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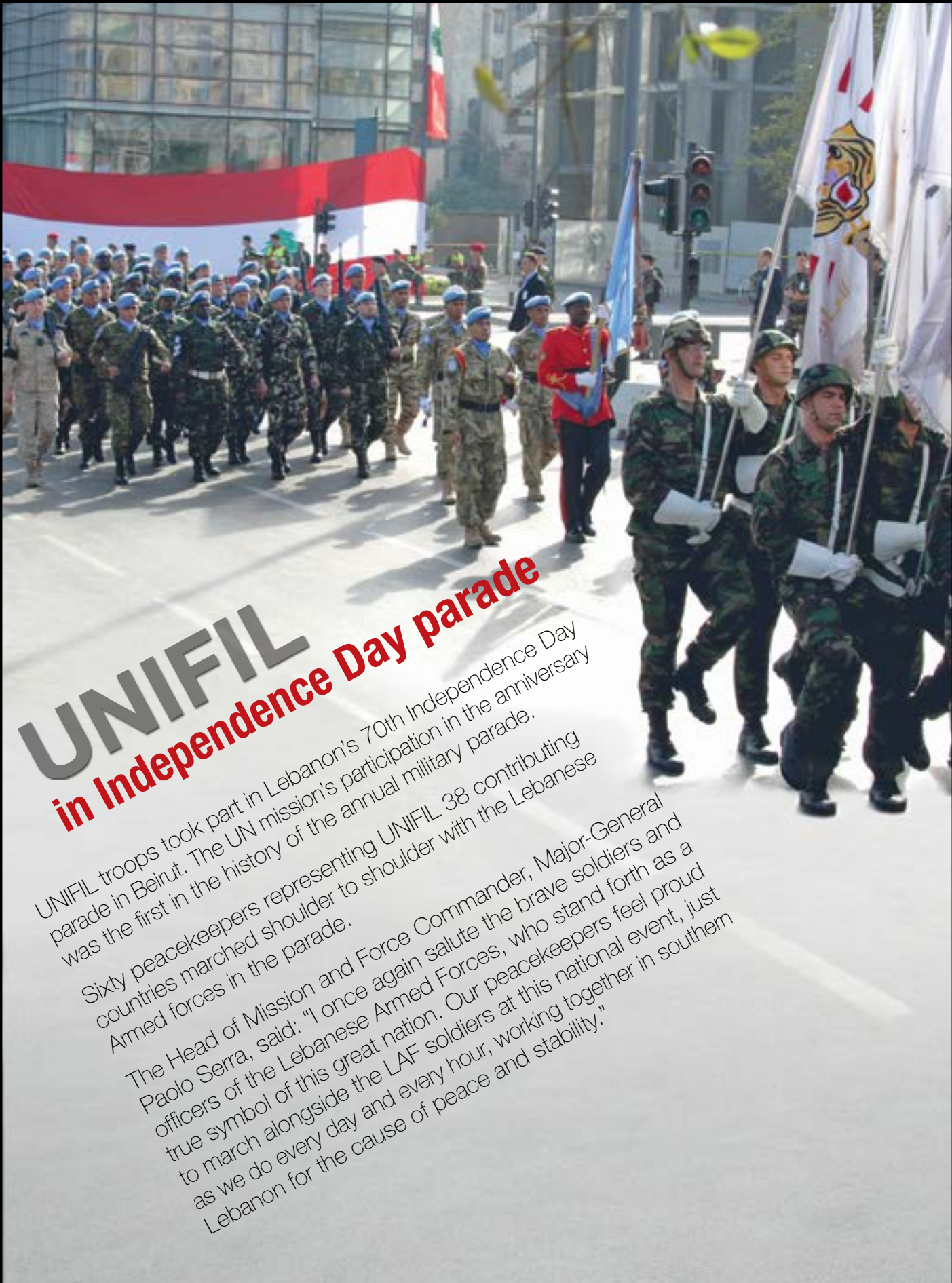
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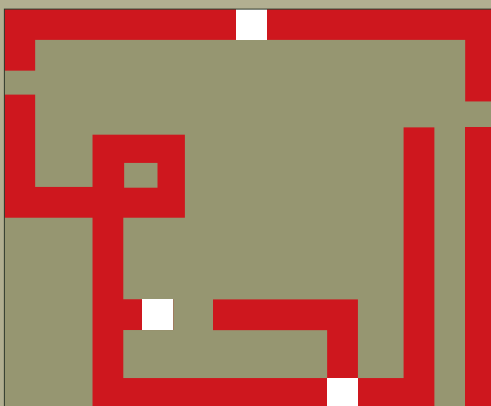


UNIFIL in Independence Day parade

UNIFIL troops took part in Lebanon's 70th Independence Day parade in Beirut. The UN mission's participation in the anniversary was the first in the history of the annual military parade. Sixty peacekeepers representing UNIFIL 38 contributing countries marched alongside UNIFIL 38 contributing Armed forces in the parade.

The Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major-General Paolo Serra, said: "I once again salute the brave soldiers and officers of the Lebanese Armed Forces, who stand forth as a true symbol of this great nation. Our peacekeepers feel proud to march alongside the LAF soldiers at this national event, just as we do every day and every hour, working together in southern Lebanon for the cause of peace and stability."

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Nostalgia as Milos Strugar calls it a day



As he prepared to go into early retirement at the end of last December, Mr Milos Strugar, the former UNIFIL Deputy Head of Mission and Director of Political and Civil Affairs, had only hope and nice words for the people of South Lebanon, a region that he had come to regard as his home over the last 10 years.



Mr Milos Strugar with staff from the Division of Political and Civil Affairs of UNIFIL during his farewell

"I have the highest respect for the people, their courage and resilience based on a strong will and desire to have a happy and normal life in their own land."

The 58-year-old Serbian diplomat spent the last 10 of his 21-year UN career in South Lebanon, working with UNIFIL.

"It was a very rich experience in every respect, mainly professional, but also personal. I developed important contacts, expanded my knowledge of the Middle East and Lebanon, and established some very important lifelong relationships."

He says it was not an easy decision to leave a place he had come to regard as his second home and a job he had come to love so much.

"This kind of job, I must say, is very rewarding professionally, but it requires a lot of sacrifices in one's personal life. I am now looking forward to spending more time with my family."

When Mr. Strugar's younger daughter turned 18, he sat down with her and together they calculated the number of years he had spent with her. They found out that he had spent nine of her 18 years away from home.

"And there can be no compensation for the nine years," he says.

That little encounter was perhaps one of the triggers that led to his decision to bring down the curtain on his diplomatic career.

On UNIFIL's significant role

Significant achievements have been made under UNIFIL's mandate.

Says Mr Strugar: "In my view, the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces between the Litani River and the Blue Line, for the first time in almost three decades, and the successful assumption of responsibilities and national duties by the LAF, have been two key achievements."

In addition, he says, there is a long list of successes by UNIFIL and the parties over the past seven years, though there have also been some failures.

"I regret that I'm leaving when we still have Israel air violations almost on a daily basis, the northern part of Ghajjar is still occupied and we have had rocket attacks launched against Israeli from areas under our responsibility. There were three exchanges of fire between the Lebanese and the Israeli armies, with the most serious in El Adaysee in 2010, which resulted in fatalities on both sides."

But he wishes more had been done to assist the parties in the delimitation of the maritime security line.



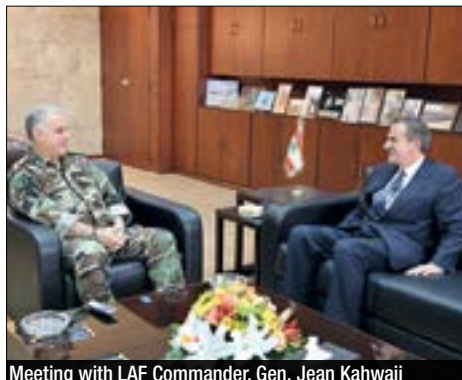
Mr Strugar at a meeting with Lebanese President, Michel Sleiman



Mr Strugar at a meeting with Lebanese Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri



Meeting with former Lebanese PM, Najib Mikati



Meeting with LAF Commander, Gen. Jean Kahwaji



With UNIFIL Force Commander Maj.-Gen. Paolo Serra

"I'm leaving behind very difficult issues, which have to be resolved in order to solidify the cessation of hostilities," he says.

He sums up UNIFIL's key functions as deterrence, prevention, conflict management and resolution. In addition to monitoring and reporting events on the ground, liaison and coordination are also important functions of the mission.

"UNIFIL's role is invaluable in maintaining the cessation of hostilities and general quiet here. Of course, the most important element is the political will of the parties to maintain peace," he adds.

His UN Career

A career diplomat, Mr. Strugar started out with the UN in April 1993, when he served as the provincial coordinator for the UN mission in South Africa. In his long career, he has mainly been involved in peacekeeping operations.

He joined UNIFIL as a senior adviser in June 2003. However, his ties with Lebanon date back to 1998, when he worked as a senior adviser for the UN Truce Supervision Organization, at the headquarters in Jerusalem, but with a regional mandate, including Lebanon.

Events that he will forever remember occurred during the 2006 Lebanese war.

"They were tragic! We had UN positions bombed and four unarmed military observers

killed. A civilian colleague and his wife also died in air strikes in Tyre. And in Shama, an airstrike left 22 members of one family dead."

"The first terrorist attack against UNIFIL was in June 2007, when some very enthusiastic young soldiers were killed. I can't really distinguish the events, but I feel about all of them in a very personal way."

He adds: "I have learnt a lot about Lebanon and established contacts with people here. This enriched my experience and helped me to look at the situation from different points of view."

He has also faced a number of challenges, including being kidnapped at gunpoint, experiencing wars and uprisings, losing close friends and colleagues, and, of course, being separated from his wife and two daughters for most of their lives.

On the future

And, as he said his farewell to the UN, after more than 30 years of living and working abroad, he remains nostalgic about South Lebanon, its people and its beauty.

"I loved Naqoura (UNIFIL headquarters) most. I think it has some special energy. I always feel good when here and, of course, it has the best fish in the whole of Lebanon."

He adds: "I'm leaving with very positive feelings about my work and life here. Because of this, I feel very good about this move... I don't have definite plans. I'm not going to retire intellectually

I have learnt a lot about Lebanon and established contacts with people here. This helped me to look at the situation from different points of view...

and I'm going to do something. But I'm going to be based in Belgrade with my family."

But he won't be leaving behind the special souvenirs that he has kept in his car for most of his stay in Lebanon. They are two bullets, which hit his car some years ago... "I kept them as a reminder of a sunny and beautiful day in Lebanon... a reminder that there is also the other side of life here, which is still very unstable and unpredictable."

He concludes: "We are seeing a shuffling of cards, some rebalancing of power and forces in the region, which creates a very unpredictable and volatile environment. But on the basis of my long experience of dealing with conflict situations, I'm convinced that this volatile time also creates opportunities."

Andrea Tenenti - Public Information Office

Top Lebanese General's inspiring optimism



Major-General Abdul Rahman Shehaitly, a top military officer, has had an impressive career with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). His remarkable resume includes a stint as Brigade Commander, Deputy Director of Intelligence, Deputy Chief of Staff - Operations, General Director of the General Directorate, Ministry of Defense and member of the Military Council. He was also the representative of the Lebanese government to UNIFIL and Head of LAF delegation to the tripartite meetings involving Lebanon, Israel and UNIFIL.

He recalls some very tense moments while working with UNIFIL. One incident in 2010 remains etched in his mind. It was a deadly clash along the Blue Line. LAF troops opened fire on Israeli soldiers, killing a senior officer. Two Lebanese soldiers and a journalist were also killed during the ensuing gun battle.

"We were going to war at that moment, the Israelis told us that they were coming to bomb our headquarters; In spite of all the warnings, Gen. Jean Kahwagi Commander of LAF refused to move from his office to a safer place."

Following intense consultations by UNIFIL Force Commander and the former Deputy Head of Mission, Mr. Milos Strugar, an extraordinary tripartite meeting attended by senior representatives of the Lebanese and Israeli armies and chaired by the Force Commander, was held in Ras Naqoura. It was a heated meeting, but the discussions and follow-up bilateral discussions helped to deescalate the tensions.

General Shehaitly emphasized the importance of tripartite meetings as an essential confidence-building mechanism between the parties, aimed at enhancing liaison and coordination, as well as addressing key security and military operational issues.

"It is a place we come with questions and get answers. It is where the Lebanese and Israelis get answers. Participating in the forum doesn't mean that we trust the Israelis or that the Israelis trust us. But they get answers to their questions, and we find answers to ours," he says.

On UNIFIL's role in the tripartite forum, he says: "Sometimes, we are not happy with UNIFIL, and sometimes, the Israelis are not happy with UNIFIL... but in the end, UNIFIL works according to the rules agreed upon, they are fair."

A significant inclusion into the Liaison and coordination arrangement, he says, is a line saying that every change in the force or movement near the Blue Line from both

sides must be communicated to UNIFIL, which then informs the other side in order to avoid any misunderstanding.

Through such meetings, he adds, the parties have managed to bring the country back from the brink of conflict on several occasions.

"We agreed on the Kfar Kila wall. On a daily basis, we had problems between our soldiers and Israeli soldiers, between our people and the IDF. Since the wall was constructed, the problems have stopped. Also, the Kfar Kila road, a very important link from the Eastern sector, which used to be very unsafe, is now a civilian road."

There was also an olive field that was the potential cause of conflict. Lebanese farmers would be forced to cross the Blue Line during harvesting. "One day, dogs from the Israeli side attacked two old people. We resolved the matter and our people can now get their olives and take care of their fields."

Major-General Shehaitly views the Blue Line marking as crucial.

Sometimes, we are not happy with UNIFIL, and sometimes, the Israelis are not happy with UNIFIL... but in the end, UNIFIL works according to the rules agreed upon, they are fair

"It is the first time in 60 years that Lebanon has visible southern "borders". Our people can now safely go to the "border". They can now cultivate and benefit from their land," he says.

"Had UNIFIL not been there," he adds, "the Blue Line marking wouldn't have been achieved. The Lebanese cannot do it and the Israelis cannot do it. Because we do not talk to one another..."

"After all these years, the problem of the drain water coming from south Kfer kila and destroying the fields of olives was solved by the efforts of UNIFIL."

According to him, the 12,000-troop UNIFIL operation in Lebanon has been impartial.

His career

From "a very early age", Maj-Gen Shehaitly says, he knew that he wanted to join the Army. And he would never be discouraged by his teachers' opposition to his choice of career.

"My teachers didn't want me to join the military. They would tell me, 'No, it's not for you, you have to continue studying. You score very high in mathematics and science. You have to pursue another career. But I chose to join the Army,'" he recalls.

And in 1973, he began his long career with the LAF, playing a role in all of Lebanon's wars.

"I saw all the Lebanese wars. I was in all of them," he says.

His battalion was deployed in different parts of Lebanon, including Sabra and Chatila, in Tyre, in the old Karantina, in the north, in the Bekaa...

In 2000, he was sent to South Lebanon, as part of a special force that was deployed following Israel's withdrawal. Then, he was a deputy commander of the force and General Michel Sleiman [now President of Lebanon] was the Army Commander.

General Sleiman told him: "If you succeed in this mission, I will promote you to a general. When I came back from the mission six months later, he told me. 'You succeeded and I will make you a general and you will be commander of a brigade.'"

He worked closely with UNIFIL, as Israeli forces withdrew. The LAF did not have forces in the South. UNIFIL's presence was critical, as it reassured southerners about the prospect for peace.

Moving forward

Maj-Gen Shehaitly is optimistic that the strategic dialogue initiative will eventually enable the transfer of greater security responsibility to the LAF.

"It is very important for the LAF to be strong. A strong army is needed by all the parties in Lebanon. We have the human resources and troop numbers and officers. What we need is a budget and equipment."

He says: "Instead of giving us fish, let the international community help us to fish. Our officers have been trained in England, Italy, France, and the US. We even have soldiers who have graduated from universities."

Andrea Tenenti & Antonette Miday
Public Information Office

Force Commander meets Lebanese PM Tammam Salam



UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander Major-General Paolo Serra together with UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Derek Plumbly and UN Deputy Special Coordinator and UNDP Resident and Coordinator Ross Mountain in Feb. 2014 called on the newly appointed Prime Minister Tammam Salam in his office in Beirut.

Following the meeting, Major-General Serra said: "I was very encouraged by this first meeting with Prime Minister Salam.

I was pleased to have this opportunity just days after he assumed office to brief him on UNIFIL's mission and related developments in south Lebanon."

"I informed the Prime Minister that the situation along the Blue Line and in the UNIFIL area of operations remains relatively stable, and that the parties have reiterated their commitment to resolution 1701 and to upholding the cessation of hostilities. I conveyed my particular

appreciation for the LAF that continues to demonstrate exemplary resolve and professionalism in working with our peacekeepers under very challenging circumstances."

"The Prime Minister had strong words of support for UNIFIL and he acknowledged the importance of the work we are doing together with the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain a safe and secure environment in the south.

Strengthening ties with Lebanese officials



During the first half of 2013, UNIFIL hosted three Lebanese Cabinet ministers at its Naqoura base.

In June of 2013, Force Commander Major-General Paolo Serra welcomed the caretaker Minister of Information Mr. Walid Daouk at UN Position 4-28 in the Ghajar area. Mr. Daouk, accompanied by senior officials in the ministry were subsequently briefed by Major General Serra on the situation in UNIFIL's area of operations - stressing the strong commitment to the mandate of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and the importance of close ties with the local population.

Speaking on this occasion, the Force Commander said, "Minister Daouk's second visit shows, once again, the deep commitment of the Lebanese authorities to the mission's mandate and to the work carried out by UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF)."

Mr. Daouk's visit - further encompassing UNIFIL's Sector East and Indian contingent - was one of three occasions in 2013 when Lebanese Cabinet ministers were hosted at the mission's Naqoura base.

A visit in early March was made by the caretaker Minister of Social Affairs (MOSA), Mr. Wael Abou Faour, accompanied by Major-General Abdul Rahman Shehaitly, LAF Government Coordinator, where he met with the Deputy Head of Mission and Director of Political and Civil Affairs, Mr. Milos Strugar. Mr. Abou Faour was also briefed on the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate, but with particular focus on cooperation with LAF and the Lebanese leadership.

The primary purpose of Mr. Abou Faour's visit, however, was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that affirms the determination of the MOSA and of UNIFIL to forming a sustainable partnership and to strengthening social development in the mission's area of operations.

"By signing this MoU, we are stepping up our partnership with the LAF and the Lebanese authorities and enhancing our mutual capabilities. Our combined efforts should be directed at providing assistance to the local population, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1701." Mr. Strugar said.

Also welcoming this move, Mr Wael Abou Faour said signing this document will, "enhance the wonderful partnership that the Lebanese have with UNIFIL, to work together for the benefit of the population and to share our social development centres for the implementation of common projects aimed at improving the lives of the people in the South of Lebanon."

The caretaker Minister for Environment, Mr. Nazem El-Khoury, accompanied by senior officers in the Ministry of Environment was the third minister to be hosted at the UNIFIL headquarters, making his visit in June. The minister toured UNIFIL's environment facilities and projects, with a view to building relations with the mission and exploring means of increasing collaboration therewith. Mr. Nazem met with, and was briefed by, senior environment officers on various



initiatives and possible avenues of collaboration - in addition to a briefing by the Force Commander.

On his visit, the Environment minister stated, "I would like to extend the gratitude of the Lebanese Government to UNIFIL and to send a clear message in support of the mission's mandate. We deeply appreciate your efforts and the work you are carrying out with the local communities."

These high level visits and interactions between Lebanese authorities and the mission once again highlight the close cooperation that exists between the two. UNIFIL and Lebanese officials share the view that in implementing activities, synergies can be tapped.

While UNIFIL has gained the trust of the Lebanese authorities and their commitment to its mandate and with the Lebanese Ministers assured of UNIFIL's support in meeting the needs of the community, it's indeed a win-win situation for Southern Lebanon.

Staying the course

Troop rotations revitalising UNIFIL



The periodic turnover of troops is a regular operational procedure in UN peacekeeping missions, including UNIFIL.

UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Paolo Serra, says: "What is important is that the operational capability of the mission is not affected by such changes; it is always maintained on the ground and always sufficient to perform the mandated tasks."

TURKCOY left, not Turkey

The withdrawal of the Turkish Engineering Company (TURCOY), in early September, is one example. When their last soldiers left their base near Knaysi Village and set off for Beirut Airport, yet another page in the history of UNIFIL was turned. It was a memorable one, says their former interpreter, Mr Hassan Saleh.

"I think many Lebanese will always remember the Turkish peacekeepers with gratitude," says Mr Saleh.

"We, as UN staff, are prepared for such changes. We are always ready to move from one battalion to another due to the frequent turnover of troops."

Turkey's decision to withdraw its military contractors and engineers followed that of Portugal, which pulled out its Engineering Company in June 2011.

However, Turkey still maintains its presence in UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force, where it contributes one fast patrol boat with some 58 sailors.

Formula for operational capability

Over the last few years, the mission has also seen a reduction of the Spanish, French and Italian contingents.

UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Paolo Serra explains that these countries have been the largest troop contributors over the last six years. They took on a big burden and so it's only logical that there is a reduction.

"What people are forgetting is that there has been an increase in troops from other European countries. We have a battalion from Ireland that was re-deployed in 2011. After that, the Finnish army joined. We also have new troops from the Republic of Serbia," he adds.

Look who is coming

While the base of the Turkish Engineering Company was shutting down, the joint Irish-Finnish battalion had begun expanding its base near the village of Tiri.

Within weeks, rows of newly refurbished containers were ready to accommodate additional 175 officers and soldiers from Finland, who arrived in November.

"In the past, we had our own battalion but peacekeeping is becoming more and more expensive. So, it is difficult for small countries such as Finland or Ireland to do this business alone. A joint battalion is a practical way to combine different kinds

of expertise," the Commanding Officer of the joint Finnish-Irish battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Asko Valta, says.

The economic difficulties in Europe have not dissuaded Finland from increasing its contribution to the mission.

Strength is not in numbers

Serbia is one of the latest countries to join the mission.

The first group of Serbian peacekeepers - around 50 officers and soldiers - was deployed near Marjeyun, in May. In November, the number rose to 140. Lieutenant-Colonel Zoran Nikolic is the contingent's commander

"It is a new experience. The last time the Serbian military took part in peacekeeping, almost half a century ago, was in Sinai in 1967, then as part of Yugoslavia."

"All troop contributing countries remain firmly committed to UNIFIL. We have received no indication about possible withdrawal of troops," says spokesperson Andrea Tenenti.

In October, Luxemburg re-deployed its troops to the mission. Today, there are 37 troop-contributing countries and nearly 12,000 troops.

"Never before in the history of the mission have we had so many countries," he concludes.

Yury Kushko - Public Information Office



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Clown therapy

Healing with a dose of humor!



The Ayta Ash Sha'b School for children with special needs in South Lebanon exuded laughter, excitement, and real joy at the hands of Walter the clown. An hour and a half of the clown's smiles, red nose, and painted face inspired feelings of love and appreciation in the 100 pupils of the school.

An air traffic controller in the Italian army and former staff at UNIFIL's ITALAIR, Warrant Officer Walter Mazzocchi is also a specialized clown therapist - attending to the psychosocial needs of children. "Most people think this is just a form of entertainment, but we are not clowns in a circus... The best way to show solidarity, particularly with children, is to give oneself. I try to give from myself, and within my capabilities," Walter explained.

Humor and laughter are the tools of clown therapists; they combat stress while reducing pain by releasing endorphins - the body's natural painkiller. "Most of the time, the problem with modern medicine is that it is focused on alleviating the effect of the disease instead of its causes," Walter lamented.

UNIFIL's clown therapy project is based on the Patch Adams alternative therapies which uses clown therapy as a supplementary treatment and as a follow up to a doctor's assessment. Focused on people with special needs resulting from severe illness, clown therapy aims at directing emotions of suffering in individuals towards more positive emotions - embodying the Patch Adams theory: "Health is based on happiness."

Walter's interest in clown therapy started in Italy, three years ago, when he tried to raise funds for children with cancer. After facing difficulties raising adequate funds, he decided to pursue alternative avenues of treatment - clown therapy.

"We noticed by their interaction and applause that the children were very happy and were trying to imitate Walter," said Hanan Mouzannar, the school's educational coordinator.

Zainab, a fifth grade pupil with learning difficulties, praised Walter. "This is great. Thank God for everything... The clown made us happy; we were delighted," she said.

Why the red nose? Walter explained, in an interview with *Al-Janoub*, that the red nose and make-up are part of the character a clown therapist adopts to capture the patient's attention. The amount of make-up applied depends on the kind of performance, with the colours and designs remaining non-repulsive and subtle.

While circus clowns rely on funny appearances and movements, clown therapists, Walter argues, work with the heart and try to communicate at a personal and involved level. He explained that during a performance, the clown has to ensure that the patients feel they are most important and that the therapist is there only for them. "You need to build trust and help restore one's self-confidence," he states, adding that, "Your smile could be the most important thing for the person with special needs."

UNIFIL organised training on clown therapy for the local organizations (MOSAN Centre for Special Needs in Tyre, the Association

for the Protection of Children with Special Needs in Ayta Ash Shaab, the Lebanese Red Cross-Youth Department, and an NGO, Developmental Action Without Borders NABAA) working with children with special needs, elderly people or vulnerable youth. The project includes training and funding for the purchase of clown costumes and kits. It extended to Abbasiyah and Rumaysh municipalities, where specific training was conducted for five Lebanese volunteers. This project was initiated by the Civil Military Coordination unit and is conducted jointly with Civil Affairs, in close cooperation with different municipalities in South Lebanon.

It targets disabled children of different ages and those suffering from mental retardation, Down Syndrome, autism, and learning and physical disabilities.

Through the interaction with the clown the children gained the confidence and they were able to take the stage and make others laugh. It also helps patients to re-establish relations with their families and societies.

"It is something that I love and enjoy doing. This is why I will do it for the rest of my life. Being a clown therapist is not about a costume and acting out stupid things; it is about giving love," Walter concluded.

Hiba Monzer & Rania Harb
Public Information Office



A helping hand from Spain

In Kafr Kila (Bride's Village), a Shia village located by the Blue Line across from the Israeli settlement of Metulla, attention has often been drawn to sensitive events such as the erection of a separation wall by the Israel Defence Forces in 2012 or demonstrations by Fatima's Gate. However, a different kind of problem has long plagued the land and helpless farmers have sought help.

The village is situated on the Marjayoun-Khiam plane, which extends into Galilee. In the distance, one can see the outline of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains dominated by the summit of Mount Hermon.

Historically, the natural declining slope of the land meant that during every rainy season, the plains near Metulla would flood, causing hardships to local farmers.

Kafr Kila has always been a farming village famous for its honey and olives. But it hasn't always been a 'land of milk and honey'. To paraphrase Herodotus, in Jebel Amel, poverty was always a guest.

Eking out a living

The mayor of Kafr Kila, Mr. Hassan Sheet, explained that heavy rains can cause massive floods on the plain. A culvert and drainage canal was built to attempt to control the flow of water.

However, a fence, which covers the culvert, often clogs due to accumulated debris and

vegetation, leading to flooding. Farmers cannot clean the fence and culvert because of the location along the Blue Line.

The deputy mayor, Mr. Khodr Sarhan, spoke emotionally about the hardships of the cereal farmers. Their demanding work of ploughing and planting before winter would be lost after the flooding.

Often, farmers would indebt themselves to acquire seed or machinery only to see their efforts drowned in water. Depending on the rain, the cycle yearly repeats itself with many having no choice but to risk planting to survive.

Helping hand from Spain

The mayor told UNIFIL that the only solution was to expand the culvert or construct a new one; and this would require cooperation from the other side.

In order to assist the Kafr Kila farmers, UNIFIL Sector East decided to undertake

engineering work to clean the fence and culvert, drain the canal and expand its width by 12 meters.

With the mayor's consent, Spanish engineers worked every day for a period of one month, from 16 September to 18 October, to complete it.

Captain Gomez-Calcerrada, the chief engineer, whose brigade left UNIFIL on 20 November, spoke with pride about the importance of the project and the need to do more in the future.

The work by the Spanish engineers was appreciated by the municipality with the hope that it would continue. It was a gesture of goodwill to build confidence with a long-suffering population and highlights the importance of UNIFIL's concern not just with security, but also with the people's well-being.

Edward Tawil - Civil Affairs Section



Olive press of Alma Chaab

With roots in the common Mediterranean heritage and many millennia of bilateral trade and cultural interaction, Lebanon and Italy have long been linked by an enduring friendship.

In addition to a similar geography, culture, weather and culinary habits, the extraction of pure quality oil from olives is an important part of their tradition.

Italy's commitment to boosting rural development in southern Lebanon, as well as to improving living conditions in this post-conflict area, was again exemplified in the installation of an olive press in Alma Chaab - a southern village notable for its abundance of olive trees.

The donation of an industrial olive press from the Pontifical mission in Lebanon and UNIFIL's Italian Battalion in 2008 improved the conditions that had previously required villagers to use rudimentary techniques for olive oil extraction and travel considerable distances to get their olives pressed.

Expressing great happiness over this donation, the Deputy Mayor, Mr. Camille Ghafary said that this assistance provided by the Italian Battalion five years ago, "contributed greatly to the agricultural development of the area and is benefitting not only the village of Alma Chaab but also its several neighbouring villages".



Welcoming an Italian delegation to the Olive Press in 2013, the Deputy Mayor offered his appreciation to them for the assistance and assured them about the proper and efficient functioning and management of the Olive Press. Other municipal officials expressed similar feelings about the olive press project.

"We used to travel to Hasbaya or Marjayoun to press our olives. Today, we can do it here, in a well-maintained, clean and near-by press and it is producing fine quality olive oil," said Mr. Wissam Khouri, from Alma Chaab.

Mr. William Haddad also thanked the Italian contingent for the donation, stating, "It is a symbol of the constructive relations that we have had since 1978 and that we are keen to maintain."

A variation of the longstanding symbol of peace and prosperity, the olive press of Alma Chaab epitomizes the relationship of mutual trust and respect between UNIFIL and the people of South Lebanon.

Dany Ghafary - Public Information Office





Lebanese who sings in Nepalese and loves it

On his Minjayra (Lebanese flute), Ali Askar, the 48-year-old resident of the town of Hinniyeh, in the South, performs popular Lebanese folkloric songs of Mijana embroidered with Nepalese lyrics.

Asked about this unusual mix of Lebanese and Nepalese tunes in his lyrics, Ali recalls that this dates back to 1989, when he had his first contact with UNIFIL's Nepalese Battalion in South Lebanon.

"I have memories engraved in my mind. I lived with the Nepalese peacekeepers through moments of danger and fear, as well as moments of fun and pleasure. We hid in the same shelters in dangerous times, during the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, but we also toured and discovered tourist sites in Lebanon. I sang their traditional songs and we danced together the 'Dabkeh (traditional Lebanese dance)', Ali fondly recounts.

Ali reminisces about numerous mutual visits which were paid.

Nepalese officers with their families visited Ali's family, after their tour of duty. They were happy to be hosted by such a fluent speaker of the Nepalese language.

He picked up the language, thanks to his contact with the Nepalese.

Ali adds: "I went to Nepal in 2007 and 2009, and I will go again in November 2013. Santosh Panta, the famous Nepalese comedian, visited Lebanon and called on me in person. My friends call me Santosh Panta now because they say that I look like him."

About the "secret" behind the close ties with Nepalese culture and people, Ali explains that "with them I feel at home, which

is one reason why I value my friendship with them".

Lebanese and Nepalese uphold similar values. Both treasure their families. A Nepalese does not extend his hand to shake a woman's hand. "It's similar to our Muslim tradition here. When they give something or offer anything, they do it heartily and generously. Above all, they have 'Dal-aouna' (Lebanese folkloric song), and when a nation has the 'Dal-aouna', it means their love for their land and home country is deeply rooted in their hearts."

The contact with the Nepalese drastically changed Ali's life. "I was a construction worker and now I'm a trader. They introduced me to trade through our interactions and

now I run my own business," said Ali, proudly.

After the Dal-aouna and Minjayra, Ali says he began to openly interact with Nepalese peacekeepers. "They gave me the courage to become more confident and establish new relations with people by taking me to Nepal in the Far East. They motivated me to learn a new language."

Ali's story is a good example of how often one's life can be dramatically changed by interacting with someone from a different culture and how a friendship can become a life experience.

Hiba Monzer
Public Information Office

Blood for life

Almost every week, four Malaysian peacekeepers from UNIFIL head to the Marjeyoun government hospital to donate blood.

"I came here to donate blood because of my sincere intention to help the Lebanese people. Who knows, maybe 450 millilitres of my blood might save somebody's life," a peacekeeper and recent 'blood donor', Corporal Bala Grushen said.

Before him, tens of other Malaysian soldiers have done the same.

It all began in September 2012, when a 21-year old university student from Kawkaba was severely injured in a car accident and needed an urgent transfusion of O- blood type, which is rather rare.

Kawkaba mayor learnt about the accident while he was meeting with a team from the Malaysian battalion to coordinate activities. He shared the news and asked for assistance; immediately, the hunt for the rare blood type began. After strenuous hours of work and contacts across various UNIFIL contingents, the soldiers were desperate. No donor was found.

Luckily, blood was found elsewhere, but this was a significant lesson for the Malaysian peacekeepers. They knew there has to be some steady supply of blood in this

remote area. Therefore, they initiated a weekly blood donation to Marjeyoun public hospital.

According to Dr Dany Romany, the officer in charge of the laboratory in Marjeyoun hospital, there is a large need for all blood types. "We have heart disease patients, we have kidney disease patients, and we have an intensive care unit. We are really relieved when someone from UNIFIL comes to donate blood," Romany added.

"All humans have the same blood. They may be different when it comes to their religion, culture,



skin colour, but they all need blood to survive," Lieutenant-Colonel Bin Majed, the head of the medical team in UNIFIL's Malaysian battalion simply put it.

Rania Harb
Public Information Office

THE CHALLENGE

Eight Students
One Mission



A UNIFIL video production, 'The Challenge', was awarded the 2013 top prize in communication in the UN 21 Awards.

"As the name of the awards suggests, our objective is to honour staff members and initiatives that help to strengthen the UN in the 21st century. We strive to share good practices and explore creative ways of fulfilling our responsibilities more

effectively," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Mr. Ban was speaking during the opening of the awards ceremony in New York.

Marking the 17th year, UN 21 Awards received a record 100 nominations from across UN agencies and missions, with the finalists chosen in each of the five categories: Efficiency, knowledge management, greening, staff volunteerism and communication.

UNIFIL's production "won the top prize in the communication category — "to best tell the story of our work in meaningful and engaging ways to people around the world."

'The Challenge (Khebz-o Meleh, in Arabic)' is a production of the Public Information Office's Video Unit. The concept brings together eight journalism graduate students from the Lebanese University in

Beirut and 16 of UNIFIL's contingents. Each student was given a day with one contingent and, under the direction of the Video Unit, set out to explore the responsibilities, activities and culture of the group they were assigned.

"The Challenge" went on air in September 2012 on several Lebanese TV stations, on UNIFIL's Facebook page, and YouTube channel and website.

Assi El Hellani celebrates Lebanese Independence with UNIFIL



Famed Lebanese singer and composer Mr. Assi El Hellani joined UNIFIL at celebrations to mark Lebanon's 70th independence anniversary, at the headquarters in Naqoura.

Mr. El Hellani, who is also a UN Goodwill Ambassador, met with UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Paolo Serra before joining the celebrations, organised by the national staff union.

"I commend the peacekeepers for their participation in maintaining peace and stability in Lebanon," Mr. El Hellani said. "Lebanon will not forget your sacrifice and contribution in preserving peace in the south."

Mr. El Hellani, who performed at the ceremony, paid tribute to the peacekeepers who have lost their lives in pursuit of peace and praised the collaboration between UNIFIL and the LAF.

Major-General Serra congratulated Lebanon on its independence anniversary while, reiterating UNIFIL's commitment to preserve peace and stability in south Lebanon. "We will continue to work closely with the LAF to maintain peace in south Lebanon," he added.

UNIFIL staff member Ms. Monita Youssef performed a self-composed Lebanese independence song.



» Brazil is well known as the home of football, samba, carnivals, quality coffee, the Amazon, the world-famous statue of Cristo Redento, and many other wonders. It is also home to the largest concentration of Lebanese outside the Middle East with an estimated over seven million Brazilians of Lebanese ancestry. In fact, Brazil's Lebanese population is nearly twice that of Lebanon itself.

» Brazil is one of the troops contributing country to the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force (MTF). The MTF is tasked with supporting the Lebanese Navy in monitoring its territorial waters, securing the Lebanese coastline and preventing the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon.

» Brazil assumed the command of the MTF in 2010 and currently has 258 peacekeepers. UNIFIL MTF has a fleet of eight ships from Bangladesh, Brazil, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, and Turkey.

» In November 2011, a Brazilian Frigate, UNIAO, joined the MTF as its flagship and on 17 May, Frigate Liberal replaced her as flagship. On 19 February 2013, the MTF command was handed over to Brazilian Rear Admiral Joese De Andrade Bandeira Leandro.

» Brazil's Vice-President, Mr Michel Miguel Elias Temer Lulia, has Lebanese roots in the town of Btaaboura in Koura District, near Tripoli in northern Lebanon. He is the second vice-president of Lebanese origin after Mr José Maria Alkmin.

» One of the major tasks of the Brazilian Navy is providing technical training to Lebanon's Navy to upgrade its capacity for effective and independent coastal monitoring and control, to prevent unauthorized entry of arms and related materials by sea.

» UNIFIL MTF is the first Naval Task Force ever to take part in a UN peacekeeping mission. Its deployment after the July-August 2006 conflict was a landmark move that prompted Israel to lift its naval blockade of Lebanon.

» Since its deployment, the MTF has hailed over 56,153 ships. More than 4,574 vessels were inspected by the Lebanese Navy.

Hiba Monzer - Public Information Office



Outgoing UNIFIL Director still going strong

His favourite story, says outgoing UNIFIL Director of Mission Support Girish Sinha, is one he heard from the late Nobel Peace Prize winner, Prof Wangari Maathai, at a meeting in London some years ago. It was the beautiful story of a tiny hummingbird that was determined to save its home from a destructive forest fire.



In a rendition that impressed the career UN official, Prof Maathai narrated that “facing criticism from other birds and animals for being too small to make a difference, all the hummingbird could do, was do its best.”

Recalling the story that he still treasures, Mr Sinha adds: “And that to me is what all of us should do. Take the lead whenever we can.”

As he prepared to embark on the next phase of his life in retirement from the United Nations at the end of December, Mr Sinha discussed with *Al-Janoub* his peacekeeping career.

Where it all began

Mr Sinha has a career spanning 41 years. A veteran of the Indian Army, which he joined in 1972, he served with distinction in different capacities.

His first assignment abroad was in Mozambique and later in Angola as Chief of Staff. On completion, he returned to India.

Little did he know that this would be his last assignment with the Indian Army, as he would be back in Mozambique, this time with the UN. He was offered the position of senior administrative officer.

He had been promoted to a colonel in-charge of a full regiment. But he chose to work in Mozambique, and later in Angola as the Chief of Integrated Services (CIS), an assignment he considers as his toughest in the UN.

On his career with the UN

“When I first joined the UN, we did everything manually, we did not have the project tools present today,” he recalls.

“The assignment in Angola was tough, there was little infrastructure. We did our best, but unfortunately, politically the process was not successful, the peace did not hold.”

He has worked in Sierra Leone, Iraq, Mozambique, the Balkans, Lebanon, Georgia, and Liberia, and at the UN Headquarters in New York.

My work is my passion

“You cannot find compensation in a salary and benefits. You must be fulfilled with what you are doing,” he says. “My work is my passion. I attribute my successful career to my passion for accomplishing tasks.”

His first assignment with UNIFIL was as CIS in 2000. At the time, UNIFIL monitored and verified Israel’s withdrawal

from South Lebanon. He stayed for one-and-a-half years.

“It was a small and quiet mission then. We quickly expanded from 4,000 to 6,000 staff, after confirming the Israeli withdrawal we scaled down to 2,000.”

He came back as Director of Mission Support in 2008 and is proud of the work of the Division.

“You may not be directly negotiating political agreements, or working with the parties but you are providing a platform... enabling the players to effectively achieve the mandate.”

Mr Sinha sees infrastructure development, notably the expansion to the new green hill compound as one of his biggest achievements in UNIFIL.

“When I joined UNIFIL, 80 per cent of the infrastructure was crumbling. What you see in the green hill today was a forest. It was a big project,” he adds proudly. “It takes time, but when it is done, you look back at the hard work with pride.”

Don't be scared of moving

He sees UNIFIL as a unique mission. “It is small, compact, with well-developed infrastructure and has over the years attracted and retained some of the best people.”

His advice to young people starting careers with the UN:

“Don't be scared of moving. Grab new opportunities. You risk developing a narrow career if you don't take advantage of opportunities,” he cautions. “Unless you have family commitments, don't get embedded.”

On work-life balance, he says: “I worked long hours and did not pay much attention to my personal life. You risk burnout. I took vacations and played golf but I should have paid more attention to my personal life.”

As he readies himself for retirement, Mr Sinha is showing no signs of slowing down. He has recently accepted a short-term contract in Darfur, and a one-year stint with the UN in Entebbe, Uganda.

Antonette Miday - Public Information Office

Greening South Lebanon

UNIFIL peacekeepers recently participated in a reforestation campaign in the Ibel al-Saqi nature reserve in South Lebanon.

The initiative was launched in 2010 by Jouzour Loubnan, in cooperation with the French, Italian and Spanish battalions to green the areas south of the Litani River. About 22,000 trees have been planted in six towns.

The 2,000 pine trees planted in Ibel al-Saqi are meant to be the seeds of a future dream of a “nature reserve”. Some 120 soldiers and peacekeepers from the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL worked hand in hand to plant the seedlings.



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UNIFIL's TV/Web Series, showing on the following
Lebanese TV stations: New TV, NBN and OTV



Salam

from the South



Every two weeks a new 10-minute radio episode
is aired in Arabic on: Al-Risala, Sawt El-Mada,
Voice of Lebanon, Voice of People & Radio Delta



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