

Lebanon: UNIFIL troop strength and humanitarian activities

Naqoura, Lebanon ' The number of UNIFIL peacekeepers rose above 12,000 following today's arrival of the main contingent soldiers from Qatar. The 184 newcomers further bolsters the 28-nation strong force in assisting the Lebanese Army in securing stability in southern Lebanon as part of Security Council resolution 1701.

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In addition to its core activities UNIFIL peacekeepers have continued to develop their humanitarian work, conducting an ambitious range of activities from a de-mining through to educational programmes and medical aid.

Today, a major Spanish language training programme was launched in the southeast Lebanese town of Marjayoun by the commander of UNIFIL's Spanish contingent Brigadier-General Garcia Sanchez.

Around 300 students have enrolled in the language courses. Teaching is being provided by 35 Spanish officers and is being conducted in several municipalities in and around Marjayoun. The programme is sponsored by the Spanish authorities and is being run under the auspices of the Cervantes Institute.

Also Monday, two Belgian de-miners were injured by shrapnel in a cluster bomb explosion during a mine-clearance operation in the vicinity of Kunin, near the town of Bint Jubayl. The injuries were not life threatening.

UNIFIL de-miners destroyed more than 4,000 explosive devices during the first four weeks of January 2007. These included rockets, grenades, cluster bombs and anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

Elsewhere, UNIFIL continued providing other humanitarian assistance to civilians, with more than 2,000 medical checks and around 350 dental inspections being carried out each month.

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