President Ivan Gašparovič of the Slovak Republic visits UNFICYP
Voices must be heard - Civil Society and the Cyprus Problem

Cyriots must feel that their voices have been heard and that they have had a say in shaping that solution – the Cyprus problem must have a Cyriot solution, SRSG Michael Møller said, opening the International Civil Society Fair at Ledra Palace in early May.

There can be no sustainable solution to the Cyprus problem unless and until every Cyriot is convinced that he or she truly understands all its components and ramifications.

On an unseasonably warm day, SRSG Møller welcomed members of the greater civil society to Ledra Palace area where he and U.S. Ambassador Ronald Schlicher launched the first-time event.

He congratulated UNDP-ACT and Jaco Clilier for organising the three-day event and said he hoped the fair would serve to promote a more vibrant civil society – “one that is alive and alert to both the challenges the island faces and the potential that beckons”.

The Chief of Mission noted that civil society is the “lifeblood of a healthy democratic culture”. A community’s sense of democratic well-being “thrives on open and ongoing debate about the basic premises that shape governance and their relationship with, and the role of, the individual citizen”. It is a basic function of democracy to ensure that people have the opportunity to join in “a communal dialogue, free of rancour, on the issues of the day in order to participate in the decision-making processes that impact on their lives, he said.

“Hence the importance of getting the island’s youth involved so that they can participate in this debate, which, after all, is about their future and their prospects. An active and involved civil society is key to how that future is shaped.”

“Creating a sustainable peace requires that every Cyriot – individually and collectively – takes part in the debate over what their country is going to look like in the future and in helping unleash its potential.”

Understanding and peace is best achieved by those who already know each other and is sustainable if imposed by “outsiders”, Mr. Møller noted. The recent UNFICYP inter-communal survey showed that Cyriots make a clear distinction between meddling and facilitating by outsiders in bi-communal activities. Yet majorities in both communities were “convinced that day-to-day bi-communal contact is essential to pave the way for a united Cyprus”, even though the actual number of Cyriots engaged in inter-communal activities “remains surprisingly small.”

The SRSG said the prevailing spirit of scepticism and disillusionment recorded by the survey about attitudes towards prospects for an early Cyprus settlement, “shows the crying need for dialogue, debate and discussion between and among the island’s communities on all the issues which make the mosaic of life on the island and, just as importantly, the need to overcome the pervasive and persistent lack of trust between the two communities.”

Civil society serves both as “catalyst” and “early warning system”. It is “a communal megaphone enabling people to voice their concerns, or a springboard for individual and collective initiatives for the public good. The challenge is to involve civil society partners responsibly with government in the service of all through a culture of openness, accountability and good governance.

“Clearly, the politics of reconciliation demand that the voices of civil society and citizens be heard. Finding a solution to the de facto division of the island must involve a process where Cyriots grapple with issues such as the shape of Cyprus society 10 and more years from now; keeping the island’s unique environment intact; managing social realities such as multiculturism, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and social exclusion, etc.

“However, the debate requires a societal context and the right atmosphere. There is a need for catalysts like politicians, academics, public figures and the media to promote and support the debate. Indeed, a national media that informs objectively and educates factually is a must. The debate and must and should tackle controversies, but in a fair and balanced manner, where different views can be expressed and people have an opportunity to have an open voice.”

Every Cyriot should be an active participant in the debate, Mr. Møller concluded.

A total of 82 NGOs participated, and approximately 2,000 people visited the fair between 3-5 May.
Peacekeeping tends to be associated with blue berets. A stereotype image is that of a UN soldier or police officer providing humanitarian assistance to civilians in war-ravaged countries around the world. Yet peacekeeping is more than intervention or post-conflict humanitarian assistance. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, about normalisation and rebuilding. Not just the reassembling of shattered infrastructure, but the long, slow haul of restoring trust and confidence in the day-to-day activities that underpin the social structure so many of the more fortunate take for granted.

Peacekeepers tasked with rebuilding are defined by the United Nations as, “soldiers, civilian police officers and other civilian personnel who monitor and observe a peace process in post-conflict areas and assist ex-combatants in implementing peace agreements they may have signed.”

The Blue Beret spoke to several UNFICYP military, police and civilian peacekeepers who all concur that international peace may be a lofty ideal that seems unattainable in the world today, but being a small cog in the wheel, trying to alter the course of events, is worth the effort.

SSgt. Michal Ivan, UNFICYP Force photograph, who is on his second mission to Cyprus, said that for a Slovakian soldier, joining a peacekeeping mission is voluntary, yet it is a much sought-after position. A cynic would say the economic benefits are the drawing card, but Michal points out that no amount of money could replace the lives lost by peacekeepers on dangerous missions around the world. He views peacekeeping as an opportunity to work in a multinational environment where his training and skills as a soldier offer him the opportunity to help people. “International Day of Peacekeeping serves as a reminder of the soldiers who lost their lives in the service of peace in Cyprus and other countries,” he said.

Sgt. Paul Rhodes from 8 Transport Regiment in Sector 2, although on his first UN mission, has served in other peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan. As a British soldier, he does not have the choice of joining a peacekeeping mission and says he does not differentiate between being in the service of his country or that of the UN. He has been trained to face the enemy and defend his territory and, if necessary, return fire. However, the kowtow here, he says, is being the buffer between two opposing forces and remaining impartial. He would like to see developments towards normalisation during his tour here, and says that the opening of the Ledra Street crossing would be, for him, a great achievement that he could say he was a small part of.

Argentinian Capt. Miguel Cato, Civil Affairs Liaison Officer, is on his first UN mission and admits it is a challenge overcoming the cultural barriers, while at the same time adjusting to different work environments and procedures. “The greatest challenge, however, is being the ‘bridge-builder’ between the two communities on the island,” he said, adding that the responsibility of providing the framework for political, social, economic and environmental normalisation is a complex task.

Being a peacekeeper with UNFICYP is more complex than being on a battlefield. In battle, you are prepared to fight and implement a plan of action. With a peacekeeping role, there are more grey areas where you have to adjust from being a soldier to a peacekeeper and have to complement the efforts of the military. You are monitoring and observing a peace process. In the case of UNFICYP, you are in a BZ where civilians may live and work between two opposing forces.

Marjano says he is not looking for recognition as a peacekeeper because as a soldier, he is taught to carry out orders. But, he says, “It is nice to be acknowledged for the work we do, as well as pay tribute to those who have lost their lives for peace.”

Capt. Csaba Baksos, SO2 Ops Policy and Planning, is on his third peacekeeping mission, having served previously in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

In Hungary, he is stationed at the Peace and Support Training Centre where, as an instructor, he trained soldiers for deployment on peacekeeping missions. He is, therefore, familiar with the difficulties faced by peacekeepers sent to conflict areas to either intervene, provide humanitarian assistance or oversee the return to normal conditions.

In Cyprus, he says, although the situation appears peaceful, there are minefields and opposing forces with rifles and ammunition facing each other while our peacekeepers are unarmed and need to use negotiation skills to resolve disputes when they arise. Pointing to the UN badge on his left arm and the Hungarian badge on his right arm, Csaba says these are both visible to civilians and military, “identifying not only our nationality, but also the responsibilities we have as peacekeepers.”

Sgt. Anne Byrne, Irish UNPOL officer working with Civil Affairs, is on her first mission and admits it's quite different to the work she did at home as a police officer. Being part of Civil Affairs means working as a team not only with police but also civilian staff and military who together accomplish their tasks. “My boss at home is a police officer, but here I work in cooperation with military liaison.” Also she says the type of work is different to her usual crime investigations. The issues Civil Affairs deals with are related to farming, well drilling, construction in the BZ as well as dealing with civilians from the two communities that may have their own issues. Anne says she volunteered to join a peacekeeping mission because she wanted to do something completely different.

“In Ireland, I work in a relatively small area and I’m not community policing. I wanted to do something completely different, work with different agencies and cultures.” Work at UNFICYP is busier than she expected and her community policing background is useful in the liaison work. Anne says she would advise others to become peacekeepers, whether they are uniformed or civilian, as it is important to be involved not only in our own problems but in assisting others solve theirs.

The uniformed world of soldiers and police tends to be male dominated but, as Anne notes, the contribution of women has complemented the work of male peacekeepers positively.

David Wilkins, OIC ITU, is a civilian peacekeeper who manages and supervises the ITU unit within CITS. This encompasses all hardware and software requirements for the mission. This is David’s fourth UN mission. He has served in Angola, Brindisi and Israel, as well as visiting missions on temporary assignments, including Georgia, Lebanon and Syria. Having served 11 years as a peacekeeper he says, “I am a very proud and staunch believer in the UN and I believe it does have a purpose and serves a great cause in the world.” David rejects what he says is often unfair criticism of the organisation, particularly towards the SG. “I believe he is not the SG people who work in the organisation who take the decisions. It’s the contributing countries, the Security Council and the General Assembly who ultimately decide where the UN does or does not...
On 13 April, UNPOL held a medal parade for 34 UNPOL officers who were presented with the UN medal. Recipients comprised members of the Argentinian, Australian, Bosnian, Croatian, Dutch, Salvadorian, Indian and Italian contingents. The presentation was held in the courtyard of the International Cafeteria at the UNPA. Among the guests were members of senior management, as well as Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the contributing countries. The Ambassador of Bosnia Herzegovina, Mrs Jadranka Maslese, came all the way from Israel for the occasion. A delegation of police from The Netherlands was present as well. The ceremony was conducted by Deputy Senior Police Adviser Col Speedie, with speeches by the Senior Police Adviser, Carla Van Maris and Acting Chief of Mission, Force Commander Maj. Gen. Rafael José Barni.

In her welcoming speech, SPA Van Maris stated, "When considering the many differences in background, be it culture, style of policing or international experience, it never fails to amaze and impress me how well these UNPOL officers manage their quite demanding task at UNFICYP. Apart from the occasional exception, there exists a great cooperation and dedication to the job. Communication, tolerance and mutual respect are, after all, the key words to success."

Maj. Gen. Barni commented during his speech that the UN has always had exceptionally good relationships with both communities in Cyprus. He said this was because of the ability to communicate in an appropriate manner and deal with issues of concern to both sides in a balanced and non-biased manner. A reception was held after the main ceremony. UNPOL members, family and friends were able to convey their congratulations to the proud medalists. Croatian medal recipient Sgt. Vedran Zgela's attempt to return from holidays at home in time for the parade missed the main ceremony when his plane was delayed by a few hours. However, Maj. Gen. Barni was kind enough to hold another short ceremony to present Sgt. Zgela with his medal during the reception afterwards.

Every 25th of April at dawn, Australians and New Zealanders from cities and towns gather at monuments all over the world to commemorate and remember the ANZAC legend. It was on this date in 1915 that the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed on the beaches of Gallipoli, Turkey. They landed one mile off course and encountered well-defended positions on brutal terrain. Eight months of tortuous inch-by-inch warfare in myriads of trenches and tunnels, through steep ravines and over impossible cliffs resulted in tremendous casualties. From this landscape, a special Australian spirit was born — an identity of courage, endurance, sacrifice and mateship. It is that special sensation when the bugle sounds and the flag is raised that gives every Australian reason to be proud.

Over the course of the Gallipoli campaign, the ANZACs and allies advanced little more than one kilometre. Whilst the ANZACs were part of a larger coalition, the proportional losses were staggering. Over half the Australians who fought became casualties with 8,700 dead. Nearly 90% of the New Zealanders became casualties with 2,700 killed. The Gallipoli campaign had such a profound effect that 25 April quickly became the day on which all Australians remember the sacrifice of those who died in war and peacekeeping.

In Cyprus this year, the Australian Police (AUSTPOL) Contingent led by Commander Col Speedie, their families and invited guests attended the dawn service at Wayne’s Keep Cemetery in the buffer zone not far from the UN Protected Area. A candlelit path guided the way, for guests bearing sprigs of rosemary, past soldiers’ graves to seats near the Cross of Sacrifice. The gathering light of dawn, from the very direction of the Gallipoli beaches, gradually filtered over the eastern horizon, revealing the eerie silhouettes of Turkish soldiers in hilltop OPs. The haunting bugle notes of “The Last Post” echoed across the quiet of the cemetery gravestones, reminding all those present of the sacrifices made.

At the conclusion of the service, the guests were hosted by AUSTPOL to a “gunfire breakfast” in the International Mess. A cup of coffee with a dash of Bundaberg Rum and some ANZAC biscuits were also served, making the breakfast uniquely Australian.

Many of the guests also attended the CIVPOL Club to be treated to a demonstration of the ANZAC trench game of Two-Up, followed by a traditional Australian barbeque.

AUSTRALIAN High Commissioner Garth Hunt presented UNFICYP’s Ms. Diana Bridger (above) with a letter of thanks from the Australian Federal Minister for Veteran Affairs for her well-recognised efforts in organising this special day for the last nine years.

Australian Police (AUSTPOL) Commander Col Speedie (above) present the UN medal to UNPOL officers.

Without administration and civilian support staff, the military and police could not function, while the military and police are the face of the United Nations and frequently put themselves in the line of fire.

Referring to the International Peacekeepers Day, David says: "Many people have laid down their lives for the United Nations and have died in the service of peace. They should be honoured, remembered and recognised for their dedication and commitment to the organisation. It is also a good time for self-reflection. What are we all here for? We are not here just to pick up a pay cheque at the end of the month. We all have a role and destiny in the future of the UN.”

David says he is a peacekeeper “for the long haul,” describing himself as “an international nomad” whose family is the United Nations wherever it takes him. “When you are a peacekeeper, the world becomes a much smaller place and you have colleagues and friends all over the world.”

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Netha Kreouzos

"At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we shall remember them"
**Presidential Visits**

SRSG Michael Moller, the UNFICYP Chief of Mission, received two Presidents during the April-May period, first meeting with the President of the Slovak Republic Mr. Ivan Gašparovič on 18 April, and then with the President of the Federal Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer on 12 May. Both countries have peacekeepers serving with UNFICYP.

**President of the Slovak Republic Mr. Ivan Gašparovič**

On 18 April, the President of the Slovak Republic, Mr. Ivan Gašparovič, accompanied by his wife, Silvia Gašparovič, the Minister of Defence of the Slovak Armed Forces, František Kašicky, and other political representatives, arrived in Cyprus.

Following a visit to Chief of Mission Michael Moller and Force Commander Maj. Gen. Rafael Barni, the visitors got a chance to find out more about the soldiers’ everyday mission life when they toured Slovak Engineers’ quarters in the UNPA.

The President and his party then travelled to Pyla to meet members of the Slovak Contingent who are stationed there. Patrol Base 126, overlooking the village, had been refurbished especially for the occasion.

After a briefing by Commander Sector 4, Lt. Col. Jaroslav Schönvicky, the President was introduced to members of Sector 4, many of whom had travelled to Pyla from Camp Štefánik, Famagusta, for the occasion.

Highlight of the special Slovakian buffet lunch prepared for the visit was the informal discussion between members of the delegation and Slovak soldiers. Many asked the President and the Defence Minister questions about the recently introduced revised military law and the new standards of military service. The President expressed his satisfaction at the high esteem in which members of the Slovak Contingent are held.

**President of the Federal Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer**

The Federal President of the Republic of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer, paid an official visit to the Republic of Cyprus from 10 to 12 May, accompanied by his wife, Margit, and a high ranking delegation.

On 12 May, President Fischer visited HQ UNFICYP. He met with the Chief of Mission, Mr. Michael Moller, and the Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Rafael José Barni. Then Chief of Staff Col. Peter Fraser-Hopewell briefed the President and his party on the current situation in UNFICYP.

A vehicle tour through the buffer zone in Sector 2 gave the President and his party a sense of the duty of the UN soldiers on the ground.

In the afternoon, President Fischer and Maj. Gen. Barni laid a wreath at the monument for three Austrian soldiers, killed in action in 1974 in Goshi.

After the commemoration, President Fischer congratulated Maj. Gen. Barni on the excellent atmosphere in UNFICYP.

On a lighter note, the President asked his wife to take a picture of himself with UNFICYP Force Photographer Sgt. Michal Ivan saying, “It’s about time you have a picture of yourself”!

**“Kafenio” or “Kahve”**

The coffee shop, or “Kafenio” for Greek Cypriots and “Kahve” (short for Kahvehane) for Turkish Cypriots, plays an integral role in village life on the island. Whether it’s a Turkish Cypriot or Greek Cypriot village, the idea is the same – the coffee shop is located in the centre or in the central square of the village. Larger villages may have more than one coffee shop, but they can usually be found in the central square at the heart of the village.

It is where the residents, as well as visitors, gather to drink small, pungent cups of their favourite black beverage, either “sketo”/“sade”, (without sugar), “mehito”/“orta” (medium – one spoon of sugar) or “glyki”/“shekerli” (sweet – two spoons of sugar).

If one is not a coffee drinker, there is always tea from herbs growing in the mountains (spadgia, mint and anise), and for those who want to soothe their indigestion after a heavy meal, there is “Afroza”/“Perisgan”, a type of sherbet that fizzes when water is added and must be drunk immediately to have any effect.

Villagers gather in the coffee shop to chat with friends, play cards or “tavli” (backgammon), or just meet and see other people. It is also the right place to obtain all the latest news of the village, the country and the whole world for that matter.

Coffee shops were restricted to men who played the important socio-economic roles in their respective communities. Local politics and other community issues were discussed, private business deals could be made in the setting of the coffee shop, as well as wedding dowry arrangements between the fathers of the bride and groom. Women visited the coffee shops only for special occasions like “Karagiozi” (puppet theatre) performances, or to listen to the radio and later, from 1956, to watch television.

Although nowadays everyone is welcome, in practice mostly men remain the regular customers of coffee shops across the island.

Keeping in with their traditional role where important socio-economic community issues are discussed, the coffee shops in buffer zone villages have become informal meeting places where Turkish and Greek Cypriots who live, work or farm in the buffer zone are able to raise their concerns and discuss possible ways of dealing with issues affecting them with the UN peacekeepers.

The Blue Beret accompanied the Civil Affairs SCAT team members Cpl. Noé Amaya from El Salvador and Lt. Dante Contreras from Argentina on one of their coffee shop visits to Lefke and Kato Pyrgos. Arriving at the first coffee shop, Lt. Contreras, concluded the visit by saying, “that is our table whenever we come here”. Sure enough, the regulars soon start arriving to pick up farming permits and apply for new ones.

The welcome is evident in the insistence of all the “customers” wanting to buy refreshments for the peacekeepers. Their work includes discussing areas where farming is permitted, issuing farming and work permits, and resolving any problems that may arise within the BZ.

After an hour, their work is complete and the peacekeepers pack up their briefcases to move on to the next coffee shop in Kato Pyrgos. Here a similar scene unfolds, with the peacekeepers being ushered by the coffee shop owner to their regular table, offering them refreshments while they await their customers. Soon, a few farmers arrive with their permits for renewal or to pick up ones they applied for at the previous meeting.

Noé says this is the first time he has been involved in community policing and says he finds the work rewarding as he is able to do something positive for the community. Dante concurs, noting that their interaction with the community, whether it’s issuing a permit or facilitating a pilgrimage to a church in the BZ, is a small but positive step in the right direction.
Old foes working side-by-side

It may be the 25th anniversary of the Falklands War this year, but British soldiers training from the UNFICYP Roulement Regiment in Nicosia have been enjoying working side-by-side with the Argentinians in perfect harmony as part of joint patrols with the United Nations.

Seventeen soldiers from West Troop, 8 Transport Regiment RLC, have spent a week helping to man an Argentinian Platoon base in Morphou, while the Argentinian Contingent banters handover with their new arrivals.

That has meant British and Argentinian soldiers deploying together: “At first, I wasn’t sure what to expect as the Argentinians are used to quite different meals to ourselves, and what with the language barrier, communication has been a bit tricky at times. “But it soon became clear that with the empty plates coming back, I was doing the right thing!” Indeed, for many of the Argentinian soldiers, a taste of British Army cooking and in this area, the results have been perhaps a little surprising. The food has been a total success!”

“As a professional soldier, it is important to learn from others, and I think that has been the case for all of us in the last week.”

One thing the Argentinian troops may not have experienced before is British Army cooking, and in this area, the results have been perhaps a little surprising. The food has been a total success!

As for the future and six months working with the United Nations in Cyprus on Op TOSCA, almost all the soldiers are united in looking forward to what is a very different six-month operational tour.

LCpl. Gregor Nicolson, of the Catterick based Regiment, said: “We all know that this will be a challenging tour, although in different ways to Iraq or Afghanistan, where many in the Regiment have been before. “Out here, the emphasis is much more political, and every incident can have serious implications – we have to understand the country’s perspective, all at the same time.”

“But it is also true that being here on a summer tour has the potential to be a great opportunity. We all hope to get involved in as many outside activities as possible, and get to see some of the recreational side of the island.”

And for some soldiers, the tour has already been a way to bond with team members.

Pte. Darren Archer, who just moved out on to Iraq and was last deployed to the Falkland Islands, said: “I prefer it here to back home. At least now we get away from all the worries of everyday life and work with mates, where it is often) chilled out and we are doing a real job in a unique environment.”

As Pte. Archer said: “We’ve been here that we have been given the same order from our bosses,” he said. “We both have to win it!”

Contingent winners of that competition have been argued over by the soldiers at the Platoon base in Morphou well into the night, the chance to work with a once-OPposing army has been educational and well-enjoyed throughout.

As Pte. Archer said: “We’ve had some good fun together, a lot of banter of course, and also some evenly-contested games of football after work.”

“All the soldiers we have met here have been a good laugh and not afraid to talk to us, even if our Spanish and their English meant for a lot of sign-language at times – the right sort of sign-language of course!”

“Its been a bit of an eye-opener and we’ve all made some good mates. I hope we can work together again in Cyprus before we go home.”

Capt. Gary Allen

8 Transport Regiment RLC

8 Transport Column, Royal Army Service Corps, was formed in Munster, West Germany, in 1964 and assumed the role of the carriage of 1 (BR) Corps special weapons. Protection was provided by a dedicated mechanised infantry battalion and the whole organisation was given the codename BANNED Support Group (WSG). On the formation of the Royal Corps of Transport (RCT) on 15 July 1965, the unit was re-titled 8 Transport Regiment RLC.

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Sector 1 Rotation

Sector One’s rotation, which took place between 6 and 23 April, saw the departure of Deputy Commanding Officer Lt. Col. Hector Marcelo Tomas who handed the post over to Lt. Col. Pablo Eugenio Chort (see page 14).

The arrival of Task Force 29 marked 14 years of uninterrupted Argentinian presence in UNFICYP. The Sector continues to include personnel from the armed forces of Chile and Paraguay, and its responsibilities cover a buffer zone area stretching across 80 km of terrain.

Sector 1 currently comprises 254 members. Task Force 29 will serve with the mission until next October.

New MOLOs join Sector 1

Along with the Sector 1 rotation which took place early April, six new Military Observation Liaison Officers arrived from Argentina. They are all posted on a one-year tour.

A 10-day course began on 10 April where the MOLOs were briefed on several topics, including communications, map-reading, driving skills, negotiation procedures, etc. The extensive course ended with a final exercise on the ground.

On 20 April, diplomas were presented to all course attendants at St. Michael’s School by Force Commander Maj. Gen. Rafael Barni.

Pilgrimage to Agios Georgios

Within Sector 1’s buffer zone area is the abandoned village of Agios Georgios, located approximately 1.5 km from San Martín Camp. Sector 1’s OPT 23 is positioned just east of the village.

On 1 May, nearly 160 villagers arrived at Sector 1 for a pilgrimage. The religious activity started with a mass, held in the Orthodox Chapel located inside San Martín Camp. The pilgrims then walked to OPT 23 where they visited the now abandoned village.

Argentinian blue berets, SCAT 1 and UNPOL deployed personnel and vehicles to escort and assist the pilgrims. The three pillars worked together in order to ensure that the whole event went off without disturbance and according to plan.

At the end of the pilgrimage, which was a complete success, the villagers thanked UNFICYP’s peacekeepers and requested a return visit in 2008.

Visitors to UNFICYP

UNFICYP extended the usual courtesies when the Chief of Mission and Force Commander received the following visitors during April and May:

- H.E. Ms. Mandisa Dona Marasha, High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa with the SRSG – 9 May
- H.E. Mr. Bae Young-Han, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea with the Chief of Staff – 17 May
- Austrian university students – 26 April
- Finnish veteran’s reunion – 19 April
- 92 UK military air cadets, ranging in age from 15 to 21 years, arrived at the UNPA for a familiarisation tour – 26 April
- Union for Europe of the Nations delegation, led by MEP Brian Crowley (front) – 15 May
Lt. Col. Keith Robinson
spent life as a junior officer with 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, as a degree student at the Royal Military College of Science; and with 31 Forward Observation Group (FOS) in Pulaski. He served in Northern Ireland, BATUS, Hong Kong, Cyprus and the Falkland Islands, before retiring as a Major in 2011. He then held a number of staff and command appointments within the Directorate of Equipment Capability. His first posting was as a general support troop commander in Germany where he undertook exercises to Poland, Oman, Kenya, the Czech Republic and Belgium. Posted to Tidworth, England, he then deployed to Kosovo.

Lt. Col. Ladislav Dovhun
arrived in UNFICYP on 20 April. He graduated from the Slovak Military Academy in 1991, and continued his defence studies at King’s College London from 2004 to 2005. He has completed defence courses in Advanced Military Studies (UK), International Staff Officers’ Orientation (The Netherlands), the Operational Planning Workshop (Lithuania) and the Joint Services Command and Staff College (the UK).

Lt. Col. Klaus Peer
was born in 1962 in Leoben, Styria, Austria, and graduated as an infantry officer in 1987. He left the armed forces in 1987 and took up a position as an engineer with a computer company. He rejoined in 1989 as a platoon leader and company commander in the 10th Infantry Regiment. Lt. Col. Peer has served twice with UNFICYP, from 1992 to 1993 as a platoon leader 1st Coy in Sector 4, and as Deputy Commander and then Commander 2 Coy, Sector 4 from 1995 to 1996. In 1998, he left 10th Infantry Regiment and joined the Federal Ministry of Defence in Vienna. In 2003, at the rank of Major, he took up the post of Ops Info Officer in UNDOF for one year. He was then promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in 2007.

Lt. Col. Peer is married to Silvia and they have one daughter, Sophie, aged 16.

Lt. Col. Gonzalo Villagran
was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a member of the Argentinian Army (artillery unit), Lt. Col. Villagran has served in UNFICYP in 1992 as a Military Observer in UNIKOM (1999) and as the Training Officer in MINUSTAH (2005). Before arriving in UNFICYP, he was in charge of the courses and training division at Caecopaz, the Argentinian Joint Press Officers’ Training Centre. Lt. Col. Villagran is married to Matilde. His hobbies include football, history and business studies.

Lt. Col. Pablo Eugenio Chort
joined Sector 1 on 1 November. Born on 11 April 1970 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, he graduated from the Argentine Air Force Academy in 1995. He then served as a pilot with the Argentine Air Force in Brazil, before attending the Argentine Military General Staff College in Buenos Aires. In 2003, as a Major, he took command of the 6th Special Mountain Troops Company in Patagonia for two years. Then he was posted to the 6th Mountain Brigade HQ as a staff officer.

His overseas missions included a mountain course at the Military Mountain School in Aosta, Italy, Military Observer in UNIKOM, Staff Officer at the KFOR HQ and a Peace Support Operations Course at the Naval Post Graduate School in California, USA. Lt. Col. Chort has a degree in Strategy and Organisations and also an MA in Strategy and Geopolitics. He is married and has three sons. His interests include running and squash.
Secretary-General calls for solidarity with detained staff

Kidnapping, assault, robbery, theft, harassment and detention continue to be grim realities for United Nations personnel and our colleagues in the media and non-governmental community. In his message on 25 March to mark our solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members, Ban Ki-moon noted that there are 14 staff members currently under arrest, detained or missing, with respect to whom the United Nations family of organisations has been unable to exercise fully their right to protection.

“The International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members is thus an important occasion on which to underscore not only the plight of those who have been incarcerated, but the broader need for peacekeepers, civilian staff and others to be able to pursue their work free of impediment and mortal threat,” he said.

The SG also reminded that it is 22 years since UN staff member Alec Gillett was abducted by armed men in Beirut while working for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He has never been seen since, and there has been no final resolution to his case.

The SG pointed out that legal protection is essential for international and national staff alike and noted that 81 countries have become party to the United Nations Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel, while another 43 have signed it. Urging the Organisation’s membership to embrace this Convention, he noted it as a key piece of the architecture of protection that also includes the Geneva Conventions, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, and other instruments.

A strong commitment to staff security is especially timely given the dramatic increase in the number of UN field personnel in recent years, and the Organisation’s growing involvement in delicate tasks such as criminal justice.

“Urged governments and all involved to uphold their responsibilities, from prevention to protection – and prosecution when violations and crimes have occurred,” he said.

In a World Press Freedom Day message on 3 May 2007, the SG voiced concern for the safety of BBC journalism Alan Johnston, while noting that over the past year, more than 150 media professionals have lost their lives in the line of duty.

Attacks on freedom of the press are attacks against international law, against humanity, against freedom itself – against everything the United Nations stands for, he said.

“A free, fearless press is among the very foundations of democracy and peace.”

May 3 was this year’s International Day of Families, and this year’s theme was “Families and Persons with Disabilities”.

For many persons with disabilities, family life has been, and remains, a source of empowerment. For others, however, their family has perhaps been overprotective, restricting their growth as individuals. Tragically, for others still, their family has viewed them with stigma or shame, and has even become a source of abuse and neglect.

Accordingly, UNFICYP’s Conduct and Discipline Unit will be responsible for conduct and discipline issues, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and will be responsible for the missions of UNTSO, UNSCO, UNDOF, UNIFIL, UNLB, and UNFICYP.

Mr. Hayde, who will be based in UNIFIL, Lebanon, took up his position on 30 March. His Unit will be joined by Ms. Mumbi Njau, a civilian Conduct and Discipline Officer. A military officer of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel is also assigned by DPKO as a member of the Unit. Both report to the CCDO. The CCDO itself reports directly to the Chief of Mission with respect to all conduct and discipline issues, including all categories of mission personnel.

Mr. Hayde will be visiting UNFICYP on a monthly basis. He invited all categories of personnel to feel free to contact him on any issue they wish to discuss relating to conduct and discipline, regardless of rank, and stressed that all matters will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

His comments were received with a positive reaction from those present.

Mr. Hayde can be reached at UNIFIL on the following numbers:

Office: +1-212-963-3303/4, Ext: 6727 +961 1 826 727
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Alvaro de Soto’s service to the United Nations

Alvaro de Soto’s service to the United Nations wrapped up 25 years of dedicated work for the Organisation. On 7 May, the Secretary-General expressed deep gratitude for Mr. de Soto’s outstanding service.

During a distinguished career both at UN headquarters and in the field, the diplomatic talent of Under-Secretary-General Alvaro de Soto were in high demand around the world, from El Salvador to Myanmar, Cyprus to Western Sahara, and most recently in the search for peace in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Mr. de Soto made a decisive mark in the Central American peace process. The agreements he helped to broker in El Salvador not only brought a better future to the people of that country, but also became a model for UN peacemaking efforts elsewhere. From November 1999 to May 2004, he served as the Secretary-General’s Special Adviser to Cyprus and helped create what came to be known as the Annan plan – the most comprehensive plan ever formulated for the island. Mr. de Soto’s contributions to the development of UN practices in conflict mediation and resolution will be a lasting part of his legacy in the Organisation.

The SG joined UN staff in wishing him the very best in his future endeavours.

Town Hall Meetings

Conduct and Discipline

Mr. Wayne Hayde, the newly appointed Regional Chief Conduct and Discipline Officer (CCDO), welcomed all UNFICYP headquarters staff to a Town Hall Meeting, held at the International Cafeteria on 11 May.

He outlined the nature of his appointment, explaining that in accordance with his duties and responsibilities, all incidents, reports, complaints and other issues relating to conduct and discipline are to be addressed to the Unit, either directly or through the UNFICYP Conduct and Discipline Focal Points (see box).

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UNFICYP Survey

On 27 April, Senior Adviser Wlodek Cibor welcomed Mr. Alexandros Lordos and Mr. Erol Kaymak to the International Cafeteria for a Town Hall Briefing on the the polling results from an island-wide survey conducted by UNFICYP in January/February 2007.

A sample of 1,000 Turkish Cypriots and 1,000 Greek Cypriots were interviewed in their respective languages face-to-face in addition to a special sample of 100 Turkish Cypriots and 250 Greek Cypriots, all resident within the UN buffer zone for comparison with the general population.

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The Blue Beret – May 2007

Winners of North Pole race pledge funds to UN refugee agency

Two intrepid young Britons have won an Arctic sprint to the magnetic North Pole which they say should boost their chances of raising £495,000 for the United Nations refugee agency. Co-organiser Jock Wishart confirmed that former UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) staffer Jake Morland and teacher James Turner reached the Pole on 2 May and edged out five other teams to win the 2007 Polar Race. The two, racing as Team Refuge, trudged across 560 km of snow and ice in just over two weeks, almost seven hours ahead of second-placed Polar Horizon and five days faster than the first-placed team, which included a 62-year-old woman and her son.

Jake Morland (right) and James Turner

The UN Buffer Zone Cycle ride

On 27 and 28 April, British soldiers serving with HQ BRITCON completed a charity buffer zone cycle ride, which encompassed the whole BZ less the Kokkina and Louroujina pockets.

Friday started nice with an early meeting at HQ BRITCON. Raring to start with our go-faster sunglasses and ridiculously tight cycling shorts, the majority of us were a little shy of the full kit. After a quick stretches and lathering on of the issue sun cream left us all white, with the FOWO, looking much like a giant Smurf.

The race itself was a sprint distance triathlon (400m swim, 20km cycle and 5km run) and for many of the participants it was the first triathlon they had ever attempted.

The event attracted both young (the youngest competitor was Ryan Hall aged 14) and old (the eldest competitor was 55 and anonymous!) and was open to all abilities.

On arrival at the pool, all competitors were given a race number and allocated a heat for the aqua-phase of the event. The first heat was quick, with most of the competitors completing the nine lengths in less than nine minutes. First out of the pool was Maj. Matt Walker, and with a short sprint to the transition area, he was off his bike and away for the cycle phase of the competition. The fastest swimmer was Cpl. Rachael Hunt from Sector 2 who, competing in the Relay Competition, completed the nine lengths in an amazing six minutes!

The cycle phase followed a route from the pool out towards Fostret Gate before turning back onto the low, slow, uphill grind of Concession Road. Once Concession Road was (eventually!) put behind them, competitors headed on to the airfield before turning towards the control tower and back to the pool via the sports pitches. Competitors with road bikes had a clear advantage over those with mountain bikes, but this didn’t daunt the cyclists with knobly tyres who worked hard to get over some tough hills. Scott Cawley from the UNFICYP P1O began to establish his position at the top during this phase with a solid cycle, covering the 20 km in 36 minutes, but the quickest time was one of the relay cyclists, WO1 (RM) Andy Simpson from Sector 2, who covered the distance in 35 minutes (averaging over 33 kph).

After a quick transition and a sip of water, the competitors moved on to the run; a 5 km circular course around UNPA. Again, the route was surprisingly hilly and it proved to be hard work after almost an hour’s physical effort. The short but sharp hill up to the HIVE was a real killer and everyone could feel their legs pounding. This didn’t stop Sgt. Alex Keenan from Sector 2, another relay competitor, who ran the 5 km course in under 18 minutes. The short downhill to the pool and the finish was enough to spur most people on, and a lot of competitors managed a sprint finish and a smile as they crossed the line.

Once the race was over, the competitors tucked into a full English breakfast (the breakfast of true athletes!) which was provided by the military chefs from Sector 2. The Force Commander, Maj. (Gen. Rafael Barch) was then asked to present prizes to the following winners:

- Veteran (over 35) – Maj. Stan Stanton (1 hr 9 mins); Super Veteran (over 45) – Col. Peter Fraser-Hopewell (1 hr 18 mins);
- Female Winner: Cpl. Amanda Kemp (1 hr 21 mins); Male Winner: Scott Cawley (1 hr 6 mins);
- Relay Team: Sector 2’s Fife Flyers (1 hr 3 mins); and the Overall Team: BRITCON (1 hr 13 mins).

Yet again there were some comedy moments. Crossing the Louroujina pocket, the Turkish Forces made us load the vehicles with our bikes and shipped us across to the far side, a huge 150m. Maj. Moon again was at the butt end of our laughter. His chain broke so he had to use the spare bike – which slowed him down as he decided to continue, despite the spare not having a seat!! Standing and peddling across undulating rough terrain for several kilometres was a serious achievement and left him feeling rather sick by the time we took our next planned stop.

At the end, the legendary WO2 Nash ran down the cliff to take a dip in the sea, delaying that much warranted beer by 15 minutes. Overall, the experience was fantastic, with the 10 competitors split between which day they preferred – the pain of the hills or the monotonous speed of the flats. The team completed the BZ cycle challenge in 18 hrs 50 mins over two days covering 203 km. A monumental effort.

New Addition to the Moons

Maj. Moon fell off his bike for a third time when his wife Lindsey gave birth to their son Oliver on 17 May. Weighing in at a healthy 6 lb 3 oz, Oliver will soon be on his own bike to challenge his father!
President Heinz Fischer of the Federal Republic of Austria at the Goshi Memorial