



14 January 2012

UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT

Address of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at UNIFIL headquarters, Naqoura

Dear Major-General Alberto Asarta Cuevas, Force Commander and UNIFIL Head of Mission,
Dear officers,
Dear men and women of UNIFIL,
Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here today. I commend you General Asarta as you complete two years of leading one of the most challenging United Nations peacekeeping missions in the world. I also thank all of you, the brave women and men serving Lebanon and the Lebanese people, you may be military or civilian, national or international staff, but you are all united for peace.

You have a strong partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain peace and stability. You are building confidence between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Israeli Defence Forces and that is creating space in which the parties can seek a long-term solution to the conflict.

Each of you makes a difference for the people of Lebanon. A Lebanese woman from the south once said, I quote, "If I am alive today, it is because of UNIFIL." End of quote. I am sure she is not the only one who could pay such eloquent testimony to the value of the mission.

Members of UNIFIL risk their lives to rescue others. You have been attacked, again and again. This is an appalling injustice. It is a tragedy for the affected families, for the people of Lebanon, and for the United Nations. But today, we pay tribute to the brave individuals who came to Lebanon to bring peace but were never able to return to their families. Two hundred ninety three UNIFIL personnel have lost their lives in southern Lebanon since the mission began in 1978.

I pay tribute to the memory of all those who died here serving under the United Nations flag. I also honour many personnel who have been injured in the line of duty. I am especially thinking of the five French peacekeepers wounded last month in a road side bomb near Tyre. As we all know. This was not a random act. These colleagues of ours were targeted. Peacekeeping is always dangerous but it is especially deadly in Lebanon.

More personnel have lost their lives serving in UNIFIL than in any other United Nations peacekeeping operation. This weighs heavily on my heart. Your safety is critically important. In my meetings with government officials I called on them to strengthen protection for you. UNIFIL is one of the oldest United Nations peacekeeping missions. It is one of the most prominent in terms of its strength and resources. Most importantly, UNIFIL is playing a major role in bringing peace to this troubled region and our world.

I thank you for your service. I am deeply grateful for your commitment. Let us proudly carry on the work of our former colleagues. Peace will be the greatest tribute to their memory. And I wish you all the best and I thank each and every one of you.
Thank you very much.
