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Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) covers developments from 19 June to 18 December 2020. It brings up to date the record of activities carried out by UNFICYP pursuant to Security Council resolution [186 \(1964\)](#) and subsequent Council resolutions, most recently resolution [2537 \(2020\)](#), since the issuance of my report on UNFICYP dated 10 July 2020 ([S/2020/682](#)) and on my mission of good offices dated 13 July 2020 ([S/2020/685](#)).

2. As at 18 December 2020, the strength of the military component stood at 796 (717 men and 79 women, or 9.9 per cent women for all ranks, compared with the global peace operations target of 6.25 per cent women), while that of the police component stood at 68 (41 men and 27 women, or 39.7 per cent women, compared with the overall global target of 22 per cent women) (see annex).

II. Significant developments

3. The reporting period continued to be marked by the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic across the island. Improvements in the epidemiological situation in both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities were recorded at the beginning of the summer, leading to an easing of restrictions on both sides, including a gradual reopening of the crossing points. In practice, however, crossing from one side to the other remained difficult, owing to requirements introduced by the respective authorities, thus limiting drastically contacts between the communities during that period. Both communities then witnessed a resurgence of contagion, albeit at different times, with the north experiencing a high number of cases towards the end of August, while cases in the south increased dramatically in November, leading to a reintroduction of restrictive measures, including local lockdowns. Despite encouragement from the international community, including the Security Council in its most recent resolution (resolution [2537 \(2020\)](#)), the response to the continuing COVID-19 outbreak remained largely uncoordinated and separate, as had been the case at the outset of the pandemic.

4. After a six-month delay due to COVID-19, voting for the leadership of the Turkish Cypriot community took place on 11 October, with a run-off on 18 October, and resulted in the election of Ersin Tatar as the new leader. Subsequently, on 3 November, the Greek



Cypriot leader, Nicos Anastasiades, met with Mr. Tatar in an informal meeting held under the auspices of my Deputy Special Adviser on Cyprus, Elizabeth Spehar. After the meeting, the United Nations issued a statement stating that the two leaders had expressed their determination to positively respond to the Secretary-General's commitment to exploring the possibility to convene an informal five-plus-United Nations meeting, in a conducive climate, at an appropriate stage. Further details are provided in the report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus ([S/2021/5](#)).

5. In the continued absence of a political solution and with regional tensions on the rise, political tensions on Cyprus increased during the reporting period. Challenges to the status quo on the ground, within and outside the buffer zone, appeared linked to the broader political context. A particularly significant and concerning development was changes to the status quo in Varosha, which were announced by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot high-level officials and observed by the mission on the ground. On 6 October, at a joint press conference held by the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and the then leadership candidate, Mr. Tatar, Mr. Erdoğan declared that he would support the new decision by Mr. Tatar to make the coastline of Varosha accessible to the public. On 8 October, a section of the beach was opened and made accessible by foot through the fenced-off part of the city. Those actions were denounced in the strongest terms in the south, but also by various political actors and civil society activists within the Turkish Cypriot community. On 9 October, the President of the Security Council issued a statement expressing the Council's deep concern regarding the aforementioned announcement and called for a reversal of this course of action. Following the election of Mr. Tatar as the new Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Erdoğan visited the north, including Varosha, with Mr. Tatar on 15 November, which was the thirty-seventh anniversary of the unilateral declaration of independence. The visit, which divided public opinion in the north, prompted strong reactions from Mr. Anastasiades and resulted in demonstrations on both sides of the island.

6. Tensions around the island and in the eastern Mediterranean more broadly over such issues as maritime boundary delimitations and hydrocarbons exploration escalated during the reporting period, severely straining relations between the parties, including Greece and Turkey, two guarantor Powers in the Cyprus context.

III. Activities of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus

7. The absence of negotiations continued to stoke political tensions that had been steadily growing since the closing of the Conference on Cyprus in 2017. Developments in Varosha and, to some extent, in Strovilia (see para. 12 below), contributed significantly to fuelling those tensions, although they did not lead to an overall increase in military violations. The decision in the south not to allow third-country nationals to cross to the other side in the COVID-19 context also triggered demonstrations in the north, especially in the tourism-dependent part of north Nicosia.

8. Despite the heightened tension, data collected through the Comprehensive Performance Assessment System indicated that tension in most of the usual areas of friction in the buffer zone, while not resolved, remained largely muted, with the exception of Avlona. The deterrence role and preventive efforts of the mission through liaison and engagement contributed to defusing tensions that arose in and around the buffer zone between civilians, between civilians and opposing forces or directly between the opposing forces.

9. The impact of the pandemic on the interaction between the communities continued to be of particular concern for UNFICYP, especially as a result of movement restrictions at the crossing points. Meeting with members of the other

community required extra effort, including financially, owing to the cost of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests required to move across the buffer zone. The mission tried to mitigate the situation by promoting the use of online platforms by civil society actors, with some limited success. Similarly, the meetings and activities of the bicomunal technical committees were significantly reduced. The pandemic also directly affected the mission, with 27 cases recorded among its personnel (19 military, six police and two civilian personnel) during the reporting period, despite additional internal measures introduced with respect to the length of quarantine and testing requirements and a strong recommendation to limit physical interactions with the local population.

A. Prevention of tensions in and around the buffer zone

10. Although the situation in and around the buffer zone continued on the whole to be calm and military-level tensions were generally low, political tensions increased significantly, linked to the broader political and regional context. The gradual hardening of positions along the ceasefire lines previously reported continued to be observed. Challenges to the military status quo continued to occur, in parallel to limited respect for the authority of the mission as mandated by the Security Council.

11. The partial opening by the Turkish Cypriot authorities of the fenced-off part of Varosha on 8 October was a significant change to the status quo in that area. This partial opening mostly took the form of limited infrastructure works to prepare access by civilians, road rehabilitation and closed-circuit television installation. The temporary but considerable increase in Turkish forces presence and activity within and near Varosha on the occasion of the visit of the President of Turkey on 15 November did not result in a reciprocal deployment of the National Guard. The developments substantially raised tensions, both politically and on the ground, including by triggering protests by former Varosha residents, political parties from both communities and other concerned actors from both sides. The freedom of movement of UNFICYP in Varosha continued to be significantly hampered. The United Nations continues to hold the Government of Turkey responsible for the situation in Varosha.

12. Strovilia also remained a source of political tension as changes to the status quo continued to be observed in the form of overstaffing by the Turkish Cypriot security forces and some civilian constructions, prompting more systematic written démarches by the Greek Cypriot authorities. The presence and operations of UNFICYP in Strovilia continued to be regularly challenged by the Turkish Cypriot security forces.

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

13. The reporting period saw a decrease in the overall number of military violations (288, compared with 376 during the first part 2020). The National Guard, however, continued to deploy prefabricated concrete firing positions along the southern ceasefire line (70 during the past six months), bringing the total since December 2019 to 223, including 35 inside the buffer zone, constituting a significant violation of the military status quo. The mission registered an increase in military construction violations, with 81 violations by the National Guard (compared with 64 during the previous reporting period), and 42 by the Turkish forces and Turkish Cypriot security forces (compared with 9 during the previous reporting period). The violations registered on the northern ceasefire line included two prefabricated concrete firing positions and the installation of fixed thermal imaging devices at existing positions,

and are assessed to be a response to the deployment of prefabricated concrete firing positions by the National Guard. The persistent efforts of the mission to secure a reversal of those respective installations were not successful.

14. Despite restrictions related to COVID-19, engagement with the National Guard leadership was mostly sustained during the reporting period, while high-level engagement with the Turkish mainland army and the Turkish Cypriot security forces resumed only in September, after an eight-month hiatus. The second half of the period also saw significant improvement in lower-level liaison and engagement with the Turkish Cypriot security forces. Looking ahead, regular engagement and dialogue with the opposing forces are assessed as critical to fulfil the mandate of the mission and maintain calm in and around the buffer zone.

15. Despite the tabling by UNFICYP on 1 May 2020 of a proposal for a direct military-level contact mechanism, no significant progress could be achieved, owing to the persistence of divergent views by the two sides, in particular on the issue of the nature of the participation in the mechanism. The mission nevertheless continued to engage with both sides on the issue.

16. There was no progress during the reporting period regarding the clearing of the 29 suspected hazardous areas on the island. The United Nations Mine Action Service continued to research options for the next phase of clearance activities to be presented to the two sides, with a special focus on the buffer zone and its four mined areas.

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

17. UNFICYP recorded 989 civilian incidents during the reporting period, a slight increase compared with the same period in 2019 (853). Incursions into the buffer zone continued to account for the largest number of incidents, followed by unauthorized construction and farming. Partly as a result of the sustained engagement efforts of the mission, the number of civilian issues related to the buffer zone that escalated to the political level remained low during the reporting period, as did civilian activities that generated tension either with other civilians or with the opposing forces, with the notable exception of Avlona.

18. Unauthorized farming on Greek Cypriot land in Avlona remained a significant source of friction. In early November, UNFICYP prevented physical altercations between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot civilians, the latter having refused to comply with the request by the mission to leave the area. Although, unlike in previous reporting periods, incursions by the Turkish forces into the buffer zone in support of civilian activities were not observed, tension with the opposing forces linked to disputed sections of the ceasefire lines and competition over land use increase the risk of military violations and civilian confrontations in Avlona and elsewhere. The Turkish forces subsequently built a new observation tower in Avlona, close to where the aforementioned altercations occurred, north of the buffer zone.

19. In Pyla, police services on both sides continued to collaborate effectively with UNFICYP to respond to breaches of law and order and provide policing services in the village. Nonetheless, 11 illegal establishments (casinos and nightclubs) continued to operate, some of which are suspected of being linked to tax evasion activities, drug and other types of trafficking and prostitution. Those establishments, involving both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, continued to exploit the legal and political challenges associated with the particularities of the bicomunal village and remained a testimony to the continued need for an effective coordination mechanism for law enforcement in Pyla. UNFICYP continued to engage with both mukhtars of Pyla, who displayed a willingness to collaborate. Meanwhile, the university in Pyla continued to operate without authorization from UNFICYP, and no progress was registered to

resolve the matter of the large unauthorized construction project associated with the university, despite the continued efforts of the mission to engage with the Greek Cypriot authorities and with the entrepreneur on the issue.

20. Outside of Pyla, criminal activities in the buffer zone increased during the reporting period, mostly in the form of illegal dumping of waste and hunting. A significant increase in hunting and related activities was registered in UNFICYP sector 1, in the west of the island. Those activities are not allowed, primarily because of the security risks associated with the presence of individuals wearing military fatigues and carrying weapons close to military positions.

21. In line with the Action for Peacekeeping framework, UNFICYP police continued to carry out targeted patrols, to deter illegal activities, and to facilitate the work of law enforcement agencies as well as cooperation at the level of the “Joint Contact Room” (also referred to as the “Joint Communications Room”), which allows both sides to exchange information on crimes, or alleged criminal conduct, with implications across the divide. Such cooperation increased during the past six months. Since 19 June, the Joint Contact Room, with the support of UNFICYP, also facilitated the handover of seven suspects between the two police services across the buffer zone, following an established procedure that has become an effective practice. In addition, UNFICYP police and military personnel responded to fire incidents in the buffer zone and provided escort to the Famagusta fire brigade to various locations in the buffer zone to extinguish the fires.

22. The partial opening of Varosha triggered a number of demonstrations in the south, including some led by ultranationalist groups. On 17 October, such a large demonstration was organized at the Deryneia/Derinya crossing point, triggering a counterdemonstration on the north side of the crossing. UNFICYP worked closely with the police services on both sides to prevent any breach of the buffer zone or confrontation.

D. Intercommunal relations, cooperation and trust-building

23. Limited contact occurred between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities during the reporting period, mainly because of the movement restrictions mandated by both sides as a result of COVID-19, including the ongoing closure of three crossing points (see sect. E). As a result, there were very few face-to-face intercommunal activities or even simple interactions, a situation that deepened the estrangement between the two largest communities on the island. Established mechanisms for cooperation, such as those between the two Nicosia municipalities (the Nicosia Municipal Coordination Group and the Nicosia Master Plan) remained dormant during the reporting period, owing to the difficulty of operating by online means. In response, the mission strengthened its capacity to facilitate online connections and sought creative ways to continue to support dialogue and cooperation across the divide. UNFICYP maintained its engagement with women and youth representatives of civil society, also reaching out to new constituencies, with modest success.

24. Despite the calls of the Security Council for cooperative approaches, the two sides continued to pursue largely uncoordinated responses to the pandemic and other issues affecting the whole island. On the positive side, special provisions related to COVID-19 for certain categories of individuals (such as workers and students who need to cross regularly, and the Greek Cypriot and Maronites who live in the north) agreed by the leaders and implemented as of June 2020 remained in force to facilitate the crossing of the Green Line by those individuals, up until a few days before the end of the reporting period. In mid-December, however, the authorities in the north extended new quarantine requirements to those categories. Several of the bicomunal

technical committees, including those on health, cultural heritage, crime and criminal matters, and education, continued to operate throughout the reporting period, for the most part by online means, with some limited in-person activities. Most of the Turkish Cypriot members of the Technical Committee on Culture and of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality resigned following the Turkish Cypriot leadership election. The Technical Committee on Cultural Heritage, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Commission and UNFICYP, completed 18 key projects, including the renovation of parts of the Venetian walls of Nicosia. Although the Technical Committee on Health continued to share information and met a few times, it did not lead to an overall joint response to the pandemic. Further details on the work of all committees are provided in the most recent report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus.

25. In order to bolster interaction between the communities, UNFICYP continued to implement its UNFICYP Youth Champions – Environment and Peace initiative, with the participation of 24 young activists from across the island. The Youth Champions developed a number of advocacy campaigns on environmental issues and created bicommunal groups aiming at lasting collaboration and at achieving a multiplier effect in their respective communities. Despite the challenges to in-person meetings, the Youth Champions identified multiple ways to keep being engaged, including through their participation with UNFICYP in several buffer-zone clean-up operations. The participation of the United Nations Environment Programme, the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and other local and international bodies in this programme enriched its value and outreach.

26. UNFICYP worked further to fully use the potential of online platforms by reaching out to and engaging with civil society organizations that had not previously participated in intercommunal events because of geographical limitations. UNFICYP continued to support the Non-Governmental Organization Networking Group (a platform of 200 local non-governmental organizations) by ensuring that activities and coordination would continue by online means. During the reporting period, the mission also contributed to trust-building and confidence-building efforts between the communities, reaching an ever-broader constituency, in particular through the use of social media. The UN75 campaign, Peace Day and International Youth Day were used extensively to amplify the voices of women and young people.

27. The leaders and representatives of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot political parties maintained their regular meetings, some of them online, under the auspices of the Embassy of Slovakia. In July, they agreed on a joint statement calling upon the leaders to prepare the ground for the resumption of the negotiations immediately after the Turkish Cypriot leadership election of October. The Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, under the auspices of the Embassy of Sweden, continued to advocate respect for the measures put in place by the authorities to prevent further spread of COVID-19, including by translating them into Greek, Turkish and English. Further information is provided in the report on my mission of good offices in Cyprus.

E. Facilitation of access and humanitarian functions

28. As the two sides grappled with the pandemic, movement across the buffer zone remained substantially constrained. While most of the crossing points were reopened, the Lefka-Apliki/Lefke-Aplıç and Deryneia/Derinya crossing points were kept closed by the north, and the Ledra Street crossing point was kept closed by the south. UNFICYP was able to use the Lefka-Apliki/Lefke-Aplıç and Deryneia/Derinya crossing points for its supplies and emergencies, but not for its regular operations. The closure of the Deryneia/Derinya crossing point created substantial operational issues for UNFICYP in sector 4.

29. Furthermore, strict PCR testing requirements introduced by the Greek Cypriot side early in July were replicated by the Turkish Cypriot side three months later and significantly restricted movement across the buffer zone. On 17 July, the Greek Cypriot authorities introduced a ban on movement between south and north for third-country nationals, including European Union citizens. Towards the end of November, uncoordinated decisions between the two sides to impose additional restrictive measures at the crossing points resulted in an increase in political tension. This was particularly the case with respect to the measures introduced by the Turkish Cypriot side, which affected both the Turkish and the Greek Cypriot communities and, in the latter case, especially the residents of Kato Pyrgos and Strovilia. In response, the Greek Cypriot authorities suspended on several occasions the crossing of the Turkish forces to Kokkina. Such issues required frequent interventions by UNFICYP, at the request of the two sides, both on the ground and through my Special Representative. The pandemic also prevented religious pilgrimages to sites across the green line and religious services at those sites, which had been hitherto an important confidence-building measure.

30. Since most of the crossing points reopened during the reporting period, the humanitarian functions of UNFICYP were only slightly affected compared with earlier in 2020, whether for the delivery of medicine, the facilitation of access to critical medical care across the lines or the transport of education material. At the same time, as a result of the restrictions imposed on third-country nationals in July, UNFICYP was requested to facilitate movement from the north of more than 450 people of 11 nationalities, so that they might have access to Larnaca Airport to leave the island. At times, people were stranded in the buffer zone, sometimes for weeks, as in the case of an Iranian asylum seeker in mid-September, who was therefore left to the care of UNFICYP. In compliance with its mandate, the mission continued to engage with the Maronite and Greek Cypriot minorities living in the north, albeit in an altered rhythm and modality, and with Turkish Cypriots living in the south.

31. The crossing of persons and goods between the two sides continued to be facilitated through European Council regulation (EC) No. 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 (the Green Line Regulation). The reporting period registered 293,540 crossings, compared with 3,119,120 in 2019. Trade across the Green Line remained at its usual level after a brief suspension during the lockdown period of the first semester, a level assessed nonetheless as very low by the European Commission compared with the actual trade potential across the island.

F. Refugees and asylum seekers

32. After a lull between February and May, arrivals of irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to the island resumed and increased steadily from June onwards, linked, *inter alia*, to the degradation of the situation in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. A marked increase in irregular crossings of the buffer zone was reported, with at least 565 persons, mostly Syrian national refugees, having crossed, compared with 53 during the previous reporting period. Changes in the asylum and migration policy of the Republic of Cyprus, in particular the barring of entry to its territory to asylum seekers since April because of COVID-19, resulted in a significant increase in unchecked crossings of the buffer zone, which likely accounted for most of the new asylum applications from July to October (2,452, compared with 4,247 in 2019). As mentioned above, the new policy resulted in several cases of asylum seekers being stranded in the buffer zone, in one case for weeks. UNFICYP, out of commitment to humanitarian principles, provided some support to the stranded individuals, albeit without any dedicated means for such interventions.

33. At the same time, there was a notable increase in the number of boats carrying asylum seekers arriving in Cyprus, from both Lebanon and Turkey. Nine such boats made their way to the south from Lebanon between August and September, carrying a total of 202 persons. In addition, 243 persons aboard six boats who had also left Lebanon were either pushed back on the high seas by the Republic of Cyprus or, for those who had reached its shores, deported to Lebanon without having been granted access to asylum procedures. There were a further 13 failed attempts of boats trying to reach the island from Lebanon, including one instance of a boat rescued by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) after having spent seven days at sea. In that particular incident, despite the intervention of UNIFIL, three persons lost their lives, including a young child, while 14 were lost at sea. As regards the boats arriving from Turkey, 178 persons arriving on 13 boats and reportedly landing in the north and the buffer zone crossed to the south and were granted access to the asylum procedures of the Republic of Cyprus. In addition, 29 boats carrying 208 Syrians landed in the north, where they were detained pending their return to Turkey. A total of 198 persons have already been returned to Turkey, including 31 unaccompanied and separated children, 27 of whom had their parents or other close family members in the Republic of Cyprus.

G. Gender, and women and peace and security

34. Owing to the COVID-19 outbreak, UNFICYP shifted its implementation of the women and peace and security agenda to online platforms and adjusted its work to include initiatives touching upon the gender dimensions of the pandemic, including the surge in gender-based violence across the island. The mission continued to engage with women's civil society organizations from the north and south to maintain momentum for dialogue and trust-building, irrespective of the limited opportunities for in-person contact, and held a series of intercommunal meetings focusing mainly on the gender elements of the peace process.

35. UNFICYP also held a series of events in the context of the twentieth anniversary of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security, in coordination with my mission of good offices and in cooperation with international counterparts, such as the Embassy of Ireland for a series of workshops with peacebuilders from Northern Ireland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Embassies of Canada and the Netherlands for a virtual "Women walk and talk" event to discuss ways forward for the participation of Cypriot women in the peace process. Cyprus was included in an engagement held under my auspices, involving remarks delivered by a Cypriot activist on the participation of women in the Cyprus peace process. A communiqué highlighting challenges to and opportunities for women and peace and security on the island was also delivered to me on behalf of established bicomunal women's groups. In parallel, within the framework of the UN75 global dialogue, the mission produced media material to highlight women's perspectives on the future of the island.

36. Internally, the mission held virtual gatherings within the military and the police components to enable dialogue on the experiences, concerns and perspectives of uniformed female peacekeepers and to provide information on the approach of the mission to gender mainstreaming and gender parity.

37. UNFICYP continued to lead by example with female leadership in key mission positions, such as Head of Mission, Force Commander, Senior Police Adviser, Chief of Civil Affairs and Chief, Joint Mission Analysis Cell.

IV. Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus

38. Since its establishment, the bicomunal teams of scientists of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus, supported by the United Nations and mandated to recover, identify and return the remains of persons who went missing during the events of 1963/64 and 1974, has exhumed or received the remains of 1,212 persons on both sides of the island. No recoveries were made during the reporting period. The overall exhumation figure may include persons who are not on the official list of missing persons and is only finalized after the completion of anthropological analysis and DNA identification, a process commonly completed within one to two years. When the identified remains are not related to the mandate of the Committee, they are then subtracted from the official figures. Owing to the outbreak, the operations of the Committee were suspended for 73 working days and fully resumed on 2 July. Eight bicomunal teams carried out excavating work across the island during the reporting period, except in Turkish military areas, where access is not authorized as a result of COVID-19-related restrictions. To date, of 2,002 missing persons, 994 have been identified and their remains returned to their families, including 20 during the reporting period.

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

V. Conduct and discipline and sexual exploitation and abuse

40. UNFICYP remains committed to encouraging strict adherence to the United Nations policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. In coordination with the Regional Conduct and Discipline Section of UNIFIL, responsible for supporting UNFICYP, the mission implemented activities related to prevention, enforcement and remedial actions regarding misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and to the enforcement of the policy of zero tolerance.

41. Owing to the pandemic, briefing sessions to all incoming military, police and civilian personnel on the United Nations standards of conduct, including on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, were delivered online.

42. UNFICYP did not receive any allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse during the period under review.

VI. Financial and administrative aspects

43. The General Assembly, by its resolution [74/285](#) of 30 June 2020, appropriated the amount of \$51.7 million for the maintenance of UNFICYP for the period from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

44. As at 9 December 2020, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNFICYP amounted to \$16.7 million. The total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to \$3,099.6 million.

45. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 June 2020, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2020, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

VII. Observations

46. When I repeated my call for a global ceasefire on 2 October, the International Day of Non-Violence, I highlighted that that celebration was taking place in the shadow of the devastating human and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Cyprus, COVID-19 continued to have profound negative repercussions for the two communities, both in terms of health and socioeconomically. The unprecedented dimension of the threat posed by the pandemic has, notably, resulted in a further separation of the communities, while efforts to identify acceptable ways to jointly tackle the virus and its multiple effects on the lives of Cypriots have been limited. As mentioned in my previous report, there are existing mechanisms, mostly underused, that could precisely address those issues if they received sufficient political support. The bicomunal technical committees were specifically designed to address island-wide issues that affect the daily lives of Cypriots and to foster cooperation that would serve to build the foundation for a sustainable settlement. I therefore call upon the leaders to enhance their support for the technical committees and, in the specific context of COVID-19, in particular those that focus on health, economic and commercial matters, crisis management, gender equality and humanitarian affairs, bearing in mind their potential role in contributing to the alleviation of the effects of the pandemic across the island.

47. As stated by the Security Council in its resolution [2532 \(2000\)](#), the pandemic is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security. Sustainable peace does not lie in the separation of communities, but instead in contacts that challenge prejudices and achieve reconciliation. I note that, as had already been the case during the previous reporting period, decisions by both sides to restrict passage at crossing points continued to be made without consultation with the other community. While mindful of the need to put public health and safety first, I encourage the leaders to discuss and harmonize the protocols governing crossings and to come to a mutual agreement on the reopening of the remaining crossing points as soon as feasible.

48. The absence of a viable peace process since July 2017 has resulted in more and more substantial changes on the ground. This, in turn, has heightened tensions between the two sides, moving the parties further apart and possibly affecting the efforts towards an overall sustainable solution. As outlined in the principles of my Action for Peacekeeping initiative, there is a clear complementarity between peacekeeping and peacemaking, and the actions of both missions on the ground shall therefore continue to be mutually reinforcing.

49. As I have already stated on several occasions, developments in Varosha are of concern and representative of the unsustainability of the continuing hiatus in the peace talks. During the reporting period, my representatives and I have stressed repeatedly that the position of the United Nations on Varosha remains unchanged and is guided by the relevant Security Council resolutions. I have emphasized the importance of not taking unilateral actions that could raise tensions on the island and compromise a return to the peace talks, while also calling upon all parties to engage in dialogue in order to resolve their differences.

50. I continue to deplore the restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNFICYP imposed in, inter alia, Varosha and Strovilia, and request that the ability of the mission to patrol and implement its mandated activities be fully restored. I also deplore the frequent disregard shown by the two sides towards the mandated authority of UNFICYP, especially when dealing with security-related issues in and around the buffer zone. In addition to the Agreement on Unmanning of Positions in Sensitive Areas of Nicosia of 1989, the aide-memoire of the mission, as repeatedly highlighted by the

Council, is the document of reference that describes the arrangements put in place by UNFICYP to supervise the ceasefire and contribute to the maintenance of law and order and to a return to normal conditions. I would like to echo the clear stance of the Council and urge all parties to abide by the aide-memoire, inter alia, by respecting the no-fly zone status of the buffer zone and the UNFICYP delineation of the ceasefire lines, as well as refraining from unauthorized constructions, including prefabricated concrete firing positions, and other unauthorized military or civilian activities.

51. Tensions around Cyprus, in particular in relation to hydrocarbon exploration, continued during the reporting period. As also recorded in the report of my mission of good offices in Cyprus, I reiterate my call for serious efforts to avoid any further escalation and to defuse tensions.

52. As I had expressed it on the margins of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, I reiterate the importance of confidence-building measures for Cyprus, in particular in the current difficult climate. In that vein, I encourage the two sides to put forward in good faith proposals and ideas for possible new measures, or to review past proposals, so that discussions and progress may be further pursued. Given the tense regional environment and its impact on Cyprus, I also call upon relevant actors in the region to exercise restraint, explore confidence-building measures and take constructive approaches to resolving their disputes and to the Cyprus problem. It is important that the parties demonstrate their goodwill and make greater efforts to create conditions conducive to a successful negotiation process.

53. In my report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace issued on 30 July 2020 ([A/74/976-S/2020/773](#)), I warned that the pandemic threatened hard-won peacebuilding gains. More than ever, I call upon opinion leaders on the island, be they from the political, commercial, religious, artistic or other spheres, to contribute to bringing the communities closer together as an element necessary for building a constituency for peace and laying the foundation for a sustainable solution to the Cyprus problem. Regional dynamics notwithstanding, in the light of significant societal scepticism and disengagement with regard to the peace process, coupled with an estrangement between the communities that has now run over three generations, redoubled efforts are required for Cypriots to re-engage in peace efforts and bridge the divide between them. Conversely, acts that are aimed at provoking the other community or inciting hatred need to be addressed and clearly denounced by political and other leaders.

54. The Security Council has repeatedly called upon the leaders to refrain from using rhetoric that might deepen the mistrust between the communities, insisting on the importance of improving the public atmosphere and preparing the communities for a settlement, while also highlighting the importance of peace education. Forty-five years after the ceasefire and de facto division of Cyprus, most of those pillars of reconciliation, unfortunately, remain to be built. Consequently, I echo once more the calls of the Council in this regard, as well as its support for greater civic engagement and trust-building across the divide. I also urge the leaders to encourage more explicitly contact and cooperation between the two communities and to provide direct support to people-to-people initiatives, as evidence of their genuine commitment to a solution.

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

56. Even in these difficult times, and despite repeated calls on my part and on the part of the Security Council, efforts in Cyprus to achieve greater economic and social

parity between the two sides and broaden and deepen economic, cultural and other forms of cooperation remain limited. The full implementation of European Council regulation (EC) No. 866/2004 would significantly help to increase the volume of trade and should be pursued with renewed vigour. Increased cross-island trade, together with deeper economic, social, cultural, sporting and other ties and contacts, would promote trust between the communities and help to address the concerns of the Turkish Cypriots regarding isolation.

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

58. Regarding the request of the Security Council to see the establishment of a mechanism for direct military contacts, I sincerely hope that, beyond general statements, concrete action can now be taken following the tabling by my Special Representative of a proposal on 1 May 2020 and the conclusion of the recent electoral process in the north. I remain convinced that such a mechanism would allow the parties to alleviate day-to-day tensions in and around the buffer zone effectively and would constitute an important military confidence-building measure. I urge the parties to work with my Special Representative to establish the mechanism, thereby also meeting the expectations of the Council.

59. Having celebrated on 31 October the twentieth anniversary of the landmark Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), I applaud the tenacity and continuing efforts of women’s groups and women activists in Cyprus to ensure the full participation of women in the peace process and for a gender-responsive settlement. UNFICYP will continue to play its part in leading by example on gender parity in peacekeeping and will redouble its efforts to support gender and peace activists to take their rightful place in the peace initiative on the island. In that respect, I urge the leaders to fully support the work of the Technical Committee on Gender Equality and the critical role of civil society and to ensure a linkage between the two in order to pursue a sustainable solution to the Cyprus issue for all.

60. The situation of asylum seekers and refugees across the island continued to deteriorate considerably during the reporting period and is of serious concern to the United Nations. While appreciating the exceptional circumstances and pressures arising from COVID-19, as well as the high volume of arrivals in Cyprus in relation to the size of the population, I must recall the critical importance of full adherence to international legal norms in the handling of asylum seekers and refugees, wherever they may be found. In the absence of a dedicated bicomunal mechanism to deal with the issue across the divide, I would also suggest that the Joint Contact Room be used to share information on migrations and asylum seekers.

61. In the light of the continued contribution of UNFICYP to peace and stability and the creation of conditions conducive to a political settlement, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of the mission for six months, until 31 July 2021. Looking ahead, UNFICYP will continue to monitor the evolving situation and adapt its operations to implement its mandate effectively.

62. I would like to thank the partners, in particular the European Commission, that have continued to provide support for the work of both United Nations missions in

Cyprus, UNDP and the Committee on Missing Persons and have contributed to the implementation of various confidence-building measures. I also thank the 36 countries that have contributed troops, police or both to UNFICYP since 1964, and I pay tribute to the 186 peacekeepers who have lost their lives in the service of peace in Cyprus.

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

Annex

**Countries providing military and police personnel to the
United Nations operation in Cyprus (as at 18 December 2020)**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of military personnel</i>
Argentina	255
Australia	2
Austria	3
Brazil	2
Canada	1
Ghana	1
Hungary	11
India	1
Pakistan	3
Paraguay	12
Russian Federation	4
Serbia	3
Slovakia	240
Ukraine	1
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	257
Total^a	796

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of police personnel</i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6
Bulgaria	2
China	5
India	5
Ireland	12
Italy	4
Jordan	4
Lithuania	1
Montenegro	1
Pakistan	3
Romania	5
Russian Federation	5
Serbia	2
Slovakia	6
Sweden	2
Ukraine	5
Total^a	68

^a Of the military personnel, 717 are men and 79 are women. Of the police personnel, 41 are men and 27 are women.

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