Resolution 1701 explained

The devastating 2006 war ended in a cessation of hostilities on 14 August, following the adoption three days earlier of Resolution 1701 by the UN Security Council. Since then, Resolution 1701 has helped stabilize the situation in south Lebanon. The following are the key elements of the Resolution, which forms the core of UNIFIL’s mandate:

- Monitoring the cessation of hostilities;
- Accompanying and supporting LAF as they deploy throughout south Lebanon (as shown in this image);
- Extending assistance to ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons;
- Assisting LAF in the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons except those of the Government and UNIFIL;
- Assisting the Government, at its request, in securing its borders and other entry points to prevent the illegal entry of arms or related materials into Lebanon.

In addition, the resolution also authorized UNIFIL to take “all necessary action” to ensure that its area of operations is not used for hostile activities of any kind.

As envisaged by the resolution 1701, UNIFIL provides a window of opportunity to advance the progress towards a permanent ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel. UNIFIL’s good offices role has been effective in de-conflicting the situation on the ground and de-escalating tensions. One such example is the UNIFIL-chaired “Tripartite Forum”, under which both parties meet once every month at the behest of UNIFIL.

This is the fourth time that I have had the pleasure of serving here in Lebanon. In many ways, I feel that there must be an umbilical chord linking me to the people, towns and villages where I served: Sultaniyah, Dayr Ntar, Tarbiné and now for the second time, Naqoura. However, there is of course no comparison between the Lebanon of my memories and the current reality in 2016. During my first deployment in 1982 as a young platoon commander, my soldiers and I experienced first-hand the violence of that year’s Israeli invasion. Now, I am fortunate to be a witness to the fruits of a decade of relative calm and stability and one of the key challenges I will face as Head of Mission and Force Commander is maintaining that calm, by working in close conjunction with our colleagues in the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). It is fair to say that the LAF, the Lebanese Government and people of south Lebanon, deserve our admiration for what they have achieved in the last decade.

I am delighted to take this opportunity to send a greeting to both my fellow peacekeepers and to all those residents of south Lebanon who will get an opportunity to read this edition of “Al-Janoub”, either in this format or online. Indeed, since my appointment as Head of Mission and Force Commander in July 2016 I have used every opportunity available to me to introduce myself to the people of south Lebanon and to highlight the important role that UNIFIL plays as we strive together to implement the mandate laid out for us in the UN Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

I therefore complement the editorial staff of “Al-Janoub” for selecting the 10th anniversary of the adaption of UNSCR 1701 as the central theme of this edition. While the tragic memories of the 2006 conflict are now beginning to fade, it is right that we never forget what happened 10 years ago and remind ourselves of the costs of war for the people of south Lebanon.

This commemorative edition will help us all appreciate how much life in the UNIFIL Area of Operations has improved since the cessation of hostilities. I look forward in particular to reading the reflections of Brig Gen Manuel Kiréjian, the LAF Liaison Officer to UNIFIL in 2006, while I have no doubt that being reminded of the experiences of those who were present in Bint Jbeil during that summer’s month-long conflict will make sombre reading. With the future in mind, Brig Gen Antoun Mourad will give us in UNIFIL, as well as our general readership, a unique Lebanese insight into the marking of the Blue Line. I have no doubt that our colleagues in the Division of Political and Civil Affairs, who work on this important project, including the soon to retire Mr. John Molloy, will be particularly interested in this article.

To conclude, I say to the 10,600 peacekeepers of UNIFIL: always be mindful of your mission, your mandate and your responsibilities as representatives of your home country and the United Nations. To our Lebanese hosts, I thank you for your continued welcome and promise you that as long as we are present in South Lebanon we will hold out the hand of friendship to you, your families and your communities.

I look forward to engaging with you in the coming months.
UNIFIL CICIM activities

UNIFIL’s eastern command organized a friendly relay march on 25 September 2016 along the 52-kilometre stretch of the Blue Line with participation of UN peacekeepers and Lebanese soldiers as a way to furthering and deepening the ties between them. A total of 19 teams participated in the peace march from Shab’a to Bika’a, the first of its kind, in which each group carrying a UN flag ran for about five kilometres under scorching heat. The last stretch of about three kilometres was run by UNIFIL’s Sector East Commander (June - November 2016) Brig Gen Perez de Aguado, contingent commanders and soldiers from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

During his introductory meetings with local authorities and religious leaders from UNIFIL’s area of operations in south Lebanon, the newly arrived head of the UN peacekeeping mission, Maj Gen Michael Beary, underlined the importance of cooperation between peacekeepers and the host community in order to sustain the existing calm while working together for a permanent peace. Maj Gen Beary told gatherings of dignitaries, including Qaem Qaem, mayors, mukhtars and religious leaders in October and November, that while the ten years of peace in south Lebanon is a work in progress “Its cause can only be advanced one small step at a time.”

One of the most fundamental and enduring features of Lebanese society is its sense of community and the respect that the people of the south have for their religious, political and civil leaders,” said the UNIFIL head.

He added that remarkable achievement – in the areas of infrastructure, economic development, educational opportunities and security – can only be done through the strong partnership between the local leaders, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Government and UNIFIL. He stated that achieving the final goal of permanent peace is ultimately what the people in UNIFIL’s host communities, thereby deepening the relations between UN troops and the local population. During the first ten months of 2016, a total of 10,671 Civil-Military Cooperation (CICIM) activities were carried out. The following are the major highlights:

- 36% of the activities included sanitary assistance, medical, dental and veterinary,
- 26% of the activities included meetings with local and religious authorities, school principals, directors of social centres and NGOs, among others.
- 19% of the activities included various language courses.
- 230 projects (23 from UNIFIL and 207 from the budget of individual troop contributing countries of TCCs) were conducted during the period, which is more than the number of projects completed during the same time in 2015.
- The total amount spent was about $3,000,000, of which 87% was financed by TCCs and 13% by UNIFIL.
- Additionally, 200 donations were conducted by various TCCs during the same period in the fields of education and social issues.

As of early November 2016, 52 CICIM projects are ongoing with a total amount of $926,995.

LAF joins UNIFIL peacekeepers in peace relay march

UNIFIL's mandate, is all about.
The Blue Line is not always visible, and just a single incautious step could lead one to inadvertently cross it, risking life. Brigadier General Antoun Mourad, who currently heads the General Studies Office of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the LAF focal point for Blue Line marking when it started in 2007, said the LAF admires UNIFIL’s work. We try to support them, providing whatever we can, like supplying UNIFIL with data for maps and geographic information or in other ways possible,” he said.

According to Brig Gen Mourad, there are several disputed areas where markers have not been placed due to a lack of consensus. “In these areas, Lebanon respects the Blue Line but rejects the marking because it does not want to create a new reality on the ground. These reservation areas will be put on hold until we find a solution for them in the future,” he explained.

A total of 257 blue barrels (as of early November 2016) have been installed. However, they are not sufficient to identify the Blue Line on the ground or to prevent violations. Shepherds from Kfar Shouba, for example, deal with the realities of the Blue Line on a daily basis. They graze their flocks close to the Line, yet must be careful not to wander past it by accident. Whenever possible, UNIFIL peacekeepers offer them guidance on where the Line is and assist in retrieving animals that have crossed over.

Preventive efforts undertaken by peacekeepers as well as the ambitious efforts around the marking of the Blue Line have resulted in positive changes on the ground. “Certainly it had an effective and obvious outcome, there is no doubt about it – the inadvertent violations have decreased noticeably,” Brig Gen Mourad added. In Meiss El-Jabal, for instance, farmers noticed that the Line is and also assist in retrieving animals that have crossed over.

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Working with UNIFIL during the time of crisis
Brigadier General Manuel Kirkjian, Lebanese Armed Forces

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has a liaison office at the UNIFIL Headquarters since the deployment of the peacekeeping mission in 1978. Besides representing LAF and other Lebanese authorities at both the civil and military levels in UNIFIL’s area of operations, the Lebanese Liaison Office (LLO) ensures communication between UNIFIL, local population and local authorities, in order to facilitate the implementation of UNIFIL’s mandate.

Since July 2004, I spent more than four years living and working together with the Blue Helmets in south Lebanon. Notwithstanding its aptly developing effect on Lebanon and her people, the five-week war of 2006 nonetheless pronounced the excellent cooperation between LAF and UNIFIL. Between July 2004 and July 2006, the main LLO office was based in the town of Qana and it was staffed with five officers, including an officer stationed in UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqoura. The problems taking place during that period – Israeli violations of the Blue Line and the Lebanese shepherds crossing the Line allegedly inadvertently with their herds – had been tackled amicably through LAF-UNIFIL coordination. In addition, Lebanese officers used to carry the Blue Line in order to make sure that the Blue Line markers – evidence of the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 – had not been altered. At the logistical level, LAF used to escort UNIFIL convoys moving between Naqoura and Beirut.

In December 2006, the entire LLO was transferred to the UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqoura, giving a fillip to the already increasing cooperation between the Lebanese and UN troops. This was helpful not only with the exchange of information and coordination between them, but also helped increase the efficiency of the troops. This provided an opportunity for UNIFIL troops, drawn from different countries, to better understand local traditions and customs.

Summer of 2006
During the July-August 2006 war, the coordination between liaison offices of LAF and UNIFIL became all the more important in order to cope with the events taking place in the area of operations. Since the outbreak of the hostile bombing operations, I felt that my job would be different than before. The consequence of my presence in the headquarters of foreign troops in the capacity of a liaison officer in the midst of military operations, something I was not familiar with before, I asked myself: ‘what should be my priorities?’ At first, I assigned a LAF officer to station in UNIFIL’s situation room in order to follow up the course of events, so as to keep the LAF Command abreast of all the developments, and to remain ready to provide assistance to UNIFIL, as required.

As the situation unfolded, we were overwhelmed with reports of more and more bombings and clashes along the Blue Line. Bridges and main roads were bombarded, effectively leaving the UNIFIL area of operations disconnected from the rest of Lebanon. In that situation, it was necessary to stress the cooperation and coordination between the Lebanese side and the international community, as well as to upkeep with what was going on and to ensure UNIFIL’s freedom movement. The cooperation during the war can be divided into operational and humanitarian levels.

Operational level (as far as Lebanon was concerned):
- Provide the international forces with daily bulletin on the state of roads and bridges which were bombed. This would help plan convoys movements;
- Make necessary arrangements to escort UNIFIL’s convoys, enabling them to reach the towns of Saida and Naqoura;
- Coordinate with UNIFIL for the repatriation of the people kidnapped by Israel from Lebanon in the course of the military operations.
- Facilitate UNIFIL’s armoured convoys, considering the seriousness of movement along Naqoura-Tyre road because of the shelling of hostile battalions.
- Attend emergency meetings and those with operational nature in UNIFIL’s situation room.
- Assist in the evacuation of UNIFIL international civilian staff and other people with foreign passports by ensuring security in assembly points and the port of Tyre.
- Help locate the body of a UNIFIL employee who was lost during the evacuation process.

Humanitarian and logistical levels (as far as UNIFIL was concerned):
- UNIFIL carried out several evacuation operations of civilians out of the military operations zone in cooperation with LLO;
- UNIFIL facilitated the evacuation of some 200 community prisoners from the prison of Tihri and Nabatieh to Beirut;
- UNIFIL’s Chinese Engineering Battalion cleared the rubble of a building that was levelled by an Israeli shelling, which took the lives of a UNIFIL staff member and his wife. The two bodies were recovered from the rubble, along with those of other civilians who were living in the same building;
- UNIFIL evacuated civilians from the towns of Naqoura, Dahrar, and Yarin, who then took refuge in the UNIFIL Headquarters. They were later escorted to safety in Tyre;
- UNIFIL made all the necessary arrangements to ensure the entry of fuel tanks to Marjayoun following a request from the Lebanese side;
- UNIFIL helped with the delivery of food items (bread and canned drinks) and medicines to the civilian prisoners from the prisons of Tibnin and Nabatieh, who then took refuge in the governmental hospital in Tyre.

The aforementioned activities only represented the tip of the iceberg. LLO’s way of dealing with international forces served to protect thousands of civilians, under constant threat of attacks from a hostile army for 34 days and around the clock.

I felt that my first responsibility was to work with the international forces to protect the people of my homeland, particularly the defenseless people who had nothing to do with tactical and military matters. In the end, my role as a liaison office was to coordinate with the forces was I assigned to communicate with, thereby facilitating the implementation of their mission in support of the Lebanese people.

In his comments at the 19 July ceremony in which Major General Beary’s predecessor, Major General Luciano Portolano, officially handed over the command to him, the new UNIFIL head expressed optimism about the future of Lebanon.

“I know that there will be challenges, even difficult moments. Put together, we can overcome and continue to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701 to the very fullest degree,” he said. “With the 10-year anniversary of the 2006 war, we now have 10-year olds who do not know what devastating war looks like. Let’s work together so that they grow into adulthood with peace and stability.”

As his time as Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Beary vowed, “no effort will be spared to bring lasting peace and stability to this beautiful area of southern Lebanon.”

Major General Michael Beary of Ireland took over the command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon amidst a special ceremony in the United Nations mission headquarters in Naqoura on 19 July 2016.

In his comments after assuming the command of UNIFIL, General Portolano handed over the mantle to Major General Michael Beary of Ireland on 19 July 2016. In his comments at the 19 July ceremony in which Major General Beary’s predecessor, Major General Luciano Portolano, officially handed over the command to him, the new UNIFIL head expressed optimism about the future of Lebanon.

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Major General Beary has a wide range of overseas experience in addition to UNIFIL deployments. He has served in Kuwait and Baghdad as part of the UN Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina with UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR). In 2003 he completed a tour of duty with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. In September 2004, he was seconded to the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, where he served for three years with the EU Military Staff.

Major General Beary commanded the EU’s military mission to the Somali National Army in Uganda from August 2011 to February 2013. In July 2016, he was appointed as Force Commander and Head of Mission of UNIFIL in south Lebanon.

Ex-UNIFIL head stresses relationship with local population

As he was preparing to leave UNIFIL in early July 2016, the UN Mission’s erstwhile head, Major General Luciano Portolano, left a piece of advice for his successor: continue to engage with local communities.

In his last interview as the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, the Italian General said, “Operationally, I define the relationship with the local population as my centre of gravity. It means an element that, if it exists, might lead to success; if it doesn’t exist it will lead, for sure, to complete disruption of the Mission.”

Major General Portolano added that the link between UNIFIL and the local population “is the most important element I recommend for the future leadership to take into consideration.”

After his two years as UNIFIL head, Major General Portolano handed over the mantle of UNIFIL to Major General Michael Beary of Ireland on 19 July 2016.

In the interview, he also highlighted the spillovers of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon as a major challenge facing the UN Mission. Given this and continued mistrust between Lebanon and Israel, he said that, during his two years as the Mission head, the number of daily operational activities of UNIFIL increased from an average of 250 to 400 on the ground in the air and at sea.

In his comments after assuming the command of UNIFIL on 19 July, Major General Beary said the Mission will continue to support the local communities “to the very best of UNIFIL’s abilities” and preserve “the strong bond of trust and friendship between UNIFIL and the proud people of South Lebanon.”
10 years of keeping peace in Lebanese waters

The year 2016 marked a decade since the deployment of the United Nations’ first and only naval peacekeeping force, the Maritime Task Force (MTF) of UNIFIL. In his comments at a special ceremony, organized to mark the occasion at the Beirut Port on 21 October 2016, the UN Mission’s head, Major General Michael Beary, said MTF’s work has become a trendsetter within the world body.

“Over the last 10 years the Maritime Task Force has laid the foundations of a United Nations naval doctrine,” said the UNIFIL head and Force Commander, on the pier in front of MTF’s flagship Frigate “Liberal.”

He added: “As a result of a decade of closely planned training, today the LAF (Lebanese Armed Forces) Navy patrol their territorial waters, use modern coastal radar to monitor sea traffic, plan and execute complex special operations exercises and coordinate search and rescue operations at sea.”

MTF was deployed on 15 October 2006 at the request of the Government of Lebanon, following the adoption of the resolution 1701 by the UN Security Council. MTF supports the Lebanese Navy preventing the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon. It also assists the Lebanese Navy enhancing its capabilities by carrying out a range of different training courses and joint exercises with the intent of the Lebanese Navy assume all duties required for maritime security.

Rear Admiral Claudio Mello said MTF is proud to work in close coordination with its strategic partner, the LAF Navy, “in order to enhance the latter’s capabilities to carry out its maritime security duties.”

“Countless training activities, ashore and at sea, have been accomplished in the past 10 years resulting in solid progress,” added Rear Admiral Mello. Maj-Gen Beary called cooperation a “remarkable partnership.”

Over the last decade, 15 countries have contributed their naval assets to MTF, which in turn hailed more than 70,000 ships (as of October 2016). More than 8,500 of them were referred to the Lebanese Navy for inspection. UNIFIL MTF currently has more than 850 uniformed naval personnel and seven ships: two from Bangladesh and one each from Brazil, Germany, Greece, Indonesia and Turkey. There are two onboard helicopters.
A reflection of 2006 war

By John Molloy

Currently a senior political affairs officer with UNIFIL dealing primarily with the tripartite forum and Blue Line marking issues, John Molloy was the UN Mission’s senior liaison officer, seconded by the Irish Defence Forces, during the 2006 war. Mr. Molloy completed his sixth military deployment with UNIFIL in December 2007 and returned to peacekeeping in UNIFIL in April 2008 in a civilian capacity. He wrote this article for “Al-Janoub”, reflecting back on his first-hand experience of the war.

I arrived (back) to South Lebanon in September 2005 (what a contrast) to my previous experience of peacekeeping duty with UNIFIL. Excited by the prospect of renewing old acquaintances and visiting the picturesque villages I was familiar with from earlier years, my return felt more like a ‘home coming’ rather than a tour of duty in a foreign land. As Senior Liaison Officer I had the opportunity to visit locations I had been to before, and I particularly enjoyed the open freedom of driving and passing through friendly villages, no longer under occupation, a choice I was unable to do in former times. However in my contacts it soon became evident that behind the smiling faces an air of apprehension existed where the community sensed a level of volatility about the situation along the Blue Line, heightened by the prospect of renewing old acquaintances to assist the local population with aid and evacuation.

End of war, beginning of dialogue

Finally on 14 August 2006 and much to the relief of all, Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) came into effect. The day is also significant for it marked the convening of the first Tripartite meeting between LAF and IDF; chaired by the UNIFIL Head of Mission. Initially set up to quickly supervise and coordinate the withdrawal of IDF out of south Lebanon and deployment of LAF up to the Blue Line, the meeting evolved over time into an indispensable forum to address Resolution 1701 issues. Now in its tenth year this key conflict management forum, has defined its detractors and proved itself, time and again as a ‘mechanism of choice’ in which the parties can express their positions and de-conflict potential or actual breakdowns to the cessation of hostilities.

As an observer and participant of this unique forum since its inception, I can say that were it not for this forum a number of tense situations on the ground could have taken us to a dangerous place and possibly a resumption of violence. Another and equally important aspect of UNIFIL’s contribution to the parties can express their positions and de-conflict potential or actual breakdowns to the cessation of hostilities.
Ireland is an island nation situated on the western edge of Europe and often referred to as “The Emerald Isle”. The island is divided into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland which is part of the United Kingdom. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and ‘St. Patrick’s Day’ is a national holiday which is celebrated throughout the world on 17 March every year.

The Republic of Ireland has a population of approximately 4.6 million and a large diaspora in many countries throughout the world. The Irish people pride themselves on their hospitality and warm welcome given to visitors which, along with its beautiful scenery, contributes to its enduring popularity as a tourist destination. Agriculture, pharmaceuticals and information technology are also major drivers of Ireland’s economy.

The national flag of the Republic of Ireland is composed of three vertical bands of green, white and orange. It represents the different traditions of the two main ethno-religious white and orange. It represents the different traditions of the two main ethno-religious communities in Ireland.

Ireland has a long tradition of Irish UN peacekeeping. The Irish Defence Forces have 181 personnel serving in UNIFIL with an Infantry group that formed part of a Joint Irish-Finnish battalion deploying in May 2011. They were deployed in the western part of Lebanon to support the Lebanese Army in its efforts to maintain law and order. In addition, there are 30 personnel serving in UNIFIL Headquarters in Naqora and four personnel serving in Sector West HQ, Shama.

In al-Mari, 80% of the people earn their living by being in agriculture and farming. There are around 20 poultry farms in the village, with each of them accounting for 30,000 to 35,000 chickens. They are the major source of poultry for various Lebanese companies today.

“Nowadays, youths from Deir Mimas, who had left the village in the past due to wars and insecurity, are motivated to come back to the village during summer vacations,” said Dr. Nakad, adding that these youths have undertaken several community activities.

The al-Mari mayor, Mr. Fayyad, concludes: “UNIFIL and Lebanese Army patrols are the major difference that crowned the scene in south Lebanon after 2006 and after the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 1701 (which forms the core of UNIFIL’s mandate).”

Hiba Monzer - Public Information Officer
Recalling war as UNIFIL head

By Major General (Retd) Alain Pellegrini

(Major General Alain Pellegrini was the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL from 2004 to 2007. In that role, he oversaw the UN Mission’s response to the devastating 2006 war. Marking the 10th anniversary of the war, he agreed to share with “Al-Janoub” his experience of the terrible 34 days of hostilities. Currently based in Beirut, Pellegrini is working on a project with the European Union geared towards building the capacity of the Lebanese security forces.)

On 12 July 2006, when Hezbollah launched an operation across the Blue Line and abducted two Israeli soldiers, there was no sign of what was in store. At UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura, I was closely monitoring the unfolding situation and expected that – as had been the case numerous times in the preceding months after the “usual” tit-for-tat strikes between the two sides. But this time, it wasn’t the case. UNIFIL must continue to do everything it can to solidify peace in South Lebanon.

UNIFIL always had to stay between the two sides, as was their political nature: to be directly in contact with each other. While Lebanon was withdrawing from the south of Lebanon, LAF was taking over the land, but UNIFIL always had to stay between the two armies and a buffer to make sure they would not come in contact. This was not an easy or quick task.

This led me to come up with the idea of having a tripartite forum, a meeting chaired by UNIFIL where both parties could meet together. At the beginning, the Israelis came with a map of their areas, and on the other side of the room, the Lebanese also had their maps. UNIFIL was going from one side to the other to work out the process. The first meeting was held on 14 August, on the same day the hostilities ceased. Despite the existing tension between the two delegations, IDF, LAF and UNIFIL met regularly and step by step other issues beyond the IDF withdrawal were discussed. The Tripartite Forum was launched. Today, it still goes on, which I am very happy about, because it allows the two sides to discuss any topic and avoid conflict.

Blue Line marking: a crucial project for peace
When the withdrawal of IDF was complete with the exception of Northern Ghajar and adjacent areas, my priority shifted to make the Blue Line more visible on the ground to prevent violation from either side. UNIFIL was aware that this would be a long and slow process, one small step at a time, and would require a sufficient level of confidence-building between the two sides. It was also important to inform the population living close to the Blue Line of the importance of this project as well as ensuring the support of local politicians.

UN officials in Beirut, in particular Special Coordinator Geir Pedersen, played an important role in getting the support of the Government. The Blue Line marking process is a great success, but it is not complete yet. The areas that are yet to be marked are mostly on the eastern side of the Blue Line in Shab’a Farms. It will be difficult to bring the two sides together and get their agreement on the marker points that would be completed. UNIFIL must continue to do everything it can to solidify peace in South Lebanon.

On the borders, then UNIFIL intervenes, there is now security, patrols on the road, which was not the case ten years ago, thanks to UNIFIL. On the heads of the people at the ground – regardless of their political or religious leanings. They have left a positive impact on me.

What do you remember from the 2006 war and how has your life changed since then?

Al-Janoub’s Rania Harb recently asked people of south Lebanon, who bore the brunt of the 2006 war, to recollect their memory of the war and explain how their life has changed in the last decade. Here are excerpts.

Rima and Yolla Nahra (sister, shop owner, Sayayini, Sayayini)

The 2006 war was a point in our lives. We lost many dear death experiences. My sister worked with the Red Cross, she inspired me to overcome and reach as far as the war went. Ten years on, thanks to UNIFIL, there is now security, patrols on the road, presence on the borders. A dam as high as one meter. The war was completely changed. We had the Indian Battalion nearby. UNIFIL is a powerful support to people on the ground – regardless of their political or religious leanings. They have left a positive impact on me.

Ahmed Al Kassem, farmer from Naqoura

The war was a hard time. People were left for 18 days during the war, we ran out of wheat. I was one of the people who harvested the wheat, I was able to store it. The effects of those 34 terrifying days lasted long after the war ended. We needed some hope of help. The effects of those 34 terrifying days lasted long after the war ended. We needed some hope of help. When we had no money, we worked in keries, under bombardments, to be able to make ends meet. UNIFIL troops have a great deal of goodness and kindness in the way they deal with people. Their presence gave us a sense of reassurance. The 2006 war was a hard time. People were left for 18 days during the war, we ran out of wheat. I was one of the people who harvested the wheat, I was able to store it. The effects of those 34 terrifying days lasted long after the war ended. We needed some hope of help. When we had no money, we worked in keries, under bombardments, to be able to make ends meet. UNIFIL troops have a great deal of goodness and kindness in the way they deal with people. Their presence gave us a sense of reassurance.

Khaled Nahra, businessman, owner of carwash in Khiam

The war had a bad impact on us. Before the war, our factories used to produce 100 pairs of shoes a day and 14 writers. The number of workers were down to 50 pairs a day and six employees. The war caused a total destruction. The shoe factories were leveled. Even leather (not killed) was destroyed. The war completely changed my life. UNIFIL helped me to establish my business. Even passing UNIFIL gave a sense of security. I felt we are one of us. But I don’t think I can ever get back the kind of life I had before.
The town of Bint Jbeil, which was the flashpoint of the 2006 war, has witnessed a vast majority of its population settle abroad.

A casual stroll would be enough to make one believe that Bint Jbeil in southern Lebanon is indeed a thriving town. Schools, hospitals, businesses, beautiful concrete buildings and asphalted roads criss-crossing the town offer ample evidence of that.

But today’s prosperity veils the bitter truth that this town – just about three kilometres from the nearest Israeli territory – has been the epitome of decades of wars and decimation in southern Lebanon. In particular, Bint Jbeil – one of the oldest towns of the Middle East – was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting during the 2006 war between Hizbullah and the Israeli Defense Forces. The town had suffered heavily at least twice before: in 1970, during Israel’s war with the Palestine Liberation Organization; and during the Lebanese civil war between 1976 and 1978.

A resident of the town, Bilal Charara, 55, says Bint Jbeil was home to some 75,000 people in the late 1960s, but it now has only about 3,000 people – mostly elderly. The rest, he says, have settled abroad. Mr. Charara, who is the head of the foreign affairs at the Lebanese Parliament, says about 30,000 people from the town, including his own son, have resettled in the United States alone.

“Now, they come here only as tourists,” Mr. Charara, said, woefully, during an interview in his sprawling house in the centre of the town. “The city has been rebuilt with modern infrastructure but no one is here to live and enjoy the serenity… our people send money from abroad and those living here just guard the houses.”

As Mr. Charara was talking, one of his relatives, an Australian citizen, entered the room. “I visit Bint Jbeil every summer to see my parents,” said Ibrahim Boussi, 48, who left the town in the middle of an active war in 1991 and currently settled in Sydney. “There is no one here during the winter…” added Mr. Boussi, who was planning to leave in three days.

Mr. Jouni later took us to one of the shoe factories, owned by Ghassam Charara, 55, who was the last of the three generations of his family in the business. His 21-year-old son has settled in the US. “Before the 2006 war, our factories used to produce 100 pairs of shoes a day with 14 workers,” he said, adding that the number has dropped to 50 pairs a day with only six employees.

The shoemaker does not want his son to return. He explains why: “If there is the guarantee of peace, my son may return… if another war breaks out his life is ruined.”

But the one thing that keeps Ghassam hopeful is the presence of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). “Even seeing the UNIFIL cars pass by gives a sense of security… They (UN peacekeepers) walk around like they are one of us,” said Ghassam. He appreciates the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which donated two shoemaking machines enabling him to restart his business after the aftermath of the 2006 war.

Ghassam believes that Bint Jbeil in southern Lebanon epitome of decades of wars and decimation in southern Lebanon.
Every two weeks a new 10-minute radio episode is aired in Arabic on: Al-Risala, Sawt El-Mada, Voice of Lebanon, Voice of People and Radio Delta.

“UNIFIL: We Work With You”
From joint police training to medical visits, this is a new TV/Web series highlighting UNIFIL’s collaboration with Lebanese security forces and civic organizations to support local communities and maintain peace. Twice a month on NBN, OTV and YouTube.

Check unifil.unmissions.org to watch and read a weekly multimedia report on one of over 400 UNIFIL activities that happen every single day in south Lebanon.