



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 4 August 2021 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In a letter dated 24 June 2021 addressed to me, the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested that the Security Council extend the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of one year, “without amendment to its mandate, its concept of operations and its rules of engagement”. In this regard, and further to my report to the Security Council of 13 July 2021 on the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#) ([S/2021/650](#)), I hereby request the Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of UNIFIL, which is due to expire on 31 August 2021.

While I commend the continued commitment of both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to maintaining the cessation of hostilities and for their close cooperation and coordination with UNIFIL, there has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict, as called for in resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#).

Fifteen years have now passed since the war between Israel and Lebanon, which ended on the basis of the measures outlined in resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). While the underlying drivers of conflict and the dynamics between the parties have not significantly changed since 2006, UNIFIL does face renewed challenges in the way that it is able to conduct its operations, including continued restrictions to its freedom of movement and an undiminished risk of a resumption of hostilities between the parties, even if accidentally triggered.

Both parties have yet to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, and it must cease violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, prevent hostile actions from its territory and ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River other than those of the Lebanese State and UNIFIL. UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, continues to work with the parties in supporting the fulfilment of these outstanding obligations.

The past 12 months have seen a number of incidents of serious concern, including several breaches in the cessation of hostilities. In May and July, rocket fire across the Blue Line from Lebanon and response fire from Israel led to a dangerous risk of escalation, and the role of UNIFIL in calming the situation proved crucial again. Large-scale demonstrations were also held along the Blue Line in the context of the conflict between Israel and Gaza in May, with protesters crossing south of the



Blue Line and damaging Israeli security infrastructure and a protester killed by Israel Defense Forces fire.

The incidents in May and July demonstrate the possession of unauthorized weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations, in clear violations of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#), and continuing to present a risk of large-scale conflict. It is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon to take appropriate actions to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

The stability of Lebanon has been further challenged by the continued deterioration of the country's economic situation, compounded by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While all State institutions are overstretched in the country's current political and economic situation, the Lebanese Armed Forces and other State security institutions are especially critical for its stability and require renewed political and material support.

The presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations has been reduced as they carried out security responsibilities elsewhere in the country. Over the past four months, 16 per cent of all UNIFIL operational activities were conducted in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces. This is down from over 22 per cent in 2019, prior to the onset of the political and economic crisis. The Lebanese Armed Forces have recently informed UNIFIL that they will need to reduce operational activities with UNIFIL to around 10 per cent towards the end of July, owing to the lack of fuel, spare parts and personnel.

Against this backdrop, I would like to underscore the importance of international support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are called upon to respond to a growing number of demonstrations and roadblocks in the country related to the sweeping economic crisis. The centrality of the UNIFIL partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces to the mission's mandated efforts cannot be overstated. It is of utmost importance that the Lebanese Armed Forces remain able to continue performing critical operations in the south and work alongside UNIFIL, so that the authority of the State is effectively extended in the area. The integrity and effectiveness of the Lebanese Armed Forces, a UNIFIL strategic partner, remain vital for the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). The Lebanese Armed Forces can fulfil the competing demands placed on them only if they receive the support they need.

The liaison and coordination arrangements UNIFIL has established with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, bilaterally and through the tripartite forum, remain vital to mitigate tensions in sensitive areas along the Blue Line. I encourage the parties to continue to engage in the process to mark the Blue Line visibly on the ground, without prejudice to future border negotiations, as a confidence-building measure, as well as to assist with the monitoring of violations and prevent inadvertent crossings. I urge the parties to continue to make effective use of the UNIFIL liaison and coordination structures to lower tension and resolve disputes peacefully and avoid escalation.

To the extent possible given the current dramatic economic situation in the country, the Government of Lebanon continues to express its commitment to the expansion of Lebanese Armed Forces capacity on land and at sea, which remains vital for enhancing State presence in southern Lebanon. Mobilizing additional international support to build this capacity is fundamentally necessary if we are to see continued progress in this regard, including towards the deployment of a model regiment to southern Lebanon.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL in its entire area of operations and along the full length of the Blue Line remains critical. It is the responsibility of the Lebanese

authorities, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, to enable UNIFIL to carry out its mandated activities unhindered. UNIFIL has yet to gain full access to several sites of interest, including several Green without Borders sites, as well as some patrol routes. The incidents involving restrictions of UNIFIL freedom of movement have been detailed in my reports on the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#).

I reiterate my call to the Lebanese authorities to fulfil their obligations to ensure the safety of UNIFIL personnel and full accountability for those who attack peacekeepers, including with respect to the incidents in Bar'ashit on 10 February and Blida on 25 May 2020, as well as in Majdal Zun on 4 August 2018. I note the verdict of 24 March by the Permanent Military Court of Lebanon sentencing the perpetrator of an attack on UNIFIL peacekeepers in July 2011 as well as the verdict by the Permanent Military Court of December 2020 in the case of the killing of two peacekeepers in 1980. I welcome these developments and urge the timely conduct and completion of judicial processes into all outstanding cases of attacks against United Nations personnel. This remains critical for preventing future incidents and retaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries. In relation to tunnels confirmed by UNIFIL to cross the Blue Line, it is also essential that Lebanese authorities undertake a thorough investigation on the Lebanese side and that UNIFIL gain access to relevant sites.

It is also important to note the urgent need for progress on the responsibility of Israel to cease all violations of Lebanese sovereignty and airspace. The overflights cause distress to Lebanese civilians, run counter to the efforts of UNIFIL to reduce tensions and have a negative impact on the credibility of the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL.

Throughout the past year, and despite the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, UNIFIL has maintained a high operational tempo and continued to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of its operations in accordance with resolutions [2373 \(2017\)](#), [2433 \(2018\)](#), [2485 \(2019\)](#) and [2539 \(2020\)](#), including through foot patrols; increased night patrols along the Blue Line; and utilizing air assets more effectively, including by increasing the number of operational flights, such as reconnaissance of sensitive areas, and undertaking night flights over rugged and difficult terrain. From 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, the mission conducted an average of 13,882 activities per month, which included 7,444 patrols. Some 45 per cent of all operational activities were conducted at night.

In the aftermath of the devastating 4 August 2020 explosion at the Beirut port, a UNIFIL engineering task force was deployed to the port in accordance with resolution [2539 \(2020\)](#). During its three-week deployment from 27 September to 23 October, the task force, consisting of 150 peacekeepers from 13 contingents, cleared 12,000 tons of debris and dismantled four damaged warehouses. The task force also assisted in restoring damaged buildings of cultural and historical importance.

The total number of UNIFIL military personnel as at 21 July 2021 was 10,101 personnel, including 635 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprises five vessels, one helicopter and 559 military personnel. The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 241 international and 557 national staff. I am grateful to the 45 troop-contributing countries and continue to encourage them to increase the number of women deployed to UNIFIL.

According to the assessment report ([S/2020/473](#)), UNIFIL has been optimizing its configuration and operations. To date, this has included the optimization of the civilian staffing of the mission (civilian staffing review of October 2020) and greater reliance on lighter vehicles for monitoring and reconnaissance rather than heavy infantry patrols, in addition to a further strengthening of liaison and coordination

capabilities by deploying a third liaison team south of the Blue Line. The reconfiguration of UNIFIL operations towards the Blue Line has also begun. Two of the five positions identified for consolidation have been closed, with infrastructure handed over to the Lebanese Armed Forces. Three more positions are scheduled to be closed in the coming year. In order to achieve a gradual transition of UNIFIL Maritime Task Force responsibilities to the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy continues advanced training activities and exercises with a view to enhancing its preparedness to partially take over Maritime Task Force responsibilities in one sector of the area of maritime operations. The Lebanese Navy also maintains a 100 per cent inspection rate of ships referred by UNIFIL.

Pending final agreement on the boundary between Lebanon and Israel, and as long as the Lebanese Armed Forces are not able to deploy to southern Lebanon in significantly larger numbers, UNIFIL operational and liaison activities continue to provide valuable deterrence and a critical de-escalation mechanism in a context where escalation has been a reality. In the absence of progress towards a permanent ceasefire, the ability of UNIFIL to deter, prevent and deconflict remains crucial. The priority remains for the parties to take the necessary steps towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict. UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, is ready to lend its full support to the parties in this process.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Stefano Del Col, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work they are carrying out in southern Lebanon and for their commitment in the service of peace.

The General Assembly, by its resolution [75/250 B](#) of 30 June 2021, appropriated the amount of \$476.8 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

As at 22 July 2021, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNIFIL amounted to \$190.5 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$4,219.2 million. Reimbursement of troop costs and contingent-owned equipment have been made for the period up to 31 March 2021 in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

I would like to express my appreciation for the continued united and steadfast support of the Security Council to UNIFIL and its mandated activities. With the information above in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2022.

I would be grateful if you could bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**

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