

**UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON
(UNIFIL)**

PRESS RELEASE

The escalation of hostilities between the IDF and Hezbollah has clearly affected operations of UNIFIL in the south. Restrictions imposed on UNIFIL's freedom of movement in its area of operation are preventing UNIFIL from carrying out its activities and mandate fully. Following a conversation between the UN Secretary General and the Prime Minister of Israel a few days ago, we received assurances that UNIFIL will be allowed freedom of movement, but this pledge has not yet been implemented on the ground.

There is a pressing need for UNIFIL to secure supplies of diesel fuel, water, and food to its positions throughout the area. Despite repeated requests addressed to the Israeli Defense Forces Command by the UNIFIL Force Commander, General Pellegrini, we have received no response to ensure the safe passage of logistic convoys to re-supply UNIFIL positions. UNIFIL was able to dispatch two supply convoys on 15 July, but the situation at the UN positions remains critical. UNIFIL notified the IDF today that we will dispatch a logistics convoy to re-supply our positions in order to ensure the continuation of UNIFIL's vital functions on the ground.

There is also a growing concern about the safety of UN personnel deployed in the area. Yesterday, there were 17 incidents of firing close to UNIFIL positions, and two direct impacts inside UNIFIL positions. There was significant material damage, and one member of the Indian battalion with UNIFIL was seriously wounded by shrapnel from the tank fire from the Israeli side.

Under such circumstances, UNIFIL is doing its best to provide assistance within its limited capacities. On the humanitarian front, UNIFIL is ready to work in collaboration with the Lebanese government, but UNIFIL cannot replace the role of the Lebanese authorities in the area.

Following a report about Lebanese civilians killed on 15 July on the road between Al Bayyadah and Sharma, as their two vehicles were fleeing from the Marwahin village, UNIFIL retrieved 16 bodies and transported them to Tyre. During this mission, UNIFIL medical teams also came under fire. Despite some media reports and statements in the press, these were not the same civilians who had approached UNIFIL for shelter earlier that day.

The Lebanese government requested UNIFIL to provide a humanitarian escort to the villagers seeking safe passage outside of Marwahin. UNIFIL dispatched a patrol to the village the same day, which stayed with the villagers throughout the night. Yesterday, UNIFIL was able to provide a

humanitarian escort to 283 villagers from that area to Tyre. During this mission the team came under fire, which endangered the lives of local civilians and UNIFIL troops. Initially, Hezbollah fired rockets from the vicinity of the village and subsequently the IDF fired into village on two occasions.

Furthermore, UNIFIL requested the IDF for a safe passage in order to transport humanitarian assistance provided by CARITAS, from Tyre to the border villages of Rmeich and Ayn Ibil. The response to the request is still pending since 14 July, although it has been repeated by UNIFIL again today.

Today, UNIFIL carried out a small humanitarian convoy between Tyre and Naqoura, and will attempt to provide water supply to a civilian hospital with 500 people in Tibnin.

Naqoura,
17 July 2006