

# BLUE BERET

## Together for peace: UNFICYP joins global commemoration of the International Day of Peace

**N**ICOSIA, 21 September 2017 – The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) today marked the International Day of Peace at Force HQ in the buffer zone; the International Day of Peace is commemorated annually on 21 September, and is an opportunity for renewed determination to work for a future free of conflict, and a day to honour those who have fallen in war. This year, the day was held under the theme: “Together for Peace: Respect, Safety and Dignity for All,” which was initiated during the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016. It honours the spirit of TOGETHER, a global, UN-led initiative that promotes respect, safety and dignity for anyone forced to flee their home in search of a better life.

Joining UNFICYP’s leadership and military, police and civilian staff to mark the event were, among others, Mr. Damtew Dessalegne, the Representative of UNHCR Cyprus, Ms. Salpy Eskidjian Weiderud and Ms. Linnéa Frändå of the The Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, and Ms. Stephanie Nicolas, programme coordinator of PeacePlayers International - Cyprus. “The International Day of Peace is an opportunity to call for an end to the conflicts that continue to ravage the world, destroying families and nations,” the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus and Head of UNFICYP, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, said in her remarks. “It is a day on which the United Nations calls for a 24-hour global ceasefire, with the hope that one day of peace can lead to another, and another, and ultimately to a stilling of the guns.”

“Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to those who have perished as a result of violence and strife across the world, including those who lost their lives in conflict on this island,” she added. “The best way we can honour them is to continue, and in fact, to rededicate ourselves to our work to end conflict and in turn, to end the suffering it wreaks on people who deserve to live, and to thrive.”

Also speaking at the event, UNHCR’s Mr. Damtew noted that with 65.6 million people displaced globally, the world is witnessing the highest level of human suffering ever seen.

“Refugees are a symbol of our turbulent times. They bring home to us in the most visceral and compelling way what is happening in the world,” he said. “When we see these big numbers, we should not forget that behind each refugee or internally displaced person fleeing war or conflict there is a tragic individual story; a story of loss and suffering; of family separation. Many of them have seen their homes destroyed, members of their family killed, their communities bombarded.”

“This is therefore a time where refugees need us more than ever. Many people have opened their hearts to refugees. Others have perceived their arrival as a threat to their identity. Some of those who perceive them as a threat have probably never met a refugee,” he added. “There is a lot each of us can do to overcome indifference or fear and to counter narratives that would seek to exclude and marginalize refugees and other uprooted people.” Addressing the event, Ms. Nicolas from PeacePlayers Cyprus noted that young people were disproportionately affected by conflict and forced migration, and highlighted the important role team sports like basketball can play in bringing different communities together, building deep personal bonds and lasting friendships. The organisation also focuses on peace education, teaching young people the values of equality, dignity and leadership.

“All around the world, young people deserve the chance to live healthy lives, to go to school, to dream and to live out those dreams,” she said. “Young people deserve to hear the guns fall silent.”

The event concluded with a candle-lighting ceremony in honour of those who have died in conflict, and a minute’s silence led by UNFICYP Force Commander Major General Mohammad Humayun Kabir.



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