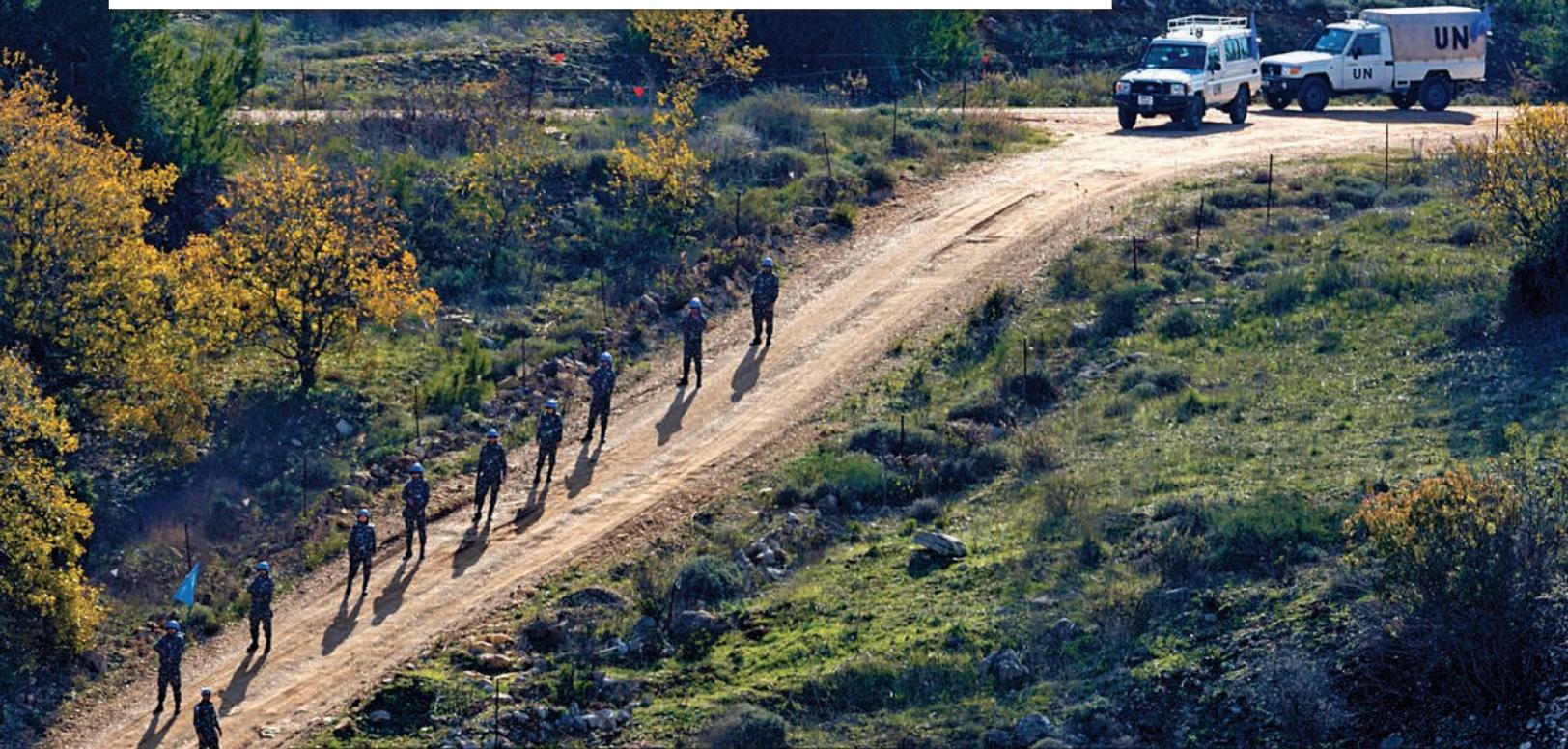
Nonetheless, he finds it interesting.

"But it's an interesting job for me. It's really, really a great experience."

Tilak Pokharel -
Strategic Communication



Maintaining operational tempo



The patrols UNIFIL's more than 10,000 peacekeepers conduct every day - in vehicles, on foot or from the air - constitute core elements of the Mission's overall operational tempo, which was well maintained despite the numerous challenges posed by the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

A comparison of the number of operational activities conducted during the four months of the pandemic, from 1 March to 30 June 2020, shows that UNIFIL peacekeepers in fact conducted more of such activities than the corresponding months the previous year. The number jumped from 54,500 to 56,530, with an overall increase of 3.7 per cent.

Included in this is also a rise in the duration of daily air patrols from about 74 minutes to 82 minutes. The number of foot and vehicle patrols remained at similar levels.

However, due to social distancing protocols and other preventive measures in the midst of the pandemic, the number of activities

conducted with the Lebanese Armed Forces dropped from 17.4 per cent to 13 per cent, which jumped to 16 per cent in July.

Highlighting the importance of these operational activities, UN Chief António Guterres wrote in his latest report on UNIFIL that the pattern of operations of UNIFIL and the frequency of its patrols, including close to the Blue Line, serve as a deterrent to potential spoilers and provides UNIFIL with the capacity to deter, prevent, de-escalate and deconflict rapidly. "This has proved to be instrumental during incidents of heightened tension," he wrote.

On the other hand, UNIFIL peacekeepers' demining activities – conducted since 2006

- represent a life-saving undertaking of the Mission. During the pandemic, UNIFIL demining units from Cambodia and China worked relentlessly in clearing the areas infested with deadly mines.

Between 1 March and 30 June 2020, while 4,097 square metres of land was cleared as part of operational demining in support of the Blue Line marking project and in vicinity of UNIFIL positions, they also cleared about additional 500 km² as part of humanitarian demining. During the same period, UNIFIL deminers also found and destroyed 101 anti-personnel mines.

Tilak Pokharel - Strategic Communication

Tried & trusted for 14 years,

Tripartite forum continues to yield results



The 14th of August 2006 is a hugely significant date in the history of UNIFIL as this is the day the cessation of hostilities between Lebanon and Israel came into effect. It is also significant for another particular reason, unknown to most people, as this is the date the first Tripartite meeting was convened in a UN position along the Blue Line in the Ras Naqoura crossing point. This was the first time in the Lebanese-Israeli conflict that the armies of the two sides sat face-to-face in a room for a dialogue, facilitated by UNIFIL.

Based on the Security Council Resolution 1701, adopted three days earlier, UNIFIL had a mandate to coordinate its activities with both parties for Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) into the area. As such, UNIFIL invited both parties - the LAF and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) - to the Tripartite meeting. Its primary objective was to avoid any misunderstandings or clashes during the withdrawal of the IDF and the LAF's subsequent deployment up to the Blue Line.

While the parties understandably required persuasion to attend the initial meeting, given the high levels of tension and mistrust following the numerous casualties and extensive damage caused by the 2006 war, both parties voluntarily agreed to attend and the Tripartite forum as we know it today was established. UNIFIL's position 1-32A in Ras Naqoura was chosen as the most appropriate venue for the meeting, being the only UNIFIL controlled location that the IDF could also easily enter without the requirement for logistical or security arrangements.

It is noteworthy that the parties have voluntarily attended 140 meetings (as of Sept. 2020). Intense discussions have taken place and none of the parties has ever walked out. This is a reflection not only of the success of the Tripartite forum but also of the trust shown by the parties in UNIFIL as the means of resolving contentious issues along the Blue Line.

Tripartite meetings are chaired by the head of UNIFIL and attended by delegations from both LAF and IDF. This is a unique forum and its strategic importance should not be underestimated as it is the only recognized forum jointly attended by representatives of both Lebanon and Israel. The meetings are held approximately every six weeks with the option to call for a special meeting at short notice should the criticality of the situation merit one. This has happened on a number of occasions after serious incidents and escalations over the years.

The success of these initial meetings has allowed the tripartite forum to evolve over the years and it is now accepted as the primary liaison and coordination mechanism available to the parties to resolve contentious issues and potential sources of friction in a professional manner.

This unique forum enables the parties to present their respective issues of concern in an open and non-judgmental manner with the objective of reaching all-party agreement, facilitated by UNIFIL. Over the years the Tripartite forum has successfully delivered a number of local arrangements and confidence-building measures such as Blue Line marking, Blida Olive harvest, Wazzani resorts and working in sensitive areas, to name but a few.

These achievements are not realized overnight. In the background the UNIFIL-led Tripartite

Secretariat engages with the parties relentlessly – both bi-laterally from the outset and through continuous back and forth discussions seeking to establish sufficient common ground for the parties to reach an understanding.

The negotiations can sometimes lead to agreement; however, this is not always the case and there is still much work to be done. However, the tripartite forum is a tried and trusted mechanism that the parties have confidence in and will play a leading role in facilitating progress. The true value of this forum however cannot be solely measured in the number of agreements that have been successfully achieved but rather in its acceptance by both parties as the default mechanism for resolution of contentious issues and their continued trust and faith in the process.

To this day the Tripartite mechanism remains an essential confidence-building mechanism. It is UNIFIL's primary tool for strategic liaison and coordination between the parties and the corner stone to all-party engagement.

The Tripartite forum with its continued success stands as a unique example of what a peace operation can deliver when the parties to the conflict choose to co-operate in a mutually beneficial framework, through which we can engender trust and play our part in contributing to a longer-term agreement.

Eugene Friel - Head of Tripartite Secretariat

UNIFIL's exemplary wastewater management scheme

UNIFIL stands out among UN peace operations around the world in delivering on reducing the peacekeeping footprint in the host communities.

With its **21 high-capacity** wastewater treatment plants spread across the Mission's 1,060 square kilometre area of operations in south Lebanon, UNIFIL caters to not only its peacekeepers but also thousands of people from the host communities. These plants have the capacity to cater to up to 25,000 people.

Delivering on the Mission's commitment to reduce environmental footprint in the communities they serve, the mission also has an additional five sludge disposal systems, which process sewage in an environment-friendly manner.

According to Lokuwattage Kamal Gnanendra Perera, the UNIFIL engineer responsible for wastewater management, the wastewater plant in Naqoura alone caters to about 6,000 people – 4,000 from the Naqoura village and 2,000 living in the UNIFIL camp. He added that the plant has an additional 20% capacity.

"Standards are periodically tested in AUB (American University of Beirut), recycled water is released into the sea, and the rest of the recycled water is used throughout the camp for irrigation and camp beautification purposes," he said.

In March 2019, environment officers and water and sanitation focal points from 15 UN

peace operations around the world gathered in south Lebanon to see first-hand and understand UNIFIL's successful wastewater and sludge management scheme.

During their learning tour, the 23 UN officers spent a week attending classes and visiting five wastewater treatment plants.

Jacquelyn Amoko from the UN's Environmental Technical Support Unit in Brindisi, Italy, said the tour was helpful for UN peace operations in thinking "beyond package wastewater treatment plants."

"That's why UNIFIL's wastewater treatment process is very important," she said. "It's making the missions understand that, even in very challenging field settings, we can do more to implement more sustainable wastewater infrastructure."

Ms. Amoko noted that the UN Department of Peace Operations has launched – as a high priority agenda – an environment strategy for peacekeeping, and in relation to risk management.

"We've had the situation where wastewater has had challenges in field settings, and now we want to do more consciously to improve that situation across the board," she added.



At the end of the tour, one of the participants, Thierry Tremblay from the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), said learning about UNIFIL's "centralized system" can be helpful in addressing wastewater management challenges in UNMISS.

Sigit Pramono from UN Disengagement Observer Force learned that the UNIFIL technology requires less maintenance, hence cost-effective, and easy to handle. "This would be good for contingents operating in remote areas," he said.

Kassaye Atsime of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic thinks UNIFIL's example gives room for missions to think outside the box and design cost-effective plants.

More than 10,000 military peacekeepers and more than 800 civilian personnel currently serve with UNIFIL.

Tilak Pokharel - Strategic Communication



Did you know? India

The rich heritage of India, one of the world's oldest civilizations, is an all-embracing confluence of religions, traditions and customs. The highlights of Indian heritage lie in the treasure of its art, architecture, classical dance, music, flora and fauna, and the innately secular philosophy of its people.

The father of American Literature, Mark Twain, once said, "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend, and the great-grandmother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only." A standing testimony to his words today, India remains to be one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage.

As the seventh largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by mountains and the sea, which give the country a distinct geographical identity. Dotted by the Great Himalayas in the north, the country stretches southwards and tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west.

Since 1948, India has had a long and distinguished contribution to the UN Peacekeeping worldwide. Currently, there are about 5,500 military and police personnel serving in various UN peace operations, making it the fifth largest troop contributor. More than 200,000 Indians in uniform have served in 49 of the 71 UN peacekeeping missions established around the world since 1948. Indian contribution to UNIFIL includes one Indian Battalion (INDBATT) in addition to staff officers and medical personnel.

INDBATT has been deployed in UNIFIL since 1998 after taking over the responsibility from Norwegian Battalion. The last 22 years have seen Indian soldiers serve in one of the most rugged and sensitive parts of UNIFIL area of operations in south-eastern Lebanon. In spite of exceptionally harsh terrain and long spell of inclement weather conditions, the unit has carried out area domination and sanitization operations with absolute perseverance, thereby maintaining the operational tempo in the 115 km² area.

UNIFIL's Indian peacekeepers, who were joined by Kazakh soldiers in October 2018, monitor an un-demarcated and unfenced stretch of approximately 16 km of the roughly



120-km long Blue Line. The area is extremely sensitive due to its proximity to the tri-junction of Lebanon, Syria and Israel. One of the UN positions (UNP 4-7A) and an observation post (OP1), which sit at the altitudes of 1,370 metres and 1,800 metres respectively and both manned by the Indians, are among the highest UNIFIL installations.

Besides performing their operational duties, Indian peacekeepers are known for establishing and maintaining strong bond with the host communities. From medical and veterinary assistance to firefighting, Indian soldiers have been doing everything at their disposal to support the local communities. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the UNIFIL Indian

peacekeepers regularly supported local farmers with veterinary assistance as well as local dispensaries facing acute shortage of drugs with life-saving medicines. This has contributed to sustaining stability and normalcy in their area of operations.

Commander of the Indian Battalion, Colonel Narayan Singh Bhati, says that the Battalion has devised "detailed yet flexible" civil-military cooperation programmes, the successful implementation of which is well evident from the warmth in relationship with the locals. "For INDBATT, Lebanon is truly a home away from home and we will continue to serve for peace and stability for this blessed land and its people like we would do for our country," he says.

Major Arshil Muheet - UNIFIL Indian Contingent

Security Council

reaffirms strong commitment to UNIFIL mandate



The **UN Security Council** unanimously **adopted resolution 2539** on **28 August**, extending the UNIFIL mandate for a year. The Council reaffirmed its “strong continuing commitment” to the UNIFIL mandate under resolution 1701 (2006) while elaborating its expectations and requirements towards achieving the mandated objectives. **Excerpts below:**

- Underscored the “constructive” role played by UNIFIL’s Tripartite mechanism in facilitating coordination and in de-escalating tensions, and encouraged measures to further reinforce the capacities of the mechanism.
- Encouraged the parties to accelerate their efforts in coordination with UNIFIL to delineate and visibly mark the Blue Line in its entirety, including its points of contention.
- Called on the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL to further enhance their coordinated activities.
- Encouraged Lebanon to deploy a model regiment and an offshore patrol vessel, and to elaborate jointly with UNIFIL benchmarks and timelines for further enhancement of LAF ground and naval capabilities towards its effective and durable deployment in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon.
- Authorized UNIFIL to take temporary and special measures to provide support to Lebanon and its people in the aftermath of the 4 August Beirut Port explosions.
- Condemned all violations of the Blue Line, both in the air and on ground, and strongly called upon the parties to respect the cessation of hostilities. Requested the Secretary-General (SG) to provide prompt and detailed reports on all violations of

resolution 1701 (2006) and of the sovereignty of Lebanon.

- Urged all parties to ensure UNIFIL’s freedom of movement and access to the Blue Line in all its parts, and requested the SG to provide prompt and detailed reports on the restrictions to UNIFIL’s freedom of movement including specific areas UNIFIL does not access and why.
- Urged measures to enhance the safety and security of peacekeepers, calling on Lebanon to investigate and bring to justice perpetrators of any acts of aggression against UNIFIL, and requesting the SG to report on such incidents and related investigations.
- Called on Lebanon to facilitate UNIFIL’s prompt and full access to sites requested by UNIFIL for the purpose of swift investigation, including all relevant locations north of the Blue Line related to the discovery of tunnels crossing the Blue Line.

- Requested the SG to provide a plan for implementing his recent recommendations on the assessment of UNIFIL’s resources, and options for improving its efficiency and effectiveness.
- Requested UNIFIL to support the implementation of the action plan on Women, Peace and Security, including on sexual and

gender-based violence, and called for the full, effective and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of operations.

- Reduced the authorized troop ceiling from 15,000 to 13,000. [The current UNIFIL troop strength is around 10,300.]





Sexual Exploitation and Abuse KNOW THE RULES: THERE IS NO EXCUSE!

- ! At all times we must treat the local population with respect and dignity.
- ! Sexual exploitation and abuse is unacceptable behaviour and prohibited conduct for all United Nations and affiliated personnel.
- ! Sexual exploitation and abuse threatens the lives of people that we are to serve and protect.
- ! Sexual exploitation and abuse undermines discipline, and damages the reputation of the United Nations.

EVERY PERSON UNDER THE UNITED NATIONS FLAG MUST COMPLY WITH THE FOLLOWING PROHIBITIONS:

- ! **It is strictly prohibited** to have any sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18 years (regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally or in my home country). Mistaken belief as to the age of the person is no excuse.
- ! **It is strictly prohibited** to have sex with anyone, in exchange for money, employment, preferential treatment, goods or services, whether or not prostitution is legal in my country or the host country;
- ! **It is strictly prohibited** to engage in any other form of sexually humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour;

I fully understand that:

- Involvement in any act of Sexual exploitation and abuse will be investigated and prosecuted if warranted;
- Any proven act of Sexual exploitation and abuse will result in measures that can include but are not limited to: suspension, immediate repatriation, dismissal, imprisonment and a ban from future United Nations employment;
- If I witness Sexual exploitation and abuse behaviour by others, regardless of their position or seniority, I have a responsibility to take all reasonable measures to stop the misconduct and report the incident immediately to my commander or manager;
- Failure to respond or report misconduct is a breach of the United Nations standards of conduct. **There is no excuse!**



NO EXCUSE • ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

For further information see the
Mission Conduct and Discipline website: <https://conduct.unmissions.org>



ZERO TOLERANCE
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE

Ensuring highest standards of conduct and behaviour

UNIFIL is committed to ensuring that its personnel act in accordance with the highest standards of conduct and behaviour. As proud peacekeepers:

- we treat the population of Lebanon with respect and dignity at all times;
- we always uphold the highest standards of conduct expected of UN civil servants;
- we will never threaten the lives of the people that we are to serve and protect;
- we will never engage in a behavior that undermines discipline, and damages the reputation of the United Nations and our national flags.

If you observe any behaviour that might fall short of these high standards, please let us know by contacting the Regional Conduct and Discipline Section by e-mail unifil-cdu@un.org or on 01-926 215/6/7/8/9



To watch and read our multimedia reports, radio and video productions on UNIFIL activities in south Lebanon.

