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Letter dated 29 July 2006 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to refer to Observer Group Lebanon of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which serves alongside the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and to my most recent report to the Security Council on UNIFIL activities (S/2006/560).

The tragic event at patrol base Khiam of Observer Group Lebanon on 25 July 2006, in which four military observers were killed, and the incident on 23 July, when a military observer at patrol base Ras was seriously injured, have called into question whether United Nations peacekeeping personnel can be sufficiently protected in their current positions. The deep concern about the safety and security of United Nations personnel expressed by the Security Council in its presidential statement (S/PRST/2006/34) also having been noted, it is the Secretariat's assessment that, in the current circumstances, the risks of continuing to staff the remaining two patrol bases with unarmed military observers outweigh the merits gained from their presence. Patrol bases Ras and Khiam have not been occupied by United Nations personnel since 23 and 25 July, respectively.

In coordination with the Secretariat, the Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Alain Pellegrini, yesterday relocated the military observers deployed at patrol bases Hin and Mar to other positions within UNIFIL.

I have written to the Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, stating that I would have preferred that the Government of Israel and the United Nations carry out a joint investigation into the events that led to the deaths of the military observers at patrol base Khiam. I understand that the Government of Israel will carry out its own investigation, and I have urged that this be comprehensive and that its results be made public. I have asked in particular for information about what actions the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) took in response to the repeated communications from UNTSO and UNIFIL on the recurring incidents of close firing in the hours before the position was hit directly. I was disturbed to learn that the patrol base and its surroundings have come under renewed firing by IDF in the days following the incident of 25 July, which will undoubtedly have an effect on the investigation of the site that the United Nations will need to undertake shortly.

In view of the ongoing hostilities in south Lebanon and their impact on UNIFIL, General Pellegrini has been delegated full authority to decide on and make preparations for additional relocations of personnel under his command should that,



in his judgement, become necessary to better ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel.

The United Nations is committed to carrying out all mandates entrusted to it by the Security Council. The Organization does not take lightly a decision to relocate any of its peacekeeping personnel serving in south Lebanon, but was compelled to do so at this time, as potential threats to the unarmed military observers can no longer be mitigated by other means.

While I am gravely concerned about the safety and security of United Nations personnel, I remain deeply troubled about the innocent civilians, both Israeli and Lebanese, who are caught in the fighting and the deepening humanitarian catastrophe in south Lebanon. I must strongly emphasize that under international humanitarian law, United Nations peacekeepers not participating in an armed conflict are entitled to the same protection as that accorded to civilians.

I therefore reiterate my call for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a political dialogue with all parties to reach lasting peace and security.

I should be grateful if you would bring this matter urgently to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kofi A. **Annan**
