



Security Council

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Letter dated 1 August 2019 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In a letter dated 7 July 2019 addressed to me, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested the Security Council to extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further year, without amendment to its mandate, its concept of operations and its rules of engagement. In that regard, and further to my report to the Council of 17 July 2019 ([S/2019/574](#)) on the implementation of Council resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#), I hereby request the Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of UNIFIL, which is due to expire on 31 August 2019.

I commend both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces on their continued commitment to maintaining the cessation of hostilities and their close cooperation and coordination with UNIFIL. The relative calm and stability in southern Lebanon and along the Blue Line, as well as in northern Israel, should not be taken for granted and must be preserved.

There has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict, as called for in resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). Both parties have yet to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line and cease violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, prevent hostile actions from its territory, ensure the safety and security of the civilian population, in addition to that of United Nations personnel, and ensure the disarmament of all armed groups so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State. UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, continues to work with the parties in fulfilling those obligations.

The beginning of 2019 was marked by increased tensions between the parties that have kept UNIFIL on high alert. Three tunnels were confirmed by UNIFIL to cross the Blue Line, in violation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). In addition, Israel, and more recently Lebanon, conducted construction work in close proximity to the Blue Line, as detailed in my most recent reports to the Council ([S/2019/237](#) and [S/2019/574](#)).

The liaison and coordination arrangements that UNIFIL has established with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, bilaterally and through the tripartite forum, remain vital for mitigating tensions in sensitive areas along the Blue Line. I encourage the parties to re-engage in the process to mark the Blue Line visibly on the ground, without prejudice to future border negotiations, as a confidence-



building measure, as well as to assist with the monitoring of violations and prevent inadvertent crossings. It is of paramount importance that the confidentiality and effectiveness of the tripartite meetings be maintained. In that regard, I encourage the parties to respect the integrity of the location where the tripartite meetings are held.

The Lebanese authorities should take all action to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River, bearing in mind the primary responsibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces in that regard. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL remains committed to taking all action necessary within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.

The Government of Lebanon continues to express its strong commitment to expanding the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces on land and at sea, which remains vital for enhancing State presence in southern Lebanon. Mobilizing additional international support to build that capacity is a key priority, and follow-up to the commitments made at the ministerial-level meeting known as the Rome II conference is critical for progress in that regard. UNIFIL, in consultation with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, is engaged in mobilizing international support for developing the capabilities identified as priorities by the Lebanese Armed Forces, including the deployment of a model regiment to southern Lebanon and the development of a transition strategy for the gradual transfer of responsibilities from the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force to the Lebanese Navy.

UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces continue to work closely together through the conduct of exercises and provision of training, on land and at sea, with the aim of increasing the capacity, capabilities and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and the territorial waters of Lebanon. The Maritime Task Force continues to support the Lebanese Navy in carrying out maritime interdiction operations and providing training.

By enabling a safe and stable maritime environment, the Maritime Task Force contributes to maintaining calm in Lebanon by deterring the use of Lebanese territorial waters for illicit purposes and mitigating the spillover effects of regional crises, as well as enhancing maritime trade in that part of the Mediterranean.

UNIFIL has maintained a high operational tempo and continued to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of its operations in accordance with Council resolutions [2373 \(2017\)](#) and [2433 \(2018\)](#), including through foot patrols, increased night patrols along the Blue Line and a more effective use of air assets, including by increasing the number of operational flights, such as reconnaissance of sensitive areas, and undertaking night flights over rugged and difficult terrain. The mission conducts an average of 13,884 operational activities per month, which includes 7,458 patrols. Of those activities, 32 per cent are conducted at night. Since August 2017, UNIFIL has also increased by 43 per cent the number of activities conducted in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces, with some 70 operational activities conducted per day in coordination with the Forces, of a daily average of 450. Thus, UNIFIL makes a critical contribution to conflict prevention and security and stability.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL in its entire area of operations and along the full length of the Blue Line remains critical and has been generally respected. The number of incidents involving restrictions of its freedom of movement remains exceedingly small compared with the overall number of activities and patrols, and all such incidents have been detailed in my reports on the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). It is the responsibility of the Lebanese authorities, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, to ensure that UNIFIL has the ability to carry out its mandated activities unhindered. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces also

continued to visit and monitor Green without Borders sites situated in close proximity to the Blue Line.

Recalling that the Government of Lebanon has the primary responsibility to ensure that the freedom of movement of UNIFIL in its area of operations is fully respected and unimpeded, I note that the United Nations has not been informed of criminal proceedings to date to bring to justice the perpetrators of the attack on UNIFIL peacekeepers that occurred on 4 August 2018 in Majdal Zun. Such proceedings remain critical for preventing future incidents and retaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries. In relation to the tunnels confirmed by UNIFIL to cross the Blue Line, it is also essential that the Lebanese authorities undertake a thorough investigation on the Lebanese side and that UNIFIL gain access to relevant sites.

In the absence of progress towards a permanent ceasefire, the ability of UNIFIL to deter, prevent and deconflict remains crucial. All efforts, therefore, must be made to take advantage of the relative calm to make progress on outstanding elements of resolution 1701 (2006). The priority remains for the parties to take the necessary steps towards a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution to the conflict. UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, is ready to lend its full support to the parties in that process.

As at 16 July 2019, the total number of military personnel was 10,505 members, including 551 women. The Maritime Task Force comprised six vessels, two helicopters and 748 military personnel. The UNIFIL civilian component included 237 international and 585 national staff. I am grateful to the 43 troop-contributing countries and continue to encourage them to increase the number of women deployed to UNIFIL.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, the General Assembly, by its resolution 73/322 and decision 73/555 of 3 July 2019, appropriated an amount of \$480.1 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. Should the Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 August 2019, the cost of maintaining UNIFIL would be limited to the amounts approved by the Assembly.

As at 25 July 2019, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNIFIL amounted to \$72.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to \$5,584.6 million. The reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 April 2019, while the reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2019, in accordance with the quarterly schedule.

I should like to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Stefano Del Col, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work that they are carrying out in southern Lebanon and for their commitment to the service of peace.

I should also like to express my appreciation for the continued united and steadfast support of the Council for UNIFIL and its mandated activities. With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further 12 months, until 31 August 2020.

I should be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

(Signed) António **Guterres**