The Blue Beret

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Cyprus peace talks gather momentum

Serving UNFICYP's civilian, military and police personnel

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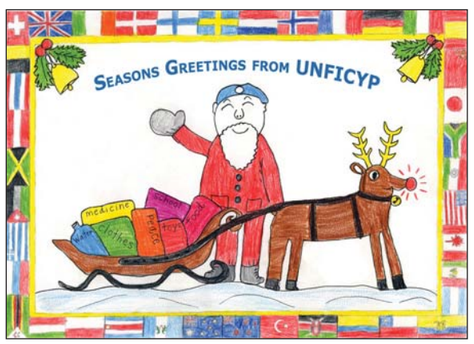
Editorial

The new year has started on a hopeful note in Cyprus. The leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities have, despite some ups and downs, continued direct talks aimed at reaching a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem. Things have come a long way since this time last year, when the peace process was still stalemated and frustration was growing in Cyprus and in the international community over the lack of progress.

Things changed dramatically in early March when the leaders kick-started the latest effort to bring peace to the island. As of this writing, Demetris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat, and their teams, have finished preliminary negotiations on how power might be shared in a future united Cyprus and moved on to the issue of how to resolve the problem of properties left behind when people were displaced, following the events of 1974.

Undeniably, then, progress has been made. Just as evident, though, is the fact that much more remains to be done. The most contentious and emotive issues are yet to be agreed on. As the Special Representative of the Secretary-General recently told peacekeepers receiving their UN service medals after their tour of duty in Cyprus, it is perhaps on those issues the two sides will be faced with the inevitable trade-offs and historic compromises they will need to make in order to reach a settlement. Tough as these choices and decisions will be, he said, it is essential to keep in mind that the peace process is not a zero-sum game; one side's gain is not necessarily the other side's loss.

A just settlement will help unshackle the tremendous potential and capacity of this beautiful island and make it a stronger and more prosperous home for all its citizens. There is indeed good reason to strive for the larger good, to look beyond the past, to the common and promising future that awaits all Cypriots.



Julieanne Whitley, 11-year-old daughter of staff member Brett Whitley, won the Public Information Office's seasons greetings card competition with her design shown above. The design was unanimously voted on as the most creative and original work submitted.

Julieanne has been presented with a gift pack with the compliments of the PIO.

Well done Julieanne!

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Peace talks tackle power-sharing and property questions

Talks to reunify the island are at the half-year mark now, with leaders from both sides wrapping up their initial discussion of the question of property after having looked at how a post-settlement Cyprus should be governed. The other major issues to be tackled are the economy, territory and security.

Broadly speaking, during this first stage, the two sides are expected to continue to determine what aspects of each question they agree on, what matters are still open, and what they disagree on. They will then move to the actual bargaining. The talks are not time bound, although everyone agrees that the process should not be allowed to drag on.

Leaders meet in UNPA for peace talks under UN auspices

Photo by PIO, RoC

Giving his assessment of the talks, which are being facilitated by an integrated UN team (see box) and held in the UN Protected Area housing UNFICYP and different UN institutions, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon wrote in his latest report to the Security Council on Cyprus that, "on the whole, negotiations are moving ahead well, with both parties presenting their respective positions and engaging with each other in a constructive and open manner".

The Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Cyprus, speaking after a session between the two leaders on 16 January, echoed that sentiment.

"I remain of the view, as I've said for quite some time now, that there is a real possibility of reaching a settlement here", said Alexander Downer. "It's an incredibly difficult task. Nobody should underestimate how hard it is, after so many years and such deep conflict to put together an agreement, but days like today just help to confirm the view that I've expressed on many occasions, that I am cautiously optimistic", he added.

A comprehensive settlement, a goal that has eluded the island for decades, would be put to the two communities for final approval in separate referenda.

Mehmet Ali Talat (left) and Demetris Christofias

UN pools resources to help peace process

The current effort to reach a just settlement in Cyprus benefits, as have other peace initiatives over the years, from the assistance of the United Nations. But the ongoing peace process differs from previous efforts in one important way. In contrast to the separation that once existed between its peacekeepers on the island and its political mission, the ongoing negotiations are part of an integrated push that brings together UNFICYP and the Secretary-General's good offices mission. This approach aims to make the most of the experience and resources of the Organisation on the island, combined with a renewed commitment of support from the Secretary-General.

What this means in practice is that the substantive pillars of UNFICYP – civil affairs, military, civilian police – are supporting the Good Offices efforts through the provision of expertise and institutional knowledge, in particular by assisting the parties in devising and implementing confidence-building measures. UNFICYP is also providing support in the areas of public information, administration and infrastructure. The Special Representative and Chief of Mission, Taye-Brook Zerihoun, is called upon to coordinate expertise from the United Nations country team, including the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, in a common effort to maintain an environment conducive to the talks. Mr. Zerihoun also serves as the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Adviser on issues relating to the Good Offices.

Throughout its long history on the island, UNFICYP has played a key role in creating the conditions that make negotiations possible. The stabilizing influence it has on the ground and the critical support it is offering the good-offices mission were the main reasons behind the Secretary-General's recommendation to the Security Council last December that it extend the mission's mandate until 15 June 2009.

Breaking the taboo of *AIDS*

The number of people living with HIV is continuing to rise in every part of the world. Despite enormous efforts towards prevention and great progress in treatment, there are now estimated to be 33 million people living with HIV worldwide. A big part of the problem is that people who are HIV-positive or living with AIDS are often discriminated against or marginalized. This in turns hampers both attempts to prevent infection and the care given to those affected.

The recent World Aids Day, marked on 1 December 2008, took direct aim at discrimination and exclusion.

"Breaking the Taboos and Living Positively with HIV" was the theme of this year's World AIDS Day activities at UNFICYP on 1 December 2008.

A series of events were held including a talk by UN Plus staff member Rodrigo Pascal as well as a quiz to test the general knowledge of staff on HIV/AIDS.

A bicommunal event was also held at the Ledra Palace Hotel where local experts Charis Kaite and Mevhibe Hocaoglu discussed the findings of research on HIV in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities respectively.

Both experts pointed out that people living with HIV/AIDS continue to suffer discrimination throughout Cypriot society, starting from the home, to health professionals and potential employers.

Referring to the findings of a study on HIV in Cyprus Kaite, who is a researcher from the University's Research Unit of Behavioural and Social Issues (RUBSI), said that 40 percent of HIV positive people living in Cyprus were not accepted to jobs, 30 percent were socially excluded and 30 percent were rejected by family members.

Kaite highlighted the prevalence of discrimination in Cypriot society where once an individual's status becomes known they are isolated and rejected from social groups and even the medical profession has been known to stigmatise them.

Kaite noted that patients wanted alternatives to the only HIV/AIDS clinic in Larnaca with more specialised doctors, psychological support, social benefits and support for employment. "Many still believe they should only have a relationship with another HIV positive person," she said.

Mevhibe Hocaoglu, from the Public Health, Cultural and Scientific Research Society, highlighted the problem of human rights and denial in the north. Where she said according to the health authorities there are only three types of AIDS patients: homosexuals or bisexuals and drug users and their number reportedly does not exceed 17. Hocaoglu said this number according to unofficial sources was much higher.

Hocaoglu said the authorities in the north fail to target the "most at risk" groups: homosexuals, drug users and sex workers. The first two are criminalized, while officially, the latter do not exist, she said.

Anti-retroviral therapy is only available to Turkish Cypriots in the north, while foreigners who tested positive on arrival, usually sex workers, are deported immediately, she said.

Hocaoglu said the biggest problems they face are social exclusion, poverty (lack of employment), fear of stigmatisation and isolation.

Rodrigo Pascal, a UNAIDS Partnership Officer from Chile, who participated in the event on behalf of UN Plus spoke of his own struggle with stigma and discrimination.

Pascal, who is HIV positive, said he was arrested several times in Chile when fighting for universal access to treatment. "With the right access, HIV positive people can be so much more than patients. I am a grandfather of two and I never thought I would see them after starting treatment. I take medication every day but millions of others still do not have access to treatment."

Pascal noted that the greatest barrier to access remained stigma and discrimination. "It is maddening to think that some people do not access life saving resources simply because they fear the consequences of doing so," he said.

"This year, dozens of UN staff around the world have died of AIDS, but emails going round say that they died of a short or long-term illness. They never say they died of AIDS. The silence around the cause of their deaths is the same silence that stops colleagues confronting the realities of HIV and accessing timely treatment that would have kept them alive," he said, adding that it is this level of stigma that has real and devastating consequences.

Pascal noted that only when people spoke of HIV could they be chased from their homes or barred from entering countries.

Apart from fighting the disease itself, many people infected with HIV also had to fight prejudice against homosexuals.

HIV/AIDS briefing in the UNPA on World AIDS Day, 1 December

UNAIDS' Global summary of the AIDS epidemic of 2007 estimates there are approximately 33 million people living with HIV. Of these, 22 million are living in sub-Saharan Africa and 4.2 million in South and South-east Asia. HIV is also present in all parts of the world, often within specific population groups or communities. And the rates of new infection means that HIV prevention remains a priority for all of us involved in AIDS, whether we are positive or negative.

"Disclosing your status is a personal decision. I'm gay, my ex-wife and children know. But if you are black and suffer discrimination, you go home to your black family. If you are poor, and suffer discrimination, you go back to your poor family. If you are gay, you have nowhere to go."

In an earlier talk to UN personnel, Pascal pointed out that the 30 percent of people who are HIV positive and are aware of their status and are taking care of their health with all the precautions to protect themselves and their families cannot be held responsible or made to feel guilty about the other 70 percent of those who do not know they are HIV positive or those that are HIV negative. "It is up to those who are HIV negative to take the responsibility for their own lives and ensure they remain HIV negative for the rest of their lives," he said.

UN Plus and other positive networks around the world, believe in the key principle of GIPA – the Greater Involvement of People living with HIV. It is important that positive people be involved, be included and be visible in efforts to tackle HIV and AIDS.

Referring to the UN Plus calendar for 2009, Pascal said its theme is "Get involved in the response to HIV". The calendar profiles positive people around the world and in the UN and also highlight their messages on how we can get more involved in doing more in the response to HIV.

In the words of former UNAIDS Executive Director, Dr. Peter Piot, "there are many solutions to this epidemic – no one way is 'The Way'. We have got to try out different methods then until we find something that works at the family level, in the workplace and in our respective communities. I urge you to not be indifferent. Don't just stand there. Get involved."

Netha Kreouzos

Above: Netha Kreouzos, UNFICYP's HIV/AIDS focal point, introducing the mission's theme of "breaking the taboos and living positively with HIV" for World AIDS Day at the Ledra Palace Hotel

Left: Rodrigo Pascal addressing UNFICYP staff during his briefing to them in the UNPA on World AIDS Day

Nevhibe Hocaoglu (below left) and Charis Kaite during the HIV/AIDS panel discussion in the evening of 1 December

Two decades of vigilance

2008 marks the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. Since 1988, the face and response to AIDS has greatly changed. While many of these changes are positive, this anniversary offers us an opportunity to highlight how much more still needs to be done.
For example:

Leaders in most countries from around the world now acknowledge the threat of AIDS, and many have committed to do something about it. As of 2007, nearly all countries have national policies on HIV. However, despite these policies, most have not been fully implemented and many lack funding allocations.

While treatment for HIV and AIDS has improved and become more widespread since 1988, many still do not have access to it – in 2007 only 31% of those in low- to middle-income countries who need treatment received it.

Despite HIV awareness now reaching nearly all areas of the globe, infection rates are still happening 2.7 times faster than the increase in number of people receiving treatment.

While the number of countries protecting people living with HIV continue to increase, one third of countries still lack legal protections and stigma and discrimination continues to be a major threat to universal access.

More broadly, real action on HIV and AIDS and human rights remains lacking. Legal barriers to HIV services still exist for groups such as women, adolescents, sex workers, people who use drugs, and men having sex with men, and programmatic responses promoting HIV-related human rights have yet to be prioritised.

World AIDS Day began in 1988 when health ministers from around the world met and agreed on the concept of the day as an opportunity for all of us to come together to demonstrate the importance of AIDS and show solidarity for the cause. In 2008, this underlining principle of solidarity and awareness remains the same.

We have only two years to go for "the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention programmes, treatment, care and support by 2010."

To achieve this goal, leadership and action is needed now. Governments must deliver on the promises they have made. Communities must encourage leadership of its members. Individuals must feel empowered to access treatment, to know their rights and take action against stigma and discrimination, and to know and use methods of prevention against receiving and transmitting HIV.

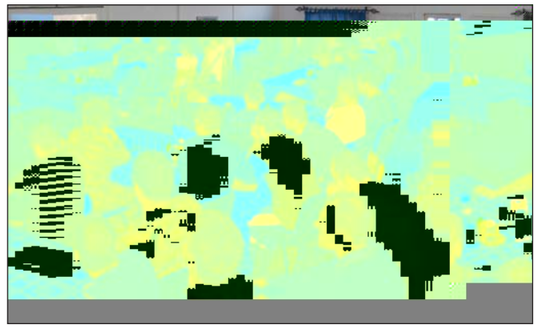
Awareness briefings in the sectors

Awareness briefings were held in the run up to WAD in Sector 1 (right, below) and Sector 4 (right). With the assistance of the Military Public Information Officer, the HIV team coordinated with the sectors asking them to organise events that we could attend – either sporting or social activities.

On 27 November in Sector 1, home to the largely Argentinian Contingent, soldiers learned more about World AIDS Day and remembered the 25 million who have died to date of AIDS-related diseases. They also reflected on how to continue and intensify efforts to prevent the spread of HIV as well as show solidarity and support to the 33 million currently living with HIV around the world.

In line with the day's theme, the work of UN Plus was highlighted, as well as the need to acknowledge people living with HIV as productive members of society.

In Sector 4, the mainly Slovakian and Hungarian Contingents held a table tennis competition on 29 November. Before the start of the competition, the soldiers gathered for a briefing by the HIV Focal Point on HIV/AIDS.



Hungarian Medical Officer Dr. Zsolt Szepensvary was the winner of the World AIDS Day quiz which aimed at testing the knowledge of UNFICYP staff on HIV/AIDS-related issues including the facts and myths as well as the current global situation. UNFICYP Military Public Information Officer Capt. Tomas Pavlik followed in a close second place.

A total of 57 staff members participated in the quiz, 23 of which managed to answer over 50 percent of the questions correctly. Dr. Zsolt was presented with a book prize on the paintings of Monet.

"Circle of Love" unites Nicosia

Hundreds of Greek and Turkish Cypriot schoolchildren held torches along the medieval Venetian walls of Nicosia on the evening of 9 January 2009 to form a Circle of Love around the divided capital of Cyprus. The event, initiated by the first ladies of the two communities, was held to raise money for disabled children and bring together the younger generations of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots

Elsi Christofias, wife of Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias, said in her speech that the students with their torches not only illuminated Nicosia, but also gave hope for a better life for children with special needs.

Oya Talat, wife of Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, expressed her hope that a bond of love could be created between the two sides.

A total of 2,000 children aged 10-15, together with their teachers, parents and other volunteers, circled the city illuminating the historic walls with their torches. Around 500 pupils, teachers and parents were in the buffer zone area in front of Ledra Palace Hotel during the event which included a bicommunal cultural programme held on a specially set up stage where traditional songs and dances of both communities were performed by groups from both sides.

The Sector 2 Civil Affairs team comprising police and military from the Ledra Palace facilitated the event by providing guidance to the organisers to guarantee a safe environment for the concert to be conducted, ensuring compliance with UNFICYP conditions on the use of the buffer zone. This included the necessity to provide such facilities such as lighting, portable toilets, seating and staging equipment. It also included the provision of ambulance/medical facilities, marshalling, clearing of the area after the event and public liability insurance. In addition, Sector Civil Affairs Teams and Sector Civil Affairs Military Liaison teams located suitable positions for the media from both communities. Sgt. Rob Duckworth, UNPOL Civil Affairs at Sector 2, said, "It was probably the best organised and most colourful bicommunal event held in the buffer zone for many years. Mrs. Christofias personally shook my hand and thanked me for all the work put in by UNFICYP," he said. Four meetings had been held prior to the event with the organisers from both communities, CAB, SCAT, SCAML and UNPOL to finalise all arrangements.

Once the concert began, Civil Affairs handed the running of the site over to UNPOL, represented by approximately 10 police officers from all Sectors, with elements of Sector 2 military mingling with the crowds for assistance.

The event, which was supported by the two leaders, Mehmet Ali Talat and Demetris Christofias, is the first of its kind and more are planned for the future.

Elsi Christofias (at microphone) and Oya Talat (far right)

Santa spreads cheer in Pyla

Santa Claus descended on the only mixed village in the buffer zone on a UN helicopter on 19 December, bearing gifts and treats for the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot schoolchildren there. Santa Claus, a.k.a. Civil Affairs Military Liaison Officer Johann Zach of Austria, was welcomed by dozens of Pyla school children and their families as he stepped out of the helicopter. The event, which has been held for the last

three years, was a collaborative initiative by the Civil Affairs, UNPOL and Military components with the support of UNFICYP Administration. It received generous assistance from Tözün Catering and Jumbo.

The arrival of Santa Claus was preceded by a sporting event organised in conjunction with PeacePlayers International, a non-governmental organisation whose mission it is to use the game of basketball to unite and educate children and their communities through a vision of bridging divided communities.

"This is a special time of year for children to have fun together, and demonstrates peaceful co-existence," said UNFICYP Spokesperson Jose Diaz.

Turkish Cypriot mother Havva Safak echoed Diaz's sentiments noting that "the children are very happy to see Santa Claus and they get all excited when he arrives". Her children are happy playing with Greek

Cypriot children, particularly on occasions such as this she said, stressing that such activities are important in strengthening relations between the children of the two communities. "It is important to give the children the opportunity to learn about each other because that's the way they learn, by playing together."

In previous years, the UN used to just drop by the school and give the children gifts. It wasn't as big an affair as today, she said, noting that over the last three years Santa arriving via UN helicopter to give the children gifts has been a great success.

Greek Cypriot mother Elena Ioannou said she comes every year to the event with her son, as it is very positive for two communities to interact through their children.

Peace Player Megan Chawansky, 32, commenting on how the children are brought together through sport and games ,said, "I don't speak Greek or Turkish so I can't tell what the children are saying. I think there is always a little apprehension at first. I read their body language, so for me, a smile by a child toward somebody else they didn't know or talk to before or giving a high five to someone says to me that they are realizing that they are more alike than different and that there are more things that they share than they don't. So we let the games do the talking."

Chawansky, a former college basketball player and coach in the US who is currently playing for Cypriot team Achilleas, and who has just completed a PhD in Sports sociology, said: "Sport, if used properly, can do a lot of good things. We are trying to use that here. A lot of people may not think sport is the best way to reach people, but I believe that if we talk about why we are doing certain things with the kids and how playing on the court can translate off the court, we can use sport effectively. I do believe that it is a useful tool."

The children themselves expressed their enthusiasm for the day's activities, the highlight for many being the arrival of Santa via UN helicopter. Petros, 11, said it was fun playing different games and receiving gifts from Santa. Panayiotis, 11, said, "We had fun playing with the Turkish Cypriots because we don't have the opportunity to play like this at other times. My favourite game was basketball where I learnt a lot from the [Peace] players."

His classmate Marios, 11, agreed that the day was fun. "I am very happy because Santa came and brought us gifts and we made friends and played football with the Turkish Cypriot children."

Sergios, 11, said he enjoyed playing different games and learning new ones. "I liked meeting new children. The Turkish Cypriots are our neighbours and we are united as one. We don't discriminate," he said. Spyros, 11, concurred saying, "In my home, we are united with the Turkish Cypriots. We live only 10 metres apart and play together in the park."

Violetta, 11, said it was one big party and that she enjoyed meeting new children and playing together. She added that the festivities would not end here and that, "At home at Christmas we take sweets and gifts to the Turkish Cypriots in our neighbourhood."

Ahmet Kuleli, 10, said he was happy with the day's activities and enjoyed meeting and playing with Greek Cypriot children. These activities give us a better opportunity to play with, and get to know each other. As a result of these activities we can now play with our Greek Cypriot friends on the street. They learn Turkish words and we learn Greek words."

PeacePlayers International was founded in 2001 in the belief that "children who play together can learn to live together." PeacePlayers International currently operates programmes in Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Middle East and in Cyprus, helping thousands of children to form positive relationships, develop leadership skills and improve their futures.

This is the third sporting event in Pyla organized by Civil Affairs together with PeacePlayers International, and a regular programme of activities is being discussed with the two schools in Pyla. The event on 19 December received wide coverage by both domestic and international media.

Hasan Kan, 10, said it would be nice if they had more such activities. "It would be better if we had such activities at least twice a year," he said.

Irem Kuleli, 9, and Ayla Cagil, 8, said it was great fun playing basketball and football with the Greek Cypriot children. It was nice to have had the chance to meet new friends and have a good time, they said.

2008 – Year in Review

The year saw significant change for the island with the political talks moving into gear and the start of a new peace push. By the end of the year, the two leaders had met 14 times under UN auspices to negotiate a peace agreement while a series of confidence-building measures had been announced.

UNFICYP also saw major changes in its leadership with Tayé-Brook Zerihoun taking over the helm from Michael Møller and Maj. Gen. Rafael José Barni handing over command of the 860-strong peacekeeping force to Rear Admiral Mario Sanchez Debernardi, Force Commander.

In January, Slovak and Hungarian troops from Camp General Stefanik donated blood to boost supplies for north Nicosia's General Hospital where over 400 units of blood are required monthly to treat patients.

At the Integrated Medal Parade on 7 February, UNFICYP head and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Michael Møller paid tribute to the "men and women from different horizons united to support the commitment of the international community to peace, stability and a just settlement in Cyprus". Møller recalled that for most of the six decades of UN peacekeeping, there have been peacekeepers in Cyprus and stressed that at this juncture, there is a need for political will on the part of both sides of the Cyprus problem in order to achieve a solution.

Greek Cypriot leader Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat agreed on 21 March to restart full–fledged negotiations in the search for a solution to the Cyprus problem. The outcome exceeded the expectations of most observers and included agreement to open Ledra Street "as soon as technically possible".

The Committee on Missing Persons inaugurated its Family Viewing Facility located in the United Nations Protected area on 18 March 2008. Relatives of missing persons will be able to view the remains of their loved ones after they have been identified and before giving them a burial. CMP Third Member Christophe Girod said, "This facility, which will see a lot of emotion being expressed. It provides a crucial service for the families in the process of recovering their missing relatives."

March saw the departure of SRSG and Chief of Mission Michael Møller and Force Commander Maj. Gen. Rafael José Barni. Barni gave his final salute on 4 March after serving with the mission for two years, while Møller departed on 27 March, having led the mission for just over two years. During the interim period from 30 March to 7 May, Elizabeth Spehar was Acting Chief of Mission and Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe visited the island from 30 March to 2 April to meet with the two leaders and civil society representatives in both communities. Speaking to the media, Pascoe said: "There is a very positive tone here in Cyprus at the moment and a palpable sense of momentum. The two leaders have set their sights on achieving a fair and lasting solution, and I think Cypriots are right to have high expectations. I'm encouraged and I will pass this on to the Secretary-General."

Rear Admiral Mario Sanchez Debernardi arrived in Cyprus on 1 April to take up his command of UNFICYP in the midst of one of the most significant developments on the island in the last few years – the opening of Ledra Street.

Almost 45 years after the Green Line cut it in half, Ledra Street, in the heart of old Nicosia, re-opened on 3 April amid the hope that it could serve as a portent of the reunification of Cyprus. Ledra Street became the sixth crossing point to be opened since 2003. It was by far was one of the most poignant symbols of the division of Cyprus. Hundreds of Cypriots flocked to Ledra Street to celebrate the momentous occasion of its opening and together, step through the buffer zone, re-uniting the centre of the capital.

April also saw the start of the five Working Groups and Technical Committees whose objective it was to pave the way for full-fledged negotiations to begin. UNFICYP

Acting Chief Elizabeth Spehar said the panels were evidence of the commitment and determination of the leaders of the two communities to reach a comprehensive settlement.

Tayé-Brook Zerihoun took up his post as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNFICYP Chief of Mission on 13 May 2008.

On 23 May 2008, the two leaders issued a joint statement following a meeting in the presence of SRSG Tayé-Brook Zerihoun where they reaffirmed their commitment to a bizonal, bi-communal federation with political equality, as defined by relevant Security Council resolutions. They agreed that this partnership would have a federal government with a single international

personality, as well as a Turkish Cypriot Constituent State and a Greek Cypriot Constituent State of equal status.

International Day of Peacekeepers, 29 May, coincided this year with the 60th anniversary of peacekeeping; SRSG Zerihoun marked the day at a meeting with the media. The UNFICYP Chief paid tribute to the thousands of UN peacekeepers who have served in Cyprus

over the last four decades. "While history will be the ultimate judge of UNFICYP's success, I believe the work of our colleagues in helping to create conditions that would allow the political process to move forward has been commendable," he said. Zerihoun also paid tribute to the 178 peacekeepers who have died in Cyprus in the line of duty.

"A window of opportunity for Cypriots to finally resolve the Cyprus problem is clearly open." With those words, the Secretary-General summarized in his report on UNFICYP the sentiment that has come to prevail in Cyprus and throughout the international community in the last few months. In renewing UNFICYP's mandate for another six months on 13 June, the Security Council confirmed the Secretary-General's assessment, encouraging the Cypriot leaders to continue working to reach a comprehensive settlement.

Under Secretary-General Pascoe held a press conference at Ledra Palace on 18 June where he expressed his optimism that the process for negotiations on the Cyprus problem was moving forward. "I am extremely impressed with the two leaders. I think they are people who are very committed to moving forward and to finally resolving the Cyprus problem and getting a unified Cyprus."

On 23 June UNFICYP's Information Assistant Ersin Oztoycan's book "My (~~Life~~) File" was launched in the presence of the island's two first ladies, Elsi Christofias and Oya Talat, at the Ledra Palace Hotel.

His Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus visited the Anthropological Laboratory of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) was visited on 4 July where he inspected the facilities and met with members of the bicommunal team of scientists working on exhuming and analysing remains of missing individuals.

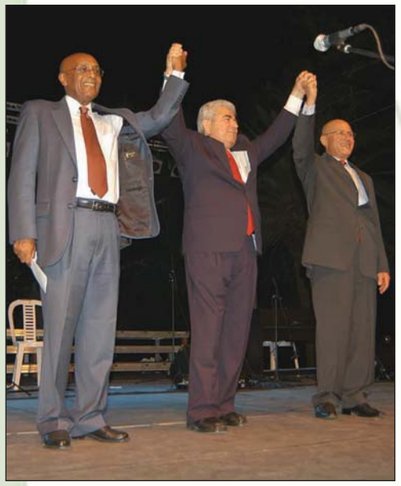
Special Representative Tayé-Brook Zerihoun opened the second UNFICYP art exhibition on 16 July, featuring the work of local artists Ioanna Philippou and Oya Silbery.

Leaders Demetris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat agreed on 25 July to launch fully-fledged negotiations on the Cyprus problem on 3 September. In a joint statement following the meeting, the leaders declared that the agreed solution

will be put to separate simultaneous referenda. They also approved a further package of measures aimed at improving the daily life of Cypriots in both communities. The measures involve environmental issues, cultural heritage, crisis management, crime and criminal matters. Earlier, the representatives of the

two leaders, George Iacovou and Ozdil Nami, held a joint news conference with the Special Representative to announce a first set of measures agreed by the committees and working groups that prepared the groundwork for direct talks.

The Secretary-General's newly appointed Special Adviser on Cyprus, Alexander Downer, visited the island between 27-29 July and said he was encouraged about



prospects for peace negotiations following his meetings with the two leaders. "Clearly, you have two leaders who are sincere in their commitment and in their engagement to move forward together towards a comprehensive settlement, and this commitment, evident through their joint statements of their recent meetings, have defined the parameters of a solution and the end game, and they have given the process a good deal of momentum."

September saw the talks move into full swing after the brief lull in political activity in August. The Special Adviser arrived on 1 September for the formal opening of direct talks two days later. The first

substantive negotiations started on 11 September on the subject of governance and power-sharing. After that four-hour meeting, Mr. Downer told the media that the talks were "productive and fruitful". By the end of the year, the leaders had held 12 meetings.

UNFICYP observed the International Day of Peace, 2 September, for a third year with a peace candle vigil ceremony at Ledra Palace Hotel. It was attended by Greek and Turkish Cypriot members of the World War II Veterans' Association, members of the diplomatic community and representatives of the two communities on the island. In a separate event, the two leaders and the Special Representative joined hands at a highly moving bicommunal event organised jointly by the Slovak Embassy and the island's political parties to mark the International Day of Peace. Christofias said: "I want to reiterate my commitment, before the young people of both communities, that I am going to do my utmost in order to find the common language we need with Mehmet Ali Talat and with the assistance of the UN to reunify our island. For his part, Mehmet Ali Talat stated that, "Our youth want to see a united, federal Cyprus. This is our joint goal."

Three members of "The Elders" visited Cyprus between 8-10 October to lend their group support to the UN sponsored peace talks. During their two-day visit, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former US President Jimmy Carter and former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi congratulated Cypriot leaders Demetris Christofias and Mehmet Ali Talat for the political will they have shown in reinvigorating the peace process, and encouraged them to seize the historical moment and help bring about a lasting settlement in Cyprus.

The village square of Troulli, one of six inhabited villages in the buffer zone on the eastern part of the island, was brimming with activity on 2 November where a fundraising event took place in aid of the pre-primary school, which badly needs a roof to adjoin two buildings, particularly ahead of the wet, winter months. The FMPU put on a display of vehicles used within the mission for this special occasion.

UNFICYP celebrated World AIDS Day on 1 December with a series of events, including a talk by UN Plus staff member Rodrigo Pascal, on "Breaking the Taboos and Living Positively with HIV" as well as a quiz to test the general knowledge of staff on HIV/AIDS. A bicommunal event was also held at the Ledra Palace Hotel where local experts Charis Kaite and Mevhibe Hocaoglu discussed the findings of research on HIV in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities respectively.

Towards the close of 2008, UNFICYP's Civil Affairs Branch organised a festive event for the children of Pyla. Santa Claus descended into the only mixed village in the buffer zone on a UN helicopter bearing gifts and treats for the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot school children there on 19 December. Santa Claus, a.k.a. Civil Affairs Military Liaison Officer Johann Zach of Austria, was welcomed by dozens of Pyla school children and their families as he stepped out of the helicopter.

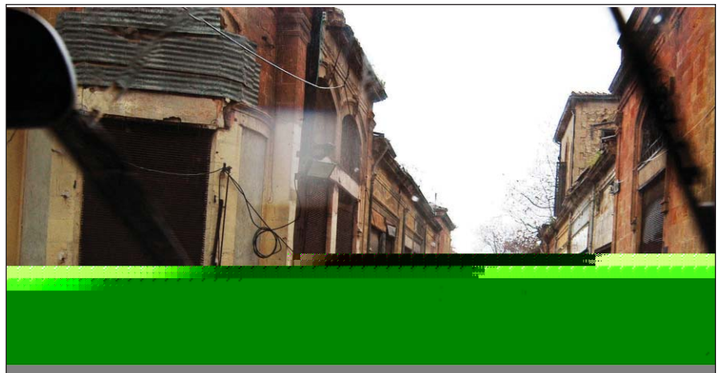
The price of reunification

For those working to help bring about a solution to the Cyprus problem, the benefits of a settlement are obvious. These include removing the threat of renewed military confrontation on the island, greater regional stability and increased trade.

What is less evident, however, is how much a solution would cost. A team of Cyprus-based economists set out to answer that very question, reaching the conclusion that the housing and reconstruction requirements of a reunited Cyprus could reach €7.2 billion.

The researchers – Praxoula Antoniadou-Kyriacou, Ozlem Oguz and Fiona Mullen – have published their findings in a new report, entitled, "The Day After II: Reconstructing a Reunited Cyprus", presented in January in Nicosia.

The authors first examined four different scenarios to estimate the amount of new housing, renovation and infrastructure investment by the public and private sectors that will arise as a result of a settlement. They focus their examination on investment that will be necessary to implement a solution, rather than on other, longer-term development goals, such as upgrading the general infrastructure of the northern part of Cyprus.



Patrolling the green line

They conclude that essential new housing, renovation and infrastructure investment could amount to €7.2 billion over five years: €4.3 billion by the public sector, and €2.9 billion by the private sector.

Taking account of one or two other variables brings the total public sector financing requirement to just over €9 billion over five years. The authors then study a wide variety of domestic and international sources of financing.

However, even with substantial input from the European Union, the European Investment Bank and other sources, they find a shortfall of just over €1 billion, which would need to be filled by international bilateral donors.

The researchers conclude that investing in the day after should not only be seen as a cost. The construction boom that a solution would entail, together with the impact of a settlement on tourism, transport, higher education, and financial and business services, would raise the real GDP growth rate by three percentage points in the first five years, creating more than 33,000 jobs.

"The Day After II" was published by the Cyprus Centre of the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO).

The deserted town of Varosha

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why...