



Security Council

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Letter dated 9 August 2022 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In a letter dated 16 June 2022 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 Council of 14 July 2022 (S/2022/556) on the implementation of Council resolution 1701 (2006), I hereby request the Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of UNIFIL, which is due to expire on 31 August 2022.

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).

While the underlying drivers of the conflict have not dramatically changed since 2006, UNIFIL does face new challenges in the conduct of its operations. A trend of increased restrictions to its freedom of movement and delays in access to locations of interest means that the mission faces increasing challenges to its operational space. Furthermore, there remains an ongoing risk of a resumption of hostilities between the parties, whether intentionally or as a result of miscalculation or misunderstanding, at a time of heightened regional and global tensions.

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 cease violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, including by preventing hostile actions, ensuring the safety and security of the civilian population, in addition to that of United Nations personnel, and ensuring that the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River remains free of unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons 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 fulfilling these outstanding obligations.

The past year has seen a number of incidents of serious concern, including several breaches in the cessation of hostilities. Most recently, on 25 April 2022, UNIFIL radar detected a rocket fired from an area north-east of Qulaylah (Sector West), which landed south-east of the Israeli village of Shlomi. The Israel Defense Forces responded by firing approximately 50 artillery rounds. UNIFIL visited the site



of the rocket launch with the Lebanese Armed Forces and observed three improvised rocket launching ramps, two with rockets still in place. On 5 and 6 August 2021, there were also incidents of rocket fire from Lebanon into Israel. Israel responded with three air strikes and artillery fire into southern Lebanon. UNIFIL maintained contact with the Israel Defense Forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout these developments. While the incidents were contained through active liaison by UNIFIL, they demonstrated the risk of escalation across the Blue Line and underlined the need for progress by both parties in addressing their respective obligations under resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#).

Between March and June 2022, UNIFIL observed, from the air, firing ranges in four locations in Sector West. UNIFIL helicopter patrols further observed individuals in combat attire carrying assault weapons and engaging in small arms exercises at these sites. The presence of unauthorized weapons in the UNIFIL area of operations is of grave concern and requires follow-up action by the Lebanese authorities.

The many challenges faced by Lebanon are exacerbated by the continuing deterioration of the country's economic situation, which has been compounded by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While all State institutions are overstretched by the financial conditions, the Lebanese Armed Forces and other security institutions are especially critical for the country's stability and require renewed political and material support.

The presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations has been reduced, given security demands elsewhere in the country. Over the past four months, 17.95 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 prior to the onset of the economic crisis at the end of 2019.

In this context, I would like to emphasize the importance of increased international support to the Lebanese Armed Forces, which are called upon to perform a growing number of tasks related to national law and order, including ensuring security during elections, as well as responding to demonstrations and roadblocks carried out by members of the public in response to the sweeping economic crisis. The centrality of the relationship between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces to the mission's mandated efforts cannot be overstated. It is of the utmost importance that the Lebanese Armed Forces remain able to perform 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, the strategic partner of UNIFIL, remain vital for the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). The Lebanese Armed Forces can fulfil the competing demands placed upon them only if they receive the support they need.

As you are aware, pursuant to paragraph 11 of resolution [2591 \(2021\)](#), UNIFIL provided the Lebanese Armed Forces with temporary, non-lethal material and logistical support within the framework of joint Lebanese Armed Forces-UNIFIL activities. As noted in my most recent report to the Council on the implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#) ([S/2022/556](#)), I was encouraged by the immediate increase in the number of UNIFIL activities conducted in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces as a result of the temporary support provided. This followed a decrease in such activities amid COVID-19 restrictions and soaring fuel costs. The support provided appears to have had a positive impact on the capacity and reach of the Lebanese Armed Forces. I therefore call for support for the request of the Government of Lebanon for an extension of the temporary and special measures of UNIFIL in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The liaison and coordination arrangements that 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 make effective use of the liaison and coordination structures to avoid potential escalation. I welcome positive signals from both parties on the potential to resume marking the Blue Line on the ground and discussions on areas that remain the subject of reservations, without prejudice to future border negotiations, as a confidence-building and proactive conflict mitigation measure.

To the extent possible, given the dramatic economic situation in the country, the Government of Lebanon continues to express its commitment to the expansion of the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces on land and at sea, which remains vital for enhancing the State presence in southern Lebanon. The inauguration of the model regiment headquarters on 13 June 2022 was a positive development in this regard, as was the initial deployment of a company to the model regiment drawn from existing Lebanese Armed Forces troops in the UNIFIL area of operations. Mobilizing additional international support to further build such capacity is necessary if we are to see continued progress.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL in its entire area of operations and along the full length of the Blue Line remains critical to the implementation of its mandate. While the mission's freedom of movement was respected in most cases during the past year, UNIFIL encountered a concerning increase in the number of restrictions. It is the responsibility of the Lebanese authorities, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, to ensure the ability of UNIFIL to carry out its mandated activities unhindered. The mission's ability to conduct patrols and activities independently must be maintained.

UNIFIL has yet to gain full access to several locations of interest, including certain Green without Borders sites as well as some patrol routes. A new phenomenon, first observed on 30 April 2022, is the installation of containers and prefabricated infrastructure at strategic locations north of the Blue Line, which in several cases have impaired UNIFIL access. The local authorities stated that some of the containers were on private land and that some belonged to Green without Borders. I am concerned about this trend.

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 2020 and Blida on 25 May 2020, as well as in Majdal Zun in 2018. I note the verdict of 24 March 2022 by the Permanent Military Court of Lebanon sentencing the perpetrator of an attack on UNIFIL peacekeepers in July 2011. I welcome this development 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.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL also extends to its Maritime Task Force. The actions of the Israel Defense Forces with respect to a UNIFIL Maritime Task Force vessel on 6 and 7 June 2022 constitute an impediment to the freedom of movement of UNIFIL and therefore a violation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). All parties must abide by their obligation to respect the safety of UNIFIL and other United Nations personnel.

As at 20 June 2022, the total number of UNIFIL military personnel was 9,995, including 701 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprises five vessels, one helicopter and 574 military personnel, including 25 women (4.3 per cent). The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 240 international and 549 national staff. I am grateful to the 47 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 (through the civilian staffing review of December 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. 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 by the end of 2022.

In order to achieve a gradual transition of UNIFIL Maritime Task Force responsibilities to the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Navy continues to participate in maritime interdiction operations along with the Maritime Task Force, simulating a partial takeover of its responsibilities in one sector of the area of maritime operations. The Lebanese Navy has maintained a 100 per cent inspection rate of ships referred by UNIFIL throughout the past year. The trial period for transferring some of the responsibilities of the Maritime Task Force to the Lebanese Navy will continue.

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 in which 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, as called for in resolution 1701 (2006). 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 Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work that they are carrying out in southern Lebanon and for their commitment in the service of peace.

The General Assembly, by its resolution 76/290 of 29 June 2022, appropriated the amount of \$502.9 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023. As at 7 July 2022, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNIFIL amounted to \$131.6 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,236.4 million. Reimbursement of troop costs and contingent-owned equipment have been made for the period up to 31 March 2022, 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 foregoing information in mind, I recommend that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2023.

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

(Signed) António Guterres