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# al-janoub

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**UNIFIL**  
magazine



# Forging Ahead





UNIFIL de-miner sweeps mine-infested area in south Lebanon

# The Line of Withdrawal

In the last issue, *'Al-Janoub'* featured the Blue Line – its characteristics and challenges. Events in recent weeks underline the need for some more elaboration on the subject. What exactly is the Blue Line and what are its implications?

The Blue Line is in fact the Line of Withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. It is not a border. The purpose of the Blue Line, therefore, is not to define which territory belongs to which country. Its sole purpose is to enable UNIFIL to verify the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon without any prejudice to future border agreements between the member states.

For this purpose, the Blue Line was identified by the United Nations in the year 2000 to ensure that UNIFIL had some reference point to determine that the Israeli forces had withdrawn from Lebanon. At that time, both Lebanon and Israel had reservations on a number of points and locations, but both the parties confirmed to the UN Secretary-General that they will respect the Line of Withdrawal as identified by the United Nations.

Following the 2006 hostilities, the UN Security Council, by its resolution 1701, tasked UNIFIL, among other things, to verify the withdrawal of Israeli forces from south Lebanon. The Blue Line remains the reference point and the basis for UNIFIL's unequivocal position that Israel must withdraw from part of the northern village of Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line that it occupied during the 2006 hostilities and that still remains under occupation.

UNIFIL has been sent to south Lebanon with very specific tasks from the UN Security Council and the peacekeepers are bound by this mandate that has been determined with the consent of the Government of Lebanon. UNIFIL has not been tasked, and rightly so, to determine what territory belongs to which country.

The same applies also to the Shebaa Farms area. UNIFIL is fully aware of the Lebanese position on Shebaa Farms. This issue is being dealt with through a political and diplomatic process with the active involvement of the United Nations, but this process does not involve UNIFIL. We hope this process will bring a solution quickly, but in the

meantime this is not under UNIFIL's mandate.

The Blue Line remains the only reference point for ensuring that there is no violation by any side. This is an important element of the cessation of hostilities and the related obligations that both the parties have taken upon themselves. This is what the UN Security Council resolution 1701 has tasked UNIFIL to monitor.

As such, any crossing of the Blue Line constitutes a violation of resolution 1701. As an impartial observer, UNIFIL deals with all violations in an open, transparent and even-handed manner. UNIFIL's objective reporting on developments serves as a deterrent to wanton escalation by any side and has contributed to the unprecedented calm the area has witnessed for close to four years now.

The Israeli Technical Fence has been another point of confusion recently. This is a security fence that the Israelis have built on their side of the Blue Line. The fence runs along the Blue Line, but in some places it is a few hundred meters south of the Blue Line on the Israeli side. UNIFIL's task is to ensure that there is no Israeli Technical Fence north of the Blue Line on the Lebanese side.

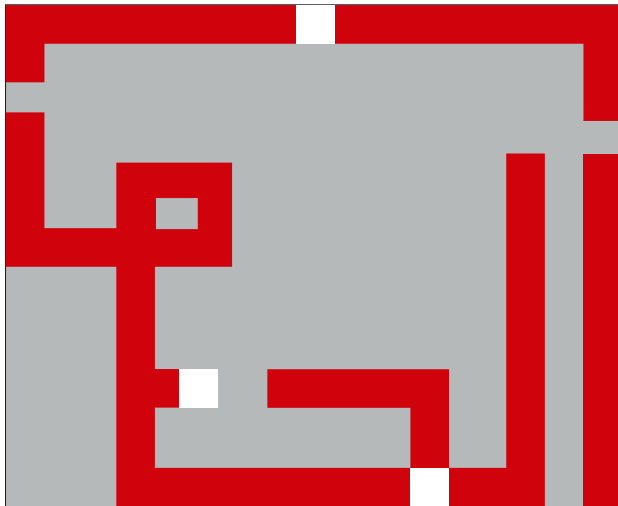
Sometimes when Israeli forces cross their Technical Fence to do some works, UNIFIL monitors the activities to ensure that they do not cross the Blue Line and enter Lebanon. Also sometimes the Lebanese people get confused and go up to the Technical Fence without realising that they have crossed the Blue Line.

To help avoid such misunderstandings, UNIFIL is undertaking the visible marking of the Blue Line in cooperation with both the parties.

The Blue Line is always very sensitive and therefore utmost caution is necessary in any activities along this stretch.

**Neeraj Singh**  
Editor-in-Chief

# Contents



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**The Line of Withdrawal** 3

**At UNIFIL, faces change but tasks don't** 5

**Outgoing Commander declares Mission's success** 6, 7

**New Commander eyes closer cooperation with LAF** 8

**Presidential support for UNIFIL** 9

**Photo Feature** 10, 11

**To the rescue ... UNIFIL ships take on extra duties** 12

**Haiti catastrophe a painful reminder of UN sacrifices** 13

**Tibnin, a microcosm of Lebanon's ups and downs** 14

**Mayor's Word: UNIFIL is a true witness** 15

**Promoting organic farming in Marjayoun** 16

**For a greener south Lebanon** 17

**UNIFIL, Lebanese army in joint amphibious exercise** 18

### **Disclaimer**

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## At UNIFIL, faces change but tasks don't



**UNIFIL has changed hands one more time on 28 January 2010, but its mission remains unchanged. That is the message the UN Interim Force in Lebanon is keen on stressing.**

That is because it is important that the people of south Lebanon, whose safety is entrusted with the peacekeepers working together with the Lebanese Armed Forces, understand that no matter who is in Command and which country he belongs to, or which country has the largest number of troops, it is a Mission under the United Nations and remains so.

UNIFIL currently has about 12,000 military personnel, including about 600 serving in the Maritime Task Force, from 31 countries. The civilian component of UNIFIL numbers more than 300 international and some 700 Lebanese staff.

It comes as no surprise that people ask questions whenever there is a change of Command.

Originally, UNIFIL was created by the Security Council in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area.

Following the July/August 2006 war, the Security Council adopted resolution 1701 enhancing the Force and decided that in addition to the original mandate, it would monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in their deployment throughout the south, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdrew its armed forces from Lebanon; extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons; and assist the LAF in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed

personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area.

"UNIFIL activities, operations and readiness will not be affected by the change of Command, because command and control is with the United Nations," said Milos Strugar, UNIFIL Director of Political and Civil Affairs. "The change of personalities does not change the way the Mission operates," he told *'Al-Janoub'*.

The Transfer of Authority in January was for the 12th commander.

Lieutenant-General Claudio Graziano (Italy) handed over Command to Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas (Spain). In the space of a couple of hours, the outgoing Force Commander reviewed an Honour Guard drawn from UNIFIL's national contingents, remembered fallen peacekeepers, made a farewell speech, signed the Transfer of Authority document, passed on the UN flag to Major-General Asarta and left, ending a three-year tenure.

Major-General Asarta, in his first speech as Force Commander and Head of Mission, promised to do his utmost to fulfill the mandate.

He recalled his previous stint with UNIFIL as Sector East Commander from December 2008 to April 2009. UNIFIL is here to assist the parties to maintain the cessation of hostilities and to move forward towards a permanent ceasefire, he said, "and we are determined to do it".

He added: "In this spirit, I shall do my very best to ensure the successful implementation of our mandate in southern Lebanon."

Lieutenant-General Graziano looked back at his Command of UNIFIL, pointing to major improvements in the situation on the ground in south Lebanon.

"The cessation of hostilities and respect for the Blue Line have been mostly upheld by the parties," he said in his farewell comments. "The parties' continued cooperation with UNIFIL and their steadfast commitment to resolution 1701 have been essential in this regard," he added.

The hand-over ceremony at UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqura was attended among others by the Defence Minister of Lebanon, Mr. Elias Murr, the Spanish Minister of Defence, Mrs. Carme Chacon, the Italian Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. Giuseppe Cossiga, Lebanese Armed Forces Commander General Jean Kahwagi, Italian and Spanish Chiefs of Defence, General Camporini and General Rodriguez Fernandez, Members of Spanish and Lebanese Parliament, senior officers of the Lebanese Armed Forces, Internal Security Forces, General Security and State Security, regional and local government officials, Ambassadors and senior UN officials.

The outgoing Force Commander praised the Lebanese Armed Forces for its cooperation. "UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces have developed an effective partnership, which is the cornerstone for successful implementation of resolution 1701," he said.

He pointed to the challenges that lie ahead, and said: "It is the responsibility of the parties to take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by UNIFIL's presence to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution."

# Outgoing Commander declares Mission's success but warns of challenges ahead



Lieutenant-General Claudio Graziano admits he never had a boring moment in his three years as UNIFIL Commander, linking days with nights, weekends with holidays troubleshooting and ensuring peace in an area that has long been mired in conflicts. But as he left the post at the end of January he warned that although the Mission so far was a success it cannot rest on its achievements as challenges remain.

In that context, he has urged the parties to work towards a permanent ceasefire and expected the next two years to be crucial while support from troop contributing countries remains at its current high.

The Italian general was confident that the parties in Lebanon and Israel did not want war despite the recent sharp pitch of rhetoric but added that UNIFIL has no control over regional developments which could have a negative impact on stability in southern Lebanon.

A key element to establishing long-term stability was to strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces so that one day it could replace the peacekeepers and alone ensure security in southern Lebanon, he said.

"I am not the best one to judge if we have been successful or not. (But) According to what the parties are saying we have," the outgoing Force Commander said in an interview with 'Al-Janoub' in the closing days of three years as head of one of the world's largest UN peacekeeping Missions.

"The parties acknowledged that UNIFIL's role has been key to enabling them to keep the cessation of hostilities; the situation is now

much better than it used to... In addition, the parties asked UNIFIL to remain, not to downsize the forces, and they are saying that any change in the near future on the strength of UNIFIL could be a destabilizing factor. So, all those elements make us understand that the Mission was successful."

But more remains to be done, the general added. It's a "major challenge" to move from the current cessation of hostilities in place under UN Security Council resolution 1701, some of the security aspects of which UNIFIL is mandated to implement, to a permanent ceasefire.

"This is a responsibility of the parties and the parties need to accomplish that duty," Lieutenant-General Graziano said, sitting in his office at Mission headquarters in Naqoura on the Mediterranean in the southern end of Lebanon, a few kilometers from the Blue Line.

Resolution 1701 is an "important bridge between war and peace" and the security provisions that are UNIFIL tasks have seen significant progress in implementation, he said, adding that the peacekeeping Mission could open a window of opportunity and facilitate the process towards achievement

of a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict.

"But if there is no full involvement of the parties in the long run there is the risk for the Mission to become hostage of the situation."

"In this moment, we are at a point where the security situation is quiet. The cessation of hostilities has been maintained. The parties are happy with UNIFIL, but they cannot afford to relax," the general said.

Here lays the risk in the medium and long term, he warned, because the countries that are now supporting UNIFIL could opt to save money or to send their troops elsewhere.

"That would be very risky," the outgoing Force Commander said. "I think the next couple of years are crucial because it seems that in the next couple of years the international community is going to keep the effort and the commitment to support UNIFIL. But in the next couple of years the parties have to find a way out to reach a sort of permanent ceasefire," he stressed.

UNIFIL has no shortage of support in its mission and Lieutenant-General Graziano believes that a downsizing of the force is



unlikely in the near future.

UNIFIL first deployed in southern Lebanon in 1978 to confirm Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese Government in restoring its effective authority in the area. A more robust force was tasked in 2006 under resolution 1701 to monitor the cessation of hostilities; accompany and support the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in their deployment throughout the south, including along the Blue Line, as Israel withdrew its armed forces from Lebanon; extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons; and assist the LAF in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani river of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL deployed in this area.

The Mission now numbers about 12,000 troops from some 31 countries. It also has about 1,000 civilian employees. In addition, it comprises the first naval force to be part of a UN peacekeeping mission.

The outgoing Force Commander downplayed the recent threat of war, with both sides recently accusing each other of preparing for another war in south Lebanon.

"I think, first of all, that there is a difference between reality and rhetoric from both parties," he said. "There is rhetoric coming from both parties that is amplifying incidents and speaking about violence and future wars; in reality during my meetings with the parties I never had this feeling. It seems that parties don't want war."

But he warned regional events across the Middle East could cause a deterioration of the situation in the south. Also, the firing of rockets from Lebanon and, on each instance, Israeli artillery firing directed towards the rocket launching site, could spiral if there were casualties.

On the UNIFIL proposal to facilitate the Israeli withdrawal from the northern part of the village of Ghajar, the outgoing Force Commander said the matter was under discussions.

"I hope - maybe not with me - but very soon with the newly appointed Force Commander that the problem could be solved," he added.

Under resolution 1701 Israel is obliged to withdraw from the northern part of Ghajar and the adjacent area which is north of the Blue Line. This is not a subject of negotiation. UNIFIL's proposal centers over the modality to facilitate the withdrawal from the village.



Israel occupied the village from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war. When the Line of Withdrawal, or Blue Line, was drawn by UN cartographers in 2000 for the UN to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces it cut right through it. Israel has kept control of the northern part after the 2006 war.

In addition to this violation, Israel continues to send reconnaissance flights over Lebanon in another violation of resolution 1701.

Another aspect of UNIFIL's tasks since 2006 is to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces as it deployed throughout southern Lebanon up to the Blue Line for the first time in three decades. The two forces have conducted joint exercises in areas such as live firing, patrolling and disaster relief on the ground. At sea, UNIFIL-Maritime Task Force is closely working with the LAF Navy on training and in ensuring no illegal weapons are smuggled into the country.

"We need to help the LAF to the best of our ability, to receive new equipment, new capabilities in order to better fulfill their mandated tasks," Lieutenant-General Graziano said.

The ultimate goal for UNIFIL is to see the LAF assume effective security responsibility over the area of UNIFIL operations and the maritime entry points into Lebanon in the future.

"I am very optimistic that is going to happen. It's not going to happen tomorrow because it's not only a matter of means and capabilities but also of confidence building," he said.

"All the parties at this moment need UNIFIL," he added.

In the past three years, UNIFIL has been the victim of three terrorist attacks that killed six

peacekeepers and injured two.

Lieutenant-General Graziano said the Mission's success in itself makes it a potential target for terrorists.

"The more UNIFIL is successful, the more the peace is getting closer, so they want to attack UN Security Council resolution 1701 by targeting UNIFIL, the Lebanese Armed Forces and all the elements that are bringing stability," he said.

UNIFIL has received threats about possible terrorist attacks and has taken measures to minimize the risk. "We don't have to underestimate this risk but at the same time we should not be deterred by it," the general added.

Lieutenant-General Graziano has become a national figure in Lebanon in the last three years, meeting leaders and attending functions, donning a Santa Claus red cap to distribute Christmas gifts to children, or a peacekeeper's blue beret or holding the binoculars of a combat soldier while attending military exercises, all in his Italian army camouflage and his blue UN neck scarf.

Capping a long tenure, the general looks back with satisfaction at what he has accomplished.

"I never had a boring moment. I have to say that it was the most exciting and the most important professional experience in my life," he said.

"I was both the military and civilian Commander of this Mission. I had a lot of responsibilities, authority and a lot of satisfaction. It's really an experience I will always cherish."

**Samir F. Ghattas** UNIFIL Public Information

# Commander stresses closer cooperation with LAF

Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas confidently spoke of improvement in the situation in south Lebanon. But the new UNIFIL Force Commander says the peacekeeping force must remain vigilant and stresses that the key to long-term stability in south Lebanon is in strengthening and supporting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).



Since the 2006 deployment of a robust UNIFIL under UN Security Council resolution 1701, there was much improvement in the situation on the ground, he noted.

“That means the implementation of 1701 is ongoing, but there remain several challenges,” Major-General Asarta said in an interview with *‘Al-Janoub’*.

“I feel the situation here is good, calm and stable, but always fragile,” said the general, who wore a green camouflage as he sat in his office at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura on the coast of south Lebanon.

UNIFIL, he added, is working to prevent incidents from taking place along the Blue Line “and in case of any incident to avoid escalation of such incidents”.

The Force Commander said that while he wants to accomplish all the tasks required under resolution 1701, relations with the Lebanese – military and the local civilian

population in the south – remain a priority.

“Among these priorities is to establish a very good relationship with the LAF, to work in close coordination with them and to assist and support them in all situations because I think that LAF is the key to long-term stability in this country.”

He added that collaboration between UNIFIL and LAF is important in fulfilling UNIFIL’s mandate, disclosing that in his frequent discussions with foreign diplomats and visiting military and government officials he repeatedly stresses that countries need to support the LAF with assets.

“At the end of the day we are here to assist and support the Lebanese Government and the LAF,” the Force Commander said. “One day LAF must take full control over all of the country.”

Another key issue in the success of the Mission is relationship with the local population, Major-General Asarta said.

A great majority of the population supports UNIFIL or has good perception of the peacekeeping force, and “my purpose is to increase the good perception towards UNIFIL”.

The Force Commander said he would like to see the UNIFIL troop level rise from the current number of around 12,000 soldiers, and would like to see more demining teams deployed to facilitate the task of visibly marking the Blue Line.

“We need the help and support of Troop Contributing Countries to get these numbers of soldiers and these assets,” he said.

One of UNIFIL priorities in the next couple of years is to visibly mark as much as possible of the 121-kilometre Blue Line, the Line of Withdrawal of the Israeli forces from Lebanon in the year 2000. He noted

that, sometimes, the population tended to consider the Israeli technical fence as the Blue Line, which is only true for some segments; in many others the Blue Line actually runs separately and north of the technical fence, a fact that might lead to misunderstandings until the Blue Line is visibly marked.

He added that it is important not to conflate Blue Line-related issues, which fall under the mandate of UNIFIL, with territorial claims, that are beyond the Mission’s mandate.

In this regard, Major-General Asarta explained that he wants to work toward progress on the issue of the Israeli withdrawal from the northern part of the village of Ghajar. Israel is obliged to withdraw from northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line in accordance with resolution 1701. “The obligation of Israel to withdraw from the area is not negotiable,” he said. UNIFIL has put forward proposals to facilitate the withdrawal.

Security of UNIFIL personnel, military and civilian, and improving their living conditions also are among the other priorities of the Force Commander.

Major-General Asarta said his previous experience as Sector East Commander, a position he held from December 2008 to April 2009, was “outstanding” but his tenure as UNIFIL Force Commander and Head of Mission brings more responsibilities.

“As Sector East Commander, I was at the tactical level and now I am at the strategic, operational and also tactical level,” he said. He added: “It’s an honour and privilege to be the Force Commander of such an important Mission in this region of the world.”

**Samir F. Ghattas** UNIFIL Public Information



# Presidential support for UNIFIL

President Michel Sleiman once again underlined his support for UNIFIL and its mission on his second visit to the peacekeeping force in south Lebanon since assuming office.

The President praised the efforts made by the UN Interim Force in Lebanon and its cooperation with the Lebanese Army in the south, during his visit to the UNIFIL headquarters of Sector East in Marjayoun on 11 January 2010.

Later, writing in the UNIFIL Spanish contingent's record book at the base, President Sleiman recalled UNIFIL's long attachment to Lebanon.

"I reiterate Lebanon's appreciation for your efforts and sacrifices which you have been offering in south Lebanon since 1978, and to the solidarity of the United Nations and the countries you represent with Lebanon and their continued support for Lebanon's

sovereignty, unity and the sanctity of its land," the president wrote.

President Sleiman inspected a UNIFIL Guard of Honour and laid a wreath in memory of the fallen peacekeepers. He also held a meeting with senior UNIFIL representatives.

UNIFIL's deputy Force Commander at the time, on behalf of the Force Commander who was then on official travel in New York, welcomed the president, who was accompanied by Army Commander General Jean Kahwaji.

"This visit testifies yet again to President Sleiman's own personal as well as the Lebanese government's support and commitment to UNIFIL's mission and to the implementation of UN Security Council



resolution 1701," UNIFIL Deputy Force Commander Brigadier-General Apurba Kumar Bardalai said.

"This was an opportunity to reaffirm our common resolve to work for security and stability in southern Lebanon in strategic partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces," Brigadier-General Bardalai said.

President Sleiman has also visited Lebanese Army units deployed in the south during his trip.

The President has previously visited UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura in late 2008, a few months after assuming office. Prior to that, he had visited as Commander of the Lebanese Army.

## Lebanese Defence Minister backs 1701, stresses cooperation with UNIFIL

Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr took time twice in two months to visit UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura to renew Lebanon's commitment to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701 and to stress continued cooperation between the Lebanese Army, the local population and UNIFIL.

But the visits by the Defence Minister were a powerful testament of his and the Government of Lebanon's strong support for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, its mission and Command, which changed hands on 28 January 2010 from Lieutenant-General Claudio Graziano of Italy to Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas of Spain.

On 22 December 2009, Murr and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander General Jean Kahwaji made the visit near the end of the tenure of Lieutenant-General Graziano. Murr used the occasion to praise the general's handling of relations with the local population and expressed hope the policy can be followed by the new Force Commander.

During that visit, Minister Murr inspected a Guard of Honour presented by UNIFIL troops and laid a wreath at the cenotaph in memory of the fallen peacekeepers.

"We renew today the commitment of the Lebanese Government to UN Security Council resolution 1701 in all its articles and we renew the support of the Lebanese Government for UNIFIL Forces that are present in south Lebanon. Today, we reaffirm the cooperation between the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL," the minister said.

He also stressed the Army's commitment for further coordination with UNIFIL.

"What is important for us is that we implement resolution 1701, preserve it and strengthen our coordination with UNIFIL, consolidate the capabilities of the Army in the south and coordination with UNIFIL so that we can safeguard stability and tranquility for the people," Murr said.

Minister Murr said Lieutenant-General Graziano "laid the cornerstone of cooperation between LAF and UNIFIL and weaved the cooperation with the villages and towns in south Lebanon."

He expressed hope that this policy will be transferred to the new Force Commander because the way UNIFIL has handled relations with the southern communities "created great comfort and this is something we insist on to preserve stability and calm."



Murr's latest visit was to attend the Transfer of Authority between Lieutenant-General Graziano and Major-General Asarta, a ceremony that was also attended by the Defence Minister of Spain, Mrs. Carme Chacon, and the deputy Defence Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Cossiga.

On that occasion, Murr said he came to show that "we don't forget the sacrifices of those who are in the service of peace and security in our country" and to send a message of support from the Lebanese Government to Major-General Asarta "so that we can continue what we have started for the sake of consolidating peace and stability in this region of Lebanon."

It is also a message to the international community and particularly the UN Secretary General that Lebanon "insists" on the full implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1701, the Lebanese Defence Minister said.



Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas takes charge from Lieutenant-General Claudio Graziano: the 11<sup>th</sup> Transfer of Authority in UNIFIL since establishment in 1978 signals a different Command but with the same mission and tasks.









# To the rescue ... UNIFIL Maritime Task Force takes on additional duties

The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force's mission since 2006 has been to assist the Lebanese Navy in preventing the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon and to help build capacity of the Lebanese Navy to secure its maritime borders.



But for a few weeks this winter, UNIFIL-MTF ships and helicopters took on added tasks, playing a major role in search and rescue operations following three tragic events - the crash of a passenger plane and the sinking of two cargo vessels - and in effect indirectly contributing to regional stability.

That effort proved crucial in the early hours of 25 January 2010 when UNIFIL-MTF along with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Navy were the first on the scene after the Ethiopian airlines plane crashed in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Beirut shortly after takeoff from the Lebanese capital in stormy weather. There were about 90 passengers onboard.

After the nighttime crash, at the request of Lebanese authorities, UNIFIL-MTF mobilized to deal with the emergency. Ships and helicopters were immediately rushed to the scene before dawn despite rough seas.

UNIFIL-MTF offered all the assistance requested by the Lebanese authorities. I tasked the mine hunter "Laboe" (Germany), supply ship "Mosel" (Germany) and the Corvette "Bozcaada" (Turkey) to proceed to the scene. The helicopter from the UNIFIL Italian frigate "Zeffiro" promptly took off from Beirut, joined by another UNIFIL helicopter from the Naqoura base, flying over the area despite the extreme weather looking for possible survivors.

The UNIFIL-MTF ships and helicopters joined seven Lebanese Navy patrol boats, LAF helicopters and other assets that nations deployed despite the difficulties due to the weather.

The coordination was achieved through a combined staff that operated in the Lebanese Navy Operational Centre in Beirut and onboard the UNIFIL-MTF flagship "Zeffiro". The next day, the search expanded to look also for the aircraft's "black box", as UNIFIL-MTF deployed its German mine hunters, "Laboe" and "Pegnitz", using underwater Remote Operating Vehicles which could sweep the seabed up to 300 meters deep.

Earlier in December 2009, on two occasions UNIFIL-MTF had come to the rescue of sailors from sinking ships off the coast of Lebanon.

On 17 December, the Panamanian-flagged cargo ship "Danny F 2", carrying 83 crew members, thousands of sheep and other livestock, capsized in stormy waters 11 nautical miles from the port of Tripoli.

MTF Italian frigate "Zeffiro" rushed to the distress position, where it was later joined by two of MTF's German ships, "Mosel" and "Laboe". Upon formal request by Lebanese authorities, I assumed "On Scene Commander" duty to coordinate the conduct of search and rescue operations in liaison with Lebanese, Cypriot and Syrian authorities. The coordination included the actions of merchant vessels transiting in the area as well as Lebanese Navy patrol boats, British and Cypriot search and rescue helicopters tasked from Larnaka.

After 72 hours of continuous effort, a total of 40 crew members were rescued, the bodies of 12 were recovered while 31

others remained missing.

About a week before that, on the evening of 11 December, upon receipt of a distress call through Cyprus about Merchant Vessel "Salla 2" that sank in rough seas 50 nautical miles off the southern coast, UNIFIL-MTF ship "Zafer" (Turkey) was tasked to respond to the distress position. I assumed coordination duty conducting the search and rescue operations from the MTF flagship "Zeffiro" (Italy).

"Zafer" rescued one member of the crew despite difficulties due to heavy rains, storms and rough seas. Over the next 86 hours, six members of the ship's Ukrainian crew were rescued, two bodies retrieved while four remained missing.

UNIFIL-MTF has also taken part in humanitarian efforts in the past when called upon. In 2008, UNIFIL-MTF ships came to the rescue of a disabled merchant vessel off Lebanon.

In such emergencies, UNIFIL-MTF acts at the request of Lebanese authorities and in accordance with humanitarian rules.

The recent disasters in the eastern Mediterranean have demonstrated how the deployment of maritime assets in a region of crisis contributed to overall security of shipping and provided humanitarian assistance that was beneficial for stability and had a positive impact on creating a more peaceful environment.

**Rear Admiral Paolo Sandalli**  
Commander of UNIFIL Maritime Task Force



# Amid the colossal catastrophe of Haiti a painful reminder of UN sacrifices



On 12 January 2010, a devastating earthquake hit Haiti taking the lives of many thousands of Haitians and nearly 100 of our UN friends and colleagues. This natural catastrophe has been the biggest single loss of life in the history of UN Peacekeeping.

Going through the list of colleagues who lost their lives is a painful reminder of the sacrifices made by the UN staff and the challenges they face as they work for peace all around the world.

Since that tragic day, much progress has been made by our MINUSTAH (the UN peacekeeping Mission in Haiti) colleagues to get the Mission back on its feet, support the mandate and help the Government of Haiti get the country on the path to stability and sustainable long-term development.

The quake in faraway Haiti somewhat reverberated here in Lebanon, and at UNIFIL in particular. Some UN staff members who perished in Haiti had worked in Lebanon or had worked elsewhere with UN colleagues who are now members of UNIFIL.

“The Haiti earthquake hit too close to home, for the civilian and military personnel of UNIFIL,” UNIFIL Force Commander Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas said during a speech to commemorate the loss of lives in Haiti.

“Peacekeepers – not unlike army men – live nomadic lives, forever on the move to bring peace and security to the most remote corners of the world,” he said at

the ceremony at UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura that was attended by civilian and military staff members.

With voluntary contributions from staff members, UNIFIL has so far deposited almost \$20,000 to the OCHA-administrated UN Emergency Response Fund for Haiti.

Scores of UNIFIL staff members volunteered to serve in Haiti to help with the relief and recovery efforts in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Of these, 19 UNIFIL staff members with expertise in the areas of security, communications, logistics, civil affairs and public information were sent to Haiti and worked there under very challenging conditions for several weeks.

“Assisting Haiti and MINUSTAH is more than a moral obligation. It’s also a challenging experience when you think of what has happened there and how we can contribute with our limited resources to improve people’s lives,” said Thomas Kontogeorgos, a UNIFIL Civil Affairs Officer who went to Haiti for one month to help out.

“The scale of the catastrophe is such that it is not the individual who can make the difference, but we can at least help and show our support. There is a chaotic

situation in the aftermath of this disaster and whoever goes there will simply try to do her/his best,” Kontogeorgos added.

“Going to Haiti is something that we had to do not only because of our commitment to the UN and the international community but because the catastrophe was so shocking that we needed to show some support. I had this feeling of duty and to show with my photos what is happening there,” said UNIFIL Photographer Pasqual Goriz Marcos on his return from a month-long stint in Haiti.

“Being there was a very challenging experience; you felt totally powerless in front of Nature, I was not prepared and you can never be prepared for this kind of disaster. The positive side is that when I was there the level of commitment shown by the people of Haiti and the international community towards reconstruction was unbelievable.”

It is at times like these that we are all reminded of the risks taken and sacrifices made by those who work for peace under the UN flag.

**Andrea Tenenti** - UNIFIL Public Information

# TIBNIN:



## Tibnin, a microcosm of Lebanon's ups and downs

Tibnin can easily fit as a microcosm of Lebanon, the country's ups and downs, its religious mix and its people's quest to survive and prosper.

The south Lebanon town has borne the scars of invasions, destruction and migration, but it also has seen a share of hope and peace such as a construction boom, a popular revival and a long-term commitment to security by UN peacekeepers.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon set up base in Tibnin ever since the force deployed to south Lebanon in March 1978 after an Israeli invasion.

Besides security, among the variety of community services undertaken by the peacekeepers, a priority has been to provide health services to the local population. A permanent clinic was established there and then a field hospital was set up.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the good relationship between the local population and UNIFIL is the intermarriage. As many as 15 Tibnin women or men were married to members of UNIFIL's Norwegian and Irish contingents over the years.

Most of Tibnin's 20,000 natives are in America, in Detroit, Michigan, with only 5,000 remaining in Lebanon and many of them living in Beirut.

Following the footsteps of others villages and towns of south Lebanon, its majority

Shia and minority Christians fled three decades of fighting and occupation to start new lives abroad, particularly in the US, where they prospered in running small businesses.

Those who stayed behind are mainly state employees or farmers. Prominent among the natives is Nabih Berri, the Speaker of the Lebanese parliament since 1992.

The source of the name "Tibnin," like in many other towns or villages of this ancient land, is not clear.

University professor and historian Hassan Saleh says there are varying origins of the name. One is linked to its founder, Amela bin Saba'a, who was asked "Atabinin? (Are you building?)" Another possibility is it is derived from the ancient Aramaic language reference to hay, or Tibin, or named after the king of Sidon in the third century B.C., Ashmoon azar ibn Tibnit, and Tibnit means 'to build.'

Tibn also could mean a generous man, says Saleh, whose hilltop residence overlooks the town.

Some historians date Tibnin back to pre-Crusader times, but others say it gained prominence in the year 1091 with the Crusades during which armies from Europe

conquered Tyr and Tibnin for its strategic location to control and observe the coastal approaches of south Lebanon and northern Palestine. Historians suggest the name could have come from a Crusader's family of Thevnin, but others insist it was the Arameans who first built the town's citadel in the 9th century B.C.

The religious mix of Muslim and Christian of this town is traced back to its ancient conquerors.

Israel occupied Tibnin for four months after the first invasion of 1978. UNIFIL peacekeepers deployed soon afterwards. Israel again invaded and occupied the town in 1982 and held it until 1985. After the Israeli withdrawal to a border zone, Tibnin became the front line in the fighting that continued till the Israeli withdrawal from the border zone in 2000. A number of residents were killed and many of its residences and businesses damaged in fighting in 1996 and in 2006 war.

The war brought destruction, but more recently with peace having been restored particularly since the 2006 deployment of the reinforced UNIFIL under Security Council resolution 1701, massive stone mansions have sprung up in the town's adjacent hills.

**Sultan Suleiman** - UNIFIL Civil Affairs





## UNIFIL is a true witness



The UN Interim Force in Lebanon deployed to south Lebanon in 1978 and its flag fluttered over Tibnin from the very beginning, in March of that year. To this day, UNIFIL continues to carry out its mission of safeguarding peace and stability as well as facilitating life for the people.

UNIFIL is a true witness of what is happening in our area, relaying an honest picture of it to the world.

These forces have offered many martyrs in addition to those of the Lebanese Army, the people and the resistance for the sake of implementing United Nations resolutions. They have helped the citizens in various fields and have established the best relations with them, free of any dispute or difference.

Our town Tibnin is considered an important command centre for UNIFIL. They are always welcome and their visitors - including presidents, personalities and many delegations - are welcome by the people, the municipal council and the Mukhtars as well as educational, health and labour bodies.

Everyone is keen to have UNIFIL. We thank these forces, their governments and their peoples, particularly the Force Commander Major-General Alberto

**Everyone is keen to have UNIFIL... They are always welcome**

Asarta Cuevas, his military and civilian staff, contingent commanders and soldiers as well as their predecessors for the humanitarian assistance they've offered the residents of Tibnin and neighbouring areas and the south in general.

We are thankful for their cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the security forces, wishing them a good stay in Lebanon to carry out their mission and to return to their families and countries in peace.

**Asaad Fawaz**  
Head of Municipality/Tibnin



# Promoting organic farming in Marjayoun

Throughout its history in the area south of the Litani river, UNIFIL has carried out many community projects. During the past three years, following the reinforcement of UNIFIL pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 1701, these projects were intensified and have amounted to millions of dollars.

One such project, although costing just a few thousand dollars, had a great impact on the people of the Marjayoun area. The project was for providing training in organic farming and bee-keeping.

On a proposal from the Agricultural Cooperative Association for organic agriculture in Dayr Mimas and the surrounding area, presided by Mrs. Amal Hourani, UNIFIL's Civil Affairs Department undertook to organize the training and provided funds for the project.

The course was held over four days in a hall belonging to the World Vision Foundation in the town of Qlaiyah, and involved around fifty farmers (males and females) coming from different backgrounds and villages, such as: Dayr Mimas, Kfar Kila, Burj al-Molouk, Qlaiyah, Marjayoun, Blat, Debbine, Ibl al-Saqi, Khyam, and el-Mari. The training course, in which men, women, mayors and heads of municipalities participated, was conducted by three specialized engineers. Each course-day was divided into two periods: theoretical explanation with photos displayed on a screen in the room; followed by practical training in the field. The daily lunch was made of organic agricultural products.

Head of Dayr Mimas Municipality, Mr. Khalil Najib Al-Hourani, 76, who participated in the training course, told 'Al-Janoub' magazine that he "benefited greatly from this course".

"Although I know lots of information about olive trees for instance, I have learned many new things, especially in terms of trimming the trees and dealing with fertilizers and soil in a manner that is friendly to the



environment and human health," he said.

"I would like to thank UNIFIL for the project and for everything it provided to make it a success. This project is just a small part of the services that UNIFIL provides to our people in the south," Mr. Hourani added.

Rania Qassem, 30, housewife and a Political Science graduate, also participated in the course with great enthusiasm.

"I work in beekeeping since two years. I have benefited a lot from this course not only on agricultural training on trimming the trees, dealing with soil and fertilizers and ways to dispense chemicals, but also in matters related to beekeeping," said Mrs. Qassem while attending a practical lecture in the fields.

"I would like to call upon UNIFIL officials to continue organizing similar courses to encourage the participation of women. Although such courses do not take a lot of women's time, they develop their scientific capabilities and knowledge, not to mention that this may constitute a source of income to support their families," she added.

The enthusiasm shown by participants was appreciated by the engineers who provided guidance tirelessly.

Engineer Hussein Htaït, 40, said: "I have been working in the field of agricultural guidance since 12 years. However, during my career I never saw such enthusiasm amongst participants who were from different age and social groups. Their responsiveness was evident from their questions."

"UNIFIL's funding of this course and other similar courses, if possible, would

**Although I know lots of information about olive trees... I have learned many new things**

stimulate the farmers to take interest in organic farming," added Mr. Htaït.

Speaking about the reasons behind requesting such a course from UNIFIL, Mrs. Amal Hourani said: "I found that no one is interested in organic agriculture; it is more expensive by 30 percent than normal agriculture. Given the attention this kind of agriculture deserves, being friendly to the environment and human health, and since my Cooperative lacks the potentialities, I requested assistance from UNIFIL's Civil Affairs department that responded positively."

"The course was very successful and well organized. At the end of the course, the participating farmers requested similar courses on a regular basis, which proves the success that we have achieved," she added.

The training course was concluded by a simple ceremony during which the Head of UNIFIL Civil Affairs department, Ryszard Morczynski, awarded certificates of participation, in addition to a saw and secateurs as a symbolic gift for each participant.

**Sultan Sleiman** - UNIFIL Civil Affairs



# For a greener south Lebanon

An ambitious re-forestation project with the aim for a greener south Lebanon got a boost in Sh'huur village on the Litani river when UNIFIL's Civil Affairs department stepped in with financial support from the Australian Embassy.

UNIFIL officials as well as local authorities, including the Mayor of Sh'huur, Hajj Ali al-Zein, were at hand on 15 January as Australian Ambassador Jean Dunn planted a pine tree, one of 2,300 to fill the Lebanese-Australian Friendship Forest project.

It is part of a bigger scheme to plant 10,452 trees – the number symbolizes the total square kilometer area of Lebanon – in this village on a hilly southern bank of the Litani. Four thousand trees have already been planted.

The project at Sh'huur is part of UNIFIL's efforts to raise environmental awareness in its area of operations in southern Lebanon as well as to make the area environmentally friendly with long-lasting impact on development through providing residents with green space for recreational benefits, fruit products, increasing biodiversity of the nearby farming land and indirectly supporting beekeepers in the area.

Other recent initiatives include the re-forestation projects undertaken at Khiam (5,000 trees) with Malaysian funding and at Rachaya al-Foukhar (3,000 trees) that was funded by UNIFIL.

al-Zein expressed appreciation to the UNIFIL Civil Affairs and the Italian UNIFIL contingent deployed in the area for its humanitarian assistance as well as to the Australian Embassy for funding the re-forestation project.

"A tree is the best way to bring comfort and beauty to the south," the mayor said.

The Australian Ambassador thanked the local community and UNIFIL at a ceremony before planting the first tree of the project outside the village.

"I hope very much that the Australia-Lebanon friendship forest will remind you



and the future generations to come of the great friendship between Australia and Lebanon," the ambassador said.

"More important, in a way I think, is to remind future generations of the importance of preserving Nature and looking after the trees and birds in Nature," the ambassador said.

Ms. Dunn addressed a gathering of several hundred villagers, including schoolchildren, that had turned out at the village's square to welcome the visitors.

The project aims to establish a green zone for recreational and economic benefits. Various kinds of trees, including walnuts, olives and pine, will be planted over the next few months.

The trees will be planted in several locations in the municipality, including along the five-kilometre stretch of the Litani river, in recreational areas and picnic sites, on the nearby de-forested hills and along the roads in the village.

Greening of the area around Sh'huur is being spearheaded by the "Green Sh'huur" Committee constituted by citizens of the municipality, including the Mayor, with the ultimate objective of planting the 10,452 trees.

Kamel Khalil of the "Green Sh'huur" Committee said it goes without saying

the benefits of the green area to the environment. He went on to express the close relationship between the communities and UNIFIL.

"There is a kind of friendship between the community, the municipality and UNIFIL," he said, adding that while UNIFIL's contributions to development were appreciated, "no doubt this (re-forestation) step will strengthen this".

Schoolteacher Batoul Zreiq said re-forestation began as a modest project to plant trees at the village's entrance and streets' sides but it has now evolved into developing a nature's reserve.

She sees in this also an educational potential for her students: "Definitely we will take them to this green reserve to educate them on how to preserve the environment and maybe each student will plant a tree of his own."

Mohammad Hammoud, member of the Arab chamber of commerce and industry in Australia, said: "We all know that the world is going through environmental crisis because of global warming. But in southern Lebanon the situation is being aggravated because of wars and cluster bombs that scorched a lot of forests and valleys. This project would compensate the people and the environment for their losses."

**Rania Bdeir** - UNIFIL Public Information





# UNIFIL, Lebanese army in joint amphibious exercise

**The Lebanese commandos sped towards the shore in five dinghies, hurriedly disembarking to take up combat positions on the beach rocks to secure the harbour at Naqoura in south Lebanon. Two Landing Craft Units, each bringing two armoured vehicles ashore, followed shortly.**

“Open Sands” is the second joint amphibious military exercise in a year between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL.

Held 26 October 2009 in the harbour and off the shore of the southern Lebanese village of Naqoura where UNIFIL has its headquarters, the exercise also saw military vehicles embarking and disembarking via a Landing Craft Unit on the Italian amphibious ship San Marco.

A landing on the ship’s deck by Italian UNIFIL commandos using the fast rope technique from a hovering helicopter, with another helicopter providing air cover, simulated the boarding of a suspect smuggling ship for inspection as part of the mission of UNIFIL-Maritime Task Force to implement UN resolution 1701 in cooperation with the LAF Navy.

The joint exercise aimed at testing the command and control procedures, train both forces and check all means

and facilities used for basic amphibious operations, according to a press release issued by the Lebanese Army and UNIFIL.

“It was a good occasion to train together, to increase cooperation, coordination, friendship and to stay together,” UNIFIL Force Commander at the time, Lieutenant-General Claudio Graziano, told journalists at Naqoura Harbour at the end of the exercise.

Brigadier-General Khalil Msan, LAF commander south of the Litani river in south Lebanon and head of the liaison office between the Lebanese military and UNIFIL, said the two forces benefitted from each other in such exercises, UNIFIL deploying its big capabilities while the Lebanese military being expert on the terrain.

“If we combine Lebanese expertise with the foreign ones it will be beneficiary for both sides in future operations,” he said in an interview with UNIFIL Radio.

UNIFIL-MTF has been deployed at the

request of the Lebanese Government to assist the Lebanese Navy in securing the territorial waters and to help prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon.

The first joint UNIFIL-LAF naval exercise was held in March 2009. Since the start of its operations on 15 October 2006, MTF has hailed close to 30,000 ships and referred more than 400 suspicious vessels to the Lebanese authorities for further inspection.

The UNIFIL-MTF, currently totaling eight ships, is the first Naval Force to be part of a UN peacekeeping mission.

A total of 14 countries have contributed naval units to the MTF: Bangladesh, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Turkey.

**Jean Al Alam** - UNIFIL Public Information



## DISCOVER UNIFIL TV Series Broadcasts Continue

These 10-minute documentaries provide a special insight into UNIFIL's activities and especially its peacekeepers. 9 episodes are planned, 6 of which have already been broadcast on Lebanese TV stations: NewTV, NBN and Tele Liban. Each new episode is announced through 30-second promotions broadcast days in advance. If you missed an episode, you can watch them on youtube, facebook and our new UNIFIL website.



1 NAQOURA CAMP

2 MTF - SCIROCCO

3 UNIFIL DE-MINERS

4 THE BLUE LINE

5 MTF - HESSEN

6 ASSISTING COMMUNITIES



## Join us on the Internet

 **YouTube:** [www.youtube.com/UNIFILVIDEOUNIT](http://www.youtube.com/UNIFILVIDEOUNIT)

On our youtube channel you can watch the latest DISCOVER UNIFIL episodes and all of our other video productions, including "Journey Through UNIFIL with Rafic Ali Ahmad". Subscribe to our channel to be notified when we upload new productions.

 **Facebook:** page: **UNIFIL-PIO**

Our facebook page is specifically meant to announce UNIFIL's public information products. DISCOVER UNIFIL's latest episodes are all available in high quality video. Become a "fan" of UNIFIL-PIO (all capital letters) and be alerted the moment we upload a new episode. Tell us what you think by posting a comment and invite your friends to become fans.

 **UNIFIL's website - [unifil.unmissions.org](http://unifil.unmissions.org)**

Here you can read about UNIFIL's history, get all the latest information on the Mission and its current activities and check out our photo galleries or any previous edition of "Al-Janoub" magazine.

**Also introducing UNIFIL's website  
in English and Arabic**

<http://unifil.unmissions.org>



**UNIFIL**

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

اليونيفيل  
قوة الأمم المتحدة المؤقتة في لبنان





The earthquake  
that ravaged  
Haiti made  
many children  
refugees

