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PRESS RELEASE

Foreign Ministers of France, Spain and Italy Visit UNIFIL

Naqoura, Lebanon – The Foreign Ministers of France, Spain and Italy – Bernard Kouchner, Miguel Angel Moratinos and Massimo D'Alema – today paid a visit to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

The ministers began their visit at UNIFIL Headquarters, based in Naqoura in southern Lebanon. There, they were welcomed by the UNIFIL Force Commander, Major-General Claudio Graziano, who also briefed the ministers on the work of the peacekeepers as well as recent developments in the peacekeeping mission's area of operations.

The ministers were then flown to the bases of their respective national troop contingents serving with UNIFIL. They later gave a joint press conference in Naqoura with the UNIFIL Force Commander.

At the end of the visit, Maj.-Gen. Graziano highlighted the importance of the international community's support to UNIFIL's mission.

"I thank the ministers for their commitment and the support their governments have extended to UNIFIL so far. Their presence here today was a strong reflection of that support," Maj.-Gen. Graziano said.

He added: *"It was the support of countries such as theirs which made possible the swift and effective deployment of the enlarged UNIFIL. That deployment – together with the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces south of the Litani River – has allowed for the establishment of a new strategic environment in southern Lebanon."*

The Force Commander also underscored the role played by the other countries which currently have troops serving as UNIFIL peacekeepers.

"But while we have here the foreign ministers of three important UNIFIL troop-contributing countries, we must not forget the other 25 countries which currently contribute peacekeepers here. Their contributions are also vital and must be acknowledged as such," Maj.-Gen. Graziano said.

At present, there are 13,530 peacekeepers from 28 countries serving with UNIFIL. Of these, 1,585 peacekeepers are serving at sea with UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force.

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