



## Security Council

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### Letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

In a letter dated 26 June 2023 addressed to me, the caretaker 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 any amendments to its mandate, its concept of operations and its rules of engagement, and based on Security Council resolution 2591 (2021). In this regard, and further to my report to the Council of 13 July 2023 (S/2023/522) 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 2023.

I commend the continued stated commitment of both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to uphold their obligations pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006) and for their close cooperation and coordination with UNIFIL. The delineation of the maritime boundary between Lebanon and Israel, announced on 27 October 2022, is a most welcome development. However, the risk of escalation and a resumption of hostilities, whether intentionally or as a result of miscalculation or misunderstanding, persists against a backdrop of regional and global tensions. Furthermore, I note that 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).

Both parties have yet to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and the 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.

Amid several incidents of concern along the Blue Line, the most serious was a breach of the cessation of hostilities on 6 and 7 April when UNIFIL detected 24 rockets fired from Sma'iyah, Malikiyah and Zibqin (all Sector West), crossing south of the Blue Line, and heard two explosions from the direction of Metulla, northern Israel, in the vicinity of Sarda (Sector East). Subsequently, the Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL that three projectiles had been launched from Qulay'at (Sector East) towards Metulla. On 7 April, the Israel Defense Forces conducted air



strikes on three locations near the Palestine refugee camp of Rashidiye, south of Tyre (Sector West).

Incidents in the occupied Shab‘a Farms area also contributed to tensions. On 7 May, UNIFIL observed a tent placed south of the Blue Line near Bastrah (Sector East). A second tent was observed at the site on 17 June. UNIFIL has observed individuals repeatedly crossing from north of the Blue Line to access the structures. It has requested the Lebanese Armed Forces to have the tents removed and has, in concert with the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, engaged with the parties to urge restraint and to avoid unilateral actions, which could lead to escalation. On 1 July, one of the tents was moved north of the Blue Line; one tent remains south of the Blue Line.

Also in the Shab‘a Farms area, in May and June, UNIFIL observed several incidents in connection with ground works by the Israel Defense Forces south of the Blue Line near Kfar Shuba (Sector East). These incidents included weapons pointing between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, stone throwing and violations of the Blue Line by individuals from north of the Blue Line, and the use of tear gas by the Israel Defense Forces. UNIFIL liaised with the parties to de-escalate, interposing on multiple occasions. The Lebanese Armed Forces also acted to de-escalate tensions by keeping individuals away from the Blue Line.

While the active liaison by UNIFIL with both parties helped to contain these situations and prevent further escalation, the incidents demonstrated the risk of escalation across the Blue Line and underlined the need for progress in addressing the outstanding provisions of resolution 1701 (2006) by both parties.

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 liaison structures to avoid potential escalation through coordination.

I encourage both parties to resume the process of marking the Blue Line on the ground and to resume discussions with respect to Lebanese “reservation areas” as confidence-building and proactive conflict mitigation measures, without prejudice to future border negotiations.

While the underlying drivers of conflict have not dramatically changed, UNIFIL continues to face challenges in the conduct of its operations. A concerning trend of restrictions to its freedom of movement and delays in access to locations of interest continues. 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, particularly aggressive incidents during the past year included the fatal attack on 14 December 2022, when a UNIFIL convoy was attacked in Mazra‘at al-Aqibiyah (outside the area of operations) while moving to the Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut.

I reiterate my condemnation in the strongest terms of this attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers, which resulted in the death of a UNIFIL peacekeeper and the injury of three others. I also reiterate my condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of the peacekeeper who was killed and my wishes to the injured for a full and speedy recovery. On 1 June, the first military investigation judge of Lebanon issued indictments against seven suspects and search warrants against six additional suspects before referring the case to the Permanent Military Court for trial.

It is the responsibility of the Lebanese authorities, including the Lebanese Armed Forces, to ensure that UNIFIL is able to carry out its mandated activities unhindered. The mission's ability to conduct patrols and activities independently must be maintained.

The mission's freedom of movement also extends to its Maritime Task Force. The actions by the Israel Defense Forces with respect to a UNIFIL Maritime Task Force vessel on 26 April are extremely concerning. All parties must abide by their obligations to respect the safety of UNIFIL and all United Nations personnel.

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 attack near Mazra'at al-Aqibiyah on 14 December 2022, as well as to the incidents in Bra'shit on 10 February 2020, Blida on 25 May 2020 and Majdal Zun in August 2018. Noting the issuance of an indictment on 1 June by the military investigative judge in the case of the fatal attack on 14 December 2022 near Mazra'at al-Aqibiyah, I urge the timely conduct and completion of judicial processes for all outstanding cases of attacks against United Nations personnel. This remains critical for preventing future incidents and retaining the confidence of troop-contributing countries.

UNIFIL is yet to gain full access to a number of locations of interest, including several containers and Green Without Borders sites, the tunnels crossing the Blue Line (see [S/2019/237](#)) and four unauthorized firing ranges. The installation of containers and prefabricated infrastructure north of the Blue Line provokes tensions and can impair the mission's access to the Blue Line. The presence of individuals with professional cameras and binoculars, as well as closed-circuit television cameras at some of the installations, creates an additional source of tension, raising questions about their purpose. In addition, in late February and early March, UNIFIL first observed small ground openings, which can fit a single person, at three sites near Mallul (Sector West). Drilling equipment was observed at one of these sites. In May, a larger ground opening was observed near Alma al-Sha'b (Sector West). While it is possible that these holes could have a mundane function, their purpose must be ascertained.

UNIFIL continued to observe the active use of unauthorized firing ranges in four locations in Sector West, with 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 concerning and requires follow-up action by the Lebanese authorities. Although it is outside the UNIFIL area of operations, I note with grave concern the conduct of a Hizbullah military drill involving uniformed and armed combatants with heavy weapons on 21 May, in violation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#).

Cooperation and coordination between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces remain crucial for the successful implementation of resolution [1701 \(2006\)](#). The continued resource constraints faced by the Lebanese Armed Forces affect not only operational capabilities but also progress in the strategic dialogue with UNIFIL aimed at increasing Lebanese Armed Forces deployments in southern Lebanon and extending State authority. Reiterating appreciation for continued international support for State security institutions in Lebanon, I also underscore the need for further demonstrable commitment by the Lebanese authorities to an effective and durable deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces to southern Lebanon, notably the model regiment, whose headquarters stand equipped and ready.

The livelihood support programme for the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces commenced on 18 April with the first monthly disbursement

for Internal Security Forces personnel. The contributions to stability provided by these State security institutions cannot be understated.

As you are aware, pursuant to paragraph 11 of resolution [2650 \(2022\)](#), UNIFIL provided non-lethal material and support to the Lebanese Armed Forces from September 2022 to February 2023. It provided 230,000 litres of diesel fuel, food rations for approximately 190,000 meals, and 72 kg of medicine. The provision of this support contributed to maintaining the pace of UNIFIL activities conducted in close coordination with the Lebanese Armed Forces at a level of approximately 20 per cent. The assistance has been critical to ensuring a continued joint presence and activities in the UNIFIL area of operations. I therefore urge consideration of continued support to the Lebanese Armed Forces at the request of the Government of Lebanon.

At sea, the gradual assumption of maritime interdiction operation command functions by the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy with UNIFIL support is encouraging. In order to achieve a gradual transition of UNIFIL Maritime Task Force responsibilities to the Government of Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy increasingly assumed command functions for maritime interdiction operations, with support from the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force. In this regard, the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy increasingly assumed hailing and tracking duties in the central maritime corridor.

As at 24 July, UNIFIL comprised 9,541 military personnel, including 708 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprised five (temporarily four) vessels and 480 of the Force's military personnel, including 28 women. The civilian component of UNIFIL has 234 international and 553 national staff. I am grateful to the 49 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 continues to optimize its configuration and operations. This has included the closure of five UNIFIL positions and the continued transition to high-mobility light tactical vehicles for monitoring and reconnaissance rather than heavy infantry patrols, in addition to the further strengthening of liaison and coordination capabilities.

Pending final agreement on the land 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 to serve as 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 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 [77/313](#) of 30 June 2023, appropriated the amount of \$537.4 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024. As at 26 July 2023, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for UNIFIL amounted to \$221.6 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to

\$5,105.0 million. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 March 2023, and reimbursement for contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 December 2022.

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 2024.

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

*(Signed)* António **Guterres**

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