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The Smiles of Peace



UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas watches a craftsman make pottery at the Lebanese homemade traditional food and handicraft festival. Held at UNIFIL HQ in Naqoura on the International Day of Peace 21 September 2011, the event aims to assist local agricultural cooperatives and associations promote their products as well as introduce Lebanese culture to UNIFIL members.

The mechanics of peacekeeping, five years since 1701

Chatting over coffee in Beirut the other day, a senior journalist raised a question on my observation that the last five years since adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) has been the quietest period southern Lebanon has witnessed in the last three decades. His point was not to challenge the fact that there has been unprecedented calm in the area, rather that this was not the result of UNIFIL's efforts but because the parties did not want a conflict.

I told him that I had absolutely no problem in acknowledging that the credit for this achievement goes largely to the parties. Commitment to the cessation of hostilities is ultimately about 'political will' on both sides.

Ideally, we would like that this 'political will' leads to a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict, a matter that lies outside the remit of UNIFIL.

Short of that, within the scope of its mandate UNIFIL provides a security framework through our coordinated operations with the Lebanese army that prevents potentially escalatory incidents and we provide an effective liaison and coordination framework that allows the parties to address all security and military operational issues through UNIFIL. This underpins the 'political will' for continued commitment to the cessation of hostilities on both sides.

Yet despite our best efforts incidents do happen, some with the potential to escalate into larger conflict. Take for example the exchange of fire between the Lebanese and Israeli army troops across the Blue Line in Wazzani last August and the more serious exchange in the previous year at El Adeisse. UNIFIL's immediate intervention helped stop the firing and contain the situation. Then by quickly engaging the parties on the tripartite forum UNIFIL secured reaffirmation of their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and helped in mutual confidence building. Thereafter, based on the findings of our investigations into the incidents UNIFIL enabled concrete steps by the parties to mitigate the potential for recurrence of such incidents.

El Adeisse is one among other hot spots along the Blue Line where underlying differences and territorial counterclaims between the parties tend to precipitate tensions despite their stated commitment to respect the Blue Line as the Line of Withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. In this context UNIFIL plays a major role in maintaining calm and preventing escalation.

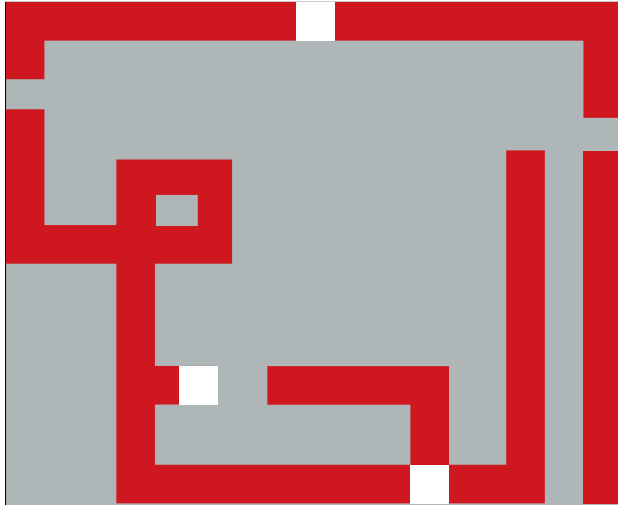
An important step in this direction is the ongoing visible marking of the Blue Line, a daunting task that UNIFIL has undertaken in cooperation with both sides. The amount of time and resources committed by UNIFIL in mine clearance for access, negotiating with the parties and marking each point on the ground to have an inter-visible stretch of blue barrels, by far surpasses any similar exercise undertaken anywhere in the world. Such are the sensitivities involved, but we are making steady progress now: on 19 August, UNIFIL placed the 100th blue barrel with an estimated 350 more required to complete the Blue Line marking.

These are just some instances of how the mechanics of peacekeeping operates within the framework of resolution 1701. Most significantly, the deployment of the Lebanese army with UNIFIL's robust support has brought about a strategic change in the security environment of southern Lebanon. The strategic partnership of the two forces has effected steady improvement in the security situation in the area through these five years. This is reflected in the normal daily life of the people and the general economic development so amply evident across south Lebanon.

All said and done, however, the fact remains that UNIFIL is not the solution to the conflict; it was never meant to be. Writing for *Al-Janoub* in June 2008 the then Head of UN Peacekeeping Operations Under-Secretary-General Jean-Marie Guehenno said: "A peacekeeping operation is to support diplomatic efforts to reach a political solution; it cannot be the substitute for a political solution...UNIFIL creates an opportunity for peace, but that opportunity has to be seized."

Neeraj Singh
Editor-in-Chief

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PM Mikati visits UNIFIL

It was a first for UNIFIL and a first for a Lebanese Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Najib Mikati visited UNIFIL on 16 July 2011. The whirlwind tour of Mission Headquarters at Naqoura in southern Lebanon carried two messages: renewed commitment by Lebanon for the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701 and appreciation of the peacekeepers' contribution to peace and stability in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

"In my name and in the name of the Lebanese government I thanked General Asarta and the officers and soldiers for the mission they are carrying out in all sincerity, particularly in imposing security and peace in cooperation with the Lebanese Army in southern Lebanon," Prime Minister Mikati said in an interview with *'Al-Janoub'*.

Accompanying the Prime Minister in the delegation were Minister of Defence Fayez Ghosn, Lebanese Armed Forces Commander General Jean Kahwagi and other senior military and government officials. The Prime Minister reviewed a Guard of Honour presented by UNIFIL troops. Then he received an operations briefing on UNIFIL and discussed with Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas the activities undertaken by the peacekeepers in collaboration with the LAF.

In renewing the commitment to the cessation of hostilities under resolution 1701, PM Mikati pointed to his government's decision to seek renewal of UNIFIL mandate for another year starting 1 September 2011 as proof of interest in the peacekeeping mission and its work.

"We say again: Thank you UNIFIL, and thank you for imposing security and peace. Today, we look forward also that the reality be not only a cessation of hostilities but also a cease-fire so that stability will be comprehensive and full," the Prime Minister told *'Al-Janoub'*.

In a statement issued after the talks, the Prime Minister said there is national consensus on UNIFIL and its mission. "I am here to stress that again in



unequivocal terms," he said, adding: "The people of Lebanon, and I personally, have deep appreciation for the work you are doing, hand in hand with the Lebanese Armed Forces, to maintain the peace and quiet for this part of the country that has suffered from many years of conflict."

PM Mikati again stressed: "My government is committed to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701."

In the interview with *'Al-Janoub'*, PM Mikati touched on the good relationship between UNIFIL and the people of south Lebanon and the Lebanese Army.

"We appreciate the good relationship with the people of south Lebanon. This is very important. Whereas UNIFIL's mission is security-related we also notice the aid and the social relations which began to link these forces to the people of the south," he said.

Earlier that day during a visit to Lebanese Army positions along the Blue Line, PM Mikati praised UNIFIL's presence, saying: "The international umbrella provided by UNIFIL deployment in the south reflects the international community's interest in Lebanon and its security and stability."

Addressing the Lebanese soldiers, he urged them to work closely with the peacekeepers.

"Soldiers from friendly countries have left their homelands and families and come to our land to achieve peace and security and to consecrate the will of the international community in seeing our country stable and safe. Cooperate with them, coordinate your measures, and encourage closer bonds between them and our families in south Lebanon, who undoubtedly appreciate their sacrifices and embrace them as they embrace you," the Prime Minister said in a statement.

For his part, Major-General Asarta said PM Mikati's visit to UNIFIL "constitutes a strong statement of support for our mission."

The Force Commander added: "I have no doubt that this will greatly encourage UNIFIL peacekeepers as well as our strategic partners in the Lebanese Armed Forces to further build on the steady gains in the security situation over the past almost five years since the cessation of hostilities came into effect. The support of the Government of Lebanon is very important for the success of our mission."

Samir F. Ghattas UNIFIL Public Information

UNIFIL General: Strong LAF is key to mission success



The French General who served for a year as UNIFIL's Chief of Staff until June 2011 says while the Mission has been a success in maintaining stability in south Lebanon despite the difficulties, the ultimate achievement would be in full Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) takeover of responsibilities under UN Security Council resolution 1701.

To enable that to happen, Brigadier-General Xavier de Woillemont said, there should be more support for the LAF in every possible way, from increased cooperation and coordination to stepped-up joint training and campaigning on the international scene to provide the LAF the necessary equipment.

Brigadier-General Pougin de la Maisonneuve of France assumed the post of UNIFIL Chief of Staff in July 2011.

Looking back at his one-year tenure as UNIFIL Chief of Staff, Brigadier-General de Woillemont can be proud.

"The great achievements of a peacekeeping mission lie in that incidents do not happen," he said. "It is often said that this is the calmest area

in Lebanon and perhaps in the whole region now. I think this is our mission and the most important achievement, and this is what probably makes me most happy and proud," the General added in an interview with *'Al-Janoub'* at the end of his mandate.

The key to sustained stability is in strengthening the LAF. Joint exercises are one aspect.

"The Lebanese Army is very fond of and with a high demand for these drills," de Woillemont said. "The more we go for the training activities, the more we will know each other and the more possible it will be to go towards the 'end state' for this Mission, which is to transfer our tasks, the tasks accomplished today by UNIFIL, to the Lebanese Army."



Joint Lebanese Army-UNIFIL training



UNIFIL "Force Commander Reserve" unit on patrol in south Lebanon

He noted that while the LAF is fully deployed in the south it still needs to be provided with the necessary infrastructure and training to accomplish its tasks.

"What we can and what we do is to carry, as UNIFIL officers, in all the contacts we may have with the international community, our own countries, the UN Headquarters, the EU, etc. the message that it is a must to support and assist LAF, in particular with everything related to the military infrastructure such as improving the barracks, building training centres in the south, and so on," de Woillemont said.

"LAF has proven all its capacity here in southern Lebanon and I believe we must continue to work in close cooperation and to assist them, little by little, because this is the target: that UNIFIL leaves and LAF takes care of all the responsibilities."

He summed up the work of UNIFIL during his tenure, saying that in addition to stability, the cooperation with the LAF has greatly improved, increasing the power of the LAF, while within UNIFIL itself there was the successful implementation of the Joint Technical Review that reconfigured the force and created the Force Commander Reserve combining the French infantry battalion and Quick Reaction Force to enhance operational mobility.

"We, too, must continue to adapt and to constantly reorganize our forces to be always more useful and more efficient," he said, adding that UNIFIL should remain a "robust military mission".

The general stressed the good cooperation with the LAF. "This cooperation functions very well, and I might say it is functioning better and better... the population does not always see us with the LAF on the ground, because we are 12,000, hence, more than the LAF troops, and the LAF has other tasks... the tendency is to increase all these joint activities together."

Touching on operational activities that have at times caused friction between UNIFIL and the local population, he said, "I think that we need to establish a balance between operational efficiency and the population's well-being."

People no doubt get disturbed by military operations everywhere, even around military bases in France, he said. But the general added that the population of southern Lebanon must appreciate the reasons behind UNIFIL's activities.

"If we are exercising, it is not for the pleasure of manoeuvring. We are fulfilling an operational task which is to ensure security here and which is first for the benefit of the local population. Hence, I think the population knows quite well that a minimum of disturbance must be tolerated," de Woillemont said. "Of course, we try to reduce the nuisances to the population as much as we can."

Addressing southerners, the general said they should put their trust in the LAF and UNIFIL, adding that the peacekeeping force is operating in complete transparency.

"We do not have any hidden agenda. We do not have any dark secret schemes. We are here under the United Nations flag, whichever the countries, and we are working first of all for the population; the first beneficiary is the population. I think that this trust of the population is first our fine reward," he said.

His interactions with the population of the south are the General's memorable moments, whether planned ahead or impromptu, organized or not, official or informal.

De Woillemont said: "When you go to a school in south Lebanon and the students sing French songs, for example, because I am French, first it is beautiful, and then it is very touching. When you are invited to lunch or dinner, there is always an abundance of things, even when people are not necessarily rich, so this is the generosity."

He wraps up his memories, expressing gratitude and honour in serving, as a Frenchman in UNIFIL, in light of the shared history between Lebanon and France "which inevitably creates very strong ties and obligations for us, the French."

"The first contact with a southerner is always friendly, I think that this is the memory I will keep from Lebanon and the south."

Yury Kushko UNIFIL Public Information

“Do not approach, Do not touch” simple UNIFIL instructions save boy’s life



A lesson by a UNIFIL instructor two years ago saved Hussein Abu Raya’s life

The 15-year-old school dropout used the skills he learned from a mine and cluster bomb awareness session by UNIFIL instructors to escape becoming victim of the many thousands of unexploded ordnance strewn over many parts of south Lebanon, almost five years after the end of conflict.

The incident happened near the village of Hinniyeh one recent morning when Hussein set out as usual on his old motorcycle headed to work in the neighbouring town of Qlayleh. As he manoeuvred his way slowly along a side road snaking amid citrus and banana groves in vernal weather pervaded with the fragrance of orange blossoms, he spotted a strange object at the side of the road.

The boy pulled over and carefully approached the spot. “When I saw the white tape on which the body was suspended, I became certain that it is a cluster bomb,” he recalled.

Hussein quickly stepped back, jumped on his motorbike and headed out to the main road, where he bumped into a UNIFIL Italian patrol that happened to be passing by.

He hailed the troops, but did not know what to tell the peacekeepers since they don’t speak Arabic and he does not speak any other language. The boy pointed by his hand to the place of the bomb, shouting “Bam Bam Bam,” then asked the peacekeepers to follow him. After some convincing he was able to lead the troops to the location.

“What if these peacekeepers do not possess enough equipment to dismantle the bomb or set it off?” Hussein thought. Worried about what might happen next, the boy headed to the nearest Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) position on the outskirts of Hinniyeh. There, he told the soldiers about what he had seen.

At once, the local commander dispatched a

patrol to the site. By then, the Italian patrol had searched the area and located other bombs. The two units teamed up and cordoned off the area before detonating the bombs.

Although the boy was not an explosives expert he managed to distinguish the cluster bomb, thanks to the instructions he picked up from the awareness session provided by UNIFIL.

Speaking outside his family home in Hinniyeh, Hussein said that two years ago, when he was still attending school, LAF and UNIFIL used to make periodic visits to educate students about the dangers of cluster bombs and mines strewn in the orchards and bushes from the 2006 war.

“They used to bring with them to school dismantled cluster munitions and mines of various kinds. They briefed us about the risks of these bombs and how we should act if we came across any of them,” Hussein recalled.

“I still remember how the interpreter was strictly telling us: ‘Do not approach. Do not touch. Inform the nearest LAF or UNIFIL position,’ ” he added.

While Hussein was repeating the interpreter’s instructions, his four older brothers echoed the same phrase just like a chorus: “Do not approach. Do not touch. Inform the nearest LAF or UNIFIL position.”

Hussein added that when he spotted the bomb on that morning, he could only remember the instructions he learned at the school, which he literally applied.

Mine infestation remains a challenge in southern Lebanon with unexploded ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, left over from the 2006 conflict, claiming 28 civilian lives and 263 civilian injuries in the area since the end of the conflict. Besides, during mine clearance

operations 14 de-miners including two from UNIFIL have been killed and 49 injured, including five UNIFIL de-miners.

UNIFIL demining teams have since 2006 contributed to demining around 4.8 million square metres of affected land and destroyed more than 34,000 unexploded ordnance and mines in southern Lebanon. Besides, UNIFIL regularly conducts activities aimed at raising awareness of the population to the dangers of landmines and other explosive remnants of war.

Facing the dangers of cluster bombs is just part of Hussein’s tragic upbringing. Born a refugee to Palestinian parents who hail from the town of Al-Bassa a few kilometres from Lebanon, the family ended up in Hinniyeh northeast of Naqoura in the southernmost part of Lebanon.

Hussein had to drop out of school to work to support his family and help pay for his father’s serious eye injury he suffered in a work-related accident. His four brothers also dropped out of school and moved to the work force. His two sisters also were not able to continue their education and opted to marry and move out.

Hussein wanted to work in manufacturing aluminium metal frames for windows and doors but even that was not possible due to his pressing living conditions. So he ended up working with his brothers in a pit, turning timber and branches to charcoal for domestic use.

His face blackened by soot, the boy said he also picked up some information on cluster bombs and mines from his elder brother, Ali, who works for a Norwegian team specialized in mines clearance in southern Lebanon. He said Ali always brought home with him awareness publications depicting cluster bombs and mines, and explained to his brothers how to act in the event of seeing any of these bodies.

Due to the nature of their business, which is collecting wood, Hussein’s family members are vulnerable to exposure to cluster bombs that are heavily scattered in Hinniyeh’s orchards, plains and surrounding valleys. Therefore, Ali was always keen to remind his brothers of the need to be cautious while walking and working in the orchards.

It is true that Hussein dropped out school at an early age, but at one specific session, when the peacekeepers explained the dangers of bombs, Hussein proved that he deserved a better chance to continue his studies. The pictures and words that he saw and heard in the awareness session stuck in his memory, and the result was that his life and that of others were saved.

Sultan Sleiman UNIFIL Civil Affairs

UNIFIL, through the eyes of southern students

On 26 July, a group of school students from various parts of southern Lebanon visited UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqoura. The “Day with UNIFIL” was an opportunity for the students to learn about the peacekeeping force, its mission, activities and its members – civilian as well as military. The students took a close look at the helicopters used for patrolling the Blue Line, transport and medical evacuation, saw a demonstration on demining and a drill on fire fighting. Their experience with the life of a soldier included a lunch at the “International Mess”, the restaurant where soldiers and officers from UNIFIL’s 36 troop contributing countries join together for a meal.

The students, in turn, will take their experience back to their schools to share it with fellow students. They were able to see first-hand how the soldiers and civilian staff members of UNIFIL go about their daily routine. They heard explanation on UNIFIL activities, including intricate subjects such as the Blue Line. One girl asked how to volunteer for UN peacekeeping duty, for example. But they were, of course, impressed most by the cockpit of the Italian military helicopter and the fire fighting skills presented by the Danish logistics contingent.

The students came from the public schools in Naqoura, Marwaheen, Tyre and Rmeish, with students joining from other neighbouring villages as well.

The day-long event was organized by UNIFIL Civil Affairs section for students who successfully completed their official Grade 9 exams (Brevet). It is part of the peacekeeping force’s efforts to explain to the people of the south and particularly the new generation the Mission and its activities.

Mohammad Ghassan Bzeih, a 14-year-old from Zibqine village who goes to Tyre Public High School for Boys and Girls, is one of those students. He read out a letter he had written in Arabic about UNIFIL to the other students at a conference hall at the Naqoura headquarters. Here, in his own words, are his impressions of the visit and of UNIFIL:



Thank you

It was a busy Tuesday for me and my friends, in all 45 students, from different schools in the south.

Hope was regenerated in us as we enjoyed the various activities and learned life experiences that develop our souls and drive us forward. It felt on that day as if we travelled from the heart of the south to a miniature replica of the world, where we engaged people from different countries who spoke various languages.

We became firefighters, then deminers, and helicopter passengers.

How happy and proud we felt that day, undergoing training about UNIFIL activities in the south. And when we stepped into the Headquarters in Naqoura, we were so amazed to see nations united, working hand in hand to ensure peace in the south.

Therefore, in the name of the Lebanese people, especially the southerners, I thank UNIFIL officers and soldiers. You have come from thousands of miles away to spread peace.

You have come here to sketch a smile in the hearts of the people and students. Our presence here is a proof of that. You have come to restore to people what remains of their smiles, so that children can feel safe, so that no mother will fear anymore for the safety of her child from a cluster bomb when wandering in the countryside to smell the flowers. You have come to secure our fields from bombs and remnants of war.

You have offered a lot of assistance and services in various fields. You have provided medical services, food and others. You have conducted different training sessions in first aid and fire fighting, as well as sewing to enhance the role of women in society.

You have made the dreams of some come true, something that is lacking in the south because of the security situation which erupts every now and then, in addition to the poor financial and social conditions.

So, as Lebanese people, we wish to thank UNIFIL which together with the Lebanese Army are watching over us in order to ensure security and stability in Lebanon and the implementation of resolution 1701 with all its details by both the Lebanese and Israeli sides.

Finally, we salute you, and raise our hats in gratitude and appreciation for all what you offer and help.



On top of peacekeeping tasks and the assistance they offer to southern communities, UNIFIL troops join the people, particularly the children, in recreational activities. The effort enhances understanding through cultural awareness and helps develop closer bonds between the soldiers and the communities.





Fasting, iftars and patrols Ramadan at UNIFIL

The holy month of Ramadan is a time for Muslims to fast, pray, reflect and be close to Allah and to their own families and friends. Muslim soldiers of UNIFIL are no different when it comes to tradition, but on top of that they have peacekeeping duties to perform. For those Muslims in uniform the holy month also carries the extra burden of being away from loved ones.



During the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from drinking liquids, eating, smoking and any excessive indulgences from sunrise to sunset every day. So Ramadan, of course, brings some changes into the daily routine of the UNIFIL soldiers who are from the Muslim faith.

“For me as a UNIFIL peacekeeper, the Ramadan occasion is a very nice and special one because here I’ve got an opportunity to share it with other Muslims servicing for peace here in Lebanon, with Indonesians, Bangladeshi soldiers, Malaysians, Turkish and Tanzanians (and others),” said Major Muhammad Wirda Prayogo, from the Indonesian Battalion.

But it is not easy, given that even during the holy month the peacekeepers still have to perform their duties. They conduct regular patrolling that is part of their mission assisting the Lebanese army to maintain security in the south, guard outposts and carry out logistical work as with any other day or month of the year.

Still, they have to adjust. One Muslim soldier cut down on his physical exercises to avoid drinking water during the day. Another set aside for himself additional time for extra prayers and reciting of the Quran. Soldiers gather together around the iftar table at sundown or share an early Souhour meal before dawn.

As for non-Muslim soldiers in UNIFIL, they refrain from eating, drinking or smoking in the company of fasting soldiers or in public in deference to the Ramadan tradition and related sensitivities. They, too, sometimes share iftars with their Muslim comrades.

But probably the most difficult of the holy

month is for the peacekeepers to be away from family and home.

“We miss the family and a chance to share iftars with them,” said Sergeant Ahmed Moamin from UNIFIL’s Ghanaian Battalion. “But as military servicemen we are aware of the inevitability of some limitations. There are moments when we cannot go out and should stay in barracks or to have our iftar in a truck or armoured personnel carrier, and not at the Al-Rahman table,” he added in an interview with UNIFIL Radio.

In addition to the meals that UNIFIL soldiers share with each other during Ramadan, the occasion is also an opportunity for southerners to interact with the Muslim soldiers.

“Sometimes the southerners visit us and share iftar with us. We feel proud on such occasions which are precious,” said Mahammed Abdul Roful, the Imam of the UNIFIL Ghanaian Battalion.

Senior UNIFIL representatives also have shared iftars with Lebanese southerners. A couple of years ago when the International Day of Peace and Ramadan coincided, imams and chaplains from UNIFIL contingents were invited to an iftar in Tyr hosted by the local Islamic institution.

It was a unique event, recalls Tyr and Jabal Amel Jaafarite Mufti Sheikh Hassan Abdullah. “It gave us a new line of communication with UNIFIL – through religious people, not through security officers or the military ones,” he said in an interview.

UNIFIL reciprocated, with Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas hosting an Iftar at Mission

headquarters in Naqoura. “It was an occasion that reflected respect on the side of the Force Commander to the religious rites of the Muslims,” said Sheikh Abdullah. Major-General Asarta this year attended an iftar thrown by the charity Imam Moussa Al Sadr Foundation in Tyr.

“UNIFIL will continue to do its part to contribute to the establishment of a safe environment and the improvement of lives here in the south,” he said in a speech. “Living side by side, interacting on a daily basis - with Lebanese soldiers, local authorities and villagers alike – this is, in our view, the only way to successfully achieve UNIFIL’s mandated tasks.”

It is no surprise that peacekeepers observe, share or feel Ramadan. But their involvement also helps enhance the ultimate goal of peace. UNIFIL has become a part of daily life of southerners after it had shared with them the tragedies of previous conflicts, including many peacekeepers killed in the service of peace.

“To see people leaving their families and villages and countries for the sake of ensuring security, comfort and stability of a group of people, we then realize that there are in this world people who are so good.” Sheikh Abdullah said.

“These men have become one with the Lebanese people and they share with us Lebanon’s historic values and moral values due to the martyrs from UNIFIL troops in south Lebanon. Such martyrs gave a bigger moral value to the southern soil through such men devoted to peace. I hope the peace will prevail.”

Rania Bdeir UNIFIL Public Information

Irish peacekeepers are back to a southern welcome

Many southerners have a good reason to smile. Irish peacekeepers are back.

"We welcome the Irish army's return to Lebanon", the billboard read at the entrance to Tibnin, telling of the views of many in this southern Lebanese town.

Mansour Mansour, a store owner, put up the billboard in gratitude to the Irish peacekeepers who saved his father's life on Christmas night 1980 after their house was hit by a bomb in the village of Hadatha.

"The Irish helped my father and gave him medical treatment," he said, adding that the wounded man was evacuated by helicopter by a Captain named O'Brien. A blood transfusion kept him alive until he reached hospital, where he was treated for more than 40 days.

The relationship between the Irish contingent of UNIFIL and the people of southern Lebanon dates back to the early days when the peacekeeping force deployed to the area in 1978. The troops lived through the good and bad with the people and lost 47 members in the line of duty in the service of peace.

Now this close relationship, interrupted by the withdrawal of the contingent years ago but continuously nurtured in the minds and thoughts of southerners like Mansour, is being revived.

Ali Dakik, another Tibnin store owner whose hope that the Irish would return to the same area had come true, now has an opportunity to again greet his old Irish friends and meet the new ones. In his words, the Irish peacekeepers became part of the family. It is incomplete without them.

"The relationship with the Irish battalion went beyond just a relationship between members of the United Nations and the locals," Dakik recalled of the past years. "There are some Irish soldiers who got married to Lebanese women. They worked on the ground, they visited the people and the villages. These are things that reflected positively on the relationship between the Irish and the civilians."

Ireland was one of the first contributors to UNIFIL, providing troops since its onset. They remained deployed during some of



the worst periods of conflict in southern Lebanon and faced hard times along with the population. The troops were withdrawn in 2001 and returned in 2007-2008 before being withdrawn again. Irish officers, however, continued to serve at UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqoura.

About 450 Irish troops deployed in June 2011, with their headquarters at Tibnin – a base befittingly named Camp Shamrock, after the three-leafed symbol of Ireland. They have since also taken up posts along the Blue Line.

In one of their first acts, and in a tribute to the past and their belonging to south Lebanon, on Wednesday 6 July the Irish peacekeepers held a memorial to remember fallen comrades. A Mass was held, a bagpiper played somber music as officers laid a wreath and troops saluted at the Tibnin memorial that is dedicated to the 47 Irish peacekeepers who died in southern Lebanon.

Two days later, the Irish Battalion welcomed at its Camp Shamrock UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas.

"The contributions of Irish peacekeepers to UNIFIL go back to 1978, as old as UNIFIL. They have lost brave soldiers in the service of peace in this dear land. I am proud to have you here," Major-General Asarta said.

For his part, Lieutenant-Colonel Frank Bolger, the Commanding Officer of the Irish Battalion, said: "It is of vital importance that we work in close cooperation and coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces for the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate and to

maintain peace and security in the south."

The people of Tibnin have painful stories to tell during the years of conflict but fond memories of how the Irish handled it.

Dakik remembers how in 1986 Irish peacekeepers saved a wounded civilian from certain death in nearby Hariss village. "Because of the blood that was donated by the Irish he survived and he is still alive to this moment."

Mohammad Fawaz, head of an orphanage in the town, recalled how the Irish peacekeepers entertained children "who were young and afraid" because of the conflict and did not leave them. "Such things can never be forgotten, of course."

The Irish soldiers who have served before don't see much in change in the southerner's hospitality these days – "Still warm as ever", as Petty officer Robbie Doyle put it. But it was noticeable for them the stability and economic development the country has witnessed over the years.

"Everywhere you go the Lebanese Army is around, they have the checkpoints and so on. That tells me that normality is coming back to the south of Lebanon, that Lebanese Army can take over and we will go home in due course," Sergeant Tony Grehan said.

For Sergeant-Major Noel O'Callaghan most felt is the improvement in infrastructure. "It gives me a great hope that UNIFIL has made a great difference here, that I had made a difference."

Rania Bdeir UNIFIL Public Information

Maroun al-Ras



A survivor amid regional tensions

Its strategic location overlooking a vast area has long lured colonialists. Its proximity to the frontier has earned it additional exposure in past decades, and with that a fair share of the regional tensions.

Its archaeology speaks of a long history, from mysterious sketches etched on the walls of a cave to the arches and sarcophagus carved from alongside medium-sized columns and the pottery that are occasionally found by the villagers.

Its name might suggest that it is a Christian town, named after the founder of the Maronite sect, Maroun. In fact, Maroun al-Ras is inhabited by Shia Muslims. Digging up information about Maroun al-Ras is no easy task; some references indicate that the town's composite name originates from the ancient Aramaic language, with Maroun meaning "lord" or "noble man" whereas al-Ras refers to the "top" reflecting the fact that Maroun al-Ras is the highest point in the Jabal Amel region.

Maroun al-Ras sits on a 950-metre-high hill, 125 kilometres southeast of Beirut, 50 kilometres south of Nabatiyeh, and two kilometres from Bint Jbeil. Its dry climate year round has long attracted visitors.

The town suffered during the years of Israeli occupation, said Mayor Ibrahim Alawiye. Some residents died in the conflict, others were detained for a period of time in the Khyam and Ansar prison camps and yet others moved to Beirut or to Tyr and other southern towns. Some chose to migrate to countries like the United States, Australia and Germany.

Maroun al-Ras' relationship with the UN dates back to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO). Its residents maintained the best relations with the UN military observers based in the town over the years, and later established the same cordial relationship with UNIFIL troops. In the last four years, UNIFIL spent 90,000 dollars on community projects in the town, said Mayor Alawiye. He considers UNIFIL to have become an essential part of Maroun al-Ras, thus contributing to better living conditions for the townspeople.

Maroun al-Ras had its share of destruction during the 2006 war. Places of worship alongside 200 of its houses were destroyed, while 80 others were badly damaged, said the mayor. Nevertheless, Maroun al-Ras has managed in the last five years to pick up the pieces and rebuild.

The Lebanese government funded the restoration of damaged property while private contributions from abroad helped in the reconstruction of destroyed houses, four mosques and three husseiniyahs. Since 2010, a public garden established by Iran began attracting domestic tourism, generating income for the Municipality. Mayor Alawiye has plans for expansion to include stores and restaurants at the park.

But the town lacks the basic infrastructure, such as a sewage network, forcing

residents to use septic tanks. Electricity, or the lack of it, is another problem for Maroun al-Ras. People rely on generators to compensate for shortages as with many other areas of the country.

The population of Maroun al-Ras varies seasonally and there are no accurate estimates. However, according to figures available to the municipality, there are in all 6,000 people from Maroun al-Ras residing in Lebanon and this number would double when factoring in the overseas emigrants. About 2,500 reside in the town's 400-odd houses year round, rising to some 4,000 during weekends and holidays. The Municipal Council comprises 15 members and Maroun al-Ras has three Mukhtars.

Residents make their living from growing tobacco, olives and grain, in addition to remittance from migrants abroad who send money to their families on a regular basis.

A pond collecting rainwater and wells provide irrigation for farming as well as tap water for the town. A resident has donated two ambulances for the town but inhabitants still have to travel to nearby Bint Jbeil town for medical treatment. Children attend school in nearby towns after two local public schools were closed down due to insufficient attendance.

Sultan Sleiman UNIFIL Civil Affairs



A deep-rooted relationship with the UN

The town of Maroun al-Ras has a deep-rooted relationship with both the United Nations and peacekeeping troops. The military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO), established after the 1948 war, have for many years maintained a base in Maroun al-Ras until 2010. Being popular guests, townspeople offered them the best hospitality possible throughout their long stay in the town.



In 1978, following the first Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, UNIFIL peacekeepers deployed in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions 425 and 426. The UNIFIL position on the outskirts of Maroun al-Ras has changed hands between Ireland and France. This period included the watershed event that changed Lebanon's face, namely the achievement of the liberation of the south in 2000.

After the end of the war in August 2006, and under United Nations Security Council resolution 1701, the presence of UNIFIL has been enhanced and its role was strengthened. UNIFIL was tasked with supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to supervise the implementation of this resolution [1701].

Furthermore, UNIFIL Belgian peacekeepers moved to our town with a mission to clear mines in order to

facilitate the demarcation of the Line of Israeli Withdrawal, known as the Blue Line. Their mission also aimed at ensuring better living conditions for farmers while carrying out their daily work in fields and orchards.

During all this long history of UNIFIL presence in Maroun al-Ras, we can say that the relationship between the United Nations troops and townspeople was very good and unique, on both the social and developmental levels. UNIFIL's role in the development programmes has increased after the 2006 war. Different fields of cooperation have emerged, in ways that ensure the steadfastness of our people in their land and homes. This included productive and entertainment projects for farmers and residents as well as a basketball court constructed by UNIFIL Italian Battalion; a dispensary equipped by UNIFIL Qatari Battalion; and a mini football court still under construction by UNIFIL French Battalion.

As for the relationship between the municipality and UNIFIL, there is continued cooperation and coordination between both sides at a very high level through regular meetings designed to follow up the developments in order to improve interaction between UNIFIL peacekeepers and the local community.

Finally, on behalf of Maroun al-Ras townspeople, I would like to thank all those who came as guests to our country, loved it, contributed to the steadfastness of our people and assisted in improving their living conditions. Wishing for our beloved Lebanon all prosperity and progress for the better, we also wish UNIFIL success in the implementation of its tasks, and hope that all its troops return to their home countries safely and carrying the best memories.

Mayor of Maroun al-Ras Ibrahim Alawiyeah

UNIFIL and LAF in largest naval drill



In the largest such exercise, UNIFIL Maritime Task Force vessels joined Lebanese Armed Forces Navy ships in a Naval Cadet Training Cruise in the maritime area between Lebanon and Cyprus.

Six ships took part in the 29-30 June, 2011 operation. From the MTF, FGS Mosel and FGS Hyaene of Germany and BNS Osman (Bangladesh) deployed. The ships LNS Tabarja, LNS Sour and LNS Damour participated from the LAF Navy.

The joint action was an outstanding opportunity for LAF Navy ships to conduct sea trials, and showcase their operational development. During the exercise, ships got underway with "engines ahead full", conducted "tactical manoeuvres", "light line" (mail transfer at sea), "firing exercise" on a drifting target called "killer tomato", "fire fighting drills" and "launching chaff grenades" with a fast reaction against air strike simulation.

UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas joined me and the LAF Navy Commander, Rear Admiral Nazih Baroud, on board German Supply Ship FGS Mosel to observe the exercise.

"I have noted the positive outcome of the exercise as further testimony to the excellent relations that have been

established between the MTF and the Lebanese Navy," Major-General Asarta said.

The Force Commander emphasized the importance of close cooperation between UNIFIL and LAF in all matters related to training.

UNIFIL Maritime Task Force is the first naval component of a UN peacekeeping mission. Deployed since 2006 at the request of the Lebanese Government, MTF supports the Lebanese Navy in monitoring its territorial waters to prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related materials by sea into Lebanon.

MTF has conducted continuous work executing Maritime Interdiction Operation along the Lebanese coast and inside the Area of Maritime Operation (AMO). It also provides technical training in order to develop the capabilities and skills of the Lebanese Navy.

MTF training contribution to LAF Navy has been increasing over the years in both quantity and quality. The results achieved after almost five years of

cooperation between the two naval forces are remarkable. They allow us to foresee the accomplishment of MTF's main goal that is to hand over the territorial waters responsibilities to the LAF Navy.

Besides the MTF's efforts to enhance the LAF Navy's capacity, LAF Navy has also been receiving some important donation from different countries in recent years.

The donations include 10 patrol boats from the United Arab Emirates, two police boats and one patrol boat from Germany and a patrol boat from France.

Another important contribution came from Germany in the form of building eight Coastal Radar Stations (CRS), with another one to be established later. The aim is to close all the gaps along the coast. These CRS allow the LAF Navy to keep a maritime picture and surveillance covering round the clock and 100 percent of their territorial waters.

Rear Admiral Luiz Henrique Caroli
Commander Maritime Task Force

In show of support, UNIFIL vehicles delivered to Lebanese Army



From the mammoth Armoured Personnel Carriers of the French contingent to the civilian four-wheel-drive vehicles of Mission Support - and don't forget the computer equipment - UNIFIL is contributing in yet one more way to strengthening the capability of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

These donations - on top of patrolling on land, at sea and in the air as well as assistance to the local population - are testament of UNIFIL's own consistent campaign with the international community for supporting the LAF with the technical and material resources it requires to fulfill its vital responsibilities in line with UN Security Council resolution 1701.

In the biggest yet contribution, France on 23 June 2011 transferred to the LAF eight VAB carriers which served in the French contingent of UNIFIL.

The French Ambassador to Lebanon, Denis Pietton, said the handover showed "France's commitment to training the Lebanese Army and to continue supporting it."

UNIFIL Chief of Staff and France's top general in Lebanon at the time, Brigadier-General Xavier de Woillemont, described the event as "a reflection of both France's and UNIFIL's continued and sustained commitment to

enhance the operational capabilities of the LAF to assume full and effective security control over UNIFIL's Area of Operation, in compliance with resolution 1701."

Since August 2010, UNIFIL has donated 169 four-wheel-drive vehicles and dozens of computer sets to the LAF.

Through these donations, said Director of Mission Support Girish Sinha, UNIFIL continues to demonstrate its support for the Lebanese government and cooperation with LAF.

"UNIFIL is committed to the continued donation of surplus vehicles and equipment to LAF as and when possible to enable the Lebanese Army accomplish its obligations under UN Security Council resolution 1701," Sinha added.

Speaking at the ceremony at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura on 23 June, the representative of the Lebanese Army



Commander, Brigadier-General Rifaat Choukor, said the aid the army receives serves local and international stability.

Brigadier-General Choukor renewed Lebanon's commitment to resolution 1701 and praised UNIFIL for "proving day after day its good performance and right orientation."

Samir F. Ghattas UNIFIL Public Information

UN pulls together in the face of tragedy

Tragedy has struck the UN family in different ways. Be it a plane crash in Africa, a raid on UN offices in Afghanistan, an earthquake which leveled the headquarters in Haiti and the latest bombing of the UN compound in Nigeria, it has claimed lives or harmed the innocent.



UNIFIL buglers play somber tune



Sharing the pain: UNIFIL members pay tribute to victims of the bombing of UN offices in Nigeria

Yet, the UN presses ahead with its mission, keeping the peace or building on it in places, assisting the communities in need in others and working for humanity's development worldwide.

In each of the incidents, whether a natural disaster or a deliberate attack, the UN family pulled together in the face of crisis.

At UNIFIL in southern Lebanon, such solidarity was embodied in a ceremony on 1 September to pay tribute to those killed or injured in the bombing of the UN compound in Abuja, Nigeria.

Head of Mission and Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas and Director of Mission Support Girish Sinha

laid wreaths in front of two pictures showing the devastation wrought on the UN offices in Abuja 26 August. A military band played solemn music as UNIFIL soldiers saluted and civilian staff members stood in silence.

The Force Commander said in a speech that the tragic incident is a reminder of the risks undertaken by UN staff members who often work in difficult conditions in order to bring peace and prosperity to people they serve. As part of honouring the fallen UN staff members, Major-General Asarta said UNIFIL is "determined to make every effort to contribute to the achievement of peace and stability in southern Lebanon."

Only a few months earlier, UNIFIL convoys

were attacked by roadside bombs in Lebanon, injuring 12 soldiers in two separate incidents. UNIFIL said it will not be deterred and will continue to perform its tasks under its mandate.

A continent away, in Africa, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro described the attack in Nigeria as "an assault not just on our premises, but on our values and our work: development, human rights and peace."

After visiting the site where 23 people were killed, including 11 UN staff members, and 130 injured, Migiro added: "Terrorists can never kill our ideals."

Samir F. Ghattas UNIFIL Public Information



Salam

from the South

UNIFIL Radio Program “Salam from the South”

a 10-minute episode every two weeks broadcast in Arabic on stations Al-Risala, Sawt El-Mada, Voice of Lebanon and Voice of the People brings voices of the people of south Lebanon and their views on UNIFIL, and at the same time explains the peacekeepers’ activities in the Area of Operation.

“Discover UNIFIL in 60 Seconds”

a video rich in action that depicts UNIFIL troops conducting various tasks and in just 1 minute highlights one of those many activities in south Lebanon, such as the Blue Line marking and patrolling. The clip airs on Lebanese stations NBN, New TV and TeleLiban.



UNIFIL on the Web

The UNIFIL website (<http://unifil.unmissions.org>) in both English and Arabic is continuously updated with the latest in news, photos, radio and video about the Mission, its history and past and current activities, along with a whole range of background information, from troop strength and Troop Contributing Countries to related UN documents and Secretary-General’s reports.

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A UNIFIL soldier takes time off to show a Lebanese boy how to beat the traditional South Korean drum