

**FAREWELL MESSAGE BY UNIFIL FORCE COMMANDER
LIEUTENANT GENERAL CLAUDIO GRAZIANO
TRANSFER OF COMMAND CEREMONY, 28 JANUARY 2010**

Dear all,

A warm welcome to all of you on this occasion which marks the transfer of command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) from myself to *Gen. Alberto Asarta Cuevas*. I am greatly honoured by your presence today, as I bid farewell to colleagues, friends and our Lebanese partners after three years of service under the Blue Flag in southern Lebanon.

I would like to acknowledge, in particular, the presence amongst us, of the Lebanese Minister of Defence, *Mr Elias Murr*, the Spanish Minister of Defence, *Mrs Carme Chacon*, the Italian Deputy Minister of Defence, *Mr Giuseppe Cossiga*, accompanied by the Italian and Spanish Chiefs of Defence, *General Camporini* and *General Rodriguez Fernandez*, reflecting their countries' strong commitment to UNIFIL. Let me also highlight the presence of *General Jean Kahwaji*, Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces, whose cooperation and support have been and continue to be critical to the accomplishment of our mandated tasks. I am equally pleased by the presence among us today of our esteemed

UN colleagues, Mr. Michael Williams, United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, and of Mr. Bader Al-Dafa, Executive Secretary of ESCWA. I am very grateful to you both for the cooperation and friendship extended to me during my time in Lebanon. The presence of so many delegations from our major troop contributing countries equally testifies to the international community's strong support to our Mission. Last but not least, I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the newly appointed Director of our Strategic Military Cell at United Nations Headquarters in New York, Major General Zahari Siregar and of my two my two esteemed colleagues, Major General Wolfgang Jilke, Force Commander of UNDOF, and Major General Robert Mood, Chief of Staff of UNTSO.

Today's ceremony represents a valuable opportunity to look back and assess the achievements made and the challenges faced over the past three years, so that we may look forward with renewed resolve to pave the way for sustainable peace in southern Lebanon.

As you will all recall, in the wake of the 2006 war, the Security Council decided to significantly enhance UNIFIL's mandate and strength. This was followed by a unanimous decision by the Lebanese authorities to deploy the Lebanese Armed

Forces to southern Lebanon, for the first time in decades. Over the following months, UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army developed an effective partnership, which, as the Security Council has often highlighted, is the cornerstone for successful implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). More than three years after the adoption of resolution 1701, conditions on the ground have significantly improved, and a number of mandated objectives have been achieved. This has led to what the Secretary-General and the Security Council have called a "new strategic environment" in southern Lebanon.

Foremost, the cessation of hostilities and respect for the Blue Line have been mostly upheld by the parties. Simultaneously, UNIFIL has successfully supported the Lebanese Armed Forces as it deployed its troops throughout southern Lebanon, including down to the Blue Line, while Israel withdrew its forces from Lebanese territory. And I am hopeful that, with the continued determination of all parties, an Israeli withdrawal from all Lebanese territory can be effectively accomplished in the period ahead. These achievements were made largely as a result of the comprehensive liaison and coordination arrangements put in place through UNIFIL, particularly the tripartite forum. The parties' continued cooperation with UNIFIL and their steadfast

commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) have been essential in this regard.

However, the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) is faced with a number of strategic challenges, many of which are outside UNIFIL's remit. The most important of them is to make progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict. In the absence of a permanent ceasefire, the achievements made by UNIFIL's deployment on the ground will be difficult to sustain in the long run, and the potential for incidents along the Blue Line to escalate into a larger conflict will remain.

UNIFIL's current deployment, assets and resources cannot be sustained indefinitely. 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. The successful and full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and ultimately, the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, will depend on the steadfast commitment and joint efforts of all the parties in the period ahead.

At the same time -- although significant progress has been made towards gradually transferring responsibilities from UNIFIL to the Lebanese Army -- the LAF's capacity, on land and

at sea, needs to be further enhanced before it can effectively assume security control over the Mission's area of operations. In this connection, the Secretary-General has repeatedly stated that it is essential that the international community continues to support the Lebanese Army in becoming an effective military organization, fully resourced and capable of fulfilling its many responsibilities.

Indeed, all our activities at the service of peace and security in southern Lebanon could not be implemented without the cooperation of the Lebanese Army, which has demonstrated, time and again and despite constraints faced, its professionalism and outstanding commitment to fulfil resolution 1701 (2006), working in close partnership with UNIFIL troops. Today, I therefore wish to particularly thank Lebanese Armed Forces Commander General Kahwaji and his soldiers in recognition of their role as a key partner in the performance of our duties.

At the same time, I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government, the religious and civilian authorities and the people of Lebanon for the tremendous support, cooperation and good-will which they have extended to UNIFIL, and to me as Force Commander, over the years. The success of our Mission would not be possible without their continued support.

And finally, let me turn to the military and civilian personnel who have been serving tirelessly in UNIFIL during my tenure. Their professionalism and dedication to service have been vital to the implementation of UNIFIL's mandate. I here wish to mention, in particular, the excellent support I have received from my Deputy, Brigadier General Apurba Kumar Bardalai. Not only has he impressed me with his sound managerial and technical skills. He has also been a stout promoter of United Nations values and principles amongst UNIFIL personnel.

I also wish to acknowledge the valuable support and advice received from Mr. Milos Strugar, Director of Political and Civil Affairs; Mr. Girish Sinha, Director of Mission Support; Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Vincent Lafontaine; - all of which has proven indispensable in the fulfilment of my duties. Last but not least, the achievements made to date would not have been possible without the strong commitment of the many troop-contributing countries, with their significant deployment of troops, maritime assets and financial resources to UNIFIL.

As I bid farewell to you all, I warmly welcome Major General Alberto Asarta Cuevas. As many of you know, General Asarta is no stranger to UNIFIL, having successfully commanded UNIFIL's Sector East from December 2008 to April 2009. I am confident

that, with the support of all parties, General Asarta will continue to advance the implementation of UNIFIL's mission, and to strive towards achieving sustainable peace and stability for all the people in southern Lebanon.

Once again, my most sincere appreciation to all of you for your unwavering collaboration and warm friendship that I so much treasured throughout my tenure. Many thanks, Shukran jazeelan!

Lieutenant General Claudio Graziano
Force Commander, UNIFIL