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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations operation in Cyprus

I. Introduction

1. The present report on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) covers developments from 23 June to 18 December 2017. It brings up to date, since the issuance of my report dated 10 July 2017 ([S/2017/586](#)), the record of activities carried out by UNFICYP pursuant to Security Council resolution 186 (1964) and subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2369 \(2017\)](#).
2. As at 15 December 2017, the strength of the military component stood at 887 (84 women) for all ranks, while the strength of the police component stood at 67 (19 women) (see annex).

II. Significant political developments

3. Since the closing of the Conference on Cyprus in Crans-Montana, Switzerland, on 7 July 2017, and the issuance on 28 September 2017 of the report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus ([S/2017/814](#)), the sides have remained in a period of reflection to determine if and when conditions would mature again towards a meaningful process to reach a comprehensive settlement.
4. Also during the reporting period, the presidential elections in Cyprus scheduled for January 2018 were increasingly at the centre of the political discourse, and electoral campaigning was taking place in the Turkish Cypriot community in advance of the elections to take place in the north of the island on 7 January. The political and security environment on and around the island was marked by heightened activity surrounding the exploration for natural gas reserves in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus, compounding mutual suspicion among relevant stakeholders.

III. Strategic review of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

5. As requested by the Security Council in its resolution [2369 \(2017\)](#), I tasked the Secretariat with conducting a strategic review of UNFICYP focused on findings and recommendations for how the Force should be optimally configured to implement its

* Reissued for technical reasons on 15 January 2018.



existing mandate, based exclusively on a rigorous evidence-based assessment of the impact of UNFICYP activities. A team led by an independent expert, Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber, reviewed the current configuration of the Force and its functions, tasks and activities and their impact, and drew up recommendations based on evidence from the field visit. The recommendations were presented in my report to the Council on the strategic review (S/2017/1008).

IV. Activities of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

6. The Force is mandated to prevent a recurrence of fighting and to contribute to the maintenance of law and order and a return to normal conditions. By patrolling the 180-kilometre buffer zone, the military and police components of UNFICYP help to prevent military violations or incidents that could raise tension between the opposing forces, between civilians and military personnel and among civilians. Continual liaison by UNFICYP with military, police and civilian counterparts on both sides of the island is critical in the absence of direct contact between those bodies. The civilian component of UNFICYP, in coordination with the military and police components, works inter alia to manage civilian activity in the buffer zone and build confidence between the two communities through a variety of intercommunal initiatives, contributing to broader United Nations efforts to support the peace process.

A. Prevention of a recurrence of fighting and maintenance of the military status quo

7. The integrity and stability of the buffer zone were maintained throughout the reporting period. The relationship and interaction that UNFICYP has built and maintained with the opposing forces remained essential to preserving the stability. The military component of UNFICYP continued to liaise regularly with the opposing forces at all levels, addressing all issues with both sides in a timely fashion and keeping informed through patrolling, observation and detailed situational awareness. In that manner, UNFICYP significantly contributed to reducing the potential for an escalation of low-level incidents. In recent years, the increased volume of authorized and unauthorized civilian activity in the buffer zone has made such incidents more likely.

8. Challenges to the authority of UNFICYP in the buffer zone, including unauthorized civilian constructions, were also recorded. Civilian construction activity both in and adjacent to the buffer zone is a concern, especially where it can be construed as providing a military advantage.

9. The lack of an agreed set of rules between the opposing forces and UNFICYP with regard to activity in and around the buffer zone remains a concern. No efforts were made by the sides to discuss an updated version of the aide-memoire of 1989, a document which, despite repeated calls by the Council, has never been recognized. In the absence of a political settlement and with no immediate prospect of direct communication between the military commanders, a process to update and agree upon a modern interpretation of the aide-memoire would help to resolve many issues and alleviate ongoing tensions.

10. Unauthorized incursions into the buffer zone by civilians remained problematic. Such incursions have the potential to escalate into military incidents, in particular if

either of the opposing forces moves forward to confront the civilians. During the reporting period, such incidents involved farmers operating without due care close to the ceasefire lines and armed hunters, who could be confused with military personnel owing to their camouflage clothing and possession of weapons, in the buffer zone. It is essential that civilian authorities on both sides assist UNFICYP in addressing the increasing instances of illegal entry into and abuse of authorized access to the buffer zone, especially when such instances could trigger a response from the opposing forces. It is therefore welcomed that, during the reporting period, the authorities of Cyprus agreed to amend official maps that currently show authorized hunting areas within the buffer zone. During the review team's visit, UNFICYP received assurances from the highest political level of the Government of Cyprus that its authority to regulate civilian activities in the buffer zone is recognized. Officials further committed to supporting the Force's efforts to ensure that the permit system works effectively and that its authority to manage civilian activity in the buffer zone is respected.

11. The prevalence of closed-circuit television equipment at positions that remain manned and other incremental enhancements of military positions continued to be a concern. Closed-circuit television equipment confers a military advantage, unless the position is unmanned. Although no new cameras were observed in 2017, the existing manned positions with cameras installed are considered violations. In addition, military positions established by both forces inside the buffer zone that violate the status quo, in particular at Strovilia, remained in place and are classified as permanent violations. The United Nations continues to hold the Government of Turkey responsible for the status quo in Varosha.

B. Demining activity

12. UNFICYP completed the outstanding non-technical surveys of 25 former National Guard minefields from the list of 28 legacy minefields, the locations of which had been provided to the Turkish Cypriot leader by the Greek Cypriot leader as part of the package of confidence-building measures announced in May 2015. Technical surveys were conducted on three of the minefields that required additional intervention, releasing 4,048 square metres of land. The operations, which were carried out by the Mine Action Service, helped both communities to make progress towards their shared goal of a mine-free Cyprus. In addition, the Mine Action Service provided awareness-raising training to UNFICYP troops and police on the threat from landmines and explosive remnants of war and technical support to the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, and inspected UNFICYP small arms ammunition storage facilities to ensure compliance with international standards. The Mine Action Service also initiated a comprehensive review of the UNFICYP mine action database to reconcile demining information and facilitate safe operations and future demining.

13. As noted in my previous reports, clearance of the Mammari minefield, which lies just north of the buffer zone, remains a priority to ensure that mines cannot be displaced again into the buffer zone and threaten the community or the operations of UNFICYP. I am pleased to report that a critical portion of the minefield was cleared by international mine action organizations operating on behalf of the Turkish Cypriot side.

14. Such progress notwithstanding, the two sides have not begun clearance of the four known remaining minefields in the buffer zone, of which three belong to the National Guard and one to the Turkish forces. While the Turkish Cypriot side has

indicated that it would accept the clearance of all four areas as a package, the Greek Cypriot side maintains the position that its three minefields are required to counter a perceived threat. In addition to the lack of progress on the minefields in the buffer zone, no additional areas have been released for survey or clearance. Regrettably, the Turkish Forces rejected the request made by UNFICYP to clear a small portion of land around one of its permanently manned positions adjacent to the Deryneia/Derinya minefield for safety reasons. In the absence of future tasking, the demining capacity of UNFICYP was demobilized on 30 November 2017. The Force retained a technical capacity and non-technical survey contingency to conduct new activities when access is permitted.

C. Restoration of normal conditions and humanitarian functions

15. The Force continued to contribute to a return to normal conditions through facilitating and regulating the use of the buffer zone by civilians. The demand by civilians for permits to access the area remained high during the reporting period. The Force issued 890 permits for approved civilian activities, an increase of more than 23 per cent compared with the same period in 2016, and approved 9 of 12 applications for minor civilian construction projects in the buffer zone.

16. The Force managed civilian activity in the sensitive area of the buffer zone through continual engagement with civilian authorities, community representatives and civilians. Several cases provoked tensions. For example, during the past six months, individual farmers from both communities have repeatedly entered the buffer zone to work without authorization, some close to the opposing forces. Disputes have also arisen when farmers cultivate land that is not their own in the buffer zone. The provision of vector data would help UNFICYP to map and improve its monitoring of activity in the buffer zone, and I am pleased to report that, the Republic of Cyprus made a commitment that UNFICYP would be granted access to such data.

17. I reiterate the need for both sides to support and respect the authority of UNFICYP in order to prevent and resolve civilian tensions in this sensitive area. In that context, I note that the University in Pyla continues to operate without UNFICYP authorization.

18. During the reporting period, the police component of UNFICYP contributed to the maintenance of law and order in the buffer zone through its facilitation of investigations by the respective police forces into criminal matters in the area. The Force also sought to address numerous incursions into the buffer zone. During the reporting period, 381 unauthorized incursions, including 101 hunting incursions, were recorded, compared with 162, including 44 hunting incursions, during the same period in 2016.

19. The Force continued to engage with the police on both sides through liaison officers and at the level of the Senior Police Adviser. The work of the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters and the Joint Communications Room intensified. During the first 11 months of 2017, the number of information exchanges between the two sides through the Joint Communications Room was 295, which was 66 per cent higher than during the same period in 2016. The exchanges of information, which UNFICYP facilitated, covered a broad spectrum of criminal-related matters, including suspected abductions, the sale and supply of unlawful drugs, stolen and lost property, details of detained persons and the handover of criminals within the existing legal framework. Cooperation through the Joint Communications Room continued to yield practical results, including procedures for the handover of four persons. In

addition, the Joint Communications Room exchanged information more than 40 times as part of an effort to find a 4-year-old child who had been abducted from Nicosia in April 2017. Following an extended police investigation, the child was returned safely to her mother in October.

20. Demonstrations within and close to the buffer zone continued. A total of 89 took place in support of various causes during the reporting period. The Force maintained good cooperation with the respective police services and, where possible, the organizers of the demonstrations to manage and monitor the events.

21. The Force increased its efforts to serve as convenor and connector by continuing to support Cypriots interested in reaching across the divide and engaging in intercommunal dialogue and cooperation. In the current absence of progress towards a political solution, such efforts are even more important to sustain confidence between the communities and help to create conditions conducive to a potential resumption of negotiations. In the reporting period, the Force supported 119 intercommunal activities organized by civil society actors, in which 8,034 people participated, twice the number compared with the same period in 2016. The Force also convened 59 intercommunal gatherings at Ledra Palace Hotel with more than 2,041 participants and three meetings of political party representatives under the auspices of the Embassy of Slovakia. In the context of its increased support to intercommunal and community engagement, UNFICYP significantly enhanced its efforts to work with civil society on gender issues, including through outreach to women's organizations in rural communities.

22. Two specific cases showed the potential of consistent and strategic work with key actors to boost their confidence to implement intercommunal projects on their own initiative. First, following two years of direct support from UNFICYP, on 30 June and 1 July, community representatives in the bicomunal village of Pyla staged bicomunal festivals, with minimal involvement of UNFICYP. Second, an innovative programme known as the Imagine project, launched on 2 October under the auspices of the Technical Committee on Education and endorsed by the leaders, provides children in schools in both communities with peace education and the opportunity for joint activities in the buffer zone during school hours. Scheduled to continue during the 2017/18 school year, the programme will benefit not only the participating students but also their families.

23. During the reporting period, various technical committees continued their work on confidence-building measures aimed at improving the everyday lives of Cypriots and encouraging and facilitating greater interaction among Cypriots on both sides of the island. Of the eight committees facilitated by UNFICYP, the most active was the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, which completed four major architectural restoration projects at Archangelos Michail Church, the Martinengo Bastion in Famagusta and two mosques in the villages of Agios Nicolaos/Aynikola and Agios Ioannis/Ayyani in the Paphos region. The Technical Committee on Crossings continued to work on opening the two new crossings at Lefka-Aplici/Lefke-Aplıç and Deryneia/Derinya. A tender for the sections of road inside the buffer zone was issued in November. The work of both committees is carried out with funds from the European Commission, with support from the United Nations Development Programme.

24. Opportunities to visit and hold services at religious sites continue to be important to both communities. During the reporting period, UNFICYP facilitated the participation of more than 5,375 people in 34 religious services and commemorative activities, of which 27 were in the north and 7 in the buffer zone. During the same

period in 2016, a total of 36 were held, of which 29 were in the north and 7 in the buffer zone. The Force also facilitated the crossing of nearly 2,270 pilgrims from the northern part of Cyprus to the Hala Sultan Tekke mosque in Larnaca on 26 June, 5 September and 29 November. The pilgrimage on 29 November was the eleventh following the joint agreement of the religious leaders in 2014.

25. Given that such events constitute a significant confidence-building measure, UNFICYP noted with concern the decline in the number of applications for religious services that it was asked to facilitate in the north and a decline in the number of approvals for such services in comparison with the same period in 2016. The Force remained concerned about other restrictions that hampered religious worship on the island, including time limitations on religious worship in mosques in the south. All restrictions on the freedom of worship, including those relating to access to religious sites, should be lifted.

26. The religious leaders of Cyprus continued to demonstrate their commitment to joint dialogue and the promotion of religious freedom within the framework of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden, with ongoing support from UNFICYP. During the reporting period, the religious leaders launched an unprecedented joint initiative to provide Greek- and Turkish-language classes for members of the clerical orders, nuns and laypersons working in different religious institutions. The participants meet weekly in the buffer zone, broadening the circle of dialogue and cooperation among the religious institutions.

27. On 28 September, the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), convened the third round table on human rights since 2013. OHCHR introduced the “Faith for Rights” initiative, launched in March 2017 with the adoption of the Beirut Declaration, in which faith-based civil society actors recognized “religious or belief convictions as a source for the protection of the whole spectrum of inalienable human entitlements”. Religious leaders and representatives from 16 religious groups and civil society organizations participated in the discussion in Cyprus, and the Beirut Declaration and its 18 commitments were translated into Greek and Turkish by the Religious Track.

28. The Force continued, where possible, to address the concerns of 335 Greek Cypriots and 95 Maronites residing in the north through regular visits to their villages. Since 1 October, however, UNFICYP has been unable to continue to deliver food supplies and other items provided by Cyprus to those communities because of the decision by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to impose “duties” on those items. This unilateral decision ended the long-standing practice of UNFICYP pursuant to the provisions of the Third Vienna Agreement of 1975, in which it is stated that “the Greek Cypriots at present in the north of the island are free to stay and ... will be given every help to lead a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion, as well as medical care by their own doctors and freedom of movement in the north”. The Force has continued to deliver medical aid supplies, including oxygen bottles, which were not made subject to the “duties”. Ensuring that sustainable care is provided to the vulnerable members of those communities remains important, and the Force is working with community members and relevant authorities to find practical ways forward in that regard.

29. At the beginning of the school year in September, the Turkish Cypriot authorities rejected 8 of the 282 textbooks proposed by the Government of Cyprus for use at Greek Cypriot schools in the north. They also rejected 3 of the 10 Greek Cypriot

teachers nominated to work at the schools on the Karpas Peninsula and denied the reappointment of two Greek Cypriot teachers who had previously worked there, disrupting the operation of the schools.

30. The Force continued to engage with Turkish Cypriots and the relevant authorities in Larnaca and Limassol to learn more about their access to health, welfare and educational services. There were no developments with regard to the establishment of a Turkish-language school in Limassol, although Turkish-speaking pupils continued to have access to Turkish-language education at a primary school and a high school in the town.

31. The Force assisted with the legal and humanitarian issues faced by three Greek Cypriots in the north and 11 Turkish Cypriots in the south through visits to the detention facilities in which they were held. In connection with the previously reported incident in November 2015, in which two vehicles belonging to Turkish Cypriots were targeted by young Greek Cypriots throwing stones, UNFICYP was informed that all but one of the court hearings to prosecute several individuals accused of those attacks had been postponed until early 2018. Despite repeated queries, UNFICYP received no additional information with regard to the one case that had been scheduled to be heard at the beginning of December 2017. A clear resolution of such cases would signal that such acts would not be tolerated in Cyprus and would contribute to building confidence between the two communities.

32. On 27 August, UNFICYP facilitated the post-mortem transfer of a Greek Cypriot man for burial in the north.

V. Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus

33. As at 15 December, the bicomunal team of archaeologists of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, a long-standing confidence-building initiative, had exhumed the remains of 1,212 persons on both sides of the island. This number is lower than the one reported in June 2017 as a result of carbon dating, which allowed the Committee to declare a number of remains to be irrelevant. To date, the remains of 855 missing persons, of a total of 2,002, have been identified and returned to their respective families, including, during the reporting period, those of 77 individuals. In line with the permission received in November 2015, the Committee has conducted, thus far in 2017, 11 excavations in military areas in the north, leading to the recovery of the remains of 23 individuals.

34. The Committee continued its efforts to gain access to archives that might contain information on burial sites of missing persons. Thus far, 10 of the 12 countries contacted have answered the Committee's request for cooperation. Further research was conducted in United Nations archives in Nicosia and New York, and relevant documents from those archives were shared with the Committee. Meetings with the authorities concerned took place in London, Vienna, Geneva, Athens and Cyprus. During the reporting period, the Committee also continued to receive valuable support from the Mine Action Service, notably through the training of staff in the operation of metal detectors.

VI. Transition planning

35. As requested by the Security Council, UNFICYP maintained its transition plans in relation to a settlement. No progress was made in the further elaboration of such

plans during the reporting period, however, because of the absence of new developments on the issue between the sides.

VII. Conduct and discipline and sexual exploitation and abuse

36. The Force held 16 training sessions for 710 military, police and civilian personnel on United Nations Standards of Conduct, including the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The Force organized a special event on 23 June 2017 and used social media to highlight the Organization's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse.

37. During the reporting period, four category 2 allegations, not relating to sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, were reported and referred for investigation. Three category 1 allegations and five category 2 allegations remain pending.

VIII. Financial and administrative aspects

38. The General Assembly, by its resolution [71/300](#), appropriated the amount of \$54 million for the maintenance of UNFICYP for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, inclusive of the voluntary contribution of one third of the net cost of the Force, equivalent to \$18.3 million from the Government of Cyprus and the voluntary contribution of \$6.5 million from the Government of Greece.

39. As at 18 December 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNFICYP amounted to \$11.3 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$2,141.1 million.

40. Reimbursement of troop costs was made for the period up to 31 October 2017, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 30 September 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

IX. Observations

41. As stated in the report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus ([S/2017/814](#)), my good offices remain available to assist the sides should they jointly decide to reengage in negotiations with the necessary political will. I reiterate my encouragement to the sides to preserve the body of work based on the convergences and understandings reached in the course of the past years of negotiation and in the period from 15 May 2015 to 6 July 2017 in particular.

42. The Force will continue to contribute, through its activities and assistance to the communities, to creating conditions conducive to a successful settlement process, including by supporting relevant confidence- and trust-building initiatives.

43. Exploration for hydrocarbon reserves in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone remains an issue that could lead to tensions between the various stakeholders. As I have repeatedly stressed, it is important to ensure that any natural resources found around Cyprus will benefit both communities. I remain of the view that the existence of common natural resources provides a strong incentive for all parties to find a durable solution to the Cyprus problem and should engender deeper cooperation for

the benefit of all Cypriots and stakeholders in the region. I recall that Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders had previously agreed that natural resources in a unified Cyprus would lie within the competence of the future federal government. It remains essential that all parties make every effort to defuse tensions.

44. I continue to urge greater efforts to create a climate conducive to achieving more economic and social parity between the two sides and to broaden and deepen economic, social, cultural, sporting and similar ties and contacts, including with a view to encouraging trade. Such contacts promote trust between the communities and help to address the concerns of Turkish Cypriots with regard to isolation. I urge both sides to persist in addressing those issues.

45. The commitment of both sides to the continuation of the work of the technical committees is welcomed. Both sides should further ensure that the committees can pursue their activities in a practical and results-oriented manner, unobstructed by bureaucratic constraints. In doing so, the committees can foster cooperation and contribute to improving the daily lives of Cypriots, as envisaged by the leaders when the committees were first established, while also fostering intercommunal exchange and cooperation and creating a climate conducive to the resumption of political negotiations on the island.

46. The Force continues to play an important preventive and deterrent role. Despite the continued presence of armed personnel along the ceasefire lines and the lack of direct contact between the two sides, the situation in the buffer zone remains calm, mainly because the Force contributes to resolving misunderstandings through careful observation combined with impartial and effective liaison and community engagement. As recommended in my report on the strategic review (S/2017/1008), the liaison and engagement functions of the Force should be strengthened across all mission components, given their importance in managing the increasing civilian use of the buffer zone and the parallel increase in disputes with the potential to cause tensions.

47. With the increasing civilian activity in the buffer zone, daily challenges to the authority of UNFICYP continue to be of concern. The ability of UNFICYP to play its role in maintaining a stable environment depends largely on the commitment of the two sides to refrain from challenging its authority, legitimacy and impartiality and to support it in its efforts to maintain calm. In this respect, I reiterate my call on both sides to avoid civilian construction activity both in and adjacent to the buffer zone, where it can be construed as providing a military advantage.

48. I urge both sides to support work to update the aide-memoire of 1989 to make it a mutually accepted guidance document for the effective management of the buffer zone. Through this work, agreement could also be sought on the exact delineation of the respective ceasefire lines, which, unhelpfully, remain disputed in places on both sides.

49. In addition to a stronger liaison role of UNFICYP and support for its authority in the buffer zone, progress towards resolving some of the daily issues and misunderstandings through information exchange between the sides could bring practical benefits to both communities. On numerous occasions, I have urged the sides to agree upon and implement mutually acceptable steps, including military confidence-building measures that could contribute to an environment conducive to a settlement. In the coming months, I urge the sides to make progress, even in small steps, towards developing their own mechanisms for alleviating tensions. The Force

stands ready to assist the sides in establishing new mechanisms or processes in that regard.

50. I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNFICYP for six months, until 31 July 2018. I should like to thank the 36 countries that have contributed, since 1964, either troops, police or both to the mission. I pay tribute to the 186 peacekeepers who lost their lives over that period in support of peace in Cyprus.

51. The work of the United Nations in Cyprus is strengthened immeasurably through cooperation with local, regional and international actors. I should like to take this opportunity to thank those partners and in particular the European Commission, which provided assistance in a number of areas during the reporting period, including its support to the work on two new crossing points and to the Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage and the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus.

52. The United Nations remains committed to supporting the important humanitarian work on behalf of the families of victims through the Committee on Missing Persons. In the light of the advanced age of both relatives and witnesses, it is essential that the Committee continue to receive sufficient financial support and the information, including from relevant archives, required to accelerate its work.

53. I should like to express my gratitude to Elizabeth Spehar for her service as my Special Representative in Cyprus, the Head of UNFICYP and my Deputy Special Adviser. Lastly, I extend my thanks to all the men and women serving in UNFICYP for their continued commitment to the implementation of the mandate of the Force.

Annex

**Countries providing military and police personnel
to the United Nations operation in Cyprus (as at
15 December 2017)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Military personnel</i>
Argentina	276
Austria	4
Bangladesh	2
Brazil	2
Canada	1
Chile	14
Hungary	77
Paraguay	14
Serbia	47
Slovakia	169
Ukraine	2
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	279
Total^a	887

<i>Country</i>	<i>Police personnel</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10
Bulgaria	1
China	7
India	4
Ireland	12
Italy	2
Lithuania	1
Montenegro	4
Romania	4
Russian Federation	5
Serbia	2
Slovakia	5
Ukraine	10
Total^a	67

^a Of the military personnel, 803 are men and 84 are women. Of the police personnel, 48 are men and 19 are women.