

BLUE BERET

Summer 2023

Artvocacy action marks International Day of Peacekeepers at Ledra Palace crossing

Plus:

UNFICYP bids farewell to Force Commander

Peacekeepers committed to beat plastic pollution inside the buffer zone

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Editor's note

Dear readers, with the arrival of Summer, we have the pleasure to launch the latest edition of the Blue Beret magazine highlighting the missions' key activities from April to June.

In this edition, we cover SRSG Colin Stewart's meetings with key stakeholders, including his meetings with the diplomatic community, who also visited Pyla, inside the buffer zone, recently. SRSG Stewart also had important meetings with the Greek Cypriot leader, Nikos Christodoulides, and the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar.

During the month of May, we celebrated International Day of Peacekeepers with several events taking place inside the buffer zone: On 27 May, peacekeepers and peace makers got together for the "artvocacy" action as part of the Inside Out project and on 29 May, our Force Commander, together with the Mission leadership, laid a wreath in honour of fallen peacekeepers in Cyprus and around the world.

In this issue you will also find full details of our participation with the global campaign to mark World Environment Day with pledges from our peacekeepers to beat plastic pollution and details on how we are stepping up efforts to protect the environment inside the buffer zone. In May, we also facilitated a visit from Agence France Presse to the buffer zone to showcase the barn owl nesting project led by UNPOL and the Game and

Fauna Services.

You will also find several stories on the work of our military and police colleagues and how the Mission marked some important UN dates and observances including pride month, world blood donor day and many others.

In this edition, we also include pictures from our most recent peacekeepers skills competition.

We are proud of the commitment of our Civil Affairs Section and how the team continues to engage with civil society groups across the island and is promoting numerous in person activities. In this edition you can also read about how working together across the Mission's components is enabling us to increase co-operation and collaboration between uniformed and civilian personnel to maximise the peacekeeping impact we have on the ground.

Finally, we are pleased to share an exclusive interview with the Mission's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, as we bid her farewell after two years of invaluable service with UNFICYP. We pay tribute to her commitment to peace in Cyprus and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

In the next few pages, read about how UNFICYP continues to implement its mandate inside the UN buffer zone, and much more.

Enjoy reading!

On the cover

Inside Out project comes to Ledra

On 27 May, the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Cyprus launched an Inside Out action to bring together participants from both communities on the island, to gather for a day to celebrate the International Day of Peacekeepers. The event brought together military, police and civilian staff and partners from both communities. The event served to highlight the partnerships between peacekeeping and communities and how different stakeholders are working together towards bringing sustainable peace on the island. In total, 41 portraits were glued in front of the Exchange Gate at Ledra Palace crossing inside the buffer zone. The day, celebrated with local artists, Youth Champions, women, young leaders and business entrepreneurs showcased the power of artvocacy for peace and contributed to the history of street art in Cyprus.



BLUE BERET

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The **BLUE BERET** is UNFICYP's in-house journal. Views expressed are of the authors concerned and do not necessarily conform with official policy.



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SRSG engagements with stakeholders and diplomatic community

On 15 May, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, met with the Greek Cypriot leader, Nikos Christodoulides. He met with the Turkish Cypriot leader, Ersin Tatar on 16 May.



On May 18, SRSG Stewart, welcomed the Ambassador of Latvia, Ieva Briede.

On 25 May, SRSG Colin Stewart, welcomed the Ambassador of Serbia, Marko Blagojevic, to the UN Protected Area.



On 24 April, SRSG Stewart, welcomed a delegation from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, led by Director General Olli Kantanen, to the UN Protected Area.



Diplomatic community visits the buffer zone

On 13 June, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, accompanied by UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu, UNFICYP's Chief of Civil Affairs, Faylene Woolley, and the Force Chief of Staff, Ben Ramsay, escorted a group of 15 Ambassadors based on the island to the UN buffer zone in Sector 4, which covers over 65 kilometres along the area, beginning at Kaimakli and ending at the village of Dherinia on the east coast.

The diplomatic community had the opportunity to see first-hand the work of peacekeepers on the ground and visit the villages of Pyla and Athienou, the Mission's observation posts along the buffer zone and familiarize with UNFICYP's peacekeeping efforts in the area. Ambassadors from Slovakia, Austria, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine were among the visitors.



Networking forum discusses future options for lasting peace in Cyprus

On 23 May, UNFICYP held a networking forum at Ledra Palace Hotel to discuss future options for lasting peace in and around Cyprus, including political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and international dynamics. The forum welcomed İpek Borman, Alexandros Lordos, Gülden Plümer and Ioanna Achilleos Zavitsanaki, presenters from the Cyprus Futures who are part of a diverse group

36 researchers who developed a roadmap for future options and a common language to support dialogue between the sides. The aim is for these scenarios to be useful in a wide and inclusive strategic conversation in and around Cyprus to address the challenges facing the island. More than 70 participants from civil society, embassies, journalists and academics joined the conversation.



Peacekeepers in action

With temperatures rising and summer season approaching, UNFICYP continues to prepare for any fire inside the bufferzone. On 15 June, the Mission's Fire Unit conducted a training on grass and forest fires as part of its response plan. On April 20, the Mission's Fire Unit also conducted a training on fire safety management to 20 newly arrived peacekeepers.



On 25 April, a commemorative dawn service to mark Anzac Day was held in Wayne's Keep, inside the buffer zone in Nicosia. ANZAC Day serves to honor all Australians and New Zealanders who served and died in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations while acknowledging the contribution and sacrifices of all those who have served.



On May 6, UNFICYP peacekeepers from the UK celebrated the Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla at Ledra Palace Hotel. The British contingent located in Sector two, is responsible for patrolling and monitoring military activity over 30 kilometres along the buffer zone, beginning at the east end of Mammari village and ending at the village of Kaimakli to the east of Nicosia.



On 17 June, SRSO Colin Stewart, together with 25 peacekeepers from UNPOL, military and civilian components attended a clean-up at Caretta Beach to beat plastic pollution on the west coast of the island organized by SPOT Marine Life. On the day, 188.5 kilos of rubbish were collected and properly discarded. Caretta Beach is a very important nesting beach for marine turtles. It is a 5 kilometres long beach and every year; several beach cleaning activities are organized resulting in the collection and removal of tons of plastic and other waste materials.



UNFICYP hosts networking fair in the buffer zone

In the evening of 23 June, Ledra Palace Hotel became buzzing with conversations, music, and more than 300 Cypriots from across the divide, some often meeting for the first time to discuss business and entrepreneurship. The location, known on the island as the headquarters for UNFICYP British peacekeepers, became a hub of handshakes, hugs, warm welcomes, and chats on different topics. The reason: The Mission, together with partners, organized the third edition of its Networking Fair initiatives, this time focusing on building bridges through businesses and entrepreneurship.

The UN recognizes the tremendous contributions of small enterprises to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In many parts of the world, micro, small and medium enterprises are the backbone of societies, and it is proven that they contribute to local and national economies and to sustaining livelihoods, among working women, youth, and at many times to they also support groups in vulnerable situations.

For Aliye Taygun, “having participated in the fair for the third time has been an incredibly enriching experience, brimming with networking opportunities, bright ideas and inspiration,” she works as an International Relations Officer at Oxygono.

For Rémy Mérieux, from Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre, such events help build bridges between the communities: “These events have a strong impact on the Cyprus peace process. They



help cultivate the culture needed for peace in many ways. It provides the opportunity of interaction between the communities, which helps breakdown stereotypes and misconceptions. Fostering intercommunal business partnership helps to promote initiatives by showing that there are benefits to overcome the status quo of division.”

The event offered to participants a chance to familiarize with a series of different businesses who set up their stalls outside of the hotel and several speakers presented topics ranging from Green Line trade, the potential of partnerships, using emerging technology tools for social impact and presentations of how start-ups initiatives can help foster peace.

The fair was organized by UNFICYP, in partnership with the Cyprus Peace and Dialogue Centre, Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce, the Center for Social Innovation and the World Bank. In addition, a series of different businesses, entrepreneurs,

and organizations from across the island, and EU-funded projects. The event was also supported by Turkish Cypriot Association of Shopkeepers and Artisans, StartUp Grind Cyprus, Unity Growth, CyprusInno and Oxygono.

UNFICYP puts partnerships at the heart of its work to achieve sustainable peace. The Mission’s Civil Affairs Section is responsible for facilitating activities that promote harmony and trust between communities.

Mission talks: Peacekeeping, Pride, Mine Action



On April 4, UNFICYP marked Mine Awareness Day and UNFICYP launched a podcast speaking with Mark Connelly, UNMAS expert in Cyprus. On the island, UNMAS conducts a series of practical Explosive Hazard Awareness trainings for UNFICYP peacekeepers. They are trained in identification, hazard marking and emergency procedures to ensure safety and security of operations inside the United Nations buffer zone in Cyprus. This year’s theme for the campaign was #MineActionCannotWait.

For our May edition, we marked International Day of Peacekeepers

interviewing UNFICYP’s Force Chief of Staff, Benedict Ramsay, and UNPOL’s Deputy Senior Police Advisor, Maja Gacic. They spoke about serving for peace in Cyprus and what are the challenges and daily tasks of our peacekeepers on the island.

In June’s edition of the podcast, UNFICYP brought together two representatives of the LGBTQ community, Alexandros Efstathiou, one of the founders of the Queer Collective CY, and Erman Dolmaci, the coordinator of Queer Cyprus Association. They joined us to talk about LGBTQ+ rights in Cyprus, their organizations and the work they are doing.

UNFICYP bids farewell to Force Commander Major General Ingrid Gjerde



To mark the departure of our Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, Blue Beret magazine interviewed her on her last week on the job to hear about her experiences while serving in one of the UN's longest-running peacekeeping operations around the world. We are grateful for her leadership and commitment to our peacekeepers on the island and wish her the best in her next endeavors.

Blue Beret: How was it like to serve as leader of military component in UNFICYP for these past 2 years?

I feel this has been an adventure and a great opportunity. First of all, to contribute to better future for the Cypriot population. It has been a fantastic opportunity for me personally to work in such a multinational environment. Of course, lots of different cultures and lots of wonderful personalities and I have learnt a lot about this particular conflict, about culture on island and in the neighboring countries. I have learnt about cooperation and the beauty of many people serving under the UN flag.

Blue Beret: What was your routine like? Any aspect you enjoyed the most?

Routine is hard. Every day I wake up at morning and I read the news to try to get updated. Except for that, there is hardly any routine. We have specific meetings. I have internal meetings and lots of external meetings including the most important with both opposing forces. I spent most of the time inside the buffer zone to see our peacekeepers and follow-up on our operations and that is what I like about this job: that there is no routine, and it is a fantastic opportunity for me also, to have an impact on how I want to achieve my job in this Mission.

Blue Beret: You come from a military background, how was the integration of military, police and civilians working on common issues inside the buffer zone?

It is absolutely vital for our success that we cooperate because most of the incidents and situations require us to cooperate and work closely. We have done a lot in these last two years to be more integrated within the mission and I am confident to say that we

have achieved a lot. We have done a lot on our tools, the way we are reporting, planning, and operating. We have also done a lot on building cohesion and a common culture. I think that has been a great experience, although there is still a way to go to be successful and to achieve a complete level of cooperation. And that takes time. I am very satisfied with the way we are cooperating in achieving this common objective in the mission.

Blue Beret: Did you ever feel it was a challenge being a woman leading the military component?

No, I have felt that from the very beginning that I am respected in UNFICYP. I felt respected and appreciated by the local population both from sides of the island.

Blue Beret: Do you believe you inspired women working under your leadership to deliver better UNFICYP's mandate?

I hope so. I think both young men and women need role models to inspire them, and honestly women often need more empowerment to see their options and to really feel appreciated and grab the





opportunities. For this reason, as a senior female leader, I want to inspire both men and women, but I do understand that I have to see individuals and may be pushed to support some of the women a little extra step further, therefore, I am really happy if I can be seen as a role model.

Blue Beret: What was the most challenging situation you experienced? We have had many challenging situations and in particular in engaging on difficult matters when there are disputed areas (and disputes that have been challenging) but may be the (most) challenging one, when one of our Slovak patrol officers was shot at on May 21. That was a serious, dangerous, and risky situation, which of course has an impact on me as a commander and how I look at the routine for the future to make sure that our peacekeepers are delivering the mission mandate, however they remain as safe as possible.

Blue Beret: What did you learn during this time on the island that you will carry in your future experiences?

I have learnt a lot, I learned from working in multinational operations even having worked in several mission with other nations and here on the island with both parties of the conflict. When this said, the thing I have learnt as the most important is being able to be open minded, being curious to find alternative solutions and to succeed as a team more than as individuals or as a particular military component.

Blue Beret: What message you would like to leave to your fellow peacekeepers serving in Cyprus?

For all peacekeepers: You must be curious, openminded and learn to understand and get even better knowledge. And then you must be willing to change your mind and make compromises to achieve our mission and mandate.

Blue Beret: What message you would like to leave to the Cypriots you met on the island?

I think for Cypriots that history is important, and I really understand both the sacrifice and frustration and the challenges on both sides. It is easy to be impartial for me as the Force Commander because I do understand both sides. With this said, the solution is about the future, and I think it is vital for Cypriots on both sides to think about



their children and grandchildren if they are going to stay on the island and have a better future here. Cypriots on both sides must be willing to make some compromises and sacrifices more than they have done to find a solution to the Cyprus problem. There is so much potential in Cyprus. This is a beautiful island with huge economic potential and all kinds of potentials, so I really encourage in particularly the politicians and leaders of both sides, also the population to support to find a solution for future.

Blue Beret: What is the last message you would like to give as UNFICYP's Force Commander?

Never forget our mandate that is all about getting the two sides back on the negotiation table to find a long-lasting solution for Cyprus. This requires close cooperation between the components and between many member states which are contributing to UNFICYP. For every single individual, we must show each other respect, we have to make sure everyone feels included. This is vital for cohesion, required for us to succeed in achieving mandate.

UNFICYP hosts peacekeeper skills competition

United Nations peace operations work around the world to promote and maintain peace and security, despite facing innumerable challenges while delivering its mandate. In Cyprus, to ensure that peacekeepers remain agile, fit for purpose and ready to deploy at short notice, UNFICYP organizes regular military skills competition every year.

In addition to military teams from Sectors 1, 2, and 4, the Mission's Mobile Force Reserve and the Force Protection Unit also took part in the challenge and for the first time, a team of UNPOL members also participated. On 30 May, more than 70 peacekeepers from Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Ireland, Norway, Paraguay, Slovakia, Serbia, Romania, and the UK concluded the summer competition.

It is the biggest event within the Mission's training calendar and allows peacekeepers to compete over several mission

relevant stands within a spirit of cooperation and teamwork. The teams participated in different skills, including endurance run, emergency response and assault course.

At the end of the competition, the Mission's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, awarded the Mission's Force Protection Unit for winning the competition and thanked all peacekeepers for their professionalism and their commitment in serving for peace on the island.

For Major Gjerde, "the aim of the competition is to motivate and improve professional competencies and skills. Furthermore, the competition helps to build a strong UNFICYP team. Both police and military know very well cohesion and friendship is vital to succeed in preventing and solving conflict. For this reason, it is great to have UNPOL on board with a team, which shows how much we are working towards having a fully integrated mission."





UNFICYP marks International Day of Peacekeepers



Every year, the UN marks the International Day of Peacekeepers, when we pay tribute to all the men and women who have served either as military, police or civilians and continue to serve in UN Peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage. We also honour the memory of those who have lost their lives in the cause of peace.

This year, UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Ingrid Gjerde, together with UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu, UNFICYP Senior Advisor, Aderemi Adekoya, and Chief Mission Support, Joel Cohen, led the annual commemoration of the International Day of Peacekeepers at the UN Protected Area in Nicosia on 29 May.

Speaking at the event, Major General Gjerde said: "United Nations peacekeepers are the beating heart of our commitment to a more peaceful world. For 75 years, they have supported people and communities rocked by conflict and upheaval across the globe. Today, we honour their extraordinary contributions to international

peace and security." For 75 years, UN peacekeeping has made a tangible difference to the lives of millions of people caught up in catastrophic conflict. More than two million uniformed and civilian personnel have contributed to this global effort to achieve peace and progress for all peoples.

Currently, more than 87,000 peacekeepers from 125 countries serve in 12 operations. They face rising global tensions and divides, stagnating peace processes, and more complex conflicts. In Cyprus, about 800 troops serve on a rotating basis. The largest troop contributors are Argentina, the United Kingdom, and Slovakia. Over the years, more than 150,000 troops have served in UNFICYP. The UNPOL component is comprised of 69 police officers from sixteen countries and its member are generally deployed for 12-month periods.

Today, we thank our peacekeepers, past and present, for their service and sacrifice, and pay tribute to colleagues who have paid the ultimate price by giving their life for the cause of peace.



UNFICYP peacekeepers pledge to beat plastic pollution across the buffer zone



More than 400 million tonnes of plastic are produced every year worldwide, half of which is designed to be used only once. Of that, less than 10 per cent is recycled.

In Cyprus, ahead of World Environment Day this year, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNFICYP) has pledged to tackle the scourge of plastic pollution across the UN controlled buffer zone.

UNFICYP peacekeepers from the UK, Argentina and Slovakia have been conducting clean-up operations across large swaths of the UN buffer zone collecting plastic waste and disposing it responsibly to allow the environment inside the buffer zone to flourish.

Understanding the environmental risks and promoting sustainability on the island, UNFICYP Force Commander Major General Ingrid Gjerde highlights that “climate change and pollution is threatening the life of the generations to come. We can all contribute to a better environment. Our clean-up operations are a tangible demonstration of our commitment to work closely with local communities to beat the scourge of plastic pollution.”

Our Argentinian peacekeepers, based in Sector One, which covers

the area between Kokkina village on the western coast to the village of Mammari, west of Nicosia, are leading the way with their efforts to reduce the use of single use plastics to safeguard the environment they operate in. In other parts of the buffer zone, the British contingent based in Nicosia, and the Slovak contingent responsible for the east part of the buffer zone, have begun minimizing their use of single use plastics and are currently working to eliminate the remaining plastic consumables still being used by UNFICYP peacekeepers.

UNFICYP continues to actively promote environmental awareness and protection among its personnel, as an important priority for the Mission's goal towards a greener and sustainable future.

World Environment Day is observed every year on 5 June and is the biggest international day for the environment. Led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and held annually since 1973, it has grown to be the largest global platform for environmental outreach. It is celebrated by millions of people across the world. This year's campaign theme focuses on solutions to plastic pollution under the global campaign #BeatPlasticPollution.



UN Police supports joint efforts to stop domestic violence across the divide in Cyprus

According to statistics, there has been a significant rise in the incidence of domestic violence across the divide in Cyprus. Domestic violence and other violence against women can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. Studies show it can even occur regardless of one's marital status or educational and socioeconomic background.

On 31 May, the Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, with support from UNFICYP, held a seminar on domestic violence, focusing on child abuse and femicide at the Ledra Palace Hotel in Nicosia.

The Technical Committee team leaders, Professor Andreas Kapardis and Salih Doratli, spoke at the opening, together with the Mission's Senior Advisor, Aderemi Adekoya, and UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Assistant Police Commissioner Satu Koivu.

In her opening remarks, Koivu said: "We all, as mothers and fathers, women, men, boys, girls, children, and parents, we always believe that home is the safest place on earth. And that's the message that we want to send to our families, our closest ones, and our children and to all communities where we live. But unfortunately, for some people, the most dangerous place can be their own home."

The Mission's Senior Advisor congratulated the technical committee on the efforts to address this topic in the context of committee's work and for the focus on the prevention of femicide and child abuse. He emphasized that good policies and practices are needed to challenge the norms, and stereotypes that are often perpetuate and normalize domestic violence adding that prevention is key.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers of domestic violence



have exponentially increased across the globe. "That is why the COVID-19 can also be called as a pandemic of femicide and gender-based violence against women," Koivu added.

The event offered a space for experienced practitioners, academics, and civil society representatives from across the divide, to address the phenomenon and suggest effective approaches to its prevention. The seminar comes as part of the UN's efforts to support the technical committee efforts to work on trust-building measures and sharing the concern both internationally during the COVID pandemic and locally about children and women as victims of domestic violence and emphasis was given on both the prevention and victim support.

UNFICYP peacekeepers pledge to donate blood and save lives on World Blood Donor Day

Every year countries around the world celebrate World Blood Donor Day. The event serves to raise awareness of the need for safe blood and blood products and to thank voluntary, unpaid blood donors for their life-saving gifts of blood.

On this year's World Blood Donor Day, observed on 14 June, we pay tribute to UNFICYP peacekeepers from military and UNPOL components who regularly donate blood at local health facilities on both sides of the island.

"Donating blood is the most precious gift that anyone can give to another person – the gift of life. The simple act of giving a small amount of blood can go a long way in helping to save someone's

life. I am glad to be able to help and hope others will come forward today and join us by donating blood for people in need," says UNPOL Officer Ian Walsh, from Ireland.

A blood service that gives patients access to safe blood and blood products in sufficient quantity is a key component of an effective health system. The global theme of World Blood Donor Day changes each year in recognition of the selfless individuals who donate their blood for people unknown to them. We are proud of our peacekeepers for their commitment in serving for peace and for supporting the communities we serve with vital donations and for giving a valuable gift to those most in need in Cyprus.



Integration: Working smarter together to keep the peace



United Nations Peacekeeping missions around the world help countries navigate the difficult path from conflict to peace. They have unique strengths, including legitimacy, burden sharing, and an ability to deploy troops and police from around the world, integrating them with civilian peacekeepers to address a range of mandates set by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly.

In Cyprus, “working so closely with my UNPOL and military colleagues in an integrated manner plays a key role in ensuring the smooth facilitation of daily civilian activities in the buffer zone. Integration enables UNFICYP to respond quickly to actual and emerging sources of tension”, highlights Laura Gava, Civil Affairs Officer at UNFICYP. UNFICYP’s Civil Affairs Section was established in 1998 to reflect the increasingly civilian nature of the issues confronting the Mission in Cyprus. With a military status quo, a longstanding ceasefire, and the establishment of a buffer zone between the opposing forces, normal civilian activities resumed throughout the island and have been increasing in the buffer zone in recent years.

Laura explains that the concept of integration comes to life daily with her work on the ground, “whether it is about solving farmers’ disputes or following through on unauthorized activities.

Whether it is about liaising with authorities to agree on maintenance of our patrol tracks and camps or providing escorts to municipal officials and utilities companies or whether it is about facilitating all sorts of possible events, from religious pilgrimages to more mundane rally competitions, integration ensures that all components operate in a coherent and mutually supportive manner.” Civil Affairs Section is an integrated component, headed by a civilian Chief and comprising of 13 civilians, assisted by 5 UNPOL members and 2 military officers. In addition, 6 UNPOL, 6 Military and 3 civilians are based in different offices across the island to maintain close relations with civil society and local community leaders.

“Integrated Civil Affairs is unique, since it is the only three cross-components section under civilian leadership,” adds Marijana Bulatovic, who is one of Civil Affairs Police Liaison Officers. She

notes that “by embedding uniformed and non-uniformed staff together, the work of the section becomes very productive and streamlines the United Nations peace support processes on the island.”

Furthermore, Civil Affairs Military Liaison Officer, Carlos Javier Aghem, acknowledges that “the fact that the three-components work in an integrated way helps us to carry out our tasks more effectively and efficiently. It also increases the cooperation between the components, narrowing the differences among various approaches to solving problems.”

“The fact that the three components work in an integrated way help us to fulfil the mandate more effectively,” he concludes.

The roots of the civil affairs function of UNFICYP can be traced back to the original mandate with the condition that the Mission should contribute to a return to normal conditions on the island. After the events of 1974 and the resulting displacement of large numbers of the population, UNFICYP was mandated to provide humanitarian assistance to the population across the island. In Cyprus, Civil Affairs Section is responsible for facilitating activities that promote harmony and trust building between the communities.



Sailing initiative inspires young people to help build peace across the island



Winds of Change is a project that aims to bring together the first intercommunal sailing team to sail around Cyprus. The project offers opportunities for young people from across the island to embark on a journey with the common purpose of building trust, understanding and unity between people from all communities. The project seeks to challenge, empower, and inspire young people to connect and in turn, contribute to peacebuilding on the island. The project was launched on 1 April, at an event held at the Home for Cooperation in the buffer zone, to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, which takes place each year on 6 April.

"Today we are celebrating the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, and we are launching a new sport initiative called 'Winds of Change' which aims to give rise to the first intercommunal team that will sail around the divided island together," said Greek Cypriot Sophia Papamichalopoulos, the founder of the project and organizer of the event.

Emphasizing the role of sport in peacebuilding efforts on the island, Sophia said: "As a former athlete and Olympian, I am a firm believer that sport has the power to change the world, and as a daughter of a refugee, I believe that we can all play a role in building peace together. Next to the political peace negotiations, I feel that we should be using sport more to build peace on a community level, to create neutral grounds for dialogue, to give rise to common experiences, and to create a common purpose."

Nilhan Uzman, a Turkish Cypriot who volunteer at the event, added: "I value the potential of sports in creating positive social change and work towards a more peaceful, healthy, and sustainable world. Sports can have a significant impact on promoting peace and unity."

"Winds of Change, which will bring together a bi-communal crew to sail

around Cyprus, is a great example of this. Through sailing, the crew members will learn to work together a common goal, communicate effectively, and rely on each other, breaking down barriers and building trust between communities," Nilhan explained. Supporting the initiative, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart together with UN staff were present at the launch of the project.

In his remarks, Stewart said: "Due to its vast reach, unparalleled popularity and foundation of positive values, sport is ideally positioned to contribute towards the United Nations' objectives for development and peace. To raise awareness of this potential, 6 April was declared as the International Day of Sport for Development and Peace by the UN General Assembly in 2013. It is great to celebrate this anniversary here in Cyprus with the launch of such an inspiring and exciting initiative."

Further, Stewart highlighted: "I commend all those involved in this initiative and wish best of luck to the intercommunal team which will not only sail around this beautiful island but also hopefully navigate towards a more peaceful future."



Inside Out project brings peacekeepers and peace makers together

On 27 May, UNFICYP launched the Inside Out Project in Nicosia. Peacekeepers and peace makers from across the divide gathered to place their portraits in front of Ledra Palace Hotel to mark the 75th anniversary of United Nations Peacekeeping. The event served as an opportunity to involve local artists, Youth

Champions, women, young leaders and business entrepreneurs to help put up the portraits and provide an occasion for a discussion on the power of artvocacy for peace and the history of street art in their island. The initiative comes as part of the global campaign #PeaceBeginsWithMe.



Peace Begins when we empower youth: Young leaders in action kicks-off in Cyprus

On 27 May, UNFICYP, together with the British Council in Cyprus, kicked off the second round of the Young Leaders in Action programme with a 3-day interactive workshop, bringing young people from across the island together to develop social impact projects that aim to advance gender equality and youth participation. During the workshop, young people formed intercommunal teams and begun developing their project ideas to be implemented in various parts of the island in the coming months.



Şadiye Işısal: The power of youth contributes to peace efforts on the island

Şadiye Işısal is a young Turkish Cypriot activist interested in conflict resolution and peacebuilding and is looking forward to the day when she will live in a united Cyprus. Living in Nicosia, the last divided capital in Europe, she joined the UN's Youth Champions for Environment and Peace initiative which aims to bring young people together from across the island to work together on shared environmental concerns, helping to build trust and confidence between young people across the divided island.

"The programme gave me more power to push and never give up on this journey of living in a better Cyprus. This experience made me realise that Cyprus is not only a home for Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots; but it is also a home for other nationalities who share the common vision of a united island," Şadiye highlights.

She decided to join as she had always dreamed of becoming a representative of Cypriot youth to voice her support for building lasting peace as well as to advocate for the role of young people's participation in helping to make progress towards a united Cyprus.

"The programme was very interesting and useful," says Şadiye and explains that "it has taught me the concept of environmental peacebuilding and the role of young people in the climate crisis. When talking specifically about Cyprus, we were introduced to local environmental issues by researchers who opened my eyes on environmental issues that the island is experiencing."

During the intense 2 weekend long sessions she attended with her peers at Ledra Palace Hotel, she says "I learnt how challenging it is to balance environmental, social, and economic concerns while anticipating the long-term impacts they can cause."



Furthermore, Şadiye adds: "I had the opportunity to learn more about the work of the UN in Cyprus and their contribution to the Cyprus peace process."

For her, the programme offers to young people on the island a unique experience to meet like-minded friends from the other community and of other nationalities who care about the environment and are willing to take action to mitigate climate impact. "This programme offers such a cohesive and multi-communal atmosphere which is almost impossible to find on the island," she details.

For her, "the power of youth contributes immensely to the general peace efforts on the island. My experience from the

programme can be described as life-long multi-communal friendships with fulfilment and happiness along with interactive expert training on environment and peace," Şadiye concludes.

As youth are increasingly demanding more just, equitable and progressive opportunities and solutions in their societies, the need to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young people have become more pressing than ever. For UNFICYP, youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive.

UNFICYP partners with young people, helping them participate in decisions affecting them, and strengthening their ability to advance issues such as climate action, education and employment.

Since its inception in 2020, more than 80 young people from across the island joined the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace programme. The third edition, concluded in December 2022, was organized in cooperation with British Council Cyprus with the focus on environmental peacebuilding and climate activism.

Anastasia Antoniou: People from diverse backgrounds contribute to building bridges

A committed peace activist, Anastasia Antoniou is a young Greek Cypriot dedicated to peacebuilding and protecting the environment in Cyprus. She wanted to connect with like-minded people from across the divided island, so she joined the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace initiative. Now in its third year, the initiative aims to bring young people together to work on common environmental issues, helping to build trust and confidence between the divided communities of Cyprus.



"I am Greek Cypriot and unfortunately getting in touch with Turkish Cypriots does not happen organically; it needs to be initiated," Anastasia highlights.

She joined the third edition of the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace programme which offers a unique opportunity for young people from all communities living on the island to work together and discuss peacebuilding priorities as well as the many environmental issues we are facing.

Anastasia notes: "The programme has fully met my expectations as I have learnt more on environmental peacebuilding and climate activism. I had the chance to meet and discuss with professionals within relevant fields as well as with other young people living in Cyprus who share the same concerns as me regarding the socio-political situation on the island."

"Participating in this programme has allowed me to become a member of the Youth Champions Alumni Network, and now I have access to the opportunities available to them," she adds.

The third edition of the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, concluded in December 2022, was organized in cooperation

with the British Council Cyprus, focused on environmental peacebuilding and climate activism.

Anastasia recommends UNFICYP's initiative to young people interested in peacebuilding and environmental protection, as she sees it "a good opportunity to expand your knowledge on these important topics, especially in the context of Cyprus, and to network with people who are also interested in the same issues."

"As young people living in Cyprus, we experience the negative consequences of the Cyprus problem first hand. Joining this programme helped me learn more about the

role of peacebuilding and advocacy, and what can be done to bridge the gap between the communities," Anastasia explains.

Since its inception in 2020, more than 80 young people from across the island joined the UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace programme.

She stresses that "meeting people from other ethnic backgrounds and nationalities contributes to building bridges and breaking down stereotypes and prejudices.

She concludes: "even though this may not seem like something significant to some, taking into consideration the extent of the segregation between the two main communities on the island and that some people have never even met someone from the other community I believe that it really is a big step."

Youth Participation: For UNFICYP, youth can be a positive force for development when provided with the knowledge and opportunities they need to thrive. UNFICYP partners with young people, helping them participate in decisions affecting them, and strengthening their ability to advance issues such as climate action, education, and employment.

Festival of dance and music brings communities together in Larnaca

On 22 May, over 300 people from all communities of Cyprus gathered for a day of fun with dance and music in Larnaca. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot artists organized lively performances including poetry, theater, and traditional dances to bring the communities together. The festival was organized by the Culture Movement, the Cyprus Bilingualism Association and the group Cyprus One Homeland All Together with support from UNFICYP.





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