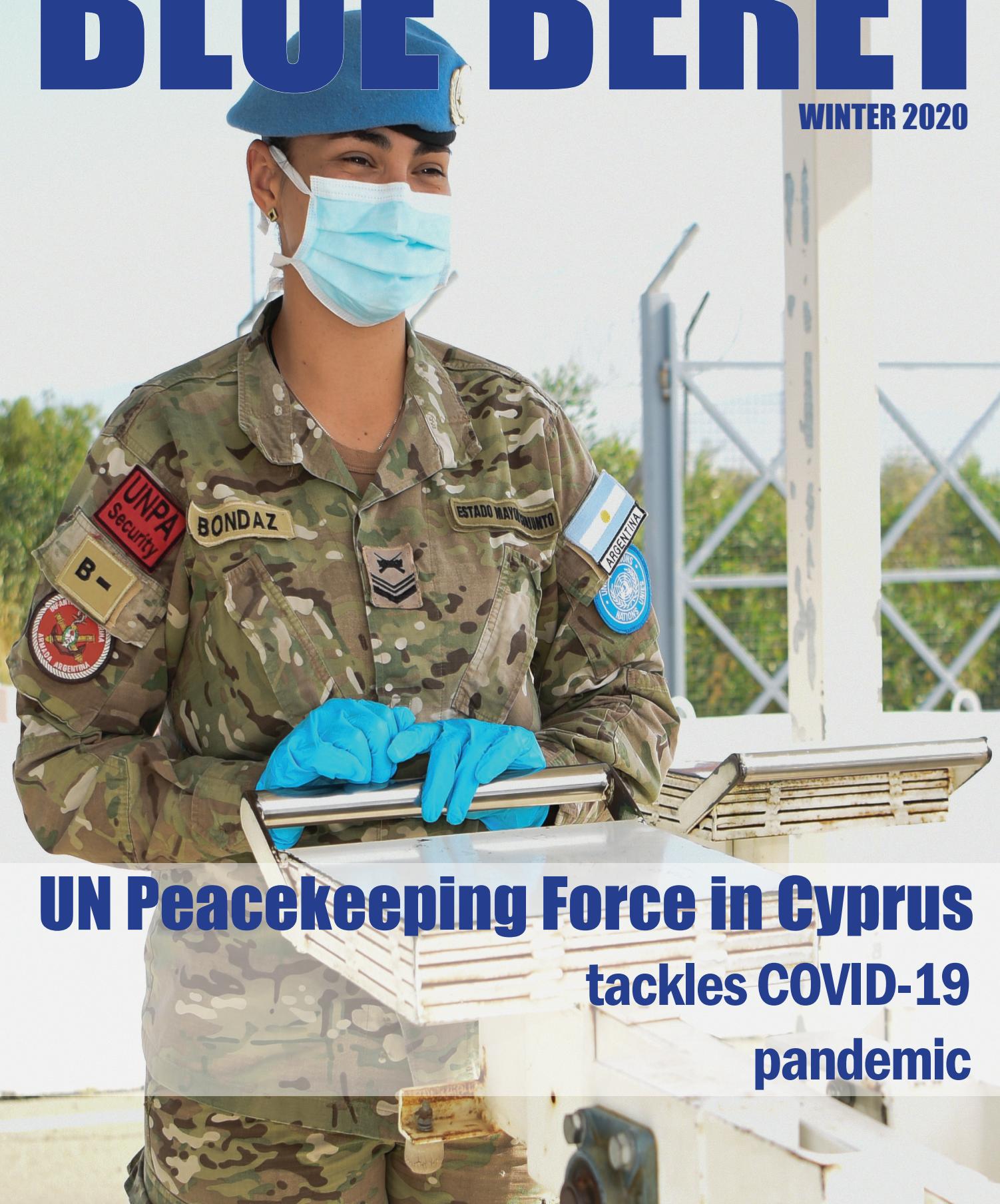


# BLUE BERET

WINTER 2020



**UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus  
tackles COVID-19  
pandemic**

**PLUS**

**UNFICYP bids farewell to Force Commander  
An interview with the Mission's Force Medical Officer**

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## UN in Cyprus marks Human Rights Day

**RECOVER**  
stand up for human rights  
**BETTER.**



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FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION  
AND ABUSE



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers, we are happy to launch the winter edition of the Blue Beret magazine covering the highlights of the Mission despite all challenges faced in 2020 with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this edition, we invite you to read about the work and activities carried out over the last months of the year by UNFICYP and by our peacekeepers in these difficult times. Despite the challenges, much has been done in all sectors and by all sections.

We hope you enjoy an interview with UNFICYP's Force Medical Officer, Lieutenant Gábor Kolonics and what have been the preventive measures in place to tackle the COVID-19 crisis within the Mission.

We also included an interview with our Head of Mission in Cyprus, Elizabeth Spehar on the challenges and highlights of the past year.

For this edition we also prepared an article for the farewell of UNFICYP's Force Commander,

Major General Cheryl Pearce, who successfully concluded her 2-year tenure in the last day of 2020 and we wish her all the best on her new assignment.

Along the next pages, you will also find one of our most notable campaigns from November last year, when the Mission added its voice on the 16 days of activism to end violence against women.

We invited two peacekeepers from the military component and UNPOL to share opinion pieces on what are their thoughts on how to promote women's participation and to end violence against women.

In this edition we also invite you to learn more with some of the stories from Inside the Blue, the winter medal parade and some of the work being done together with young Cypriots from across the divide.

We wish you all a happy new year and hope you enjoy the reading!

## BLUE BERET

WINTER 2020

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UNFICYP peacekeepers have been taking all precautions to keep COVID-19 away, Master Corporal Amelia Del Rocio Bondaz, from Argentina, is pictured at the Blue Beret entrance gate using personal protection equipment to protect herself and others from COVID-19.

Bondaz is a member of the Security Platoon within the Force Protection Unit. The unit's main function is to deter through proactive policing and security measures in order to preserve the operational effectiveness of the force and safeguard its personnel.

Some of the measures implemented to avoid the spread of the virus within the Mission are physical distancing, mandatory use of masks in all indoor and outdoor common areas where there is more than one person, mandatory daily temperature checks of all personnel upon arrival in office or common work areas, restrictions of in-person meetings, keeping rooms well ventilated, avoiding crowds and gatherings and frequently disinfecting equipment.

# Top UN official in Cyprus Elizabeth Spehar talks about the challenges and highlights of 2020



In October 2020, UNFICYP launched the first edition of Outloud, the Mission's podcast to talk about its mandate as well as its initiatives on the island. In the December edition, we featured an interview with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission on the island, Elizabeth Spehar, in a review of the challenges and highlights of 2020 and the future of the Mission and the Cyprus talks.

**Blue Beret: As the top UN official on the island, can you please tell us about the work of the Mission and the stage of the Cyprus talks?**

2020 has been a challenging year for us in Cyprus and for the entire world because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made things much more difficult than what we will be normally facing, but both missions in Cyprus have been continuing to fulfill their mandate.

In terms of UNFICYP, in 2020 we continue to do our job in liaising and engaging with people from across the divide and with the opposing forces from across the divide to make sure everything remains calm and stable in and around the buffer zone, we also have been helping people across the divide come together for trust-building.

In terms of Good Offices, we continued to stay in touch with all the stakeholders in the hopes that we can help the parties to the Cyprus problem get back to the negotiating table, because in answer to your question about the Cyprus Talks, sadly we had no negotiations now for about two and half years.

**Blue Beret: With the Corona crisis continuing, how did the Mission manage to implement its mandate?**

In light of COVID-19, we had to make a lot of changes we had to adapt, so both missions put very strict procedures in place to keep our personnel safe against COVID-19 and also to guard against any spreading of the pandemic from our mission to the wider population.

For example, putting in place alternative working arrangements, social distancing, mask wearing at all times, anyone coming in from abroad had to go through 14 days of quarantine before coming to our missions and we also adapted technologically, much of the work that we try to do to liaise and engage with both sides to solve problems or to build trust between the communities, we moved to do a lot of that work, as much as possible, virtually.

**Blue Beret: Despite the challenges, what were the achievements?**

One of the major achievements was to continue to keep the buffer zone calm and stable, to prevent incidents and from raising tensions to spark into a greater dispute, I think that is an important achievement. We also, in this context of COVID-19, facilitated a lot of cooperation on humanitarian bases that happened across the divide, such as certain people in the south of the island that needed to cross north, people living in the north needed to go for medical treatment to the south. We were often called to facilitate these sorts of things. And then finally, I would call an achievement the fact that we have been able to continue to support civil society organizations to reach across the divide to continue to cooperate with each other to build trust. We have managed to support a number of networking events and we have one particularly successful



activity in 2020 and that was launching our Youth Champions for the Environment and Peace initiative.

Early in the year, before the COVID-19 pandemic, we selected 24 Youth Champions from both communities, who are very passionate about the environment and who also have a vocation for peace.

We worked with them throughout the year, we did a number of training sessions for them on environmental peace building, they graduated in the fall and we were able to virtually give them their graduation certificates on UN Day on 24 October.

These young people have been doing a great job, staying connected and working on a number of awareness raisings campaigns on key issues related to preserving the environment on the island. One of the important premises of this initiative for the environment, is the fact that there is no way that you can implement it just on one or another side of the island. The environment has no limits or boundaries and therefore, it is very important that young people realized that if they are invested in the environment and in the future of their island, they will really need to work together, and it is being quite successful so far.

**“I really  
hope that  
2021 will be  
the year of  
the solution  
and we will  
be ready to  
support that”**

**Blue Beret: How do you see the future of the Mission and the Cyprus talks?**

I would say first of all for UNFICYP, the peacekeeping mission, we intend to continue to play our role in ensuring that things remain calm and stable in and around the buffer zone and also that we continue to help create the proper conditions for successful negotiations to the settlement of the Cyprus problem. So that means not only keeping things stable but also working to bring Cypriots together.

In terms of the Good Offices, they are ready to play a role if and when, and I do hope that it is when, the parties will be ready to resume the Cyprus Talks. I do have a concern that the longer that we do not have talks, the more challenging a return to successful negotiations will become. As the Secretary-General has often said in his reports about Cyprus, “time is not on the side of a solution”, so I really hope that 2021 will be the year of the solution and we will be ready to support that.

To listen to the previous editions, visit: <https://soundcloud.com/user-323635215/tracks>



# "We must keep ourselves realistic and positive"

## An interview with UNFICYP's Force Medical Officer, Gábor Kolonics



In times of COVID-19, the challenges facing peacekeeping missions around the world have multiplied, the health crisis has highlighted the key role of our medical teams in ensuring peacekeepers remain safe and healthy while continuing mission operations across the buffer zone. Health professionals have been heroes during the past year and deserve our praise and thanks for the work they do to tackle the pandemic and keep us all safe. In this edition, we talked to our Force Medical Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Gábor Kolonics from Hungary, who was deployed with UNFICYP in September 2020. Lieutenant Kolonics shared his experiences during pandemic, UNFICYP's approach and action plan to cope with the challenges posed by COVID-19.

### **Blue Beret: Can you give a brief overview of UNFICYP's COVID-19 pandemic action plan?**

Our approach from day one has been rooted in science, working closely with the local authorities and ensuring all preventative measures are strictly adhered to by all our peacekeepers. UNFICYP's pandemic action plan has been designed and regularly updated according to the guidelines and experiences from the World Health Organization, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and following local administrations' guidelines from both communities on the island.

### **Blue Beret: What major steps have been taken to improve internal communications on the spread of the pandemic from a medical point of view?**

Sharing information timely and accurately has been the key to our plan of action. A proper chain of command is followed, and a dedicated COVID-19 response team keeps the chief medical officer apprised of the situation across the mission. In

addition, a COVID-19 committee was established to keep the information chain connected from headquarters to all sectors and ensure information arrives in a timely manner. Under the command and leadership directives, the medical team has been vigilant to spread awareness for peacekeepers' safety and health through our medics across the Mission.

### **Blue Beret: How are the sectors and unit-level commanders dealing with preventive measures to continue routine patrolling and their other duties?**

I must say, the commanding officers of units and sectors are playing a key role in pushing the Mission directives through all ranks and through the chain of command and medical teams in the sectors. We have independent medical teams with doctors and staff in all sectors, this has enabled peacekeepers to continue their duties uninterrupted.

I am thankful to my complete medical team and to the support we received from the headquarters supply department, together we them we were able to spread information about preventive measures without compromising the operational capabilities and personal comfort of the peacekeepers.

### **Blue Beret: What specific guidelines does the UN have for meetings and mass gatherings during this COVID-19 period?**

The nature of the work performed by office staff at headquarters was mostly shifted to telecommuting. Whereas under operational requirements when physical interaction is necessary, it is done within the COVID-19 guidelines. Wearing of masks, physical distancing, following local administrations preventive measures and UN guidelines is strictly followed. In addition, the concept of "teams within teams" is implemented in the working environment at every level in the sectors and



sub-units at UNFICYP.

**Blue Beret: According to WHO, what routine cleaning and disinfection procedures are appropriate for containing the spread of COVID-19 that UNFICYP is following?**

UNFICYP peacekeepers actively follow the mandate and for its enforcement a key part is patrolling the buffer zone. For this purpose, we follow all the basic worldwide preventive and precautionary measures and WHO's principles like the mandatory use of masks, regular cleaning of hands, disinfection of office areas and vehicles before and after patrolling and physical distancing. This way, the peacekeeping operation is not disturbed, and proper precautions are also catered for.

**Blue Beret: As a Force Medical Officer, what was the biggest challenge you experienced while serving at UNFICYP?**

With COVID-19 we have experienced the situation changing on day-to-day basis, which requires regular information sharing, timely reporting and transparency. UNFICYP's medical team from headquarters and across the sectors are playing a vital role to meet up with these challenging times. Under the directions of leadership and medical science's roles and regulations we have tried our best to meet up every challenge and come out with a new learning for the way forward.

**Blue Beret: What would you like to say about the mental health and associated issues related with the pandemic and how peacekeepers have coped with it in UNFICYP?**

I would say mental health is interconnected with the physical status and wellbeing of our personnel. It is not only during the current pandemic, but peacekeepers are recommended to keep themselves fit and mentally vigilant during the whole period they serve in the Mission. We have strongly recommended to peacekeepers, irrespective of the pandemic, to practice sports regularly, eat healthy, and most importantly, to avoid rumours and false information related with COVID-19

and UNFICYP has successfully carried out physical and military exercises during the pandemic.

**Blue Beret: What are the COVID-19 protocols being followed for the troop rotations?**

UNFICYP undergoes regular biannual rotations across all sectors of the contingents and of individual staff officers without any disturbance to the operational requirement. We have been successful to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic environment and successfully carried out our rotation and are ready to go for first one of 2021 in next months. We apply all rules and regulations and in addition, we included a period of two-week quarantine for all new arrivals, a period which includes testing and following all necessary requirements before peacekeepers can start their duties. On the other hand, individual staff rotation continues throughout the year with newer procedures and arrangements from our support department we have been able to continue uninterrupted.

**Blue Beret: What are the most common myths about COVID-19 that you would dispel for patients?**

There are several myths going online, for instance, we hear a lot of fake news related to the intake of vitamins and mineral supplements can cure COVID-19, the prolonged use of masks causes CO2 intoxication or oxygen deficiency, extreme weather can kill the virus, antibiotics prevent or cure COVID-19 and these are just to name a few. I strongly discourage such myths, and during my interactions, I recommend to our peacekeepers not to overburden themselves with over-thinking. We can stay safe by following simple and straight measures under WHO guidelines to stop the spread of the virus.

**Blue Beret: In your opinion, how to save people's lives without compromising their livelihoods?**

I believe there have been an overabundance of information, both online and offline. We must keep ourselves realistic and positive at the same time. Rationally acting upon the precautionary measures and keeping healthy is what is needed at the time. We all wish for a better and safer 2021.



# Air patrols in times of COVID-19

Captain Matias Laferla and First Lieutenant Fabricio Marquez are two Argentinian pilots from UNFICYP flight unit who carry out the pre-flight inspection of the Mission's helicopters, their routine include disinfection, keeping in view the COVID-19 preventive measures, wearing masks, gloves and the technical preparations to be set for the air patrol duty of the day.

Taking off from UN flight hangar near UN Headquarters in Nicosia and flying through the buffer zone presents a scenic view of the island and its diverse landscape that ranges from build-up areas, green fields, mountainous areas and across the island's coastline.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, delivering the mandate and managing the operational activities unhindered has been the utmost priority of the Mission and the unit has played a key role not only in the patrolling, but also in the logistical and administrative support of the troops across the buffer zone. The UN flight unit counts with three helicopters, and two of those are always in operation. The unit is based at UNFICYP

headquarters and is staffed with 35 personnel from the Argentinean Air Force as an integral part of the Argentinian contingent. Using Hughes 500 and a Bell 212 helicopters, the unit conducts patrols along the buffer zone and provides logistical support for UNFICYP operations and emergency assistance such as medical evacuations, as required. In addition, with the latest incorporation of specialized personnel in the fight against fire, not only add to the capacity of aerial operations of the Mission, but also can provide a quick response in case of any fire emergency within the United Nations Protected Area or outside, if necessary.

The Argentinean UN Flight peacekeepers regularly demonstrate the skill and flexibility that are derived from working back home in wide-ranging and difficult terrains, such as Antarctica, the Patagonia region and the warmest areas of northern Argentina. UNFICYP supervises the *de facto* ceasefire that came into effect on 16 August 1974 and maintains the buffer zone by carrying out regular and round the clock patrols through air, foot, bike and vehicles.



# UNFICYP bids farewell to Force Commander Cheryl Pearce

**O**n the last day of 2020, the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus underwent a transfer of authority ceremony of Force Commander Major General Cheryl Pearce to the Mission's Chief of Staff Colonel Neil Wright at the completion of her 2-year term.

Major General Pearce is from Australia and took charge as UNFICYP's Force Commander in January 2019. During her deployment she led over 800 military personnel to overcome the challenges posed by the Coronavirus pandemic, ensuring peacekeepers were able to continue contributing to peace and stability across the buffer zone.

She has had a distinguished career in the Australian Defence Force. Prior to UNFICYP, Major General Pearce acted as

Commandant of the Australian Defence Force Academy, which provides undergraduate and postgraduate education as well as military training and education for future leaders of the Navy, Army and Air Force.

During the ceremony, UNFICYP's Senior Advisor Aderemi Adekoya congratulated the Force Commander for completing her tenure and thanked her on behalf of all the peacekeepers for her services since her arrival to the Mission.

The honour guard saluted the Force Commander and attendees paid tribute to her commitment and service for peace in Cyprus. Colonel Neil Wright will act as Officer-in-Charge of the military component, until the appointment of the next Force Commander, expected to take place early in 2021.



# Peacekeepers in action

## Winterization project

Our engineers continue to keep up with flood prevention measures and are actively working before the upcoming rains in Cyprus across all the sectors in buffer zone. The unit provides maintenance for patrol tracks and helicopter landing sites across the buffer zone and in the UN Protected Area and is currently operated with the support of 37 peacekeepers from Slovakia.



## Bike patrols

UNFICYP continues to monitor the buffer zone with bicycles to keep up with environmental peacebuilding and staying vigilant through all weathers. Our peacekeepers maintain the peace status in the 180 kilometres of the area via air, vehicle, foot and bikes.

## Explosive Hazard Awareness trainings

United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is supporting the Mobile Force Reserve troops at UNFICYP with additional practical Explosive Hazard Awareness trainings, which are vital for the safety and security of our peacekeepers. UNMAS conducts advocacy and outreach activities to raise awareness; provides training in mine awareness for UNFICYP personnel to help increase force protection and the implementation of UNFICYP activities; supports planning and coordination of UN activities and implements the establishment or maintenance of minefield marking, as needed.



# Peacekeepers awarded for the service for peace in Cyprus

UNFICYP peacekeepers from across the Mission were awarded for their service in Cyprus during medal parade ceremonies taking place in December.

In total, 135 UN peacekeepers were honoured at UNFICYP's Sector One winter medal parade and 14 peacekeepers at the Mission's headquarters in Nicosia. Eleven peacekeepers from the UN Police were awarded medals for their contributions and 19 medal recipients from four contingents took part the last Force Protection Unit medal presentation parade of 2020.

The Special Representative of Secretary-General and Head of Mission, Elizabeth Spehar, praised the peacekeepers for

playing a vital role in implementing UNFICYP's mandate on the island. UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Cheryl Pearce and Chief Superintendent Fang Li also participated in the several parades.

Elizabeth Spehar acknowledged peacekeepers efforts and commitment to support the Mission despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"You have my heartfelt appreciation for your service, I know this has not been an easy year, however, despite all challenges you showed commitment and professionalism while performing your duties for this Mission," stated Ms. Spehar.



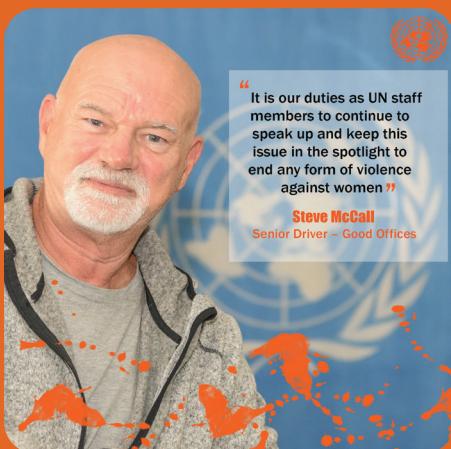
# UN in Cyprus marks 16 days of activism to end violence against women

In 2020, as the world retreated inside homes due to the lockdown measures introduced to curb the COVID-19 pandemic, reports showed an alarming increase in the already existing pandemic of violence against women.

To address the issue and raise awareness on the subject, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, launched the UNITE campaign, aimed to end violence against women by 2030 and to call for global actions to increase awareness, galvanize advocacy efforts, and share knowledge and innovations.

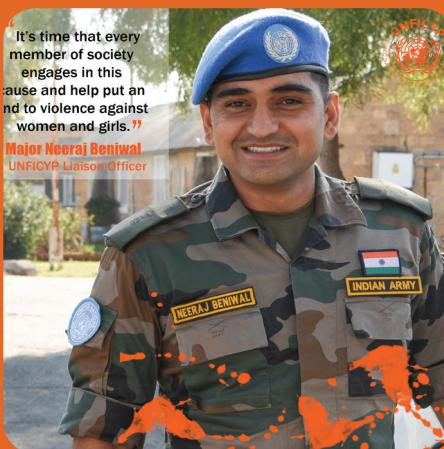
Following the 2020 global theme: "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect!", the UN in Cyprus kicked-off an online campaign to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which was started in 25 November and was concluded in 10 December, on the observance of Human Rights Day.

Below are some of the important messages shared by UNFICYP peacekeepers from civilian, military and police components, and the UN Good Offices in Cyprus.



"It is our duties as UN staff members to continue to speak up and keep this issue in the spotlight to end any form of violence against women."

Steve McCall  
Senior Driver - Good Offices



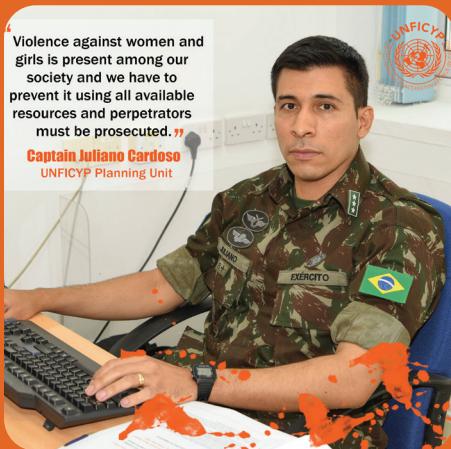
"It's time that every member of society engages in this cause and help put an end to violence against women and girls."

Major Neeraj Beniwal  
UNFICYP Liaison Officer



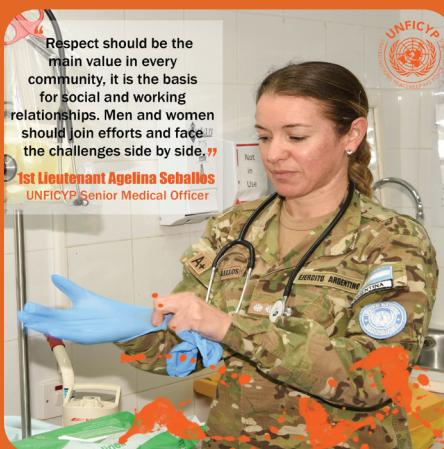
"Having a gender perspective means respecting the confidentiality of the affected person and their families and respect the wishes, rights and dignity of the victims."

Lieutenant Vanessa Boniche  
UNFICYP Information Analyst



"Violence against women and girls is present among our society and we have to prevent it using all available resources and perpetrators must be prosecuted."

Captain Juliano Cardoso  
UNFICYP Planning Unit



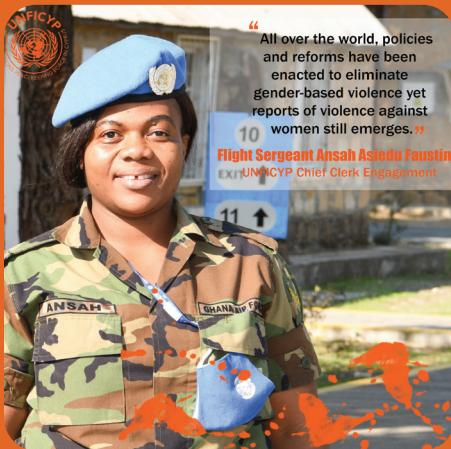
"Respect should be the main value in every community, it is the basis for social and working relationships. Men and women should join efforts and face the challenges side by side."

1st Lieutenant Agelina Seballos  
UNFICYP Senior Medical Officer



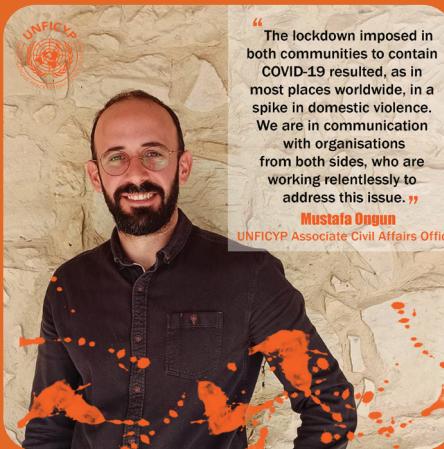
"Gender based violence and especially violence against women, is something that concerns all women living in the island. In our work, we found that women from all communities are eager to connect, discuss and share their experiences on this topic."

Maria Tsiaira  
UNFICYP Associate Civil Affairs Officer



"All over the world, policies and reforms have been enacted to eliminate gender-based violence yet reports of violence against women still emerges."

Flight Sergeant Ansah Asiedu Faustina  
UNFICYP Chief Clerk Engagement



"The lockdown imposed in both communities to contain COVID-19 resulted, as in most places worldwide, in a spike in domestic violence. We are in communication with organisations from both sides, who are working relentlessly to address this issue."

Mustafa Ongun  
UNFICYP Associate Civil Affairs Office



"Corona restrictions have dramatically increased violence against women and girls worldwide. Scientists and doctors deal with Corona, but how do we deal with the violence at home?"

Astrid Evrensel  
Office of the SASC on Cyprus,  
Political Affairs Officer

# We stand united for the elimination of violence against women

Lieutenant Colonel Zaka Ullah - UNFICYP Military Gender Focal Person

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women is not just a single day and it is neither the beginning of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, but a firm commitment to leave behind the deep footprint in societal mindsets that oppressing women and subjecting them to violence is seen as norm.

Violence against women is not limited by geographical, socio-economic or cultural boundaries. It is a universal concern, which demands a global solution. This

campaign aims to link violence against women with human rights and to emphasize that such violence is the worst form of violation. Any society will obliterate its chances of success when it accepts gender-based violence as a norm and a routine.

The UN is taking greater steps in order for men to come shoulder to shoulder with women through its "HeforShe" movement and I am using this platform to convey my feelings that gender based violence is the worst form of violence. At too often times, it also leaves irreparable damages to the survivors. How a society can



claim itself just when such violence still takes place every day?

Violence against women is simply unacceptable, unfortunately too many women continue to live in the shadow of fear. We owe it to them to speak up and step up efforts to protect the rights of women, in our families, communities and society.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence helplines and shelters across the world were reporting rising calls for help. While the world is gearing up all its

energy to counter the coronavirus infection, on the other hand we are at risk of stepping back advances made to protect women from violence and abuse.

If violence against women was to be considered an infection, we are then experiencing another pandemic. We must not only survive the coronavirus, but emerge renewed, with women as a powerful force at the centre of recovery. Violence is not can be prevented. And we must take action so women rights are protected, and they can enjoy their full potential.

## The role of female peacekeepers in law enforcement

Anna Khodos - UNFICYP Staff Officer-Personnel, UNPOL Headquarters

The need to recruit, train and promote more female police officers is receiving far more attention than ever before. Women are having a positive impact on law enforcement practices, not only serving in their native countries, but also being a part of different the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

The encouraging momentum toward creating a more balanced public safety force is fueled in part by a growing appreciation of certain unique and valuable professional qualities that women often bring to law enforcement. Such qualities can enhance the ability of peacekeeping missions to make a positive impact on the communities they serve.

One of the most critical areas where female police officer can make a difference is in addressing sex crimes and violence against women and children. That is why it is vital to have enough women working in the police. For example, in sexual assault cases, the victim might want to talk to a woman. But that cannot always happen because there are not enough female officers in the unit and it ends up affecting the mission. The topic is an extremely sensitive and we need to be able to act humanely. Access to the local population becomes particularly relevant when considering



the current nature of conflicts in which UN peacekeepers find themselves. As women and children are the main victims of violence in such conflicts, particularly sexual violence, male officers can encounter limitations to cross social and cultural boundaries to build trust. This is where female peacekeepers can fill a gap by providing women and children with a greater sense of security, but also by being able to foster their trust and in the process gather valuable information.

I will speak up and continue to voice the need of more female peacekeepers to enhance the overall approach to current peacekeeping operations. More skilled and trained female peacekeepers can be a great asset to the future operations.

A watershed moment in the history of peacekeeping took place in 2014, when Major General Kristin Lund, the first female was appointed to serve as UNFICYP's Force Commander. That appointment marked an important stage of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution aims to shift the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, negotiations, peacekeeping, humanitarian responses and post-conflict reconstruction.

# UNFICYP marks UN day with youth champions for environment and peace

To mark the United Nations 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 24 October, the top United Nations official in Cyprus, Elizabeth Spehar, hosted an online meeting with UNFICYP Youth Champions for Environment and Peace and key environmental actors on the island to encourage awareness of and their participation in caring for the environment.

The online meeting was also a graduation ceremony for the Youth Champions, following their months of training and joint activities with UNFICYP staff. They also had an opportunity to showcase their work and were e-awarded with certificates.

The UNFICYP Youth Champions for Environment and Peace initiative was possible with the funds from UN75 and its goal has been not only to promote environmental peacebuilding and dialogue among the youth of Cyprus, but also to strengthen the youth's connection to the UN system and our Mission.

During 2020, UNFICYP and the Good Offices promoted the UN75 campaign since it was launched locally with key diplomatic, political and civil society actors on the occasion of UN Day in October 2019. Activities have included social media



campaigns, online meetings and events aimed at engaging with various civil society groups from across the divide. The Youth Champions initiative was also implemented with the support from the Stelios Foundation.

## Young Cypriots are shaping the COVID-19 response with UNFICYP

The UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus has been organising youth-led online discussions and helped form a young group as part of a bi-communal initiative on environment and peace.

In 2020, UNFICYP organized a youth project called "Famagusta students together," an initiative that brings high-school students from both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities together to promote dialogue and to discover what they have in common.

Mustafa Ongun, UNFICYP's Associate Civil Affairs Officer based in Pyla, is one of the staff responsible for organizing the project. It kicked off earlier this year, but only one meeting was held in person before the onset of the pandemic. The Mission had to quickly shift its approach to ensure the project could continue online.

"When we started, we planned for a group of 20 young people to join the conversations, ten from each community. However, the number is likely to increase in the next meetings," said Mustafa, who is pleased that more students can now join from other parts of the island.

Earlier in 2020, UNFICYP also selected a group of 24 Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to become Youth Champions in support of the environment and peace on the island. Since the beginning of the pandemic, this group of young women and men

has also been meeting virtually to develop initiatives that will engage both communities to care for the planet.

Polymnia Glykeriou, a 27-year-old Greek Cypriot who lives in Larnaca, has always been passionate about environmental issues. With a master's degree in Environmental and Chemical Engineering, she is eager to expand her network.

"I usually discuss with my family, share what I learn with friends and now, with this group, we can exchange ideas, and I notice

we have a lot more in common than just our passion for the environment," she said, adding that even though they had to limit physical contact, conditions allowed them to bond in a special and lasting way.

In September 2020, the group met for the first time in person to continue to develop their ideas on how to engage both communities on the island to promote the protection of the environment.

For Yassine Chagh an 18-year-old Moroccan student who came to Cyprus to pursue his university studies in electronic engineering and is taking part in the Famagusta Students Together, the pandemic was an opportunity to connect with people on cultural topics as well.

"[COVID-19] gave me an opportunity to be inspired by my friends and by the people I met online," he highlighted, adding that new ideas on books and recipes helped him stay motivated and active.



# Inside the Blue

## In solidarity with Lebanon

When the tragic Beirut blast occurred in August 2020, claiming many lives and injuring over 5,000 people, the Inside the Blue team reached out to UNFICYP staff, acting as one community to help those who were in need of assistance. Donations in cash as well as dry and canned food were collected in boxes placed in various locations around the United Nations Protected Area.

The collected items were transported to a drop-off point facility in Nicosia and subsequently transferred to Lebanon. The cash collection was channelled to UNFSU through the Chairperson of Field Staff Union, Steven Towner, who was in Cyprus for a short visit. This cash was merged with the additional funds collected from other UN Missions around the world and sent to the Lebanese people.



## 'Be Active' event promotes healthy practices for peacekeepers

On 23 September 2020, Inside the Blue organised for UNFICYP to take part in the #BEACTIVE European Week of Sports, which takes place annually every September across Europe. The event was open to all UNFICYP staff, including civilian, military, UNPOL and their families. Over 150 participants turned up to part in either 3 kilometres walk, a 5 kilometres run or a 10 kilometres bicycle ride around the

Protected Area.

Physical distancing rules were followed and everyone enjoyed the exercise. Inside the Blue face masks and t-shirts, and #BEACTIVE t-shirts as well as other items like sports back packs, belt bags, mouse pads and exercise bands were also handed out to all participants as gifts from #BEACTIVE and Inside the Blue.





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