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PRESS RELEASE

UNIFIL OPERATION ON EVE OF SECRETARY-GENERAL'S VISIT

Naqoura, Lebanon – On the eve of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's first visit to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the number of peacekeepers serving with the mission has risen to close to 13,000, at 12,997 comprised of soldiers from 30 countries, 11,302 ground troops and 1,695 naval personnel.

Since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 last August, the peacekeepers have played a key role in monitoring the cessation of hostilities agreement and the Israeli withdrawal, as well as in assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces in deploying in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL also assisted the LAF towards establishing an area between the Blue Line and the Litani River that is free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of UNIFIL.

In his most recent report to the UN Security Council, delivered in mid-March, the Secretary-General said that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have made significant and commendable strides towards fulfilling their obligations under resolution 1701. He also noted that the LAF are the peacekeeping partner of UNIFIL, and the success of UNIFIL is tied to the capacities and capabilities of LAF.

In addition to its core military mandate, UNIFIL de-miners from various national contingents destroyed a total of more than 25,000 explosive devices. These include rockets, grenades, cluster bombs, anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

In addition, UNIFIL peacekeepers have continued to provide humanitarian assistance to the local population, including medical and dental aid, providing several thousand free health checks and medicine from bases and mobile clinics.

UNIFIL, first created by the Security Council in 1978 to confirm an Israeli withdrawal, was greatly enhanced last August to monitor the cessation of hostilities in the latest conflict, support the Lebanese armed forces as they deployed throughout south Lebanon, and extend assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

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