

UNIFIL HOM/FC's Address at
Inauguration of the 200th Blue Line Point Demined and
International Day for Mine Awareness
04 April 2012

Brigadier-General Tlais, South Litani Sector Commander,
Brigadier-General Santi Bonfanti,
Dear friends from the Lebanese Armed Forces,
Dear UNIFIL Civilian and Military Personnel,
Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all at UNIFIL's headquarters to commemorate the two-hundredth point of the Blue Line reached by the UNIFIL mine clearance teams.

As you all know, resolution 1701 called for a full cessation of hostilities but also called for the parties to support a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution of the conflict based inter alia on full respect for the Blue Line by both parties. The Blue Line marking process is an essential task of our mandate. Completing this process will reduce the potential for incidents and consequently tensions in the area.

In accordance with its mandated task to ensure that the Blue Line is respected by the parties in its entirety, UNIFIL began the marking process in 2007, with the first blue barrel constructed and verified in September that year. In 2010, a "Blue Line Task Force" was established, comprised of dedicated engineering capabilities as well as Geographic Information System (GIS) and medical support, considerably expediting the demining and measuring process as well as the placement of blue barrels.

Today, the total number of points agreed between the parties for marking has reached 253 out of 470 to be marked. A total of 132 blue barrels have been constructed (or about 50 per cent of the points agreed). Besides the 200 points demined to date, more than 50 additional points are in the demining phase.

Currently, UNIFIL has 11 combat engineering teams from UNIFIL Belgian, Cambodian, Chinese, French, Italian and Spanish contingents on the ground, along with four teams from Cambodia, China, Portugal and Turkey working on blue barrel construction.

Today, a special word of appreciation and admiration goes to UNIFIL deminers and engineers who perform their daily duties with commendable courage, professionalism and devotion whilst risking their lives for a safer Lebanon. Your work is a source of pride for UNIFIL!

I also wish to take this opportunity to convey a special word of thanks to the countries contributing engineer teams to UNIFIL for their steadfast commitment towards fulfillment of our mandate. And last but not least, let me mention the United Nations Mine Action Support Team (or UNMAST), which continued to support UNIFIL demining activities along the Blue Line by providing training to contingents as well as conducting validation and quality assurance monitoring.

Today, we are also marking the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action. Indeed, Unexploded Ordnance, particularly cluster munitions, left over from the 2006 conflict, remains a challenge in southern Lebanon. Such ordnances have claimed 29 civilian lives and 264 civilian injuries in the area since July 2006. Besides, 14 deminers were killed, including two from UNIFIL, and 49 injured, including five UNIFIL deminers, during mine clearance operations. Our presence here today pays tribute to them!

Today, we are celebrating the achievement of a milestone in our efforts to reduce tensions along the Blue Line! In the period ahead, let us continue to work together, shoulder-to-shoulder, towards the overall goal of UNIFIL's presence here, namely to ensure safer and more prosperous lives for the people of south Lebanon.

Thank you, shukran jazeelan!

Maj.-Gen. Paolo Serra
UNIFIL HOM/FC