

# BLUE BERET

Spring 2026

# MAGAZINE



Under-Secretary-  
General for Peace  
Operations, Jean-  
Pierre Lacroix, visits  
UNFICYP

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FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION  
AND ABUSE**



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# Editor's note

## BLUE BERET

Spring 2026

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure that we launch the Spring edition of the Blue Beret magazine. In this issue, we cover the Mission's highlights from January to April 2026.

In this issue you will find the most recent engagements of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Khassim Diagne, with a highlight of the recent visit of the Under-Secretary-General, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, to the island.

This edition highlights the ongoing patrols and engagements of UNFICYP's military and police components, showcasing their dedication to stability in the buffer zone, with an article focusing on community policing and the Mission's engagement with farmers. We are also pleased to include images from several medal parades honouring our personnel across the buffer zone. Our Civil Affairs Section remains deeply committed to fostering dialogue. The team organized several impactful events designed to bring communities together, with a special focus on engaging youth and bridging divides, we included an article featuring one group of UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace and their takes on the programme, which concluded in February.

We continue to incorporate coverage of events organized by the UN Good Offices Mission in Cyprus, showcasing their vital work from local technical committee meetings to diplomatic consultations.

In the following pages, read about how UNFICYP continues to implement its mandate and support peace on the island.

Enjoy reading!

## UNFICYP marks Earth Hour 2026



On 28 March, UNFICYP observed Earth Hour by switching off non-essential lights across its camps in Cyprus from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. local time. Joining the United Nations and millions worldwide under the theme #ActNowForPeace, the peacekeeping force turned darkness into a powerful statement. On an island increasingly vulnerable to drought and rising temperatures, the gesture highlighted a critical truth: climate protection is essential to stability.

By dimming its lights, UNFICYP underscored how environmental action supports peacebuilding. Climate change can intensify competition over water and land—risks no ceasefire can ignore.

For one hour, the mission stood in quiet solidarity, proving that safeguarding the planet goes hand in hand with safeguarding communities.

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Published by the Public Information Office of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.



## UN Peacekeeping Chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix concludes visit to Cyprus

On 20 April, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, arrived on the island and was welcomed by the Head of UNFICYP, Khassim Diagne, along with the Mission's senior leadership from military, UNPOL and Civil Affairs components. During his visit, Lacroix paid tribute to the peacekeepers who have served with UNFICYP since its establishment in 1964, honouring their service and sacrifice over six decades.

In a forward-looking dialogue, Lacroix sat down with young Cypriots from both communities at Ledra Palace, listening to their perspectives on peace and the future of the island. Speaking about the role of youth, he stated: "Young people are on top of new technologies and on top of new ways of doing things. Not only in terms of using their motivation and enthusiasm to promote peace efforts, but they can also help others to have a bigger impact. Peace, as we all know, is made not only from the top to the bottom, but also from bottom to top." Together with SRSG Khassim Diagne and the mayors of Nicosia, Charalambos Proutzos and Mehmet Harmanci, Lacroix inaugurated the global United Nations exhibition "Through Her Lens: Women Rising for Peace." The exhibition, currently at display outside Ledra Palace crossing, highlights women peacebuilders, UN peacekeepers, mediators, and human rights defenders,

with each portrait captured by local women photographers, underscoring the resilience and leadership of women shaping peace in their communities. The exhibition features two young Cypriot women, Eleni Anastasiou and Ayshe Biyikoglu, who were also present at the opening.

During his visit, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations met separately with both Cypriot leaders, Greek Cypriot leader, Nikos Christodoulides, and Turkish Cypriot leader, Tufan Erhürman, for conversations on the current situation on the island. He also visited the Pyla/Pile plateau, where UNFICYP continues to play an impartial role in preventing tensions and promoting activities to foster cooperation between communities.

Reflecting on broader peacekeeping efforts, he remarked: "It's about bringing together those who are working in support of the peace efforts. You have diplomats, you have peacekeepers, that is important. But you also have to bring together and in support of them the leaders, the civilians, the youth, the women, who are dedicating time and effort to supporting peace."

Lacroix's engagements on the island reaffirmed the United Nation's steadfast support for Cypriots and its commitment to fostering dialogue, trust, and cooperation.



# MILITARY

United Nations Peacekeepers in Cyprus



## This Section

**UNFICYP awards medals to peacekeepers**

**Boosting firefighting capacity for the Summer season**

### 10 years of Mine Action in Cyprus

In 2016, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) became an integral component of UNFICYP. Since then, its work in the buffer zone has led to the clearance of more than 121,891 m<sup>2</sup> of land, removing unexploded ordnance through battle area clearance and technical survey, making way for safer UNFICYP operations, confidence-building measures, and agricultural and livelihood activities.

### New Force Commander appointed



United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of Major General Mohammad Asadullah Minhazul Alam of Bangladesh as UNFICYP Force Commander.



## UNFICYP awards United Nations medals to peacekeepers

On 19 January, former UNFICYP Force Commander Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri of Mongolia awarded United Nations medals to 103 peacekeepers from Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil and Chile serving for peace in Cyprus.

### Medal ceremony for UNFICYP peacekeepers in HQ



On 12 February, 50 peacekeepers from Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Hungary, Mongolia, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and UK were awarded United Nations medals for their service for peace in Cyprus. Medals were presented by the Head of UNFICYP, Khassim Diagne, together with the Officer-in-Charge of the military component, Brigadier Patrick Allen.

### Medal ceremony for peacekeepers in Sector 4

On 20 February, 75 peacekeepers from Slovakia and Slovenia based in Sector 4 were awarded medals for their service for peace in Cyprus. Medals were presented by the Head of UNFICYP, Khassim Diagne, together with the Officer-in-Charge of the military component, Brigadier Patrick Allen, the Mission' Senior Adviser, Aderemi Adekoya, and the Sector 4 Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Jana Pastorčáková. The responsibility of the unit is to patrol and monitor activity along 65 kilometers of the buffer zone in Cyprus.





## Medal ceremony for peacekeepers in Sector 2

On 6 March, SRSG Khassim Diagne and UNFICYP's Officer-in-Charge of the military component, Brigadier Patrick Allen, awarded medals to 120 peacekeepers from the UK in Sector 2 for their service in Cyprus. Sector 2 patrols and monitors more than 30 kilometers of the buffer zone, stretching from Mammari village to Kaimakli, east of Nicosia. Their work helps maintain stability and advance UNFICYP's mandate on the ground.



## Boosting firefighting capacity for the Summer season



The firefighting and rescue capacity of the United Nations in Cyprus has been strengthened with the arrival of six professional firefighters.

The firefighters successfully completed their mandatory fire conversion training on 17 March and are now officially part of the UNFICYP Fire Teams.

Their addition will enhance preparedness and provide vital support during the upcoming high fire season on the island.

# UN POLICE

United Nations Police in Cyprus



## This Section

**The art of community  
policing: How UNPOL  
builds trust, one farmer  
at a time**

### **Tackling foot and mouth disease in the buffer zone**

UNPOL officers are on the ground, actively supporting UNFICYP biosecurity efforts to keep Foot and Mouth disease away from livestock and farming communities. Across the United Nations buffer zone in Cyprus, they are taking a range of essential measures: from close monitoring of animal movement and restricted zones to raising awareness among local farmers about early warning signs and reporting protocols. Their visible presence in the buffer zone helps detect risks before they spread, while regular community engagement builds trust, encourages compliance, and ensures that herders understand the importance of biosecurity. Through inspections, patrols, and informational sessions, UNPOL officers act as an impartial link between the UN mission and those who depend on healthy livestock for their survival. Collectively, this work is helping prevent a devastating outbreak, protecting animal health, and safeguarding the economic stability and livelihoods of farming families on both sides of the island.



## The art of community policing: How UNPOL builds trust, one farmer a time

For a visitor peering across the Nicosia wall, the buffer zone often looks like an empty “no-man’s land”. But for the men and women of the United Nations Police (UNPOL), this is not an empty space. It is a living, breathing community.

Since joining UNFICYP, UNPOL officers have taken on a role that goes far beyond traditional law enforcement. While their mandate includes monitoring ceasefire lines, their daily reality is far more nuanced: managing civilian access, de-escalating land disputes, and ensuring that Cypriot farmers can safely till their soil without triggering a diplomatic incident.

### **The frontline: Farmers and families**

Today, the most critical work happens not in boardrooms, but in the fields. Approximately 3% of the island, some of the most valuable agricultural land, falls within the buffer zone. For local farmers, the buffer zone is not a political border; it is an irrigation ditch or a fence line they must cross to harvest their crops.

However, cultivating near the ceasefire lines is strictly prohibited by UN regulations due to the risk of escalating tensions. This creates a constant tension between the right to livelihood and the need for security.

This is where UNPOL’s community policing model proves vital. It is not enough to simply erect barbed wire. Officers must actively engage with the agricultural community to de-escalate anger before it turns into a violation.





Detective Sergeant Aoife Reilly, an UNPOL officer from Ireland serving with UNFICYP, spends her days navigating these precise tensions. She explains that the key to safety is visibility and familiarity. "When you arrive at a farm gate in the buffer zone, you aren't just an officer enforcing a regulation. You are a guest. If you walk the land, understand the harvest seasons, and listen to their frustrations about water access, then you become a partner. We are here to maintain the status quo, but we do it by ensuring the farmer knows we are keeping them safe, not keeping them out."

#### **Managing access with empathy**

The permit system is the lifeblood of civilian life in the buffer zone. Beyond farmers, the area is home to villagers in places like Pyla/Pile, as well as religious site custodians and construction crews maintaining its infrastructure.

UNPOL's role is to be the "middleman." They liaise among authorities, UNFICYP and civilians to ensure

that activity inside the buffer zone does not threaten security. This requires a detective's eye and a diplomat's patience. Officers must screen applicants, coordinate with both sides and then physically escort or monitor those activities. Detective Sergeant Reilly elaborates on the balancing act: "We have to look at every request through two lenses: the legal and the human. The legal lens says, 'no movement near forward defended localities.' But the human lens asks, 'Is this old man trying to fix his water pipe or is he building a military outpost?' Usually, it's the pipe. Community policing means we make that judgment call with our local contacts, building trust so that when we say 'no,' they understand it's for their own protection." UNPOL is on the front line of that effort. By moving from static observation to dynamic engagement, the men and women of the police component prove that peace in Cyprus isn't just maintained by the distance between opposing forces, it is built by the proximity between police and people.



# CIVIL AFFAIRS

Bringing communities together



## This Section

**How Cypriot youth are building peace, one birdhouse at a time**

**2026 Young leaders in action programme**

**Celebrating the newest UN champions for environment and peace**

### **Networking forum explores pathways for civic participation**

In a significant step towards reimagining the peace process in Cyprus, UNFICYP, in partnership with the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Law, Alternative and Innovative Methods, convened an interactive networking forum at the Ledra Palace.

The event, titled "Civic Participation in Peace Processes," brought together over 120 participants from civil society, academia, and the diplomatic community to explore how every voice on the island can shape a more inclusive future.

The forum centred on a forthcoming joint proposal to update the methodology of the peace process, with a strong emphasis on the potential role of citizens' assemblies. The vibrant discussion highlighted a collective aspiration to move towards a peace process built by and for all Cypriots.

UNFICYP remains committed to supporting all Cypriots in their pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous future. This forum, which is organized monthly, energized by the contributions of its diverse speakers and underscored the wealth of expertise within Cypriot society and highlighted innovative, inclusive models that place citizens at the heart of designing their shared future.



## Rebels with a cause: How Cypriot youth are building peace, one birdhouse at a time

They describe themselves as “rebellious with a heart of gold.” They were strangers who “dared” to cross the divide and ended up becoming friends. They are the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, and they are proof that investing in young people is the surest path towards a sustainable future.

In an island that often is defined by its division, a group of young Cypriots are demonstrating that the ground beneath our feet it is a home they all share.

For Güler Özgencil, the journey home was also a journey toward purpose. Having spent 12 years in the UK, she returned to Cyprus eager to reconnect with the island she left behind. “Before leaving, I had already been involved in bicomunal activities, and coming back reminded me how important peacebuilding still is for our future,” she explains. Becoming a UN Youth Champion for Environment and Peace offered her the chance to merge her passion for the environment with her commitment to Cypriot society.

For Elia Zoe Christou, the experience dismantled the invisible walls that have kept communities apart. Güler agrees: “We share one island and one natural environment. Protecting our environment is a shared responsibility and a common ground where cooperation can thrive.”

The team’s flagship initiative, Nest4Peace, is simple in its design but profound in its impact. Through a birdhouse workshop, the group created spaces for local wildlife to thrive. But the birdhouses became more than shelters for birds, they became symbols. “The birdhouse workshop represents our commitment to nurturing the environment and creating a sense of belonging for all living things within our shared spaces, regardless of background,” says Elia. Güler adds that the real magic happened off the blueprint: “We are no longer just teammates; we have become close friends. Supporting each other, showing up for one another, and working through challenges together transformed us from strangers into a group united by

friendship.” For the group, the island’s environment proved to be the ultimate common denominator. “Nature doesn’t recognize political divisions, and neither did our mission,” Elia reflects. “By shifting our focus toward protecting our shared land and local wildlife, we stopped seeing each other as ‘the other’ and started seeing each other as teammates. We built a relationship based on our common future rather than our divided past. I believe that is the only true way forward for Cyprus.” The UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace is a testament to the power of youth. They are not waiting for permission to build the future; they are building it with their own hands, nest by nest.





## 2026 Young leaders in action programme

On the first weekend of March, young people from across Cyprus came together in Nicosia for the 2026 Peacebuilding in Divided Societies Programme of UNFICYP. Through open dialogue and interactive activities, participants explored identity, gender, trust and (in)security, building meaningful connections across communities and strengthening practical peacebuilding skills. Fresh perspectives, honest conversations, and new cross-community friendships marked an inspiring start to this year's programme. The journey continues with follow-up activities and new opportunities ahead.



## Celebrating newest UN champions for environment and peace

On 25 February, we marked the conclusion of the 5th United Nations Youth Champions for Environment and Peace programme. Six teams of young Cypriots from across the island presented their innovative environmental projects, turning their training into action.

They showcased their ideas to UNFICYP, the British Council and guests, proving that when we invest in peace, we nurture trust while caring for our shared home. Congratulations to these 28 young champions for showing that intercommunal efforts have a positive impact on the island and its future.



## Shadow theatre lights the way for friendship in Pyla/Pile

In the village of Pyla/Pile, the ancient glow of shadow theatre recently illuminated a path toward friendship and shared understanding. Students from Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot schools came together in February for a unique bicomunal creative workshop, crafting and performing with puppets to explore a common cultural heritage.

The initiative highlighted how art serves as a universal language. Anthi Pafiou, one of the artists facilitating the workshop, observed, "The children proved that creation carries the joy of togetherness, even when there is no common language. Creativity and children have always been, and will continue to be, a hope for a better tomorrow." Through cooperation and creative expression, the students demonstrated that play can build bridges where dialogue sometimes struggles.

The workshop resonated deeply because it drew upon a shared tradition. Actor Izel Seylani reflected on this powerful legacy, noting that "traditional shadow theatre is a gift to all people on this island, a shared heritage for centuries." He emphasized the unique power of such artistic dialogue, calling it "a vital means of communication and a powerful catalyst, especially for new generations. If this project expands and is sustained, it will make a serious and sustainable contribution to the peace process."

The success of the event was made possible by the strong collaboration between the educational organizations from across the divide. Süleyman Gelener, Education Secretary peace is achieved through genuine contact, when children meet through the shared language of school and play. We consider this bicomunal student meeting to be particularly important and valuable. "This sentiment was echoed by Apostolos Skouroupatis, Vice President of the Greek Cypriot teachers' union POED, who expressed the unions' collective joy. "Through play and cooperation, a powerful message was conveyed: that coexistence and respect are values cultivated from an early age," he said. "Such initiatives build bridges of peace, break down stereotypes, and remind us that our shared future must begin through education." UNFICYP extends its sincere gratitude to the dedicated teachers, school administrations, and the teachers' unions POED, OELMEK, OLTEK, KTÖS, KTÖES, and DAÜSEN, for their unwavering support and crucial role in making this meaningful encounter possible.

Initiatives like this shadow theatre workshop, supported by the UNFICYP Civil Affairs section as part of its ongoing efforts to foster trust and cooperation across the island, reinforce intercommunal bonds, nurture empathy from a young age, and support the collective path toward a lasting peace in Cyprus. They are a testament to the power of shared culture and direct people-to-people connection.

# CYPRUS TALKS



Highlights from the UN Good Offices Mission



## This Section

**Leaders meet in the UN  
Protected Area**

**Workshop brings young and  
older generations together  
through technology**

**Personal Envoy convenes  
Technical Committees  
retreat at Wilton Park**

### **UN in Cyprus brief Ukrainian youth on peace process**

The Good Offices Mission and UNFICYP jointly hosted a special briefing for a delegation of Ukrainian youth, underscoring the role of young leaders in international peace and security.

The delegation included students from the Institute of International Relations of the National University of Kyiv named after Taras Shevchenko, alongside representatives from the Youth Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. Serhii Nizhynskiy, the Ambassador of Ukraine to Cyprus also attended the session.

UN officials provided an overview of the Cyprus peace process and the ongoing work of the two Missions in supporting dialogue, stability, and confidence-building across the island. The discussion focused on the practical challenges and diplomatic efforts involved in sustaining a peace process.

A central theme of the exchange was the imperative to include youth and civil society perspectives in peacebuilding. The dialogue highlighted how young leaders can contribute fresh ideas, drive social cohesion, and help build sustainable futures for their communities.

"Dialogue with emerging leaders is essential for the work of the United Nations," said Sergiy Illarionov, the UN Good Offices Coordinator. "We were inspired by the insightful engagement from our Ukrainian guests and their commitment to the principles of diplomacy and conflict resolution. Such exchanges reinforce our shared belief that inclusive participation is the cornerstone of lasting peace."

The visit reflects the United Nations' commitment to fostering international understanding and sharing lessons learned from different peace processes around the world.



## Technical Committee on Gender Equality meets Cyprus Women Bicomunal Coalition

The Technical Committee on Gender Equality met on 27 March with the Cyprus Women Bicomunal Coalition and had a very constructive and fruitful discussion, covering prospects for joint activities to advance common objectives.

The Technical Committee on Gender Equality was established in 2015 and was announced as part of the leader's statement delivered by Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Cyprus Espen Barth Eide on behalf of the Greek Cypriot leader Nicos Anastasiades and the Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci, on 28 May 2015, by noting "the Cyprus issue can only be properly solved with due understanding of the perspectives of both women and men. To that effect, they agreed to

establish a committee on gender equality."

The Action Plan on how to ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the settlement process/an eventual settlement process, submitted pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2587 (2021), sets out practical measures to enhance women's representation, strengthen civil society engagement and embed gender considerations in a negotiation process. These commitments continue to inform the work of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, and it remains focused on the empowerment of all women and girls, ensuring that their perspectives are reflected across every sphere of society.

## Leaders meet in the UN Protected Area



On 24 February, the leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, Tufan Erhürman, and the leader of the Greek Cypriot community, Nikos Christodoulides, met in the United Nations Protected Area.

The leaders were welcomed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Khassim Diagne. The meeting formed part of ongoing engagement under the auspices of the United Nations.



## Workshop brings young and older generations together through technology

Young people and older persons from across the island gathered this weekend at the Ledra Palace Hotel in the United Nations buffer zone for the intergenerational workshop “Connecting Generations Across the Island Through Technology.”

The event was hosted by the Technical Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, with the support of the Technical Committee on Youth, and provided a space for learning, dialogue, and exchange between participants from different generations and communities.

During the workshop, young participants guided older persons through the use of everyday digital tools, helping to strengthen digital skills, support independence, and enhance opportunities for social connection. The initiative also encouraged mutual learning and interaction between participants. By bringing together different generations from across the island, the workshop highlighted how technology can support communication and cooperation while creating meaningful connections between people.

The Secretary-General, in his last report on his mission of good offices (S/2026/9), said that he remained committed to maintaining contact and dialogue, in search of a path towards a peaceful settlement on the island. The Secretary-General has welcomed the commitment shown in the past year to sustain engagement, notwithstanding this being the longest gap in active negotiations in the history of the Cyprus peace process. The special political mission in Cyprus and the Secretary-General's own good offices continue to remain at the disposal of the parties to the Cyprus issue.





## Personal Envoy convenes Technical Committees retreat at Wilton Park

The Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General on Cyprus convened the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot representatives of the 13 Technical Committees, together with the two Coordinators, at Wilton Park in the United Kingdom from 18 to 20 February. The retreat brought together Cypriot and international experts.

The discussions provided a constructive setting to exchange ideas and explore practical ways in which the Technical Committees can further strengthen trust and cooperation. Participants focused on initiatives aimed at delivering tangible benefits and making a meaningful difference in the daily lives of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots across the island.

The Personal Envoy expressed sincere appreciation to the United Kingdom for its support in facilitating the gathering.

## Economic and Commercial Committee oversees transfer of unfit euro banknotes



On 18 February, the Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters successfully oversaw the transfer of worn-out euro banknotes in exchange for new banknotes. This pilot initiative follows years of sustained efforts by the Committee and represents a practical confidence-building measure. The exchange contributes to strengthening trust between the two sides, supports economic interaction across the island, and facilitates direct contact between economic operators. The initiative reflects the continued work of the Technical Committees in delivering practical arrangements that address everyday needs while contributing to broader cooperation.



## Business leaders connect to promote women's empowerment and economic cooperation

On 3 March, the Technical Committee on Economic and Commercial Matters brought together women and men in business from across Cyprus for an event aimed at strengthening professional connections and promoting women's empowerment in the workplace.

The event, entitled "Connecting Businesswomen: Empowering Women, Creating Opportunities," featured engaging panel discussions and cross-island networking opportunities for participants representing a range of sectors, including advisory services, tourism, coffee manufacturing, and retail. Through a combination of personal stories and practical examples from the business world, panelists shared experiences of resilience, leadership and entrepreneurship, while highlighting concrete company practices that help advance gender equality in the workplace.

The discussions encouraged participants to reflect on how businesses can play a role in creating more inclusive professional environments and expanding opportunities for women.

Beyond the panels, the event provided a valuable space for dialogue and networking among economic actors from across the island. Participants exchanged views on challenges and opportunities in the business sector and explored ways to strengthen cooperation.

The Secretary-General has welcomed the commitment shown in the past year to sustain engagement, notwithstanding this being the longest gap in active negotiations in the history of the Cyprus peace process. The special political mission in Cyprus and the Secretary-General's own good offices continue to remain at the disposal of the parties to the Cyprus issue.





# THROUGH HER LENS

WOMEN RISING FOR PEACE

IS NOW OPEN IN CYPRUS  
VISIT AT LEDRA PALACE CROSSING POINT

United Nations  
Peacekeeping

DPPA

The Elsie  
Initiative Fund

UN  
WOMEN

Photoville



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