LEADERSHIP AND HIV/AIDS

The AIDS crisis is global. It knows no frontiers. It is everyone’s problem. The urgency is self-evident – the futures of entire societies hang in the balance.

Speaking at the Bangkok International AIDS Conference (see article page 4) earlier this month, the SG called on leaders around the world to speak out, and to put many more resources into what he call “this fight we have to win.”

Leadership, he noted, means showing the way by example, breaking the deadly wall of silence that surrounds the epidemic, achieving the cultural shift needed to fight it effectively, and providing treatment to all who need it.

Leaders everywhere should demonstrate that speaking up about AIDS is “a point of pride, not a source of shame”, he said. And not just national leaders.

Leadership also comes from partners who make sure they always use a condom; from fathers, husbands, sons and uncles who support and affirm the rights of women; from teachers who nurture the dreams and aspirations of girls; from doctors, nurses and counselors who listen and provide care without judgment; and from the media who bring HIV/AIDS out of the shadows, and encourage people to make responsible choices.

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Leadership means respecting and upholding the human rights of all who are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, including their right to treatment, if they are infected. As the SG said in Bangkok: “Leadership means daring to do things differently, because you understand that AIDS is a different kind of disease. It stands alone in human experience, and it requires us to stand united against it.”

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Pass the Flame – Unite the World

For the first time ever, the Olympic torch, that universal flame of hope, made a stop at United Nations Headquarters on its global circuit while pausing briefly towards the end of a day-long 34-mile run through all of New York City’s five boroughs on 19 June last.

As the last gleam of sunset streamed down Manhattan’s midtown canyons to bounce off the glass of the UN Secretariat building, the flame shone brightly outside UN HQ where Secretary-General Kofi Annan and General Assembly President Julian R. Hunte at St. Lucia presided at a special ceremony invoking the ancient Greek tradition of an “Olympic Truce” for the duration of the Games. Also present were Greece’s Alternate Minister of Culture, Fanny Palli-Petralia and Athens 2004 President Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalakis, as well as 1,000 UN staff members, diplomats and dignitaries, among them New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Lighting a symbolic cauldron with the torch to keep the flame alive outside the UN, the SG voiced his hope that during the 2004 Athens Olympics, “the serenity of the Olympic flame will silence the sound of warfare”. The Torch should be seen as more than a symbol, since “it can offer a point of consensus, a pause to open dialogue, a chance to provide relief to a suffering population”. It offered “a window of hope”, he said.

Tonight, I call on all those engaged in armed conflict of any kind to observe the Olympic Truce, and to use that opportunity to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation”, Mr. Annan said.

GA President Hunte called for “a time-out from conflict, violence and war”. Greek Minister Palli-Petralia described the Olympic Truce as “man’s first attempt in history to apply peace between nations” and, as such, “the ancient predecessor of the UN’s peacekeeping role”.

The flag of the Olympic Truce was also raised as a children’s choir sang the Olympic Hymn. “The Olympic Games are a time of peace for people of all cultures, religious and ethnic backgrounds,” declared Stavros Lambrinidis, director of the International Olympic Truce Centre.

Thanks to UNICEF, two young people, themselves victims of conflict, carried the torch to and from the UN complex. Toni Jones, who fled the conflict in Liberia a decade ago and has since fought to free child soldiers, passed the torch to the SG when he lit the cauldron. Daniel Mejia, whose uncle was the victim of political assassi- nation in Colombia, then carried the torch from the UN to its last NY stop in Times Square. By their presence, both epitomized the theme of the 2004 Olympic Torch Relay – “Pass the Flame, Unite the World”.

The Athens 2004 Olympic Torch Relay marks the first-ever global journey of the Olympic Torch Relay, spanning 34 cities and 27 countries over 35 days. It passed through Cyprus on 8-9 July, sadly only in the south.
AIDS is the leading cause of death. In 2001, 35 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world were infected, and 3 million people have died. This year, a total of 4 million people were infected, and 3 million died.

About 14,000 new HIV infections a day in 2003

- More than 95% are low and middle income countries
- Almost 2,000 are children under 15 years of age
- About 12,000 are persons aged 15 to 49 years, of whom:
  - almost 50% are women
  - about 50% are 15- to 24-year-olds

The number of people living with HIV continues to grow worldwide – from 35 million in 2001 to 38 million in 2003. In 2001, 377 HIV cases. It is estimated that 62 million people are already infected with HIV. The number of people living with HIV is 1.3 million, but this number is expected to increase to 70% of HIV cases. South Africa remains the world’s worst affected region. AIDS has spread to every continent, infecting people of all ages and genders.

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are 25 million people living with HIV/AIDS. Currently, there are 10 million young people infected worldwide, of whom 6.2 million live in sub-Saharan Africa. Of that number, 75% are young women. The region has more than 10% of the world’s population but has 70% of HIV cases. South Africa is the world’s worst-affected region.

AIDS has left “millions of orphans, children taking care of families, schools without teachers, States without fiscal revenues, fields without farmers, and rising numbers of people living in extreme poverty”, said Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Dr. Piot stated: “Despite increased funding, political commitment and progress in expanding access to HIV treatment, the AIDS epidemic continues to outpace the global response.” Experience has shown us that prevention efforts cannot be reduced. Prevention efforts targeting a specific community are decreased, the number of HIV infections increases.

Global estimates of HIV and AIDS as of end 2003

- More than 1 million of the world’s population is under 15 years of age
- More than 2 million of the world’s population is under 25 years of age
- More than 3 million of the world’s population is under 30 years of age
- More than 4 million of the world’s population is under 40 years of age

Total number of adults and children living with HIV: 38 million [35-42 million]

At a recent press conference, the SG said: “This is a global problem without frontiers of any kind. It’s everyone’s problem and it’s urgent. The future of entire societies hangs in the balance.” In a call for solidarity, the SG sent a message to leaders around the world that “this is a fight we have to win”.

The UN co-sponsored 15th International AIDS Conference took place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 11 to 16 July. Experts from all areas of HIV/AIDS (research, treatment and prevention), political leaders, AIDS activists, and celebrities gathered with people living with HIV to discuss the global fight against the pandemic. The theme of this year’s conference was “access for all”, emphasizing that treatment, prevention, and information needs to be made available to all communities.

UNFICYP’s Force Medical Staff offers voluntary confidential counselling, HIV testing, free condoms and Post-Exposure Phrophylaxis (PEP) for all personnel. UNFICYP is committed to creating an environment free of stigmas, discrimination and prejudice.

A Call for Solidarity

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The Cultural Heritage of Cyprus – Part XXV

Tavli or tavla, It’s the Only Game In Town!

It is well documented that backgammon was played extensively in England during the Middle Ages. In Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Parson’s Tale”, reference to the game of “tables” being played is made. James I of England found it a “favourite pastime” and spent the eve and night of his assassination playing it. In 1479, Albany, the brother of King James III, played against his jailor, “which was his destruction of the wretched man that Albany slew him and made good his escape from Edinburgh Castle”. Sir Miles Stapledon played King Henry VIII for the bells of St. Paul’s Cathedral… and won! Whilst in his famous diary, Samuel Pepys wrote, “lost a crown at tables before walking home”. The carved nature of the table, especially in English taverns. However, because of its prevalent gambling nature, it was blamed for inciting rowdiness and fighting and was banned from the taverns. It was only reintroduced under King Charles II. The game was extremely popular, especially in English taverns. However, because of its prevalent gambling nature, it was blamed for inciting rowdiness and fighting and was banned from the taverns. It was only reintroduced under King Charles II.

The name “backgammon” is believed to have originated from either the Saxon “baec” (back) “gamen” (game), or from the Welsh “bac” (little) “gammon” (match). But every country has its own name. In France it’s called “tric trac”, in Germany “puff”, in Turkey “tavla”, in Italy “tavla reale”, in Spain “tavla reales”, and in China “wan-liu”.

In Cyprus, it’s called “tavli” among Greek Cypriots and “tavla” among Turkish Cypriots, and it is as popular today as it was all three centuries ago when it first arrived here with the Egyptians.

Every Cypriot throughout the island knows of the game, and it’s probably fair to say that at least 75% of the population can play it, at least fairly well. Tavli boards exist in almost every Cypriot home and are brought out on a regular basis when friends or family come to visit. Every tavern and coffee shop has at least one board available for its customers (usually older men with time on their hands), and it’s not unusual for the establishment’s “regulars” to challenge visiting strangers if they happen show an interest in the ongoing match. Unlike the smart European casinos, the old men in the coffee shops rarely play for stakes, but merely for rounds of coffee, possibly a beer, or maybe even lunch!

Until a few years ago, tavli was played mostly by the menfolk but today, more and more women are taking up the challenge and beating the men at their own game! Young people too have taken up the challenge and it’s not at all unusual to see children as young as eight or nine years old pitting their wits against the older generation. Experience still counts for something it seems, and they may win a game or two, but rarely the match.

Tavli boards can be found in most souvenir shops on the island. These are usually simple, low cost, authentic wooden boards – not at all like the expensive designer boards found in the big department stores of Europe. However, if you are looking for something a little more unusual, look out for the beautifully decorated wooden inlaid sets such as the one shown in this feature. These are made by Syrian craftsmen, whose talents have been handed down from generation to generation – just like the game itself.
Pedalling from Dawn to Dusk

By Msgt. Guido Erl

Having travelled more than 4,000 km on my bike in the Troodos Mountains on the Akamas Peninsula, I needed a new challenge. In early June, not far from the Baths of Aphrodite looking down to Polis and towards the Troodos silhouette and Kato Pyrgos, the idea of cycling from one end of the buffer zone to the other crossed my mind. Only five weeks later, after a successful test ride over 95 km through Sector 1 to the UNPA, I felt ready to face the challenge.

At 0300 hours on 13 July, MCpl. Franz Rogelj and I left for Kato Pyrgos - an early departure was essential to reach the start at OP 08 at sunrise. Well prepared and encouraged by the picturesque scenery at dawn, even the steepest and most demanding ascents in Sector 1 seemed to flatten. Watched by astonished moufflons, and stopped only twice by a flat tyre, OP 18 was within sight at 0815 hours. After a short pitstop, refuelling with bananas, power gel, cereal bars, etc (the consumption of water and dehydration drinks was already frighteningly high), any shade was left far behind and the so-called "easy" part began. Only a "ridiculous" 60 km to Nicosia!

Upon reaching the climax around Lymbia, the drinks were boiling and motivation melting... A break was essential to regain strength - loads of carbohydrates were required to be able to climb the Karavous Pass in the Athienou area and final ascent up to the Pyla plateau. The ultimate 12 km to OP 146 were a bonus.

Crossing the finish line couldn't have been achieved without the invaluable support of Franz, who was also responsible for all photos taken, and WO1 Michael Hoselinger. Many thanks also for the live coverage of "The BZ in A Day" by Lt. Col. Hans Tomaschitz.

Fuel consumption: 18 litres water (17.5 to cool head and legs; 0.5 to drink!)
Gatorade: 7.5 litres
Cereal bars: 10
Powergels: 5
Bananas: Countless

Temperature above 42°C

Lymbia 1520
Start OP 08
0600

A warm welcome at the UNPA!

Camp San Martin

OP 18
0815

OP 18 OP 09
0920

Karavous Pass 1800

Nicosia

Temple 1250

Lymbia 1520

Nicosia - 1250

Finish OP 146 - 2000
Athienou’s Champion Weight Lifter
By Maj. Szilárd Várólgyi

The gym in Athienou is never empty. Just like the MFR here in the UNPA, the Hungarian soldiers train hard after duty hours. There is one small difference, and her name is Cpl. Magdolna Petróczki. Magdolna, a signaler working in the Concen in Athienou, is also a European power lifting champion, having twice won the Bronze medal. Sociable by nature, she readily agreed to talk about her ambitions.

Why power lifting?
“I’ve always liked challenges”, she said. “I enjoy working hard and try to obtain above average results. I have also said. “I enjoy working hard and try to improve my record by another 30-40 kg to bring the total up to over 450 kg.”

What about the basic rules?
“A competition consists of three events – squats, bench press and dead lifts. Naturally the proper technique and weight of the competitor are significant factors. The champion is the one who can lift the most combined weight in the three events. Officially, only the combined result is considered. Twice, in 1999 and 2002, I was placed third, and won the dead lift event in 2002.”

Is it true that you hold the record for winning the Hungarian National Championship the most times?
“Yes, on 12 occasions. The Championship began 15 years ago.”

What is your record?
“170 kg for squats, bench presses 87 kg, and 178 kg for dead lifts, making a total of 435 kg. I would like to improve my record by another 30-40 kg to bring the total up to over 450 kg.”

Amidst all these successes, have you had any disappointments?
“In 2002 at the World Championships, I was placed seventh. I had overestimated my capabilities during the dead lift event. I began with too heavy a weight, and couldn’t manage the attempt. As a result, I was disqualified. I have since learned that the first lift is always a safety attempt, and I now begin with a weight that I know I can achieve every time.”

What are your plans for the future?
“After my mission, at the end of September, I will be returning to my battalion. I would like to continue my service, and naturally to get into top condition for the next European Championship which will take place in Trenic (Slovakia) in the autumn. I will leave Cyprus with a heavy heart. I love being here, and would definitely come back, given the chance.”

Meantime, she hopes to continue her career as a professional soldier with the Hungarian military, preferably with an army parachuting unit.

All the best Magdolna, and good luck in the future. We look forward to reading about you!”

Not Quite An Olympics!

Recently, Sector 4 arranged several sport events and invited all units of UNFICYP to participate.

A basketball tournament was held on 28 May at Famagusta University. Six teams had the luxury of competing in an air-conditioned sports hall. Sector 1 came in first place, while Sectors 4 and 2 came in second and third respectively. MFR, UN Flight and HQ UNFICYP were also well represented by their teams. Force Commander Maj. Gen. Hebert Figoli and CO Sector 4 Lt. Col. Martin Baèko awarded diplomas to the winning teams.

On 19 June, CO Sector 4 staged a hockey tournament, in part a memorial named after Miroslav Hružka who died recently in a tragic accident. The teams were made up of officers, warrant officers and privates. The officers’ team had a padre as a goalkeeper, but his prayers didn’t help much since his team lost to the warrant officers. The matches were played on a wire-fenced concrete playground. Unavoidably, the wire fence became a factor in the games. The excitement was great throughout the tournament and attracted many members of Sector 4, who watched with great interest and enthusiasm.

The most recent sporting activity organised by Sector 4 was the swimming competition held at the UNPA’s Dolphin swimming pool on 9 July. A relaxed and joyful atmosphere marked the whole contest. Considering that the thermometer outside registered 38°C, a dip in the in the pool was the best remedy. In addition to the three sector teams, MFR.

SG announces key appointments

The SG announced a series of high level appointments in July. Pakistan’s Ambassador to the US, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi (62), succeeds the late Sergio Vieira de Mello as the SG’s Special Representative for Iraq. Mr. Qazi previously served as Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India, and as Ambassador to China, Russia, East Germany and Syria. Circumstances permitting, once adequate security arrangements have been made, the new SRSG and a small staff are expected to go to Baghdad sometime in August.

Louise Arbour, a Canadian Supreme Court Justice and former prosecutor of United Nations war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, assumed duty as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in succession to Sergio Vieira de Mello on 1 July.

The SG also announced the appointment of Juan E. Méndez (59) of Argentina as his first Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. The new Adviser is tasked with keeping an eye on potential situations that could develop into genocide, and to make recommendations on how the UN can prevent these events. A human rights advocate, lawyer and former political prisoner, Mr. Méndez moved to the US on his release, where he has since worked with Human Rights Watch.

Olympic Pact

In this, the year of the Athens Olympics, UN AIDS and the International Olympic Committee have agreed to work together:

- To promote HIV/AIDS awareness, particularly among the sport community, in support of HIV prevention for all;
- To promote activities to mitigate the health, social and economic impact of the epidemic on sports institutions, individuals, households, and communities;
- To work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and stigmatization of persons most affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly sports people living with HIV/AIDS.

July 2004 • The Blue Beret

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The Lowland Gunners get “Hung, Drawn and Quartered”

By WO2 (TSM) Hodges

D
during the Op TOSCA handover period from 3 RHA, we were told that a “make-over” team would be coming to check out “Camp Liri” (Nicosia) in order to transform one of the camp buildings into an interior decorator’s vision of colour-coordinated correctness for an episode of the BFBS TV programme “Hung, Drawn and Quartered”.

Because the Regiment has been residing in Topcliffe, North Yorkshire, and not Germany, we were unfamiliar with the BFBS TV personality line-up, but that only added to the excitement. The prospect of stars from the small screen arriving in our midst with a load of MDF fibre board and pots of paint ready to turn the new home of Liri Troop from 137 (Java) Bty, 40th Regiment RA (The Lowland Gunners) into a very model of imagina-
tive décor had everyone abuzz.

Under the QM’s guidance, a new Corinmec kitchen was installed and then the decision was taken that the old cookhouse dining room would be the room to get the “make-over” and that it would be converted to a TV room/bar.

It wasn’t long before we learned the identities of the “make-over artists” – BFBS’s Wob Eeles and Craig Phillips (of “Big Brother” fame!). So, they arrived for an initial recce and assessment on the evening of 21 June, with one day set aside for finding and buying mate-
rials and then two allocated to the main task of turning the dingy old cookhouse in to a modern Yate’s style bar!

On Day 1, Sgt. Greenhalgh set out with two female members of the make-over team on a tour of the Nicosia area’s various DIY shops. They came back loaded down with paint [colour me “controversial”] and other “fashion” items.

On Day 2, the real work began with the arrival of the complete team led by Wob and Craig, the “designers/presenters”, plus a director, cameraman and a sound recorder. More members of 137 Bty and the RE Detachment from 32 Regt Royal Engineers lent a willing hand.

But, first off, this being show business, I, as Troop Commander, had to open the proceedings by telling Craig and Wob how I wanted the room “done”. Actually, since the show was mostly planned back in the UK, my remarks were pre-scripted but I still managed to stumble through my lines in one take! It didn’t take long to introduce Gnr. Taff Price, known for his handiness with power tools, to Craig and before we knew what had happened, Taff had become “Craig Jnr” and remained so for the next two days.

As Craig, Taff and the Engineers began work amidst piles of MDF materials, the rest of the troop were tasked to work with Wob, removing the old chairs and other furniture from the cookhouse so that a start could be made to painting the walls. So on went the paint, a UN blue and a Korma coloured yellow. It reminded me of painting the nursery for my unborn (sex unknown) child. At least we were brightening the place up!

The main effort for Craig and his team was to produce two big seating areas using the MDF supplies. The challenge for Wob and her team was to paint and decorate the room as well as make seat cushions and curtains.

On the first working day, the two seating areas were, in fact, completed, as was most of the wall painting. Still, there was a lot of work and filming left to be done on the second and final day. So, with the production deadline rushing towards us, there was no let-up on day two. Curtains and cushions still had to be made and the new furniture had to be painted and we still hadn’t con-
structed the most important installation of all – the bar. But everything was falling into place by late afternoon, with Wob running furiously around putting the finishing touches to the room.

At precisely 1800 hours, troop and make-over team gathered together in the freshly decorated room for the final filming sequence. With seating, curtains, cushions, painting and the bar finished and in place, including an outstanding Java badge on laminated MDF, there was only one thing left to do. No one needed prompting to address the final task. Soon the new bar had been well and truly inaugurated!

Adieu Roland!

On 17 July, colleagues and friends of Roland Ramrattan gave him a warm farewell at the International Mess. After two years as the Regiment’s Radio Technician, Roland is moving to MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) where he will take on duties as the Chief Communications Officer. Good luck Roland!

Dulie and Roland Ramrattan with Contract Management Assistant Sonia Dohman (far right)

Slovak Engineers Get Cracking

A
n industrious team of Slovak engineers from Sector 4 have been working on maintenance projects throughout the Buffer Zone in accordance with UNFICYP’s long-term plan. The remarkable transformation of the toilets and showers in General Štefánik camp is a striking example of their work. These basic facilities were in deplorable conditions. The platoon works under harsh weather conditions building bridges, repairing roads, and renovating the camp.

The platoon leader, Capt. Jaroslav Schönvický, stresses that their work is a group effort. “We utilize the vehicles and heavy equipment from the HQ garage. All the engineering work in the Mission is coordinated by the Force Engineer”, explained Capt. Schönvický. “We all cooperate with our Hungarian colleagues on the OP maintenance to refurbish dilapidated buildings so our soldiers don’t have to live in unhealthy conditions. Capt. Schönvický has 18 years of experience in inter-
national environments. His wide-ranging UN career includes working as the Second-in-Command at UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia.

Before and after:    Wash basins in the soldiers’ quarters

Shower units in the soldiers’ quarters

MSgt. Rastislav Ochotnický, the 32-year-old deputy platoon leader, is on his third UN mission. When asked to compare his previous work at UNTAES with his UNFICYP experience, Ochotnický says: “The most notable difference is the contrast in climate conditions while we work on building and dismantling the containers and maintenance of the patrol track”.

The platoon of 23 engineers came together at the UN training base in Slovakia. However, Cyprus is where they are getting to know each other as members of a proud team, working together, meeting the day-to-day challenges that come their way!
In response to the “Hats Off to the Blue Beret Blues”...

UNCIVPOL Insp. Satwinder Singh Lally (see below) offers an alternative (with due regard to women’s rights):
1. It is seven metres long, 2 lbs in weight and made of cotton.
2. It keeps your hair safe and intact.
3. You cannot fold it and keep it in your trouser pockets or shoulder epaulettes (the place of this headgear is on the head, nowhere else!).
4. As a bonus, you are also exempted from wearing the blue helmet.
5. The CM & FC don’t need to issue instructions “Always wear your blue beret” (as you cannot take it off every now and then).

Millions are using it without any complaints. Guess what it is……. ?!

Visitors to UNFICYP

Rear Adm. Philip Wilcocks, Deputy Chief of Joint Operations (Operational Support) at the Permanent Joint HQ, UK, visited UNFICYP on 8 June. After inspecting an honour guard, he signed the visitor’s book and paid a courtesy call on the Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Hebert Figoli. He is seen here exchanging plaques with the Force Commander.

A new Finnish Ambassador to Cyprus, H.E. Mr. Risto Pupponen, visited UNFICYP on 13 July. On arrival he inspected an honour guard, signed the visitor’s book and paid a courtesy call on Chief of Mission Zbigniew Włosowicz. He was then introduced to members of the Finnish Contingent, and received a briefing from CO FINCON, Lt. Col. Jouko Hongisto.

Well done Blue Beret readers! The answer to our riddle “Who Keeps The Fish?” is “the German”. We got loads of correct answers. The first three out of the hat were Cranley Hudsen (Ops Branch, HQ UNFICYP), Aidan Leahy (UNCIVPOL Dhenia) and Stephanos Evripidou (Cyprus Mail).

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