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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS
INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON

(for the period from 17 July 1997 to 15 January 1998)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of Security Council resolution 1122 (1997) of 29 July 1997, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 January 1998. It covers developments since the previous report, dated 16 July 1997 (S/1997/550 and Corr.1).

II. SITUATION IN THE AREA OF OPERATION

2. During the past six months, hostilities continued between the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and its local Lebanese auxiliary, the de facto forces (DFF), on the one hand, and armed elements who have proclaimed their resistance against the Israeli occupation, on the other. The level of hostilities was higher than in the previous reporting period. UNIFIL recorded 249 operations by armed elements against IDF/DFF (20 in the second half of July, 38 in August, 51 in September, 37 in October, 48 in November, 39 in December and 16 in the first half of January). This was a significant increase from the 154 operations recorded in the previous reporting period. There were also reports of more than 197 operations north of the Litani River. The vast majority of those operations were carried out by the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of the Shiite Muslim Hizbullah organization. A number of them were carried out by the Shiite movement Amal, while the Islamic Jihad movement took responsibility for one. Three operations were attributed to other groups whose identity, however, was not confirmed. The armed elements employed small arms, mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank missiles, recoilless rifles, rockets and explosive devices. They fired more than 2,517 mortar rounds, rockets and anti-tank missiles, as compared to about 1,400 rounds in the previous reporting period. The fighting caused a number of casualties.

3. IDF/DFF, in response to attacks or in operations they initiated, employed artillery, mortars, tanks, helicopter gunships, fixed-wing aircraft and explosive devices. IDF continued its practice of conducting pre-emptive artillery bombardments. IDF also continued with long-range patrols beyond its forward positions. Two large-scale operations were conducted north of the Litani River. On 5 August, IDF helicopter troops landed west of Nabatiyah and detonated explosive devices, which killed Hizbullah members. On the night of 4 September, after landing at the Lebanese coast at Ansariyeh, an IDF unit was ambushed by armed elements and sustained several casualties. UNIFIL recorded more than 10,539 rounds of artillery, mortar, tank and missiles fired by IDF/DFF during the reporting period. IDF air raids were all against targets north of the Litani River, except for two attacks in the Nepalese battalion sector on 23 and 24 November. As before, the Israeli navy patrolled the Lebanese territorial waters in the south and continued to impose restrictions on local fishermen.

4. There was a significant increase in civilian casualties. Thirty-four civilians were killed, as compared to nine in the previous reporting period:

(a) In the Force's area of operations, three civilians were killed near Markabe by a road-side bomb explosion on 7 August. On 25 September, a civilian was wounded near Bayt Yahun by shrapnel from rockets fired by armed elements. On 5 October, another explosion near Markabe killed two civilians. The most serious incident occurred on 23 November when eight civilians were killed in Bayt Lif by mortar rounds fired by unidentified armed elements. On 5 December, three civilians were killed and one wounded near Majdal Silm, when explosive devices planted by IDF/DFF were detonated. On 5 and 8 January, one civilian each was injured respectively at Majdal Zun and Al Qulaylah by IDF/DFF shelling;

(b) A number of serious incidents were also reported from outside the area of operation. On 5 August, two civilians were killed and seven others were wounded at Libbaya by Israeli air raids, while a civilian was killed near Kfar Houne by a road-side bomb. On 7 August, a civilian was killed and five others were wounded at Kfar Melki by IDF/DFF shelling. On 8 August, a civilian was injured at Qiryat Shemona, Israel, by a rocket fired from Lebanon by unidentified persons. On 18 August, a road-side bomb explosion near Kfar Houne killed two civilians, who were family members of a DFF member. In retaliation, DFF shelled Sidon, killing 8 civilians and wounding 40 others. Following the incident, armed elements fired rockets into the Jezzine area, killing a civilian and injuring two others. The next day, the Islamic Resistance fired more than 50 rockets towards northern Israel, one of which injured a civilian near Marajayoun, while another injured a civilian near Qiryat Shemona. On 20 August, Israeli aircraft attacked several targets in Lebanon, injuring at least four civilians in western Bekaa valley. On the same day, a civilian was killed in the Jezzine area by a road-side bomb explosion. On 5 September, a civilian was caught in the exchange of fire and killed during the Israeli raid of Ansariyeh (see para. 3 above). On 12 September, a civilian as well as six Lebanese soldiers were killed near Sejoud by IDF fire during an Israeli helicopter attack against Lebanese army positions. On 8 November, a civilian was injured near Nabatiyah by an explosion of road-side bombs planted by IDF/DFF. There were other reports of civilian injuries caused by both armed elements and IDF/DFF firing.

5. UNIFIL continued its efforts to limit the conflict and to protect the inhabitants from the fighting. Through its network of checkpoints and observation posts and an active programme of patrolling as well as continuous contacts with the parties, the Force did its best to prevent its area of operations from being used for hostile activities and to defuse situations that could lead to escalation. It also deployed, as necessary, to provide a measure of protection to villages and to farmers working in the fields.

6. As reported in July 1996 (S/1996/575, para. 23), UNIFIL had obtained a commitment from IDF to respect a safety zone around UNIFIL positions and received assurances from the Islamic Resistance that they would not operate in the vicinity of UNIFIL positions. During the reporting period, both sides by and large showed restraint in this regard. Nevertheless, UNIFIL recorded a total of 73 firings at or close to its positions and personnel (41 by IDF, 26 by armed elements and 6 by unidentified elements). UNIFIL promptly protested all such instances to the authorities concerned. There were also cases in which armed elements conducted operations in the vicinity of United Nations positions. UNIFIL protested these through the Lebanese army.

7. During the night of 8 December, unknown persons detonated explosives in a United Nations position under construction near Bayt Lif. An accommodation building was destroyed and another building and equipment were damaged. UNIFIL raised the matter with the Lebanese authorities. There were a number of other hostile acts by armed elements against United Nations personnel. On 5 and 9 January, local elements of Hizbullah harassed United Nations personnel at gunpoint; on 6 January, they fired at a United Nations vehicle. UNIFIL vigorously protested those incidents and has received assurances that they will not recur.

8. During the reporting period, the monitoring group set up in accordance with the understanding of 26 April 1996 held 12 meetings at UNIFIL headquarters to consider complaints by Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL provided facilities for the meetings as well as transport to the members of the group.

9. Within the Israeli-controlled area (ICA), Israel continued to maintain a civil administration and security service. The infrastructure in ICA (road system, electricity, water supply, public buildings) continued to be improved, primarily owing to aid provided by the Government of Lebanon. However, ICA remained economically dependent on Israel, where more than 2,000 of the inhabitants go to work every day. IDF/DFF carried out sporadic search operations in several villages in ICA and made several arrests. IDF/DFF and its security apparatus on a number of occasions restricted the movement of the inhabitants.

10. UNIFIL continued to extend assistance to the civilian population in its area of operation in the form of medical care, casualty evacuation, harvest patrols, clothes, blankets, food, engineering works and the distribution of educational material and equipment to poorer schools. In addition, water projects, equipment or services for schools and orphanages, and supplies to social services and needy people were provided from resources made available by troop-contributing countries. UNIFIL medical centres and mobile teams provided care to an average of 5,200 civilian patients per month and a field dental programme treated approximately 160 cases per month. UNIFIL also assisted the Government of Lebanon in transporting and distributing supplies to villages in ICA, when those villages faced shortages owing to restrictions imposed by IDF/DFF. Throughout the period, UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon. As in the past, UNIFIL continued the disposal of unexploded ordnance in its area of operation. In all, 101 controlled explosions were carried out.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

11. As at 31 December 1997, UNIFIL comprised 4,468 troops from Fiji (585), Finland (492), France (247), Ghana (649), Ireland (608), Italy (46), Nepal (596), Norway (614) and Poland (631). UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 55 military observers of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization. In addition, UNIFIL employed 455 civilian staff, of whom 122 were recruited internationally and 333 locally. The deployment of UNIFIL is shown on the attached map. Major-General Jioji Konousi Konrote took over the command from Major-General Stanislaw F. Wozniak, who completed his tour of duty on 30 September 1997.

12. I regret to report the deaths of seven soldiers. On 6 August, an Irish soldier and four Italian soldiers were killed, when a UNIFIL helicopter crashed during a routine exercise. A Finnish soldier was killed in a traffic accident and a Fijian soldier died of natural causes. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 218 members of the Force have died: 76 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 90 in accidents and 52 from other causes. A total of 331 have been wounded by firing, or by mine or bomb explosions.

13. The problem of the rents owed by the Government of Lebanon to the owners of the land and premises used by UNIFIL has still not been resolved. Not all owners have received payment and there is continuing controversy over the lists of owners prepared by the Lebanese authorities. Some owners have requested that their properties be vacated. For operational, practical and budgetary reasons, only a few of those requests could be considered.

14. UNIFIL maintained close contact with the Lebanese authorities on matters of mutual concern. Those authorities provided valuable assistance in connection with the rotation of troops and logistic activities in Beirut. The Lebanese army was helpful in defusing confrontations with armed elements. It also provided accommodation for some UNIFIL contingents while on leave in Lebanon. The Force continued to cooperate with the Lebanese Internal Security Forces on matters pertaining to the maintenance of law and order.

IV. FINANCIAL MATTERS

15. By its resolution 51/233 of 13 June 1997, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL an amount of \$124,969,700 for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998, based on an average strength of 4,513 troops and a continuation of its existing responsibilities. The assessment of the appropriation, which is equivalent to some \$10.4 million per month, is subject to the decision of the Security Council to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 January 1998.

16. As at 31 December 1997, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIFIL amounted to \$111,071,748. The total unpaid assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to \$1.6 billion.

V. OBSERVATIONS

17. During the past six months, the situation in southern Lebanon remained volatile and continued to give cause for serious concern. The level of hostilities rose, and the increase in the number of civilians who were killed or injured is particularly worrisome. I am also concerned at the harassment of United Nations personnel.

18. The Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations described his Government's position on the situation in a letter he addressed to me on 6 January 1998 (S/1998/7). By the same letter, he conveyed his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months.

19. The Government of Israel has advised the Secretariat informally that its position is reflected in an interview of Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai with the weekly magazine Al-Watan al-Arabi, which was made public at the beginning of January. In the interview, the Defence Minister stated Israel's readiness to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978), subject to a number of conditions.

20. UNIFIL has continued its efforts to limit the conflict and to protect the inhabitants from the fighting. Although UNIFIL has been prevented from implementing the mandate contained in resolution 425 (1978), its contribution to stability and the protection it is able to afford the population of the area remain important. I therefore recommend that the Security Council accede to the request of the Government of Lebanon and extend the mandate of UNIFIL for another period of six months, until 31 July 1998.

21. I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to some \$111 million. This represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full and to clear all remaining arrears. I should also like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force, in particular those of developing countries, for their understanding and patience in these difficult circumstances.

22. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major-General Jioji Konousi Konrote, his predecessor, Major-General Stanislaw F. Wozniak, and to the men and women under their command for the manner in which they have carried out their difficult and often dangerous task. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, on their countries and on the United Nations.
