

BLUE BERET



R.E.S.P.E.C.T. – FIND OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO US! UNFICYP LAUNCHES #RESPECT CAMPAIGN

The importance of respect to our inter-personal relationships, and, by extension, our work, cannot be stressed enough.

Between 20 and 24 November 2017, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) launched its first-ever #Respect campaign, aimed at promoting greater mutual respect within the Mission and the broader UN community in Cyprus, and building a more positive workplace culture, by highlighting the profound transformation that can occur when respect becomes the basis of all the interactions we have in all the spaces we share.

The #Respect campaign was inspired by UNFICYP's Chief of Mission Support, Joel Cohen, who asked the Mission's Inside the Blue (ITB) team – an initiative pioneered in the UN by ASG Lisa Bittenheim during her time as SRSG in Cyprus – to conduct a series of activities to boost the understanding of respect and encourage greater respect within the workplace.

The UNFICYP #Respect campaign was planned, organized and run by the Inside the Blue team who successfully managed to organize rich and engaging events. The long hours that the ITB members have spent working on this campaign in addition to their duties and responsibilities, and the professionalism that they have shown, have resulted in thought-provoking, inspiring, and well attended events.

Research shows that a respectful work environment improves job satisfaction, boosts employee engagement and commitment, reduces stress and creates a fair environment, among other things. And it doesn't take much to ensure colleagues feel valued and respected – being deliberately polite and courteous, encouraging co-workers to express their opinions and ideas, actively listening to others and avoiding insulting or negative language all help to create a more respectful and enjoyable workplace.

"Respect is very much an 'eye of the beholder' concept. Many cultures perceive respect in different ways," Mr. Cohen said while launching the campaign. "Respect starts with self-respect. If you can't respect yourself, you will never be able to truly show respect for someone else. Simple, really!"

The campaign aimed to reach all UNFICYP personnel through a series of activities, including video messages, a Town Hall, a poster campaign and a number of guest speakers throughout the week; the guest speakers were well respected figures drawn from across Cyprus, with speeches covering respect from a wide

range of perspectives including history, art, music, literature, theatre, sports, psychology, philosophy, medicine, politics and the social sciences.

On 20 November, after remarks at the Town Hall by UNFICYP's Head of Mission, Ms. Elizabeth Spehar, and Mr. Cohen, Mr. Vartan Tashdjian, a prominent artist and a school principal for almost 50 years, and Mrs. Aleen Andreou, a soft skills trainer and noted toastmaster, spoke to UNFICYP staff about their understanding of respect.

At another event on 22 November, Ms. Rita Severis, co-founder of the Centre of Visual Arts and Research in Nicosia, explained the concept of respect through art featuring Cyprus through the centuries. Also speaking at the event were Mr. and Mrs. Serkan (an IT professional) and Andri (a psychologist) Gumuskut, an intercommunal couple who told UNFICYP staff that respect was the cornerstone of their relationship and that "without respect between the communities, reunification will be difficult." Ms. Lena Melanidou, the co-conductor of the Bi-Communal Choir for Peace, also spoke, noting that respect between choristers had been crucial to maintaining unity within the choir through its 20 years of existence.

On 24 November, in-house speaker Ms. Dina Kapardis and guest speakers Costas Michaelidou, a psychologist, and Dr. Aliki Anastasiou, talked about the impact of respectful and disrespectful behaviour.

The Campaign received strong support from the Mission leadership, including SRSG and Head of Mission, Elizabeth Spehar, and Force Commander Major General Mohammad Humayun Kabir. Under-Secretary-General Atul Khare of the Department of Field Support also joined in, sending a video of encouragement to UNFICYP in its quest to boost respect within the Mission. A number of staff members also recorded video messages explaining what respect means to them.

The Mission aims for the #Respect Campaign to last well beyond the campaign week, and will continue to encourage staff to practice the lessons learned within the workplace.

Congratulations to the Inside the Blue team on a successful and important campaign!

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