

BLUE BERET

Winter 2025

Bringing communities
together

Plus:

Peacekeepers join winter skills competition
SRSG Colin Stewart speaks at the Cyprus Forum

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Editor's note

Dear readers, we want to wish you all a happy and healthy 2025! We have the pleasure to share the latest winter edition of the Blue Beret magazine covering the Missions' highlights from November to January this year. In this edition, you will find SRSg Colin Stewart and senior leadership meetings with key stakeholders, and with the diplomatic community, including his end of year reception hosted in Leda Palace Hotel with both leaders. In this edition, we also continue to mark the 60 years of UN presence in Cyprus by paying tribute to former peacekeepers who have served for peace over the past six decades and returned to the island in late 2024 a series of visits across the buffer zone. In addition, in this period we also welcomed the Mission' Senior Police Advisor, Chief Superintendent Mingzhu Xu, who joined UNFICYP in early November.

In this issue, you will also find how we are continuing efforts to protect the environment with the "Greening The Blue" initiative, including our engagement with local communities and how we are supporting initiatives on both sides to protect our shared environment. Ranging from tree planting events to promoting youth participation in environment related issues

through the UN Youth Champions programme, led by the Mission's Civil Affairs Section. 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 the 16 days of activism to end violence against women. In this edition, we also include pictures from our most recent medal parades and the winter peacekeepers skills competition. We are proud of the commitment of our Civil Affairs Section and how the team continues to engage with a diverse range of civil society groups from both communities of the island and is promoting several in person activities. In this edition we included some of them, including a treasure hunt for young people in Famagusta, an intercommunal fashion design workshop in Leda Palace Hotel and a gathering of women in Ayios Theodoros, when 150 Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots came together to share their traditions, cook, reconnect with former neighbours, and remember stories from their village. In the next few pages, read about how UNFICYP continues to implement its mandate inside the UN buffer zone, and much more. Enjoy readings!

UNFICYP welcomes new Senior Police Advisor

On 4 November, top United Nations official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, welcomed newly arrived Chief Superintendent Mingzhu Xu, from China, who will serve as UNFICYP' Senior Police Advisor. She will lead a team of 68 UNPOL officers serving for peace inside the UN buffer zone.



BLUE BERET

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SRSB engagements with key stakeholders and diplomatic community



On 10 December, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, welcome Ersin Tatar and Nikos Christodoulides to Ledra Palace Hotel for the end of year reception.



On 12 December, SRSB Colin Stewart, welcomed members of the diplomatic community for a briefing on the UN's activities and current state-of-play on the island prior to his briefing to the Security Council in mid-January. At the meeting, Stewart informed about discussions on possible new crossings, the situation in the buffer zone and the ongoing activities of the 12 technical committees to address issues of shared importance on the island.



On 2 October, SRSB Colin Stewart, welcomed the Slovenian State Secretary for European Affairs, Marko Štucin, and the non-resident Ambassador Tamara Weingerl Požar for a brief on the UN's peacebuilding efforts on the island.



On 14 November, SRSB Stewart, welcomed the Ambassador of France on the island, Clelia Chevrier-Kolacko, to the UN Protected Area. She also met with UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri, and UN Cyprus Talks staff.



On 7 October, top United Nations official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, welcomed the newly appointed Ambassador of Serbia, Suzana Boskovic-Prodanovic, for a brief on the UN's peacebuilding efforts on the island.



On 31 October, SRSB Colin Stewart, attended an event organized by the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network Cyprus and the Peace Return Project in Ledra Palace Hotel to promote a collaborative initiative designed to enhance the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.



On 16 October, SRSB Colin Stewart, hosted the Cyprus premiere of the "Winds of Change Cyprus" documentary, chronicling the historic circumnavigation of the island. This initiative celebrates the power of sport to break down barriers and build bridges between communities.



On 12 November, SRSB Colin Stewart, and the mayors of Nicosia, Charalambous Proutzos and Mehmet Harmanci, visited the Green Line. This is their first visit together to discuss the city's municipal plan, to foster dialogue and future collaborations.



On 23 November, SRSB Stewart, and the mayors of Nicosia, Charalambous Proutzos and Mehmet Harmanci welcomed runners and walkers from across the island as they completed the coast-to-coast run, a celebration of resilience, unity, and healthy living. This historic journey is a testament to the power of sport in bringing people together.

Senior Police Advisor Mingzhu Xu talks about the work of UNPOL in Cyprus



In this edition we interviewed the new UNPOL Senior Police Advisor, Superintendent Mingzhu Xu from China, who arrived in UNFICYP in November 2024.

Blue Beret: UNFICYP is not your first UN mission, you also served at the United Nations Mission of South Sudan, can you please tell us a little bit about your work there and how that experience compares to your duties here at UNFICYP?

Mingzhu Xu: I was deployed to UNMIS from 2021 to 2022 as police officer. While I was deployed, my main roles were as a patrol officer and reporting back about the situation on the ground, and later I was appointed as chief of a crime analysis and intelligence unit. My responsibilities in South Sudan were much more operational and technical compared with my duties here as a Senior Police Advisor where I oversee the work of more than 60 police officers deployed across the UN buffer zone in Cyprus.

Blue Beret: And can you go into more detail about the work of UNPOL in Cyprus and how peacekeepers are maintaining law and order in the buffer zone?

Mingzhu Xu: UNPOL's role in Cyprus derives from UNFICYP's mandate, according to the Security Council resolution adopted in 1964. According to the mandate, the function entrusted upon us, is to prevent a recurrence of fighting, contribute to the maintenance and restoration of law and order and contribute to a return to normal conditions. UNPOL's role in the buffer zone is to support maintenance of public order, help resolve disputes between civilians, provide regulation for civilian access and activities, monitor and control civilian demonstrations, disturbances or planned events, and assist local police upon request in the investigation of a criminal offences. In addition, UNPOL operates and runs daily patrols within the buffer zone. In addition, UNPOL escorts humanitarian convoys to the communities on a weekly basis and monitors crossing points and deals with incidents and demonstrations at crossing points, that were opened in recent years as part of the confidence building measures. UNPOL also supports the provisions of humanitarian assistance at the crossing points for passage of medicine and patients in need of assistance. We also facilitate the exchange of prisoners.

One of the main problems in the buffer zone identified by UNPOL is illegal dumping. It is of particular concern that from the number of illegal dumping cases detected most cases result in the discovery of construction waste and dead farm animals.



Blue Beret: How do the three components at UNFICYP work together?

Mingzhu Xu: There is presently a high level of cooperation between the military and UNPOL, which is directly attributable to the excellent work conducted by the co-located liaison officers throughout UNFICYP, and several specific joint operations have taken place within the buffer zone, including patrol targeting irregular migration, hunting, theft and smuggling. Cooperation between UNPOL and civil affairs is also essential for the smooth coordination of daily operation in the Mission. UNPOL supports UNFICYP's civil affairs section by managing the permit system and dealing with humanitarian matters.

Blue Beret: Can you please tell us what UNPOL's role is to prevent escalations of tensions?

Mingzhu Xu: UNPOL serve as a principal expert on policing matters within the Civil affairs section and there's a key officer within the Civil Affairs Integrated Office.



UNPOL continues to patrol high risk areas in the buffer zone with the goal of discouraging unauthorized farming activity and maintaining a peaceful and calm atmosphere in the buffer zone.

To achieve this, we cultivate positive communication and good relations with civilians in the buffer zone and UNPOL is always ready to react promptly to each current situation to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the buffer zone.

Blue Beret: We recently learned that UNPOL has a gender action plan. Can you describe what this plan entails?

Mingzhu Xu: UNPOL's gender action plan is basically a two-year action plan and was adopted by UNPOL to operate the gender equality and gender parity objectives for peace operations. It is divided into five strategy objectives and the goal is to increase operational effectiveness of policing by ensuring inclusiveness and diversity in support of UN police to achieve an effective, representative,

responsive and accountable police service. One of the goals of the action plan is to promote the work of women, female UNPOL officers and to mainstream gender.

Blue Beret: And while on the subject, what are the positive aspects of having women in peacekeeping but also women in leadership positions?

Mingzhu Xu: I think evidence has repeatedly illustrated that full and meaningful participation of women in peace operations broadens the perspective on conflict management. This allows for more inclusive political solutions and by fostering a gender balanced leadership team we can tap into a wealth of diverse perspective.

The experiences and skill sets women in leadership bring to the table can improve organizational performance and the representation of female role models can encourage the recruitment, development and promotion for individuals from diverse backgrounds.



UNFICYP welcomes new group of UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace



In early October, the UN in Cyprus welcomed the new group of UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, who joined the 4th edition of the programme on the island. The group of 24 young people from across the divide took part in a series of workshops over the last 2 weekends in efforts to equip them to develop their own environmental actions across the island.

Spearheaded by UNFICYP Civil Affairs Section, the programme aims to promote a series of vibrant discussions among young people, and facilitate meetings with other partner UN organizations, such as UNHCR to discuss topics such the impact of environment and climate change on the global stage as well as with a series of Non-Governmental Organizations who are working on different environment issues across the island.

Last Sunday, 14 October, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, joined the group in Ledra Palace Hotel to hear about their proposals and their environmental and peacebuilding projects ideas and actions they will implement in the coming months. For Stewart, these discussions, “serve as an opportunity to bring the ideas to life and identify synergies with other efforts and, the sustainability of proposals, and promote greater intercommunal involvement.”

Also present were Michael Loizides, co-chair of the Technical

Committee on Environment and George Zachariah, Good Offices Mission. Myrto Skouroupathi and Vijdan Sengor, alums of the first UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace initiative, were on hand to mentor, representing their organizations, Cyprus Energy Agency and Green Action Group, as well as Natasa Ioannou from the Friends of the Earth Cyprus.

Daniel Barasa, one of the former champions, also joined one of the sessions named “Human Library” stated: “I hope my story inspires you to keep on your journey of self-discovery and active contribution in peace and environment-related actions, building the future of Cyprus across the divide. This programme isn’t just about participating; it’s about finding your voice or building your voice and using it to bridge gaps, connect communities, and foster a culture of understanding.”

For UNFICYP, engaging with young Cypriots plays a vital role to foster meaningful interactions and increase understanding and trust between the communities. We believe that by encouraging youth engagement active participation provides them with the necessary tools to help amplify their voices and inspire a path towards a sustainable future.

The Youth Champions for Environment and Peace programme is implemented by the UN in Cyprus in collaboration with the British Council, through its regional Youth Connect programme.



UNFICYP Civil Affairs brings communities together

On 24 November, UNFICYP facilitated an event at the formerly mixed village of Ayios Theodoros in Larnaca to bring more than 150 Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to share their traditions, cook together, reconnect with former neighbors, and remember stories from their village. This heartwarming event was made possible through the link established by UNFICYP between the Yeniboğaziçi Women's Association from the Turkish Cypriot community and the women's groups of Ayios Theodoros. This is part of the Mission's efforts to build bridges and trust between the communities.



Young people explore treasure hunt in Famagusta

On 1 and 2 December, young Cypriots from across the divide gathered in the walled city of Famagusta, where they had the opportunity to get to know each other, learn about the history of the city and join a treasure hunt adventure. This is the 4th edition of the event, which was supported by a group of 40 volunteers and organized by the Famagusta Cultural Association, Creating Friendships for Peace and the Famagusta Avenue Garage with support from UNFICYP and the British High Commission in Cyprus.



Cypriots learn about sustainable fashion in Ledra Palace

On 30 November, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots came together for a day full of fashion at Ledra Palace Hotel in the buffer zone. Fashion enthusiasts, cultural advocates, and community leaders from across Cyprus, came together and discussed the role of fashion in cultural preservation, innovation and sustainability during an event organized by Fashion Heritage Cyprus. During the event, the Fashion Heritage Network Cyprus team presented the latest sustainable designs inspired by the Cyprus architecture. Fashion Heritage Network Cyprus is the island's first ever intercommunal youth network focusing on preserving Cypriot cultural heritage through sustainable and contemporary fashion.





Peacekeepers join winter skills competition

On 27 November, despite the chilly weather, UNFICYP peacekeepers aced their annual skills competition. This activity is the Mission's way of keeping its troops agile, fit, and ready to deploy. Congratulations to peacekeepers from Argentina for being our winners. UNFICYP Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri of Mongolia, congratulated and thanked all peacekeepers for their commitment in serving for peace in Cyprus.





UNFICYP peacekeepers awarded UN medals

On 1 November, 24 UNPOL officers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, China, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Montenegro, Nepal, Russia, Serbia were presented United Nations medals for serving for peace in Cyprus.



On 19 December, 59 UNFICYP military peacekeepers from Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ghana, Hungary, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and United Kingdom were presented United Nations medals for serving for peace in Cyprus.



UNFICYP pays tribute to General Kodandera from India

On 18 December, UNFICYP Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri, together with the Mission's Senior Advisor, Aderemi Adekoya, welcomed the Indian High Commissioner in Cyprus, Mr. Manish, to the monument outside Ledra Palace Hotel for a ceremony to remember General Kodandera Subayya Thimayya, who served as the Mission's Force Commander from June 1964 to December 1965.



Peace begins with tree planting

On two occasions, 30 November and 24 January, UNFICYP peacekeepers from military, police and civilian components of the Mission joined the LIFE-AgroOasis tree planting programme in different parts of the island. This is part of the Mission's unwavering commitment to support the environment by reducing the environmental footprint as well as organizing, promoting and contributing to environmental awareness and protection activities across the divide.



SRSO Colin Stewart speaks at the Cyprus Forum

On 3 October, SRSO Stewart, spoke at the Cyprus Forum: “At the UN, we continue our efforts to build bridges across the divide and to remove walls. Economic ties are the most effective ways to bring the island together, with economic integration paving the way for political

unity,” said Stewart. “As the Cyprus Issue enters its 7th decade on the UN agenda, in the face of all that is happening around this island, let this be the year that we reveal the hidden common ground and agree on the way forward for Cyprus,” concluded the SRSO.



Young aspiring diplomats hold model UN simulations in Cyprus

On 25 November, SRSO Colin Stewart, spoke to future leaders at UNIC’s Model United Nations about the need to re-invest in multilateralism, dialogue and diplomacy should be at the heart of those efforts. He highlighted: “I am heartened to see young people and institutions of learning, still very much interested in the work of the United Nations. And valuing the ideals it represents”.

On 16 December, UNFICYP hosted in Ledra Palace Hotel a youth diplomacy conference and a Model UN exercise, an educational simulation of the United Nations Security Council to teach students about diplomacy. Around 200 young Cypriots from across the island attended and had the opportunity to take on different roles during the simulations.



Veterans from around the world visit UNFICYP to mark 60 years in the service of peace



In November 2024, a group of 75 Canadian veterans visited several locations where they were deployed and shared their memories and experiences with UNFICYP peacekeepers currently serving on the island. Canadian veteran Michelle Angela Hamelin said she was proud to represent her country: “UNFICYP is the longest running peacekeeping operation that Canada contributes to, it is so worthwhile to return after serving when I was initially deployed in 1986 and see how things have changed and improved over the years.”

During the same week, a group of 130 Finnish veterans, who were also on the island to visit the Mission, had the opportunity to interact with our peacekeepers and share their experiences from early 60s and 70s when they were initially deployed. Markku Valkama, a 77-year-old Finnish veteran, served first as Jaeger (an infantry soldier) from 1972-74 and returned in 1977 being promoted to Sergeant: “At this age, returning to the island feels great and rewarding, it is like coming back home. Since those times, I have made many Cypriot friends.”

Valkama recalls that in 1977, there were 250 Finnish peacekeepers serving on the island. At the time, there was a competition to design the Finnish monument that would withstand the test of time inside the buffer zone: “All soldiers were invited to participate by suggesting layouts for the space and I am proud to win it and see it so well kept today.”

Sweden was also one of the first Troop Contributing Countries to deploy peacekeepers in UNFICYP. For Swedish veteran Anders Arvidsson, his first deployment was a life changing experience: “As a young guy, Cyprus was a tremendous experience that has followed me all of my life.”

Arvidsson was in his twenties when he arrived in the island in 1964 as an armoured personnel carrier driver at his platoon. Having returned some 30 years later, he recalls: “It was hard to understand what was happening on the ground, we were facing some shooting incidents between the villages; we had to go out, stop the shooting and try to solve the problems.”



While visiting the island, veterans together with UN peacekeepers, attended the annual remembrance ceremony held at Wayne's Keep Cemetery inside the United Nations buffer zone on 10 November 2024 to honour the sacrifices of fallen British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen in the two World Wars and subsequent conflicts.

Peacekeepers make great sacrifices and are often deployed far from their homes and families as they protect some of the world's most vulnerable communities. When UNFICYP was established, it saw military contingents from Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and civilian police units from Australia, Austria, Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden. More than 150,000 women and men from the military and police forces who have served with UNFICYP since 1964.

The threats and challenges that the island and the United Nations have faced over the last six decades have been substantial, and 187 United Nations personnel lost their lives, making the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace in Cyprus.

ORANGE THE WORLD



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