Staying Sharp: Peacekeepers Test their Skills
Violence Against Women Always Unacceptable, SG says

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 25 November

Violence against women continues to persist as one of the most heinous, systematic and prevalent forms of violence and gender-based violence in all societies. It is a threat to all women, and an obstacle to all our efforts for development, peace and gender equality in all societies.

Many countries have made considerable progress in changing laws, policies, practices and attitudes which in the past helped create a patchwork of impunity for this despicable offence. But there is so much left to do. We must work to stamp out this violence which still sometimes surrounds it.

For the past year, our efforts have taken on new urgency. Following my predecessor’s in-depth study in 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution to strengthen efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women. The UN family is stepping up its activities at all levels – from new initiatives by the Regional Commission to better coordination at the country level – to act to bring it to an end.

I am here today to observe the impact of global warming. To see for myself and learn all I can. We are doing our part here in Antarctica on an “Eco-tour”, but I am not here as a tourist but as a messenger of early warning.

What alarms me is not the distant future, unless we act, together, now. We are all concerned by this problem, and we all need to strengthen our collective and individual response to violence against women if we are to reverse the damage done by conflict, and to build more inclusive, accountable and cohesive societies, underpinned by viable democratic institutions.

This is an issue to be taken up not only by war-torn countries trying to rebuild, but those with a theoretically more equitable and balanced social and government structure, if “the veil of tolerance” which often surrounds violence against women is to be torn down.

Because violence against women and girls encompasses “physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, including battering, sexual abuse, child abuse, dowry-related violence, rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices, directed against women, non-consensual violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.”

We are all concerned by this problem, and we all need to act to bring it to an end.

Sounding the Alarm on Climate Change

The SG in Antarctica

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**HIV/AIDS Awareness as Important as Ever**

UNFICYP’s HIV/AIDS Focal Point Netha Kreouzos gave her first Town Hall meeting on 20 November in the International Cafeteria to over 160 military, police and civilian peacekeepers.

The same briefing was conducted on 22 November for newly arrived UNPOL members.

Outlining UN policies and the organisation’s commitment to fighting the disease, Kreouzos said it is essential that all civilian and uniformed peacekeepers of all nations understand the significance of HIV/AIDS prior to taking on peacekeeping duties. She noted that it has been shown in recent years that peacekeeping operations may be playing a role in the spread of HIV/AIDS between high prevalence areas and low prevalence areas. Therefore, it was crucial for all staff to know the essential facts about HIV/AIDS, to be able to protect themselves and their families from HIV infection. She also stressed that it was important to live positively with HIV and let live by contributing to a tolerant, equitable and compassionate UN-system workplace.

Kreouzos highlighted the fact that although Cyprus is a country with a low HIV/AIDS prevalence rate at less than 1% of the population, the number of cases officially recorded is increasing. According to the data received from the health authorities in the north, in the period from 1990 to 2006, six people were infected, four died from AIDS and 11 HIV cases were detected during mandatory testing. However, she said there is no official statistical reporting on HIV/AIDS in the north.

Kreouzos said there are a number of other worrying indicators, including the lack of a comprehensive policy for education on HIV/AIDS, the increase in the number of intravenous drug users, and the fact that prostitution and human-trafficking continue to be a serious issue in Cyprus which are all factors that can contribute to an escalation of HIV/AIDS.

A common island-wide strategy to fight against HIV/ AIDS does not yet exist and there is little dialogue between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot experts on this issue, she said. Since the partial lifting of travel restrictions on 23 April 2003, experts in both communities have expressed concern about the spread of HIV infections throughout Cyprus through movement of individuals seeking anonymity whilst entering into risky sexual behaviour.

Local use of illegal drugs on both sides of the island is low compared with the situation elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean and Europe, but this problem is growing. Although there have been no official reports of cases of HIV infection in Cyprus among known drug addicts who are regularly tested in drug treatment centres, drug abuse is seen as one of the risks that could play an important role in the future spread of the epidemic, through transmission of HIV between intravenous drug users and their sexual partners. The HIV/AIDS NGO’s insist that there has already been at least one drug-related HIV death on the island, and express concern that once this starts, the numbers could increase dramatically. The exact number of drug users in both communities is not known. The number of intravenous drug users is estimated to be between 1,500 and 6,000 in the Greek Cypriot community, and 400-500 in the Turkish Cypriot community.

Kreouzos said another high risk group is the increasing number of women from south-east Europe and the former Soviet Union who apply for work in Cyprus as “artists”, a generally accepted euphemism for women working as sex workers.

Briefings will continue for all newly-arrived civilian, police and military peacekeepers as part of their induction within the mission. Meanwhile, condom dispensers have been placed in 20 locations around the UNPA and Sectors 1, 2, and 4. A further 35 condom dispensers will be placed in the men’s and women’s toilets in the coming months.

UNAIDS has issued its 2007 AIDS epidemic update. It reports that global HIV prevalence has levelled off, although AIDS continues to be among the leading causes of death globally.

The number of people living with HIV is estimated at 33.2 million. The 2007 estimates are significantly lower than the 2006 estimates due to major improvements to UNAIDS and WHO methodologies – recently endorsed by independent international experts.

According to the report, the global number of new HIV infections has decreased in part as a result of the impact of HIV programmes. An estimated 2.5 million people became newly infected and 2.1 million people died of AIDS in 2007.

While overall estimates may be lower, the data continues to confirm AIDS is the leading cause of death in Africa. Over two thirds of people living with HIV and over three-quarters of HIV-associated deaths are in sub-Saharan Africa.

In Asia, the estimated number of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia increased over 150% from 630,000 to 1.6 million in 2007, while 90% of people living with HIV in Eastern Europe are in Ukraine and Russia.

In sub-Saharan Africa, continued treatment scale-up and HIV prevention efforts are also bringing results in some countries. In South Africa, for example, the number of people living with HIV is estimated to be between 1,500 and 6,000 in the Greek Cypriot community, and 400-500 in the Turkish Cypriot community.

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Gurkha Religious Festivals

Dashain
Dashain is the most auspicious time of the year for all Gurkhas and Nepalese. It falls during the bright lunar fortnight ending on the day of the full moon in late September or early October. During this festival, Goddess Durga (Goddess of Power) and family members. The Dashain festival is celebrated for 10 days, with the Phulpati, Kalaratri, Mar and Tika being the most important days.

The seventh day of Dashain is known as Phulpati, where the whole village goes in procession to collect Phulpati (offerings of flowers and lucky plants). On arrival at the selected spot, a shrine is erected, a sacred fire is lit and prayers are offered. The Phulpati is blessed. The procession then reforms and brings the collected offerings to the Mandir Temple.

The eighth day of Dashain is known as Kalaratri (Black Night). A Dashain Hall is decorated specially for this celebration. The activities commence in the evening with drinks followed by the main dinner – the Bada Khana. Meanwhile, the Pundit (priest) and the Pujaries (worshippers) continue with the rituals of the worship of Goddess Durga in the temple. At midnight, all the lights are switched off for a period of ten minutes. In houses, this day is also known as "Black Night" and Goddess Durga is worshipped. In the Dashain Hall, a variety of Nepalese cultural dances are entertained.

The ninth day of Dashain is Mar (also known as Balidan) and is the climax of the Dashain celebration. The tenth day of Dashain is known as Tika (the day when everybody assembles at the temple where the priest (and, in the case of British Army, the senior Gurkha Officer) and the Pujaries (worshippers) put turmeric (Tika) on the foreheads and hands of all those present along with Master Kush Sona and Master Kala, and also put tika on their elders on this day. It is a day when family members who are unable to see each other during the year come to the main house (or the ancestral house in which the elders of the family usually live) and receive blessings from elders and exchange gifts. It is also a day when the family members present are invited on this day.

November 2007 – The Blue Beret
Although the title states "A hot day in the oven", that’s purely an idiomatic phrase used by our Argentinian team captain, Capt. Gordillo, who likened it to a day spent in the UNFICYP Military Skills Competition!

The event was held on 21 November, the second MI Skills of 2007. Teams from all Sectors, the MFR, FMPU, UNPOL and HQ (my team) entered. We woke at 3.00 a.m. to the sound of rain. It was an effort to get up so early, but we managed. We all looked so awful that the jokes started – and continued throughout the day. We had a quick breakfast, and by 5.00 a.m., we were standing in line for the first gruelling part of the competition – the endurance march. We were all nervous, but once the gun went off, we too were off!

My advice to the team was not to strain ourselves straight away, since the first part was uphill and very tough. My team, therefore, split into three groups – the first was the very keen and fit WO2 Aramayo, who wanted to win. The second were the "hard-headed triplets" – SSgt. Rodriguez, SSgt. Ugy and LCpl. Frost, and last but not least, the two very proud captains, Capt. Gordillo and Capt. Fragni. The run went well until we reached the worst part of this exercise – the stretcher carrying four heavy bergens. We started wrongly, and that was why we finished last. The team was a little gloomy after this, but when Capt. Gordillo started to sing our team song, the soundtrack from the Flintstones, the mood immediately changed. From then onwards, we always started to sing this song when we approached another stand.

The second stand was the command task. The aim was to set up a tent, which may sound an easy thing for a soldier to do – but not when he or she is blindfolded. Every member of the team had to participate in this exercise, guided by the team captain. We were clumsy, and felt just like malfunctioning robots!

We didn’t manage to finish this exercise, nevertheless we proceeded to the next stand, where we had to position five tyres in a specific order. This should have been a pretty easy task, however, my team captain gave the orders in Spanish. I’m Hungarian. I don’t speak Spanish! Nevertheless, in our normal happy team spirit, we found a way to communicate. This was the stand I enjoyed most!

The next exercise was the map reading. Well, we thought it was… But we mislaid the timetable and arrived at the wrong location. Gloom was about to set upon us, when we spotted WO1 Reinhard Zeiler giving out rolls, and happily accepted them. Regretfully, we missed the map reading, so we went directly to the Incident Reaction stand.

Arriving late, we had less time to solve the hunting situation. However, thanks to Capt. Gordillo’s experience here and the team’s quick reactions, we earned good points at this stand.

After this, my team finally arrived at the map reading. By this time we were soaked, and very disappointed that there were no more free rolls! Nevertheless, due to LCpl. Golding’s good training, we finished the map reading quickly and proceeded onto the next stand – the cross country driving.

This was an exercise of the Army Skills I was definitely not happy about. I had taken part in this competition last summer, and had been involved in a crash there. This time, however, I was not the driver – only a passenger. At least, that’s what I thought until Capt. Gordillo informed me that I was the driver’s guide, who went ahead to make sure the road is safe… So, Frosty and I had to plod through ice-cold water on slippery mud, almost falling over on several occasions. We got completely soaked (again), but luckily we did well on this stand. I must say a big thank-you here to Capt. Fragni for lending me a dry pair of socks!

The next stand we also did well on – patrol and observation. It’s important to comment here how much it meant to us to have our cheer-leading team join us, including the wives of Capt. Gordillo and Capt. Fragni, Capt. Gordillo’s daughter, Capt. Fragni’s son and our driver, SSgt. Pancho Almiron.

The last but one stand was the shooting competition. This was split into two parts. The first was the shooting, and the efforts by our Commando, SSgt. Rodriguez, was outstanding. If I hadn’t seen his performance, I could never have believed it! Then there was the re-assembling exercise, which started off well, but then Capt. Gordillo found himself in trouble with part of the Hungarian AK63 rifle. Although we had spent many hours practising, he was not able to re-assemble the weapon in six minutes, so we didn’t do so well here.

After a short rest, we arrived at the most arduous part of the competition – the assault course. This involved a long track with many obstacles along the way. As if this wasn’t enough for the Training Officer, we had to carry a 25-litre jerican full of water, and an ammo box full of stones! We started off well, but half way through, fatigue fell upon us. It was our cheerleaders who gave us the will to carry on, finding strength that we never knew we had. We managed to finish in good time, although we had a 30-second penalty lodged against us for not having a woman in our team!

Out of the 10 teams which participated, we managed to gain 7th place. This was a very good effort, since we were on 24/7 duty during the training period and had no chance to practise as a team.

All in all, it was a great experience, working together as “brothers” and enjoying a multi-national camaraderie. We will definitely take many memories home with us.

SSgt. Balasz Ughy
November 2007 – The Blue Beret
Prevention is Better than Cure

During October and November, just under 200 Slovak troops underwent vaccination treatment against influenza. The vaccinations were carried out by the medical staff of Camp General Štefánik. In the past, preventative flu treatment has been offered to troops. This year, however, the vaccinations were obligatory. Orders were received from the military supervisors of the Slovak Army Forces Military Staff, based on the revised national law. Only those suffering from health problems were excluded.

Vaccines against seasonal flu were purchased from the local UN pharmaceutical contractor and paid for through national funds. The vaccine was selected because in recent years, it has proven to have fewer side effects and adverse reactions. There is no vaccine against avian flu. The vaccination against the flu, however, if it is contracted, there are usually fewer complications.

Troops not only have to be vaccinated against influenza. They also have to be immunized against a number of infectious diseases before joining the mission, including hepatitis B, diphtheria and meningitis.

Kitchen Upgrade in Sector 4

The kitchen in Camp General Štefánik, Famagusta, got a facelift at the end of October. It was completely refurbished, in line with health and technical standards.

The renovation work started last summer. All cooking equipment was moved to a temporary kitchen whilst the works were ongoing. These included the repair of electrical wiring, plumbing, drainage, as well as wall, ceiling and floor surfaces. Everything had to be retiled, and windows, doors and sinks replaced.

A lot of work went into this effort. In addition to the reconstruction works underway, the daily provision of meals for the troops in Camp General Štefánik in temporary facilities had to be organised.

As work progressed, unexpected problems arose which delayed the completion of the renovations. Of course, all peacekeepers in CGS still had to be fed! As the saying goes, “Rome wasn’t built in a day”.

In February this year, the Hungarians passed everyone’s expectations!

There are still a number of problems which have to be dealt with, but the logistic and engineering personnel of Camp General Štefánik and HQ have managed to reinstate the new kitchen facilities, enabling the chefs to move back in. In spite of all the holdings, the kitchen now has a completely new look and is well in line with safety and hygiene standards.

Rick’s Bricks

Evrikos Demetriou, known to his pals as Rick, holds the position of Finance Assistant here in the HQ. But when he’s not number-crunching, he enjoys working in the outdoors.

Rick grew up in North London. His father, Peter, was a builder and so Rick, along with his three brothers Chris, Jim and Mario, used to accompany their father at weekends and on summer holidays on building sites around the country to earn their pocket money. This enabled Rick to follow his beloved Arsenal Football Club’s progress, although, as Rick says, “Some of the money went on the girls...! In those days, there was no pocket money. It had to be earned, and what’s more, we didn’t begrudge doing the work. It made us appreciate the value of money more.”

Back in 2000, Rick’s office was located near the Irish Club (now held by the R & I Unit and PCIU). Nearby, Rick spotted a pile of bricks which the Irish used as a basic, no-frills BBQ. Rick’s (then) boss suggested that it could be improved upon, if Rick had the time and the inclination. Rick persuaded the PWD office located nearby to donate some bricks, so after work, every day for a week, Rick beavered away and produced a barbecue which surpassed everyone’s expectations!

In February this year, the Hungarians discovered the barbecue – and Rick’s talents. They approached him and asked him to construct one at their bar. Following several meetings, where the design and construction were discussed, Rick agreed to go ahead. The Hungarians offered to pay but he refused. However, Rick did accept the help of three (rotating) assistants, since this project was considerably larger than his first. The work started in July, during a heat wave when temperatures rose to over 40°C at midday. Therefore, work commenced at weekends at 6.00 a.m. until noon and, on the odd occasion, in the evenings after work. During the bricklaying, Rick and the Hungarians would share refreshments – and stories. Like when Rick was a boy, helping his father, and decided to bring his father’s van closer to the skip – and backed right into it.....

The Hungarian project ended up with 635 bricks being laid with loving care. It is now proudly used by the Hungarians for their barbecue and goulash – parties which Rick and his wife Stella (also an UNFICYP colleague working for the Chief of General Services) are invited to as honoured guests! Rick says it was a collective effort where everyone pulled together. They wanted something practical and impressive, and they certainly got it.

Rick’s brick-laying skills can be viewed at his house too, where a barbecue with all accessories takes pride of place in his back garden.

The family tradition continues with his son, George, learning the trade from Rick. George assisted his father as Rick had done years before in constructing the barbecue and, of course, George got his pay too. Only now George spends it on books, PlayStation games and his beloved bike. Apart from earning his £60, George learned a life lesson in the value of money.

Rick, however, also enjoys building football teams and, as many of his colleagues in UNFICYP are aware, another of his activities is “Saturday Soccer” coaching for children on the UNPA football pitch. This is something he has done for the last three years with children from various schools in Nicosia. The teams include 7-11-year-olds and 12-14-year-olds. Rick never claims to be a professional, but says it’s all in the name of fun and the children do learn to play properly with the training they are given.

So from building bricks to building characters, Rick sets the example.

UNPOL Medal Parade

An UNPOL Medal presentation was held at the UNPA on 18 November 2007. Six Dutch UNPOL officers were among the medalists.

A group of 13 Dutch senior police officers, comprising the Dutch Police International Deployment Agency and staff members’ supervisors, travelled to Cyprus for the event.

Chief of Mission Michael Møller addressed the group. For the past eight years, Møller has been the position of Finance Assistant here in the HQ. But when he’s not number-crunching, he enjoys working in the outdoors.

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Art Attack

On 21 November 2007, Action for Cooperation and Trust (ACT), the Europe Mediterranean Art Association (EMAA) and the Cyprus Chamber of Fine Arts (E K.A.TE) announced the 32 winners and runners-up of the ART ATTACK Cyprus Art Competition at a prize ceremony in Nicosia.

As the official guests of the event the representatives of the two communities of Nicosia, Eleni Mavrou and Cemal Bulutoğlu, had the pleasure of presenting the finalists with their prizes.

"These winning artworks contain powerful messages about what is important to Cypriot people," said Jaco Cilliers, ACT Programme Manager. "They deal with topics such as the destruction of the environment, gender inequality, the feelings of teenagers, the common Cypriot culture and how people see the future. We would like to thank everybody who made the effort to send in an artwork."

The island-wide art competition was launched in May 2007 and invited Cypriots of all ages and abilities to express their ideas by submitting an artwork reflecting one of the following themes: Environment – Identity – Difference and Equality – Memories – Spirituality – Future – Line.

The competition was developed by members of the Cyprus Art Competition Advisory Board – 14 Cypriots from across the island representing the fields of fine art, design, literature, arts education, arts promotion, photography, galleries, film and theatre. Each individual contributed specialist experience, knowledge and guidance to the project.

The judging took place in early October at the Ledra Palace Hotel bi-communal rooms. International curators came to Cyprus from France and Turkey, especially for the judging.

Starting in Nicosia and travelling to six other major cities, an exhibition of the winning entries will tour the island during 2008. The aim of the exhibition is to prompt discussion and reflection on the issues which Cypriots care about and which are visualised through the art medium. The objective of the project and the message of the exhibition is that Cypriot society possesses a rich cultural diversity which can be explored through the visual arts, and ultimately this diversity needs to be shared and celebrated.

More than 900 entries were received for the competition from all parts of Cyprus, proving that art can be a powerful medium for exploring the island’s social and cultural space.

Visitors

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

Visit Slovak Ministry of Defence State Secretary

The next day, the delegation was taken on a tour of the buffer zone within Sector 4’s area of responsibility, to get a feel for the operational tasks carried out by Slovak soldiers. The tour started at OP129, situated in the centre of the bicomunal village of Pyla, then continued to PB126, and finally up to PB123, overlooking the area of responsibility of a Slovak platoon, led by Lt. Martin Obšatník.

The day’s programme ended with a lunch in the buffer zone, where the State Secretary expressed his great admiration of the work being carried out by the Slovak peacekeepers.

New Faces

Maj. Gábor Gion, MD, took over the post of Force Medical Officer on 16 October.


14 January was a special day in the Qadir household. Arena, the first child of Senior Fire Officer Nadeem Qadir and his wife Xenia Antipova, was born.

Weighing in at just over 3 kg, Arena arrived by Caesarian section. Nadeem (or Paul, as he is known to his colleagues) says, “Natural child birth was planned, however there was a last-minute emergency and Xenia was rushed to the Nicosia Polyclinic where Arena was delivered by a team of expert doctors”. Paul, who assisted during the operation, advised fathers to stay away from the operating theatre if they can! The couple met on 13 September 2000, and on 26 December 2001, Paul proposed marriage to Xenia in front of 300 people – at Larnaca International Airport!

Arena, who is a beautiful mix of her Pakistani and Russian heritage, put on 300 grams within the first three weeks, much to the delight of her doting parents. Mother and baby are both doing fine.

From the left: Ms. Eleni Mavrou, Mr. Cemal Bulutoğlu, Pembe Mentesh and Jaco Cilliers

Ms. Eleni Mavrou and Mr. Cemal Bulutoğlu with Third Prize winner Anna Charalambous

Traditional sweets, mehalla, pickles and coffee” by Margarita Kotsoni (13)

First prize: Age 13-17 category

1/Lt. Miroslav Šelep

Visiting Slovak Ministry of Defence State Secretary

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Traditional sweets, mehalla, pickles and coffee” by Margarita Kotsoni (13)

First prize: Age 13-17 category

Don’t let a wall between us” by Cegla Işhan

First prize: Age 10-12 category

"Under the Skin" by George Kvezereli

Second prize: age 18+ category
At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, Britain stands silent in memory of those who have given, and continue to give, their lives in service of their country.

The silence of Armistice Day is begun by a solitary bugle sounding the Last Post, and there can be few more poignant places for it to sound than across the buffer zone that still divides Cyprus. One would like to think that, as sentries from both sides looked down onto the international community gathered in Wayne’s Keep Cemetery to mark Remembrance Sunday, they would have acknowledged the futility and waste of war, but human history seems to refute that.

Although a British tradition, commemorating the fallen of all wars on the Sunday closest to Armistice Day with a Remembrance Day service is a truly international affair in Nicosia, where soldiers of the Queen’s Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment joined with other uniformed members of the United Nations, with their civilian confreres, with the wider international community and with veterans of wars past and present to remember the dead. Remembrance knows no boundaries and the dead share one nation. Representatives from nations who have warred against each other in the past laid wreathes in a common gesture of respect and in a common sense of brotherhood.

The end of the silence is announced by the sounding of Reveille, waking not those who have made their sacrifice, but those who have stood in silent remembrance. For those who have stood in contemplation, the Reveille is a true awakening, there is a palpable sigh and straightening of shoulders.

For peacekeepers, the act of remembrance should also serve as a reminder of the consequences when peacekeeping fails, and an incentive to carry forward the work of those who strive for a peaceful world.

WO2 Stephen Alan Goldsmith RLC

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of WO2 Stephen Alan Goldsmith RLC, who was killed in a car accident on 23 November in Nicosia.

During his service, Stephen amassed many qualifications which led to his appointment as Master Driver. He served in operational areas including Northern Ireland, the Balkans and the Gulf.

His commitment to the peacekeeping role in Cyprus was no less total. In his year with UNFICYP, he has earned the respect and regard of his multi-national colleagues in the UN and in the wider community of Cyprus.

Stephen was a keen sportsman, a strong friend and a catalyst for fun away from duty. All who knew him appreciated his good humour, total honesty and refreshing candour.

Stephen, you will be much missed. May you rest in peace.

God bless

Christine Iacovou, Transport Unit

November 2007 - The Blue Beret
Laying of Wreaths in Memory of the Fallen: Wayne’s Keep Cemetery, 11 November