



# Security Council

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## United Nations operation in Cyprus

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### I. Introduction

1. The present report on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) covers developments from 19 December 2020 to 18 June 2021. It brings up to date the record of activities carried out by UNFICYP pursuant to Security Council resolution [186 \(1964\)](#) and subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2561 \(2021\)](#), since the issuance of my report on UNFICYP dated 8 January 2021 ([S/2021/4](#)) and on my mission of good offices dated 8 January 2021 ([S/2021/5](#)).

2. As at 18 June 2021, the strength of the military component stood at 796 (714 men and 82 women, or 10.3 per cent women for all ranks, compared with the global peace operations target of 7.5 per cent women), while that of the police component stood at 65 (37 men and 28 women, or 43 per cent women, compared with the overall global target of 23 per cent women) (see annex).

#### II. Significant developments

3. The informal five-plus-one meeting<sup>1</sup> was held in Geneva from 27 to 29 April 2021. I hosted the informal meeting that was attended by the Greek Cypriot leader, the Turkish Cypriot leader and the Foreign Ministers of Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Following a succession of bilateral and plenary discussions, I announced at the end of the informal meeting that we had not yet found “enough common grounds to allow for the resumption of formal negotiations in relation to the settlement of the Cyprus problem”. I indicated that we were able to agree that another informal five-plus-one meeting would be convened “in the near future”, again with the objective of moving in the direction of reaching common ground to allow for formal negotiations to start. The report on my good offices mission in Cyprus ([S/2021/634](#)) provides more detail on the informal meeting held in Geneva.

4. In the lead-up to the informal five-plus-one meeting in April, the United Nations witnessed a surge of popular mobilization within both communities that appeared to indicate a willingness among a growing number of Cypriots to publicly engage on a

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<sup>1</sup> An informal meeting of the Greek Cypriot leader, the Turkish Cypriot leader, the guarantor Powers and the United Nations.



number of issues of importance to the future of the island, including in relation to the Cyprus problem. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic-related restrictions notwithstanding, a significant number of Cypriots took their concerns and demands to the streets.

5. With respect to the Cyprus issue, I received copies of several petitions and numerous letters addressed to the leaders and/or the guarantors and to me personally, from civil society organizations, including new large platforms such as “Cyprus Civic Assembly” and various ad hoc citizens’ groupings and movements, which deplored a perceived consolidation of the de facto Cypriot schism and expressed their deep concern that the window for a solution to the Cyprus problem was closing. However, notwithstanding those activities in favour of a solution, a majority of the Cypriots continued to not publicly engage on the matter.

6. The informal five-plus-one meeting was held in the context of rising COVID-19 cases in many parts of the world, including on both sides of the island. The reporting period saw varying degrees of restrictions on movement on both sides, according to the evolution of the epidemiological situation on the ground. Those restrictive measures, including lockdowns, deeply affected the socioeconomic situation of many Cypriots and triggered some of the demonstrations mentioned above.

7. Estrangement deepened between the two communities, exacerbated by the restrictions at the crossing points and by an atmosphere of distrust fed by the continual and duelling rhetoric between the two sides (see sect. D below). In this context, my Special Representative/Deputy Special Adviser, Elizabeth Spehar, convened a series of meetings with representatives of both leaders to discuss ways to empower the technical committees, to foster confidence-building measures, especially linked to the COVID-19 pandemic such as the status of the crossings and the sharing of vaccines, and to address issues causing tension in and adjacent to the buffer zone. This regular engagement proved critical to fostering an agreement on 2 June on the reopening of the three remaining crossing points and on the harmonization of the pandemic-related procedures for all crossings, and produced other positive results (see para 12 below).<sup>2</sup>

8. Tensions cited in the previous reporting period linked to hydrocarbons exploration and maritime zone claims, including the delimitation of maritime boundaries, and military and naval activity eased somewhat during the period. Ongoing Greece/Turkey and European Union/Turkey dialogue, as well as preparations for the informal five-plus-one meeting on Cyprus, may have contributed to the calmer atmosphere.

### **III. Activities of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus**

9. Notwithstanding renewed engagement between the parties through the informal five-plus-one meeting in Geneva and discussions on enhancing practical, ad hoc cooperation on the island, the political tensions that had been steadily growing since the closing of the Crans-Montana conference on Cyprus in 2017 continued unabated in large part during the period under review. Developments in the buffer zone and in areas such as Varosha, as well as issues related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, contributed significantly to fuelling those tensions.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on these meetings, the technical committees and confidence-building measures, details are provided in the recent report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus (S/2021/634).

10. At the same time, most of the usual areas of friction in the buffer zone, while not resolved, were, in general, contained. The preventive efforts of the mission through liaison and engagement contributed to defusing various tensions that arose in and around the buffer zone between civilians, between opposing forces and civilians or directly between the opposing forces.

11. In addition to having a considerable impact on the interaction between the communities, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the mission's operations, owing mostly to movement restrictions at the crossing points. The challenges notwithstanding, UNFICYP continued to fulfil its mandate through monitoring, reporting, liaison and engagement with relevant interlocutors, support for online gatherings involving civil society actors, and bolstering the role of the technical committees that it facilitates. UNFICYP continued to record COVID-19 cases among its personnel, with 38 cases (34 military, 2 police and 2 civilian personnel) identified and managed during the reporting period, notwithstanding the introduction of additional internal measures with respect to the length of quarantine, testing requirements and guidelines limiting physical interaction. At the time of the present report, 80 per cent of the military personnel, 73 per cent of the individual police officers and 70 per cent of the international civilian personnel had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot personnel also received vaccines directly from local authorities.

#### **A. Prevention of tensions in and around the buffer zone**

12. Although military-to-military tensions remained low, political tensions at various levels flared repeatedly during the reporting period. The inability of the parties to agree on harmonizing procedures at the crossing points during most of the reporting period, including testing requirements for crossing, led to frequent disputes that required the intervention of UNFICYP. The area of Limnitis/Yeşilirmak was particularly prone to such disputes, with, on the one hand, Greek Cypriot residents of Kato Pyrgos seeing their access to the north being limited or blocked owing to COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions introduced on the northern side of the crossing points, and, on the other hand, the Turkish forces seeing their biweekly resupply convoys to Kokkina, enshrined in the 2011 Limnitis/Yeşilirmak agreement, being blocked. As part of a weekly facilitation meeting of my Special Representative/Deputy Special Adviser between the Greek Cypriot negotiator and the Turkish Cypriot special representative, the latter issues were eventually resolved early in May. Through this trilateral dialogue, the long-standing issue of the replacement of the electric poles in Kokkina, which had remained pending for several years, was resolved towards the end of May.

13. Aside from a temporary reprieve in the days and weeks preceding the informal five-plus-one meeting, encroachment into the buffer zone and the undermining of the area's integrity by both sides, in particular through civilian constructions, increased during the reporting period and resulted in growing friction between the sides. There was, overall, a deterioration in respect for the mandated authority of UNFICYP during the reporting period. The mission's calls for a return to the status quo ante notwithstanding, Greek Cypriot workers began to deploy on 1 March what would become, by 29 April, a 12,009 m concertina wire fence, built roughly in parallel to the southern ceasefire line and located for the most part (85 per cent) inside the buffer zone. The fence, deployed by the authorities to ostensibly prevent irregular migration, triggered political criticism on both sides, caused tensions within the Greek Cypriot farming community and generated protests in the south because it restricted access to farmers in at least eight places. Furthermore, the fencing in the buffer zone, which was unauthorized by UNFICYP, blocked the mission's patrol tracks in 12 areas.

14. On 8 May in Pyla, Turkish Cypriot workers from the village of Pergamos deployed a waterpipe from the village to an area north of the town where approximately 10 Turkish Cypriot families are living, and subsequently between that area and the Turkish forces position, TK15. This position is considered by UNFICYP to be a permanent violation because it is inside the buffer zone. The mission had determined that the project was unauthorized and requested a return to the status quo ante. The incident triggered protestations to the United Nations from both sides.

15. In Varosha, high-level civilian and military visits to the area continued, although public visits in the accessible zones had decreased significantly in the early months of the period owing to COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions on movement. In the area of the fenced-off town observable by UNFICYP, activities and changes within the fenced area of the town continued. Those changes consisted primarily of small-scale infrastructure development (e.g., electrical work, road paving, installation of closed-circuit television cameras, streetlights, water containers and renovation of a mosque), the installation of a bicycle-renting stand, presumably for tourists, significant clearance of vegetation and unmanned aerial commercial off-the-shelf vehicle overflights, linked most likely to the monitoring of civilian visits. In relation to Varosha, UNFICYP continues to be guided by the relevant Security Council resolutions. Accordingly, the mission and the Secretariat repeatedly expressed concern over the developments in the fenced-off part of the town. The United Nations continues to hold the Government of Turkey responsible for the situation in Varosha.

## **B. Prevention of a recurrence of fighting and maintenance of the military status quo**

16. Tensions at the level of the opposing forces remained low during the reporting period. While quantitatively, overall, there was a slight decrease in the number of military violations, the mission nevertheless observed actions that could be construed as a further hardening of the ceasefire lines. Along the northern ceasefire line, the mission protested against violations consisting primarily of the enhancement of existing positions, the installation of new closed-circuit television cameras on watchtowers and the deployment of one additional prefabricated concrete firing position, bringing the total to three along the northern ceasefire line. Ten new watchtowers were also placed by the Turkish forces in the sector 1 area, and the mission observed that electro-optical surveillance equipment had been deployed along sections of the northern ceasefire line. On the southern ceasefire line, there was 1 new prefabricated concrete firing position installation during the period, and the 232 deployed previously remained in place.

17. An emerging trend that further challenges the military status quo is the increased surveillance capability along both ceasefire lines, in the form of closed-circuit television cameras, the presence of commercial off-the-shelf drones and, in the case of the northern ceasefire line, the deployment of electro-optical surveillance equipment, as mentioned above. The latter provides greater visibility to one side over the buffer zone. Such enhancements further highlight the technological divide between the mission and the sides. Of note, this period saw a reduction in military moves forward in the buffer zone, along both ceasefire lines.

18. In sector 4, the mission's freedom of movement both in Varosha and Strovilia remains substantially hampered, the mission's repeated engagement with the relevant interlocutors notwithstanding. In Strovilia, the Turkish Cypriot security forces position remained overmanned. In mid-March, several new temporary defensive armoured vehicles and ditches were detected within the Turkish Cypriot security forces military exercise area south of Varosha.

19. During the reporting period, active engagement with the National Guard leadership was sustained, notwithstanding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions. There was also notable progress in ensuring more regular dialogue with the Turkish Cypriot security forces, both at the leadership and sector levels. Turkish Forces preannouncement procedures and the relationship with the mission also improved across the three sectors.

20. At the same time, no progress was achieved on the establishment of a direct military contact mechanism. Positions on the composition of the mechanism remained far apart and hardly bridgeable, as confirmed by both sides when consulted by my Special Representative and by the Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and Americas, Miroslav Jenča, during his visit in March. In the south, the position remains that such interaction should involve the Turkish army alone, while, in the north, the response remains that only Turkish Cypriot security forces should be present from their side. UNFICYP had put forward the proposal that the commanders of those opposing forces that maintain military positions along the ceasefire lines should enter into dialogue, with the facilitation of the mission's Force Commander.

21. The mission engaged with military representatives on both sides to assess the latter's willingness to implement the request of the Security Council, in its resolution [2561 \(2021\)](#), to agree on "a plan of work to achieve a mine-free Cyprus". While the Turkish Cypriot security forces expressed potential interest in the discussion, provided that it would involve reciprocity from the other side, the National Guard did not wish to discuss the matter. Therefore, no progress was made during the reporting period regarding the clearing of the 29 remaining suspected hazardous areas on the island. The Mine Action Service continued to research options for the next phase of clearance activities to be presented to the two sides, with a special focus on the buffer zone and its four remaining mined areas.

### **C. Management of civilian activity and maintenance of law and order**

22. As mentioned above, encroachment into the buffer zone and the undermining of the area's integrity by both sides increased as respect for the principles and rules that UNFICYP had established and seeks to enforce dwindled. In addition to generating operational challenges for the mission, this fuelled mistrust between the sides ahead of and after the informal five-plus-one meeting.

23. During the period, steps also continued to be taken by Greek Cypriots to pursue residential, industrial and commercial development in several areas of the buffer zone, without the mission's authorization. On the Turkish Cypriot side, direct challenges to the mission's mandated authority in the buffer zone also increased, in particular in contested areas such as the Pyla plateau (see sect. A above).

24. Similarly, the reporting period saw an overall rise in unauthorized entry into the buffer zone. Although tensions on the ground linked to civilian activity, either between civilians or involving the opposing forces, remained low and within the norm of previous reporting periods, there was a significant escalation of buffer zone issues to the political level, in particular regarding construction.

25. Although the period saw an increase in the reporting of low-level criminal incidents in the buffer zone, this trend can be attributable in part to more proactive, targeted patrolling by UNFICYP. Several incidents of aggression and vandalism targeting the mission's personnel and property occurred in sector 4, illustrating the current negative climate at the level of the local community and to which the disregard for the mission's mandated authority by both sides has likely contributed. On a positive note, the "Joint Contact Room" (also known as the "Joint Communication Room"), linked to the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters,

continued to share information and to facilitate the exchange of suspects (two) between the sides. As of May, the two sides had also begun to exchange information for the prevention of human smuggling through the buffer zone. The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the ongoing division of the island and the porous nature of the buffer zone, have created conditions that are, in general, conducive to criminal activity in and around the buffer zone, in particular smuggling.

26. In Pyla, police services on both sides continued to collaborate effectively with UNFICYP to respond to law and order incidents and provide policing services in the village. However, illegal establishments (e.g., gambling) continued to exploit the law and order challenges associated with the bicomunal village to operate with impunity. With respect to intercommunal activities, while they continued to be hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, local institutions and residents, in particular schools and teachers, showed encouraging signs of a willingness to cooperate in the village. Meanwhile, the university in Pyla continued to operate without authorization from UNFICYP, and no progress was registered to resolve the matter of the large unauthorized construction project associated with the university, the continued engagement efforts of the mission notwithstanding.

#### **D. Intercommunal relations, cooperation and trust-building**

27. The various declarations made by political actors on both sides in anticipation of the informal five-plus-one meeting tended to increase polarization between and within the two communities, a situation that continued in large part after the meeting.

28. Notwithstanding the persisting, vast divergences between the parties regarding their approach to returning to the negotiating table, some encouraging progress was registered in the context of confidence-building and problem-solving, with United Nations facilitation.

29. During the reporting period, occurrences of politically or ethnically motivated attacks (e.g., desecration of the Episkopi mosque on Greek Independence Day and the theft and destruction of a Greek flag in Pyla), although serious and potentially harmful to intercommunal rapprochement, were counterbalanced by the swift and conciliatory response by community and religious leaders and political figures on both sides.

30. The two sides continued to take an uncoordinated approach to the crossings issue under COVID-19 pandemic-related conditions until an agreement was reached on 2 June by the two leaders, including the reopening of the three remaining closed crossing points. Further joint progress is expected in the coming period towards the easing of the crossing procedure for people who are fully vaccinated.

31. While the provision of vaccines to European Union member States encountered some delays, the European Commission reported that European Union-approved vaccines would be provided to cover the needs of all Cypriots. The Technical Committee on Health was tasked with overseeing the transfer of vaccines between the two communities. As of 18 June, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 831,205 doses had been received by the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus, of which, according to the Technical Committee on Health, 61,050 had been transferred to the north. Looking ahead, work is ongoing between the sides with respect to the recognition of vaccines for the purposes of travel in the future, both through the crossings and off the island.

32. UNFICYP continued to support intercommunal contacts and engagement during the reporting period, primarily through virtual platforms. Sustaining intercommunal engagement over time only through technological means presented real challenges, in particular for those not familiar with or interested in virtual exchanges. At the same

time, the mission was able to leverage the exceptional circumstances and the technological tools available to increasingly focus its intercommunal activities on youth activists across the divide, as well as on audiences outside Nicosia that are typically harder to reach, registering some important successes. One notable activity during the period was the first-ever intercommunal event in sector 1, in the western part of the island, which attracted more than 100 virtual participants from four non-governmental youth organizations. Building on the successes of the Youth Champions – Environment and Peace initiative and the social impact generator project, new areas of intercommunal engagement were developed, in areas such as environmental peacebuilding, water management and entrepreneurship.

33. With the exception of the Technical Committee on Crossings, all technical committees resumed their activity with varying levels of engagement, done for the most part virtually. Nevertheless, the overall impact of the technical committees on addressing island-wide concerns and improving the daily lives of Cypriots remained limited and tied heavily to political factors.<sup>3</sup>

34. During the reporting period, representatives of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot political parties maintained their regular monthly meetings under the auspices of the Embassy of Slovakia. In joint statements, the political parties repeatedly urged the two leaders to demonstrate the political will to resume substantive negotiations towards a just and lasting solution to the Cyprus problem. They also emphasized the need for cooperation and for new confidence-building measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic fallout. On 30 March, the Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and Americas and my Special Representative participated in a meeting with the political parties to discuss their expectations for a renewed peace process and concerns about the growing division between the communities.

35. The religious leaders of Cyprus sustained their commitment to peacebuilding and reconciliation within the framework of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden. During the reporting period, they issued public statements in which they promoted forgiveness, counteracting further polarization and standing up for religious freedom, including as a reaction to cases of desecration and vandalism of places of worship.<sup>4</sup>

## **E. Facilitation of access and humanitarian functions**

36. As was the case during the previous reporting period, until early in June, the Léfka-Apliki/Lefke-Aplıç and Deryneia/Derinya crossing points were kept closed from the northern side of the crossings, as was the Ledra Street crossing point from its southern side. UNFICYP was able to use the Lefka-Apliki/Lefke-Aplıç and Deryneia/Derinya crossing points for its supplies and emergencies, but not for its regular operations.

37. Owing to complications arising from movement restrictions at crossing points overall, there was an increase in requests for UNFICYP to resolve humanitarian concerns and thus facilitate, among others, post-mortem transfers, burial attendance, crossings of people for hospital visits and facilitation of the movement of medicine across the Green Line. The ban by the Republic of Cyprus on the crossing either way of third-country nationals also resulted in the mission needing to work closely with

<sup>3</sup> More details on the work of the technical committees are set out in the recent report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus (S/2021/634).

<sup>4</sup> Further information is provided in the recent report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus (S/2021/634).

diplomatic representatives to facilitate the crossing of their citizens from one side of the island to the other.

38. In compliance with its mandate, the mission continued to engage with the Maronite and Greek Cypriot communities living in the north, albeit in an altered rhythm and modality, and with Turkish Cypriots living in the south. The COVID-19 pandemic also prevented religious pilgrimages across the Green Line, which had been hitherto an important confidence-building measure. On 30 May, UNFICYP facilitated the movement of Greek Cypriots and Maronites who live in the north and wished to vote in the south for the parliamentary elections.

39. The crossing of persons and goods between the two sides continued to be facilitated through European Council regulation (EC) No. 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 (the Green Line Regulation). Although the 2021 data on the number of crossings are not yet available, there is no doubt that the restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic continued to reduce crossings to a minimum. Trade across the Green Line remained at its usual level, involving mostly contactless exchanges, a level nevertheless assessed as very low by the European Commission on numerous occasions.<sup>5</sup> In April, the European Commission adopted two important new measures: (a) to allow producers based anywhere on the island to benefit from the protected designation of origin status for Halloumi/Hellim; and (b) to allow the protected designation of origin product in the north to cross the Green Line, provided that the cheese and milk from which it was made met all European Union animal and public health standards.

## **F. Refugees and asylum seekers**

40. The challenges in gaining access to the territory and asylum procedures owing to measures adopted in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant reduction in the number of asylum applications in 2020 (7,094, compared with 13,520 in 2019). However, increased admissions at the reception centre in the months of March and April 2021 indicated a sharp increase in the number of asylum applicants arriving irregularly. A total of 988 persons were reportedly admitted to the first reception centre in March, tripling the number of persons admitted at the centre in February, followed by 1,061 in April and 993 in May, indicating overall an increasing trend in the number of asylum applications.

41. Incidents of pushback were noted, both from the buffer zone and at sea, rendering asylum seekers at risk of refoulement. On 5 February, five Syrian nationals, including two women, were intercepted in Pyla and directed back to the north by the Cyprus Police. In addition, witnesses reported that asylum seekers who had presented themselves to the police at the established crossing points in order to seek asylum were denied access to asylum procedures, with the explanation that this was due to COVID-19 restrictions. Some asylum seekers attempted to cross through the various sections of the buffer zone and became stranded there for several days.

42. Several incidents of pushback of boats were noted between December 2020 and May 2021. In particular, a boat carrying 38 Syrians, assumed to have departed from Lebanon, had reportedly been initially pushed back in December 2020. The boat was subsequently allowed to dock after the passengers claimed to have sailed from the Syrian Arab Republic. On 8 January 2021, a boat carrying 26 Syrians was reportedly pushed back by Cyprus coast guards. The boat was presumed to have sailed from

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the sixteenth report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004 and the situation resulting from its application covering the period 1 January until 31 December 2019, available at [www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1j9vvik7mlc3gyxp/vl9mkeuq4gx5](http://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1j9vvik7mlc3gyxp/vl9mkeuq4gx5).



Turkey. On 17 May, a boat carrying 63 Syrian nationals, including 23 children and 16 women, was pushed back to Lebanon without allowing the passengers gain access to asylum procedures, even though they had expressed clearly their wish to seek asylum. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), some of those asylum seekers continue to remain detained in Lebanon and are subject to deportation to the Syrian Arab Republic, which would be a violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

43. Lack of predictable access to the asylum procedure at the crossing points is likely to have contributed to an increase in irregular crossings through the buffer zone, putting asylum seekers at risk of exploitation and making them vulnerable to security incidents.

44. As has been noted in my previous reports, the issue of asylum seekers and irregular migration has also been a source of tension between the sides on various occasions. On a positive note, in May 2021 and with United Nations facilitation, experts from both sides, including representatives of several technical committees, held a first meeting on irregular migration. Attended by the UNHCR representative on the island, the meeting was convened to discuss various aspects of the issue, with plans to continue holding such discussions on a regular basis.

## **G. Gender, and women and peace and security**

45. UNFICYP maintained its support for the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda throughout the period, using virtual forums owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges of employing virtual means notwithstanding, women activists continued to coalesce under a shared goal of women's participation in the peace process and in favour of an urgent resumption of the talks. Several women's organizations issued supportive statements and submitted their demands to their leaders, in anticipation of the informal five-plus-one meeting, a positive step in promoting women's perspectives on peace and security for Cyprus. One intercommunal women's group, "Hands across the Divide", undertook a series of outreach meetings with decision makers on both sides of the island and with the diplomatic community, so as to further share women's perspectives in relation to the peace process.

46. UNFICYP expanded its outreach to youth groups across the island on issues related to gender equality, gender-based discrimination and the women and peace and security agenda. On International Women's Day, UNFICYP facilitated an intercommunal dialogue with young people on the gendered impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, as part of a global campaign on women's participation in peace and political processes, UNFICYP developed a month-long social media campaign with diverse content, including featuring several women serving in the mission across the components. The campaign also included videos profiling two women activists from Cyprus who are working to build trust and dialogue among women from the two communities and to promote a joint approach between them in favour of sustainable peace. In addition, in March 2021, the mission's monthly podcast featured a conversation with the outgoing United Nations police Senior Police Adviser, who spoke about the role of women in peacekeeping, including at the leadership level.

47. In line with its objective to bolster gender parity, UNFICYP continued to foster an enabling environment through which women's participation in peacekeeping is increased and enhanced. The mission continued to provide capacity-building and awareness-raising tools to personnel from its police, military and civilian components and to systematically solicit the perspectives of female peacekeepers from all

components to ensure gender-responsive operations. In May, UNFICYP again led by example by welcoming a new female Force Commander and Senior Police Adviser, thus upholding its tradition of ensuring senior female leadership mission-wide.

#### **IV. Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus**

48. Since its establishment, the bicomunal teams of scientists of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, supported by the United Nations and mandated to recover, identify and return the remains of persons who went missing during the events of 1963/64 and 1974, has exhumed or received the remains of 1,219 persons on both sides of the island. Seven persons were exhumed during the reporting period. The overall exhumation figure may include persons who are not on the official list of missing persons and is finalized only after the completion of anthropological analysis and DNA identification, a process commonly completed within one to two years. When the identified remains are not related to the mandate of the Committee, they are then subtracted from the official figures. Owing to COVID-19-related movement restrictions, operations of the Committee were suspended for 49 working days in 2021, and activities resumed in full on 2 March, with seven bicomunal teams carrying out excavations across the island. Pandemic-related access restrictions were lifted for the Committee teams in Turkish military areas by the end of April. To date, of 2,002 missing persons, 1,006 have been identified and their remains returned to their families, including 12 during the reporting period.

49. In an effort to locate additional burial sites of missing persons, the Committee continued its efforts to gain access to the archives of countries and organizations that had maintained a military, police or humanitarian presence in Cyprus in 1963/64 and 1974. During the reporting period, little archival information on possible burial sites from the parties directly involved was received. The Committee continued its extensive research in the archives of the United Nations in Nicosia.

#### **V. Conduct and discipline and sexual exploitation and abuse**

50. During the reporting period, UNFICYP pursued its efforts to encourage strict adherence to the United Nations policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. In coordination with the Regional Conduct and Discipline Section based at the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, the mission implemented activities related to prevention, enforcement and remedial action regarding misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud, and prohibited conduct in the workplace.

51. Given the COVID-19 context, all misconduct-related training for all categories of personnel in the mission, including on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, fraud and corruption, was delivered online.

52. During the period, UNFICYP did not receive any allegations of sexual exploitation and/or abuse.

#### **VI. Financial and administrative aspects**

53. The General Assembly, by its resolution [74/285](#) and decision 74/571, appropriated the amount of \$51.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, inclusive of the voluntary contribution of one third of the net appropriation of the Force, equivalent to \$17.4 million from the Government of Cyprus and the voluntary contribution of \$6.5 million from the Government of Greece.

54. As at 3 June 2021, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNFICYP amounted to \$18.6 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,499.0 million.

55. Reimbursement of troop costs and contingent-owned equipment have been made for the period up to 31 December 2020 in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

## VII. Observations

56. The COVID-19 pandemic continued to significantly affect public health and to seriously affect Cypriots socioeconomically, as well as keep the two communities apart. I am concerned by the growing estrangement during a period when efforts to return to formal talks have still not achieved a breakthrough. Growing disparities and mistrust between the sides may add a further, significant hurdle to the efforts towards reaching a settlement in Cyprus. In its resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#), the Security Council warned that “the peacebuilding and development gains made by countries in transition and post-conflict countries could be reversed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak” and that combating the pandemic “requires greater national, regional and international cooperation and solidarity, and a coordinated ... response with the United Nations playing a key coordinating role”. I am therefore supportive of the attempts by my Special Representative/Deputy Special Adviser to foster harmonization and greater cooperation in relation to certain critical aspects of the sides’ response to the pandemic, especially concerning the crossing points and the sharing of the vaccines, which echoes my call for pandemic cooperation in the context of my “appeal for a global ceasefire”. I welcome the agreement between the sides announced on 2 June regarding the reopening of the crossing points and the harmonization of the crossing procedure. I believe, however, that more can be achieved on vaccine-sharing. As I have highlighted in the past, “vaccine equity is currently the biggest moral test before the global community”.

57. Given the passage of time and the risk that the communities drift ever-further apart, fostering cooperation on issues that affect the daily life of Cypriots is fundamental. I have previously encouraged the leaders to empower the technical committees and to give them the political support required to achieve results, in particular those that can play a role in addressing key aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact, such as health, economic and commercial matters, crisis management, gender equality and humanitarian affairs. A stated political commitment to meaningfully empower these committees notwithstanding, progress achieved during the period remained limited, especially given the potential role that these committees could play vis-à-vis the pandemic and its socioeconomic and related consequences. A notable exception was the Technical Committee on Health, which, as indicated above, played a critical role in supporting the sides in advancing in terms of public health-related cooperation on COVID-19 and in reopening crossings.

58. As outlined in the principles of my Action for Peacekeeping initiative, there is a clear complementarity between peacekeeping and peacemaking, and the actions of both missions on the ground should therefore continue to be mutually reinforcing. While there is a continued absence of meaningful political progress and of a common vision for the way forward, the situation on the ground is not static. Changes to the status quo observed by the mission, subtle in some areas, overt in others, continue to heighten tensions between the two sides, moving the parties further apart and possibly affecting the efforts towards a sustainable, mutually acceptable solution.

59. I have repeatedly stressed the importance of the parties not taking unilateral action that could raise tensions on the island and compromise a return to talks, while

also calling upon all parties to engage in dialogue in order to resolve their differences. Developments in Varosha are perhaps the most illustrative of such challenges in the absence of a political settlement. I reiterate my concern over developments in the fenced-off area of the town and recall that the position of the United Nations remains unchanged. I further recall the Security Council's presidential statement of 9 October 2020 and the relevant Council resolutions related to Varosha, notably [550 \(1984\)](#) and [789 \(1992\)](#), and the importance of adhering fully to those resolutions. I also deplore the restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNFICYP imposed in the area and elsewhere, as in Strovilia, and request that the ability of the mission to patrol and implement its mandated activities be restored in full. I recall that the mandate provided by the Council to UNFICYP is not limited to the buffer zone but extends to the entire island.

60. Encroachment by both sides into the buffer zone, mostly in the form of unauthorized construction, has increased significantly. In addition to creating operational challenges for UNFICYP, these actions generate tensions on the ground and between the sides, carry security risks and do not contribute to a positive climate. Unauthorized construction for personal and commercial use in the buffer zone, in contravention of established procedures for the management of civilian activity, highlights a disregard for the United Nations delineation of the buffer zone and for the mandated authority of UNFICYP. It could further compromise the mission's ability to fulfil its mandated objective of maintaining calm and creating conditions conducive for a settlement. I urge both sides, once again, to respect and abide by the United Nations delineation of the buffer zone and established mechanisms for managing civilian activity therein. I recall the Security Council's request that all unauthorized constructions inside the buffer zone be removed and that both sides prevent unauthorized military and civilian activities within and along the ceasefire lines.

61. In addition to the above, I support the call of my Special Representative for a return to the status quo ante concerning all military installations along the ceasefire lines that constitute a violation of the military status quo. I highlight in particular the unprecedented deployment of new surveillance technology along the ceasefire lines, which is contributing to changing the military status quo and poses a supervision challenge for UNFICYP. Therefore, I reiterate the call of the Security Council to the sides to abide by the 2018 aide-memoire that underpins UNFICYP supervision of the ceasefire and its efforts to contribute to the maintenance of law and order and a return to normal conditions.

62. UNFICYP records all observed violations and engages with the two sides to resolve issues that arise in and around the buffer zone, with a view to maintaining calm and preventing escalation. However, some incidents are used politically and amplified through the media, further increasing tensions and mistrust. I deplore any attempts to instrumentalize the situation in the buffer zone and call upon the two sides to work constructively with UNFICYP to address violations and incidents and to refrain from increasing tensions further.

63. Regardless of the status of the peace process, confidence-building measures can provide hope and help to narrow the growing divide between the two communities. I encourage the two sides to put forward in good faith proposals and ideas for possible new measures, or to review past proposals, so that discussions and progress may be further pursued. In that vein, I encourage the continuation of the weekly trilateral dialogue initiated with the sides by my Special Representative/Deputy Special Adviser since March, as one of the platforms to achieve progress on confidence-building measures and to resolve outstanding problems on the ground that tend to raise tensions between the sides. Given the complex regional environment and its impact on Cyprus, I also call upon relevant actors in the region to exercise restraint,

explore confidence-building measures and take constructive approaches to resolving their disputes. It is important that the parties demonstrate their goodwill and make greater efforts to create conditions conducive to a political settlement.

64. I have heard the calls from numerous civil society actors to have a greater say in the future of the island and, in particular, on the course of the peace process. In previous reports, I called upon political leaders on the island to contribute to bringing the communities closer together as an element necessary for building a constituency for peace and laying the foundation for a sustainable solution to the Cyprus problem. I recognize and support the role of civil society, especially women and youth, and view the active participation and inclusion of civil actors in the broader Cyprus peace process to be key to a lasting settlement and peace. I further emphasize the important facilitation role of the two United Nations missions on the ground in that regard. Both missions will further this engagement. I urge the leaders to encourage more direct contact and cooperation between the two communities and to provide concrete support to people-to-people initiatives, as evidence of their genuine commitment to a solution.

65. The Security Council has repeatedly called upon the leaders to refrain from using rhetoric that might deepen the mistrust between the communities, insisting on the importance of improving the public atmosphere and preparing the communities for a settlement, while also highlighting the importance of peace education. Forty-five years after the ceasefire and de facto division of Cyprus, most of those pillars of reconciliation, unfortunately, remain to be built.

66. Even in these difficult times, and notwithstanding repeated calls on my part and on the part of the Security Council, efforts in Cyprus to achieve greater economic and social parity between the two sides and to broaden and deepen economic, cultural and other forms of cooperation remain limited. The full implementation of European Council regulation (EC) No. 866/2004 would significantly help to increase the volume of trade and should be pursued with renewed vigour. Increased cross-island trade, together with deeper economic, social, cultural, sporting and other ties and contacts, would promote trust between the communities and help to address the concerns of the Turkish Cypriots regarding isolation.

67. In their efforts to promote closer cooperation between the communities, local and international actors continue to be confronted with challenges and obstacles linked to the status of the north and concerns relating to “recognition”. While the United Nations policy on Cyprus is maintained and decisions of the Security Council on the matter are upheld, concerns about recognition should not in themselves constitute an obstacle to increased cooperation. As the two sides explore further opportunities for confidence-building and cooperation, I urge them to devise creative ways of overcoming obstacles with a view to achieving meaningful progress and delivering tangible benefits to their communities. The United Nations remains fully committed to providing them with the necessary facilitation and support.

68. With regard to the request of the Security Council to see the establishment of a mechanism for direct military contacts, I regret that no agreement could be found following the submission by my Special Representative of a proposal on 1 May 2020 and her recurrent engagement. I remain convinced that such a mechanism would allow the parties to effectively alleviate day-to-day tensions in and around the buffer zone and would constitute an important military confidence-building measure. In the absence of genuine will to arrive at a mutually acceptable but effective military contact mechanism, UNFICYP will continue to pursue other military confidence-building measures with the sides. One such measure could involve the mutually agreed use of technology to further unman positions along the ceasefire lines.

69. I applaud the tenacity and continuing efforts of women's groups and women activists in Cyprus to ensure the full participation of women in the peace process and for a gender-responsive settlement. UNFICYP will continue to play its part in leading by example on gender parity in peacekeeping and will maintain its efforts to support gender and peace activists to take their rightful place in the peace initiative on the island. In that respect, I urge the leaders to fully support the work of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality and the critical role of civil society and to ensure a linkage between the two, in order to pursue a sustainable and equitable solution to the Cyprus issue for all.

70. The situation of asylum seekers and refugees across the island, as well as the issue of access to asylum procedures in accordance with international law, continued to be a challenge during the reporting period and is of serious concern to the United Nations. While appreciating the exceptional circumstances and pressures arising from COVID-19, as well as the high volume of arrivals in Cyprus in relation to the size of the population, I must recall the critical importance of full adherence to international legal norms in the handling of asylum seekers and refugees, wherever they may be found.

71. I also encourage the continuation of regular interaction between experts of both sides to discuss the issue of irregular migration in meetings facilitated by my mission of good offices and attended by the UNHCR representative on the island, as initiated in May.

72. In the light of the continued contribution of UNFICYP to peace and stability and to the creation of conditions conducive to a political settlement, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the mission for six months, until 31 January 2022. Looking ahead, UNFICYP will continue to monitor the evolving situation and adapt its operations to implement its mandate effectively.

73. I would like to thank the partners, in particular the European Commission, that have continued to provide support for the work of both United Nations missions in Cyprus, the United Nations Development Programme and the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, and that have contributed to the implementation of various confidence-building measures. I also thank the 36 countries that have contributed troops, police or both to UNFICYP since 1964 and pay tribute to the 186 peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the service of peace in Cyprus.

74. I express my gratitude to Ms. Spehar for her service as my Special Representative in Cyprus, Head of UNFICYP and Deputy Special Adviser on Cyprus. I also express my appreciation to all the women and men serving in UNFICYP for their steadfast commitment to the implementation of the mandate of the mission and the cause of peace on the island.

## Annex

### Countries providing military and police personnel to the United Nations operation in Cyprus (as at 18 June 2021)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of military personnel</i>
Argentina	249
Austria	3
Brazil	2
Canada	1
Chile	6
Ghana	1
Hungary	11
India	1
Norway	3
Pakistan	3
Paraguay	12
Russian Federation	4
Serbia	8
Slovakia	235
Ukraine	1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	257
<b>Total<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>796</b>

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of police personnel</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6
Bulgaria	2
China	6
Finland	2
India	3
Ireland	10
Italy	4
Jordan	4
Lithuania	1
Montenegro	1
Pakistan	3
Romania	5
Russian Federation	4
Serbia	2
Slovakia	6
Sweden	3
Ukraine	3
<b>Total<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>65</b>

<sup>a</sup> Of the military personnel, 714 are men and 82 are women. Of the police personnel, 37 are men and 28 are women.

