



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9409th meeting

Thursday, 31 August 2023, 10 a.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
Ghana	Mr. Issahaku
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/587)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/587)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Lebanon to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2023/641, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/587, which contains the text of a letter dated 3 August 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Albania, Brazil, , Ecuador, France, Gabon, Ghana, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

Against:

None

Abstaining:

China, Russian Federation

The President: The draft resolution received 13 votes in favour, none against and 2 abstentions. The draft resolution has been adopted as resolution 2695 (2023).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking France for its efforts as penholder.

In a spirit of compromise and consensus, the United Kingdom voted in favour today. The United Kingdom is a strong supporter of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which has a critical role in maintaining peace and stability across the Blue Line, preventing any further escalation that would be catastrophic for the region.

Resolution 1701 (2006) has always been clear: UNIFIL is authorized to take all necessary action to ensure the freedom of movement of its personnel and to fulfil its duties. Resolution 2695 (2023) clearly upholds that principle. We are pleased that the language clarifying UNIFIL's long-standing mandate to exercise freedom of movement, which allows UNIFIL to conduct independent patrols and respond quickly to Blue Line violations and was added last year to that end, was retained. However, it is unacceptable that UNIFIL is still unable to access some locations along the Blue Line border, including Green Without Borders sites — in particular give Hizbullah's self-acknowledged stockpiling of weapons, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

The support UNIFIL provides the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has had a positive impact on the situation across the Blue Line. It is therefore disappointing that the logistical support — an important signal of cooperation — was removed from this year's mandate. The United Kingdom has long been a proud supporter of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and we will continue our support to the LAF and internal security forces in Lebanon as the pillars of Lebanon's stability.

With the adoption of this mandate, we look to UNIFIL to provide the stability that Lebanon needs, and we pay tribute to its personnel.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I commend France for its careful work as the penholder in the negotiations. We also thank all Security Council members for their constructive engagement throughout the process.

As a close friend of Lebanon and being proud of its large community of persons of Lebanese descent, Brazil has long been engaged in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and participated in the negotiations with a sense of responsibility and commitment. We fully understand and share the need to keep UNIFIL's mandate as robust as it is. But in the present circumstances we think that the text, as finally proposed by France after a careful negotiating process, in no way weakens UNIFIL's mandate, as it ensures that

the mission will continue to operate in full freedom and with the support and careful attention of the Council. In addition, it addresses some of Lebanon's concerns, which at the same time, sends a powerful message to that friendly country and its political leadership.

Brazil will continue to lend its unwavering support for the mission. We are steadfast supporters of its crucial activities in maintaining peace and stability in the region, in particular in the current circumstances. We reaffirm our commitment to Lebanon and its brotherly people.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): As the resolution (resolution 2695 (2023)) put to the vote failed to fully address the concerns of the State concerned and of members of the Security Council, the Council was unable to unanimously adopt an extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). China expresses its regret about that.

Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State concerned is a basic prerequisite for peacekeeping operations. And the consent of the State concerned constitute a fundamental guiding principle for such operations, while the understanding and cooperation of the local population provide the necessary conditions for a mission to conduct its work smoothly. We support UNIFIL in further enhancing its communication with the Lebanese Government and military when fulfilling its mandate, while also engaging in positive interactions with the local population in order to increase mutual trust, dispel misgivings and enhance the effectiveness of its peacekeeping work in earnest.

The current security situation near the Blue Line remains complex and fragile. We hope that all the relevant parties will strictly implement the provisions of the Security Council's resolutions, make full use of the liaison and coordination arrangements of UNIFIL to strengthen communication and refrain from any action that may escalate the situation. Lebanon has on many occasions sent letters to the President of the Council on the issue of the geographical names of relevant places north of the Blue Line. The Council should take seriously and properly address the views and appeals of the country.

As one of the major troop-contributing countries to United Nations peacekeeping operations, China has always attached great importance to the safety of

peacekeepers, and we hope that the relevant parties will create a favourable environment for UNIFIL to implement its mandate and fully guarantee the safety of its peacekeepers. As a permanent member of the Council and a major troop-contributing country to UNIFIL, we stand ready to work with the international community to continue to support UNIFIL in fulfilling its mandate and make positive contributions to maintaining peace and stability in Lebanon.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): We thank the penholder, France, for its tireless efforts to strike a sensitive balance in the text of resolution 2695 (2023), taking into consideration feedback from the ground, voices from the host State and the region and various views in the Security Council.

The activities of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) are carried out for security and stability in southern Lebanon and to support the people who live there. Since 2006, UNIFIL has conducted its operations in accordance with the mandate it was given in resolution 1701 (2006). As UNIFIL finds itself in an ever-more challenging environment, it is imperative for the Council to support its irreplaceable function in Lebanon and the region. For UNIFIL to continue to fulfil its mandate and serve the people there, we believe it is important to ensure that UNIFIL has freedom of movement as it has had. We also acknowledge the fact that UNIFIL works closely with the Lebanese Armed Forces, as that has always been the case. With this renewed mandate strongly supported by the Council, we trust that UNIFIL will continue to play a critical role in bringing stability to the region. We look forward to continuing to engage with our fellow Council members and other stakeholders on this important issue.

Finally, on this occasion, as I believe that this will be the last meeting before the closure of the United States Council presidency, I would like to thank the United States, under the leadership of Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield and her team, for its excellent work during its presidency.

Mr. Issahaku (Ghana): We thank the penholder, France, for its efforts in working with all members of the Security Council to ensure broad agreement on resolution 2695 (2023), on the renewal of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

As a long-standing troop-contributing country, we believe that UNIFIL continues to have an important role in preserving international peace and security,

and we reaffirm the independence of UNIFIL in the execution of its mandate.

We continue to urge the Governments of Israel and Lebanon to work towards a permanent ceasefire and to fully respect the Blue Line.

We emphasize the urgency of consolidating the authority of the Lebanese Armed Forces and State security institutions over Lebanese territory and note, in that regard, the necessity for an early and nationally oriented resolution of Lebanon's political arrangements.

We reiterate the importance of the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and of all the parties desisting from actions that could put the safety and security of the personnel at risk.

In consonance with our support in the Council during the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), we remain resolved to support international efforts towards maintaining the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon and the promotion of peace between the two countries.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): The situation in Lebanon remains difficult, and the presence and action of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) are of paramount importance for the peace and stability of the country. It is with that imperative in mind that we worked with France, the penholder, whom we thank for its diligent work and efforts, and other Council members in the process of the renewal of the mandate adopted today.

UNIFIL's presence remains critical for peace and stability in the region as well. We profoundly believe that the strengthening of UNIFIL's mandate better serves the country and its people, as well as peace and security on the ground and beyond. Therefore, consistent with our position on the issue, we highlight the importance of unimpeded access for UNIFIL with regard to its freedom of movement and independence in carrying out its mandate, the necessity of which is reflected by the security situation on the ground. We believe that both the freedom of movement and the security of UNIFIL peacekeepers remain of paramount importance for the implementation of the mandate. We voted in favour of resolution 2695 (2023) and reiterate that UNIFIL must be able and fully empowered to carry out its important mandate, without interference or impositions, in support of the country, its people and their future, as well as the United Nations action for Lebanon and peace and security in the wider region.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian Federation abstained in the voting on resolution 2695 (2023), submitted by France, on the mandate renewal of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), as a result of a series of very contentious amendments made to the text at the final stage of the difficult negotiation process. We regret that the final text put to the vote today failed to maintain the fragile compromise that had been previously found by the penholders.

We have consistently always proceeded from the need to take into account the opinion of the country that is hosting a United Nations peacekeeping contingent on its territory. In this case it is Lebanon, whose leadership has repeatedly conveyed to the members of the Security Council an unequivocal message on the need to strengthen the coordination among the Interim Force, the Government and the army of the Republic of Lebanon, including with a view to ensuring the protection and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

We would like to emphasize that our position during the voting was based solely on our disagreement with some of the wording in the resolution. At the same time, we continue to support the activities of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, which play a key stabilizing role in the context of the ongoing tensions along the Blue Line. We hope that the resolution adopted today will not complicate the situation in southern Lebanon. We call on the leadership of UNIFIL to continue to coordinate its actions in its area of operations with the Government of Lebanon.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): The fact is that tensions on the Blue Line are at a level unseen since the 2006 war. Over the past year, on a daily basis, Hizbullah has been making a mockery of resolutions 1701 (2006) and 1559 (2004). It has erected concrete military outposts and observation towers, conducted military drills with live fire and prevented the freedom of movement of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), while brazenly attacking peacekeeping forces. It has also actively perpetuated Lebanon's myriad crises, obstructed the investigation into the devastating Beirut port explosion and paralysed key institutions of the State. Those extremely inflammatory actions threaten a dangerous escalation in our region. That is why the United Arab Emirates worked hard with the penholder and Security Council members in extensive negotiations to ensure

that UNIFIL's mandate addresses developments on the ground that strike at the core of UNIFIL's ability to fulfil that mandate.

UNIFIL continues to face challenges to its freedom of movement and the lack of access to locations of interest, as reported by the Secretary-General. As such, we sought to improve the text to better address those challenges and to support UNIFIL's efforts to maintain calm and stability in south Lebanon and the entire region. We therefore welcome the clear language added to the text of resolution 2695 (2023) on the independence of UNIFIL. The text calls on the Government of Lebanon to facilitate UNIFIL's prompt and full access to sites requested by UNIFIL, including "all locations of interest". We underscore that the Government of Lebanon must meet its responsibilities with regard to UNIFIL's freedom of movement, which it has been failing to do on several occasions.

While we would have liked to have seen no ambiguity in paragraph 15, as in resolution 2650 (2022), let us be clear that the text of paragraph 15 simply recognizes what the status-of-forces agreement foresees with regard to coordination for large movements of troops. In no way can it be interpreted or misused to delay, hinder or restrict UNIFIL's freedom of movement or ability to operate independently.

We are also pleased that, for the first time and at the request of the United Arab Emirates, the resolution has specifically addressed the need for UNIFIL to access unauthorized firing ranges. UNIFIL's clear freedom of movement is further affirmed by the unambiguous language in paragraph 16, which makes it clear that announced and unannounced patrols should not be restricted or hindered.

We thank the penholder, France, for its positive engagement with our proposals and their reflection of them in the final text. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates voted in favour of the resolution.

However, we are disappointed with the needless compromise to remove the unqualified reference to the Israeli occupation of Al-Ghajar, which was in previous drafts and, we think, enjoyed widespread support in the Council. We would also have preferred clear references to the increasing obstacles hampering UNIFIL's freedom of movement and its ability to reach all important sites, including areas where containers are placed by the Hizbullah-affiliated Green Without Borders. The language around locations of interest

should help UNIFIL monitor that activity more closely in future.

The United Arab Emirates also fails to understand the hesitation to name Hizbullah and its group, who are actively undermining UNIFIL's ability to conduct its mandate within its areas of operation. No amount of accommodation will change the fact that the pursuit of progress in Lebanon through partnership with Hizbullah has yielded only disappointment and misery, not least of all for the people of Lebanon. We also condemn the agendas aimed at silencing voices calling for peace in Lebanon while providing platforms to hostile voices who seek to undermine its security and stability.

The United Arab Emirates has always been and remains committed to supporting Lebanon's security and stability. Seventeen years ago, the United Arab Emirates was closely involved in regional and international efforts to bring the war between Israel and Hizbullah to an end, not least by helping to convey the regional point of view to the Council. Today we continue that role by putting the interests of the people of Lebanon and the entire region first and foremost. We look forward to the day when Lebanon can move steadily towards stability, reform, peace and development.

As this is your last meeting, Madam President, I wish to join others in congratulating you and your team on a successful presidency and wish Albania all the best next month.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

The United States is pleased to vote "yes" on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mandate. We thank France, the penholder, for all its efforts to bring us to this point.

We are extremely grateful for the service and sacrifice of the men and women who staff that important mission in pursuit of a more stable and prosperous future for the Lebanese people and the greater region. The ability of UNIFIL personnel to carry out their responsibilities independent of any restrictions is essential. And we have had long-standing concerns regarding actions by some actors to obstruct the mission's freedom of movement.

Significantly, resolution 2695 (2023) adopted today includes language strongly reaffirming UNIFIL's full freedom of movement, and its ability to conduct announced and unannounced patrols. It is imperative

that be fully implemented and that UNIFIL not face unacceptable obstacles to carrying out its mission.

We know UNIFIL has been unable to access a range of troubling sites across the Blue Line, including illegal firing ranges, Green Without Borders sites, rocket launch sites and tunnel sites. It is clear the main purpose of those sites is to facilitate Hizbullah's operations in southern Lebanon along the Blue Line. That constrains the mission from fully achieving the directives set forth in the mandate and hinders the mission's ability to reduce the likelihood of conflict.

The United States, as a steadfast partner of Lebanon, calls on the Government to take additional steps to ensure full implementation of the mandate, consistent with the terms of the status-of-forces agreement. That includes additional steps to mitigate any restrictions on UNIFIL's freedom of movement. We continue to support efforts to address other restrictions and believe it would be valuable for the Secretary-General to produce a report on that issue with recommendations for a way forward.

We are committed to addressing the activities of Green Without Borders. The United States Treasury Department sanctioned Green Without Borders, as well as its leaders, earlier this month for its activities in support of Hizbullah. And we made clear when announcing those sanctions that we will continue to support Lebanese civil society groups protecting Lebanon's natural environment while relentlessly pursuing Hizbullah and its support networks.

We believe the resolution adopted today and the broad support for it reaffirm UNIFIL's strong mandate and its freedom of movement. We therefore strongly endorse it.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Ms. Mrad (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): As a matter of fact, I was not planning to take the floor, and I did not prepare a written statement. However, I have just jotted down some points on the paper in front of me. My statement will therefore be improvised and coming from the heart.

At the outset, I would like to express, in my capacity as the representative of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations and on behalf of the

Government of Lebanon, our thanks to all Council members who have tried over the course of this long-winding path to listen to Lebanon's concerns and reflect them in resolution 2695 (2023) adopted today. I also specially thank the penholder, France, for the efforts undertaken to arrive at a text that could at a minimum win the consensus of all members.

Unfortunately, this is the first time that two Security Council members abstained in the voting on the resolution concerning the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). That is a very significant indicator.

I would like, first of all, to reaffirm from this rostrum my country's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006) and to the request to have peacekeeping troops on the ground in Lebanon. That request has been submitted year after year through an official letter from Lebanon addressed to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General demanding an extension of UNIFIL's mandate. That is to say, their presence in Lebanon is upon Lebanese request. The troops are for peacekeeping, not for imposing peace.

Regrettably, the text did not fully reflect all Lebanese concerns. It failed to take into consideration the particular characteristics of the situation on the ground. I am not saying that there are certain groups or individuals in Lebanon rejecting this resolution, whereas others approve of it. I am referring instead to the issue of sovereignty. Lebanon made great efforts to introduce amendments to the text only to maintain Lebanese sovereignty and that of the Lebanese Government. UNIFIL troops have full freedom of movement, but only in coordination with the Lebanese Government. Lebanon has never rejected, denounced or objected to the freedom of movement that UNIFIL troops enjoy. However, it was clear throughout the long path of negotiation that such freedom of movement must be controlled, first to maintain the safety of the troops and secondly to deliver on their tasks, pursuant to resolution 1701 (2006) and the Headquarters Agreement.

With regard to AL-Ghajar, or the area north of Al-Ghajar, Lebanon did not request to change the name of the geographic location. Instead, it asked for correcting and rectifying the use of the name, specifically that north of Al-Ghajar village is simply a notion of direction, not a new name. In that regard, the area north of Al-Ghajar was used the first time in the extension of the mandate-related resolutions. That

is why any correction in that context should be made through extension resolutions. As such, the request is related to editing rather, than to changing the name.

With regard to the occupation or presence north of Al-Ghajar, we must call a spade a spade. In his letter (S/2023/587, the Secretary-General was clear, and the United Nations narratives are clear when they describe that presence as occupation. We value the reports of the Secretary-General for their consistent language. We cannot cherry-pick; that fails to take into consideration the particularities of those countries. What we discuss in the corridors of the United Nations and in the decision-making organs takes us to platonic realms. Those narratives and utopias that we all read as diplomats working here make us look forward to reaching such realms in reality, but the real world is totally different. Those texts and narratives must be able to reflect the realities on the ground and to take into consideration the sensitivity and particularities of the situation. Otherwise, there will be a separation between the text and the reality. That, in turn, would cause a setback and will not allow us to reap the benefits that we all seek. All of us have the same common goal, but we differ in the modalities and approaches that we take. The devil is in the details, as they say.

In conclusion, the resolution to extend the mandate of UNIFIL falls under Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations. It was prompted by a request from Lebanon. It was not imposed on Lebanon. Why, then, resort to language in the resolution that looks very similar to that in resolutions adopted under Chapter

VII, as if we are dealing with a disguised Chapter VII resolution? Why should we stick a finger in our eye? Why create tension where there is no reason for it?

This resolution and the presence of UNIFIL troops in south Lebanon are the result of a conflict between Lebanon and Israel. It is not a resolution due to a conflict between a group of Lebanese people and UNIFIL. Why distort the conflict and give the impression that the problem is between a group of Lebanese people, who are part of the national fabric in Lebanon, and UNIFIL? That is not the case. There is very good relationship between UNIFIL and the people in the south.

UNIFIL undertakes development projects along with its peacekeeping role. Those are quick-impact projects that establish bridges between UNIFIL and the people of the south. When I say people, I do not mean a certain group of people. Rather, I refer to all the people of south Lebanon. There is no need to create disputes, because there is no reason for such disputes. The text should help to establish security, stability and peace, which we all want as a goal. Let the text be a supporting element, not a source of tension.

Through you, Madam President, we reiterate our thanks to all Security Council members. Lebanon reaffirms its commitment to all Council resolutions. Our request is a right one. When we discuss texts of resolutions, we must take into account peoples' concerns and governmental requests — because Governments know better.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.