

# BLUE BERET

Autumn 2024



## UN marks Peace Day in Cyprus

Plus:

UNFICYP welcomes veterans to mark 60 years in the service of peace

Civil Affairs brings Cypriots together with intercommunal work

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# Editor's note

Dear readers, with the arrival of Autumn, we have the pleasure to share the latest edition of the Blue Beret magazine covering the Missions' highlights from July to September this year. In this edition, we marked several important days and observances with events organized by the Mission across the island. Ranging from celebrating Cypriot young women and men to mark International Youth Day to a special advocacy event held in Ledra Palace Hotel with Cypriot artists, peacekeepers, and peacemakers from across the divide coming together to paint a mural under the theme "Our Common Future begins with peace." In addition, you will find SRSG Colin Stewart and senior leadership meetings with key stakeholders, and with the diplomatic community.

Furthermore, we feature events and human-interest stories revolving around promoting women in peacekeeping as well as their participation in the peace process. Over the next pages you will find the stories of two female peacekeepers: Lieutenant Colonel Katarína Gargalíková from Slovakia, the first commanding officer in sector 4 and how she is leading a troop of 198 peacekeepers from her home country, and Major Sania Safdar, the first female from Pakistan to receive the 2023 Certificate for gender advocacy issued by the United Nations Department for Peace Operations. We are proud of the commitment of our Civil Affairs Section and how the team continues to engage with civil society groups from both communities of the island and is promoting several in person activities. In the next couple

of pages find out how the Section is bringing communities together through a range of different initiatives: From bringing adolescents from across the divide to the UN to understand the Mission's work on the island and in the UN buffer zone to promoting active discussions with environment experts in Famagusta the team works across the island to strengthen trust building initiatives. We also continue to mark the 60 years of the UN on the island by welcoming veterans from several Troop and Police Contributing Countries who served in UNFICYP since 1964. In August and September, we welcomed Austrians, Finnish, and Danish former peacekeepers, who had the opportunity to visit their former bases and exchange experiences with our current peacekeepers. In addition, we also welcomed German as the Mission's most recent Police Contributing Country with a flag raising ceremony held in HQ.

You will also find several stories on the work of our military and police colleagues and a special interview with one of our Field Technology Section colleagues, Adnan Al-Sinawi, who has been serving with the UN around the world since 2001 and survived the bombing attack at the Canal Hotel in Iraq on 19 August 2003, a date which is now observed annually to mark World Humanitarian Day. In this edition, we also include pictures from our most recent medal parades and how UNFICYP continues to implement its mandate inside the UN buffer zone, and much more.

Enjoy reading!

## Slovak blood donation drive in UNFICYP

On 6 September, the Slovak contingent arranged a blood donation drive in cooperation with the Embassy of Slovak Republic, contributing to life-saving measures on the Island.



## BLUE BERET

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# SRSG engagements with stakeholders and diplomatic community

In early July top United Nations official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, met with Nikos Christodoulides and Ersin Tatar prior to his briefing to the Security Council in New York.



On 4 July, top UN official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, met with the Head of Department for South Tyrol and Southern Europe Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria, Karl Prummer, for a briefing on the UN's peacebuilding efforts. He also met with Austrian peacekeepers serving for peace on the island.



On 12 July, the Co-Chairs of the 12 Technical Committees got together for a productive informal exchange on their respective activities during the first half of the year and to discuss ways to further strengthen their efforts to improve daily lives of people in Cyprus.



On 6 August, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, met with Dr. Lars Castellucci, a Member of the German Parliament, for a brief on peace building efforts on the island.

On 17 September, Colin Stewart, met the two mayors of Nicosia, Charalambous Prountzos and Mehmet Harmanci in Ledra Palace Hotel. This is their first meeting together, and provided the opportunity to discuss opportunities to update mechanisms used by the municipalities to foster partnership, dialogue, and future collaborations.



On 2 October, to mark the International Day of Non-Violence, top United Nations official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, together with UNFICYP's Senior Advisor, Aderemi Adekoya, attended a panel discussion hosted by the High Commissioner of India in Cyprus, Mr. Manish. The event also marked the 155th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, a leader who remained committed to the principle of non-violence, even in the most difficult of circumstances.



# UNFICYP peacekeepers awarded UN medals

On 17 July, 241 UNFICYP peacekeepers from the United Kingdom were awarded the UN medals for serving for peace in Cyprus.



On 22 July, UNFICYP Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri of Mongolia awarded 128 peacekeepers from Argentina and Chile UN medals for serving for peace in Cyprus.



On 10 September, UN medals were awarded to 115 peacekeepers from Slovak contingent. SRSG Colin Stewart thanked the contingent for their contributions in maintaining peace in their area of responsibility.



# Serving on the front line: Adnan Al-Sinawi, an example of commitment in peacekeeping

**O**n 19 August, the UN marked World Humanitarian Day around the world. The date serves to remember the events of the same day in 2003, when the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, which housed the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), was attacked. The explosion resulted in the deaths of 22 people, including Sérgio Vieira de Mello, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General in country, while many others were injured in the attack. This bombing had a profound impact on the United Nations and its personnel, leading to significant changes in how the organization approaches security in conflict zones. The event is marked annually by the United Nations to honour the victims who have lost their lives in the line of duty and reaffirm the commitment to humanitarian work in challenging environments.

Adnan Al-Sinawi, who joined UNFICYP in 2018, and works as an Information Systems Assistant in Field Technology Section, was one of the survivors and recalls his story:

"On 19 August 2003, as the workday was nearing its end around 4:30 pm, a devastating explosion occurred. Initially, I thought I was under rubble, but I quickly realized it was a secondary ceiling that had collapsed on me. After pushing it aside to stand up, I immediately tried to locate my colleague, Haider Sousa, who had been sitting in front of me just moments before."

He continues: "At that point, I noticed that my forehead was bleeding heavily. I decided to leave and seek medical assistance. However, the medical centre was overwhelmed with casualties, so I made the decision to evacuate myself to the assembly point. Unfortunately, due to severe blood loss, I lost consciousness shortly after."

Al-Sinawi overcame this traumatic experience and says that up to today it remains difficult to describe in detail: "I was rescued and evacuated to a hospital. Due to overcrowding, I spent several hours in the parking lot waiting for treatment before being transferred to another facility, where I underwent surgery. I was discharged the following day."



In Iraq, Al-Sinawi served as a Database Assistant and was responsible for managing essential databases that supported humanitarian efforts across the region. While still in Iraq, he changed sections and joined FTS where he focused on technical support, data management, and maintaining IT systems.

Al-Sinawi also talks about how he managed to recover from this experience and get his life back: "My recovery process was long and challenging. I underwent a second surgery and was discharged after three weeks. However, it took about a year for my physical wounds to heal."

Today in Cyprus, Adnan also acts as Deputy Chief Service Management Unit at UNFICYP, where he manages and implements key IT systems and solutions and oversees projects such as Unite Workspace and SharePoint Storage Capacity, ensuring that technology aligns with mission requirements. He prides himself that "My work involves leading teams, resolving technical issues, and supporting Mission staff with vital systems that keep operations running smoothly."

He also speaks openly about the mental health and how the event had a deep impact in his recovery process: "While I fully recovered physically, the emotional and psychological effects have been more difficult. I continue to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which is something I manage on an ongoing basis."

Despite the challenges and this life-changing experience, Adnan says, "working for the UN has allowed me to contribute to peacekeeping and humanitarian missions that make a real difference in the world. It has given me the opportunity to be part of something bigger, helping people in some of the most challenging environments. The sense of purpose, the chance to help others, and the resilience I have built along the way are all sources of pride for me. Even after facing adversity, I am honored to continue serving alongside my colleagues."

After his first UN Mission in Iraq in 2001, Al-Sinawi also served in Sudan, Italy, Abyei, Afghanistan, and now Cyprus.



# UNFICYP facilitates annual Kokkina/Erenköy crossing

On 8 August, UNFICYP Civil Affairs, UNPOL and military component worked closely together to facilitate civilian access to the United Nations buffer zone during the annual Kokkina/Erenköy crossing in Cyprus.



## German flag raised in UNFICYP to welcome UNPOL officers

On 2 July, UNFICYP held a flag-raising ceremony for German peacekeepers at the UN Protected Area. Top UN official in Cyprus, Colin Stewart, accompanied by the Mission's Senior Advisor, Aderemi Adekoya, and Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri welcomed the two new German UNPOL officers serving for peace for the first time in Cyprus.



# Argentinians mark 30 years of UN flight in UNFICYP

On 27 September, UN Flight marked its 30 years' presence in UNFICYP under the responsibility of the Argentinian contingent. With 2 Hughes 500D and 1 Bell 212, Argentinian peacekeepers have patrolled 33500 flying hours in the buffer zone and have been capable of carrying day and night reconnaissance, search and rescue operations.



## UNFICYP veterans visit to mark 60 years in the service of peace

On 17 September, UNFICYP welcomed to UNPA a delegation of 36 Danish veterans along with their spouses. Veterans were escorted to the Green Line and a small ceremony was also held in Ledra Palace Hotel in honor of peacekeepers from Denmark. On 2 October, Colin Stewart, together with UNFICYP's Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri, welcomed a group of Austrian veterans who served in UNFICYP since the Mission was established in 1964. During their visit, they had the opportunity to interact with our peacekeepers and share their experiences while serving in Cyprus. We thank them for their contributions in the service of peace on the island.



# Guardsman Lawson commemoration in the United Kingdom

**O**n Sunday 21st July, over 40 people attended a memorial service at Washington cemetery to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Guardsman Graeme Lawson, from Barmston.

Guardsman Lawson was killed whilst serving with the United Nations (UN) in Cyprus on 21st July 1974. This occurred after Turkish forces intervened; following a military coup that the Turkish government felt threatened the security of the Turkish Cypriot population on the island.

Guardsman Lawson was killed during the collection of weapons collected from Turkish Cypriot forces who sought protection from the UN. One of the weapons fired whilst being loaded onto a truck and the bullet struck and killed him.

Captain Philip Brazier, an Army Reservist from 75 Engineer Regiment, learned about Guardsman Lawson whilst researching the details of the 187 UN personnel who have died in service with United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). After contacting the Washington Family History



Society and North East Memorials Project, he decided that he would commemorate Guardsman Lawson on his return from deployment to Cyprus.

The Lawson family were represented by Doug and Gayle Melton, Guardsman Lawson's Aunt and Uncle. Also present at the ceremony were Standard Bearers and representatives from the Sunderland Branch of the Royal British Legion and Newcastle and Sunderland Branches of the Coldstream Guards Association, as well as members of Holy Trinity Church, Washington. Captain Ian Fowler, Padre of 1st Battalion Irish Guards drove up from the battalion's current barracks in Windsor to take the service. The regiment was represented by Lt Alex Hanbury, Commander of the Guards Recruit Platoon at Catterick, who took leave from an exercise to be present at the ceremony.

Last Post, Reveille and the National anthem were performed by cornet player David Petherick from Holy Trinity Church, Washington.



Photos courtesy of John Carson. [John@the-wedding-videographer.co.uk](mailto:John@the-wedding-videographer.co.uk)

# Young tech savvy Cypriots help build a sustainable future for all



Digitalization is transforming our world, offering unprecedented opportunities to accelerate sustainable development. Digital technologies such as mobile devices, services, and artificial intelligence are instrumental in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In Cyprus, we celebrate the role of Cypriot youth in pushing forward innovation and collaboration towards achieving sustainable development for all.

Two fashion designers, members of the Fashion Heritage Network Cyprus explain how their network uses digital platforms to engage with young people across the divide and the role of social media in reaching out to a younger audience.

Thalis Chrysostomou, a 24-year-old Cypriot, highlights that the Fashion Heritage Network Cyprus understands the effectiveness and is highly active on social platforms.

He explains, "our project uses digital platforms to engage with young people by promoting events and workshops focusing on heritage and sustainability, such as the Cyprus Fashion Film Festival and the REVIVE exhibition."

He tells further that these initiatives "focus on preserving Cypriot cultural heritage while also including contemporary, sustainable

fashion and art created by emerging creatives."

This intercommunal network, like others which partner with UNFICYP, aims to spread their mission and values to the youth through a strong online presence through social media platforms, which helps them to connect with their audience, share updates, and promote their work".

Rengin Akcan, a 27-year-old Cypriot fashion designer, who is also partners with Thalis, believes that digital platforms are crucial and the most effective communication tool of their era.

For her, "there is not a platform or a place where the audience is bigger, also we need to consider its speed. We can reply faster, which allows a prompt engagement with those who want to learn more about our work. Digital platforms can reach anyone and it does not depend on where they are geographically."

However, Akcan also points out that digital engagement is not a replacement mechanism to bring communities together: "we cannot forget of how valuable it is to engage as a community in person."

She recalls a workshop held in collaboration with UNFICYP held inside the buffer zone: "the project brought in artisan ladies from far villages, and they taught us how to work with straws. It was an amazing experience to be in the same room with these ladies and, not only learn about the handicraft, but also listen to their stories."

International Youth Day is commemorated every year on 12 August, bringing youth issues to the attention of the international community and celebrating the potential of youth as partners in today's global society.

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.

## UNFICYP Civil Affairs brings communities together

On 1 July, UNFICYP Civil Affairs Section organized a one-day study visit to discuss environmental issues in the wider Famagusta region. The event brought together 30 Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot civil society representatives from across the island, including environmental NGOs, former Youth Champions, activists, academics, and researchers all engaged in strengthening environmental awareness and green practices. The study visit provided the participants with a better understanding of the environmental and social implications of coastal developments in the area and created an opportunity to strengthen networks and to empower activists to take intercommunal action.



# Young peacemakers inspire hope with commitment to peacebuilding



UNFICYP often engages youth in various programs to promote peace and development. By giving young people the opportunity to act as peacekeepers, the UN not only amplifies their voices but also empowers them to contribute to global peace efforts. It's inspiring to see the next generation taking an active role in shaping a better future on the island of Cyprus.

Through organizing the "Future Peacemakers" event, UNFICYP Civil Affairs Section brought together 44 young Cypriots from across the divide who became the peacemakers for a whole day at the UN Headquarters in Cyprus.

During the day, young Cypriots from the United World Colleges, the Cyprus Friendship Programme and Intercommunal Youth Diplomacy Conference had the chance to engage with each other as well as with the UN, exploring the vital role of peacebuilding on the island. The participants visited the Committee on Missing Persons, the historic old Nicosia airport, the Good Offices mission and UNFICYP. The experience gave them a unique perspective on the work of the UN in Cyprus and the peace process in general.

In a powerful discussion session with the Head of Mission, Colin

Stewart, Good Offices and UNFICYP officers, the youth shared their thoughts on the future of Cyprus and the peace process. Their creativity and vision were truly inspiring. They emphasized the need for a more neutral history education, reducing hate speech and negative narratives, introducing official languages for greater inclusivity, and making the political processes more transparent, inclusive, and simpler to ensure everyone can understand and participate in it.

Speaking about the experience, 19-year-old Lian Liu Ioannides from the United World Colleges says that "the Future Peacemakers event felt like a sincere effort by UNFICYP, not only to give youth the opportunity to understand the role of the UN in Cyprus, but also to give the UN in Cyprus the opportunity to understand the common concerns and aspirations of Cypriot youth and work together with youth to amplify our voices for peace."

"This is just the beginning, and not the end, of the participating youth's involvement in the work of UN Cyprus," Lian highlights.

On his part, 19-year-old Ada Olgun, from the Cyprus Friendship Programme, notes that "it's truly inspiring to witness young people taking an active role in peacebuilding. Their passion and willingness to engage in dialogue brings hope for a more harmonious future. The dedication of the UN in creating platforms where the next generation can unite, share ideas, and work toward a common goal cannot be underestimated" and Ada hopes for "many more gatherings that foster connection, empathy, and lasting peace!"

18-year-old Marfa Myastsova, from Intercommunal Youth Diplomacy Conference, explains that "the Future Peacemakers event was productive and inspiring. Youth is always underrepresented, and this event gave a space where youth was listened to, and our thoughts considered. The group of motivated young activists was inspiring and a reminder that the fight for a solution to the Cyprus problem is intergenerational", and Marfa thanks the "UN in Cyprus for giving us this opportunity and hope to see more of such."

The UN in Cyprus strongly believes that voices of young people are crucial in shaping the path toward lasting peace in Cyprus.



# UNFICYP celebrates International Peace Day with the power of art



**O**n 21 September, UNFICYP hosted an 'artvocacy' event in Ledra Palace Hotel where two Cypriot artists, Ramadan Nalcioğlu and Vicky Panagi, came together with young people from across the divide, activists and UN peacekeepers and painted a mural in one of the walls outside the hotel to mark International Day of Peace.

Speaking about joining this UN initiative, Vicky Panagi said: "Art can bring people together. Many people from the across the divide came together today to paint and get to know each other. Cyprus is divided and I grew up with this division and this is something we want to end, and we want the two communities to come together and live in harmony".

Ramadan Nalcioğlu added that "art is culture and culture brings people together. Art is a movement for activism and art is always politics and is always a voice. And maybe art alone cannot bring peace, but by connecting people to each other it is capable of bringing peace".

To mark the day, the idea was to create a street art collective group painting experience, which is historically tied to social progress and human rights. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the island, Colin Stewart, together with the Mission's Force Commander, Major General Erdenebat Batsuuri joined the crowd and collaborated in painting the mural.

On her part, Cypriot activist Marilena Kyriacou highlighted that "this is a great initiative. And I am so happy and grateful that these initiatives continue to happen. These days are very important. I participated; I painted the leaves. But for me what I always think, being an activist in this field for so many years, is that we need to focus on the importance of the intercommunal aspects of it. We need to change the narratives and understand that it is not only about Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, but it's for everyone, all the people living on this island and that peace needs to be achieved for everyone, for locals, minorities, international students, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ people. Peace demands constant and everyday work".

Enjoying coming together with other Cypriots as well as with the

UN peacekeepers, young Cypriot activist, Ada Olgun said: "I had the incredible opportunity to work with a team to create a mural for International Day of Peace. It was a joyful and inspiring day, full of creativity and teamwork. We worked with a number of young individuals to make our ideas a reality, transforming what had been empty into a symbol of peace and cooperation. I met people from the UN and gained new friends, which made painting the mural much more fun".

The creative backbone of the initiative was to promote art as an effective element that brings people together and enables collaboration among people. The theme of the mural as "Our Common Future begins with Peace" and the outline of the project came as a result of a meeting of the artists with young Cypriots to hear about their views, challenges they face and how to design a future they want.

Expressing his enthusiasm, young Cypriot Sait Bulak said: "Today I joined this UNFICYP's action, and we drew very nice paintings. It was a very good experience, and I am very happy to be here".

Actively engaging throughout the event, young Cypriot Aeryn Clemenceau said: "I enjoyed participating in this event today. For me, taking part in this beautiful and constructive initiative to use art to come closer, to get to know each other, to build relationships and to cultivate peace is especially relevant in Cyprus, which has been divided for so long."

In a world with rising geopolitical tensions and protracted conflicts, there has never been a better time to remember the values needed for a culture of peace.

Every year on 21 September, the UN commemorates the International Day of Peace. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

In that declaration, the United Nations' most inclusive body recognized that peace "not only is the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged, and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation."

# Proud to lead: 1st female UN peacekeeper from Slovakia takes charge in Cyprus

“I’m proud to be the first women to lead the Slovak contingent in Cyprus as part of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus,” says Lieutenant Colonel Katarína Gargalíková. Born in Prešov, Slovakia in 1979, she joined the Slovak Armed Forces in 2003 and has served in Cyprus since September 2023, she is on her first ever UN Mission serving as a Commanding Officer in Sector 4 (eastern side of the UN buffer zone) leading a team of 198 Slovak peacekeepers currently deployed in Cyprus.

Lieutenant Colonel Gargalíková graduated from the Slovak School of Armed Forces and continued her studies in the Junior Staff Officer’s Course and Advanced Command and Staff Course at Armed Forces Academy Liptovský Mikuláš in her home country.

She has a distinguished career in the Armed Forces back home, trailblazing as a Senior Officer in several positions since 2005, including as Chief of the 11th Mechanized Battalion.



Lieutenant Colonel Katarína Gargalíková has been employed as the Commanding Officer of the Slovak contingent and sector 4, which stretches for over 60 kilometres of the eastern part of the UN buffer zone, including one of the most sensitive areas of Pyla/Pile and Varosha.

“My responsibilities include de-escalating tensions between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, preventing military engagement between the two sides, supporting UNPOL in preventing criminal activities inside the buffer zone and supporting UN civilian staff in developing peacebuilding operations,” she explains.

Katarína always keeps an exceptional eye on the situation in the buffer zone. She ensures cross-component integration within her area of responsibility to fulfill the UNFICYP’s operational tasks.

She quickly understood the complexities of peacekeeping in the divided island, and states: “I realized that diplomatic engagement with the opposing forces is the key to success”.

## “Women are crucial to fulfilling our mandate in Cyprus” says UNFICYP’s Major Sania Safdar

Major Sania Safdar from Pakistan is the first peacekeeper from UNFICYP to receive the 2023 Certificate of Recognition for gender advocacy issued by the United Nations Department for Peace Operations in New York. The award was presented to her by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart.

“Receiving this certificate as the first peacekeeper from UNFICYP is deeply meaningful to me and significant for our mission in Cyprus. It serves as a testament to our commitment to gender equality,” she states.

Created in 2016, the United Nations “Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award” recognizes the dedication and efforts of an individual military peacekeeper in promoting the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). In addition to the award, the Department for Peace Operations also recognizes military personnel from other UN Missions who are contributing to advance the WPS agenda in different countries where peacekeeping operations are in place.

In Cyprus, Major Safdar served as the Mission’s Force Signal Officer and one of the UNFICYP’s military gender focal points. Her primary



tasks involve overseeing communication systems and promoting gender equality within military component. Since her deployment to the Mission last year, she proactively took charge of several initiatives to contribute to achieve this recognition by focusing on integrating the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda into military components of the Mission’s work.

As the Mission’s Force Signal Officer in the Field Technology Section, she was also involved in strengthening the effectiveness of joint patrols by incorporating communication tools to enhance military operations on the ground while, promoting gender representation in military.

Participation of women in peacekeeping missions like bring diverse perspectives and skills that enhance operational effectiveness and foster inclusive approaches to conflict resolution. Their meaningful participation promotes gender equality within operations, contributing to more comprehensive and sustainable peace efforts. UNFICYP is on a steady curve to increase its statistics on the number of women in peacekeeping as well as promoting their participation while engaging with Member States to encourage further representation of uniformed women as critical actors in fulfilling the Mission’s mandate. Major Safdar’s recognition award serves as a testament to UNFICYP’s commitment to gender equality.

# UNFICYP welcomes Canada's support for more women in peacekeeping



**O**n 11 September, UNFICYP peacekeepers met the Canadian Ambassador on Women, Peace and Security, Jacqueline O'Neill, who visited UNFICYP to learn about how the Mission is implementing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Cyprus. Ambassador O'Neill also asked the peacekeepers about their experiences of deploying on UN Missions, what motivates them from participating in UN peace operations.

A broader discussion ensued to address existing gender inequalities, bias, and unequal treatment that women experience in their professional lives, including during their deployments to UN Peace Operations. Referring to the backlash to principles of gender equality and parity, Ambassador O'Neill notes that "is essential to address these backlashes with support from the Elsie initiative fund".

During her meeting with a diverse group of peacekeepers from the Mission's police, civilian and military components at the Elsie Room, Ambassador O'Neill was briefed on UNFICYP's work to ensure gender responsiveness within its operations, and most recently, how is the Mission is addressing the issue of asylum seekers stranded in the buffer zone.

UNPOL Gender Focal Point, Danica Gnjatovic, noted that "women in peacekeeping missions have experience in working with vulnerable categories, have the necessary empathy and do not have threatening predispositions. It is precisely for this reason that women are a key link in peacekeeping missions. UNPOL peacekeepers are actively engaged in protection of vulnerable categories from across the divide."

UNFICYP Gender Affairs Officer, Lauren McAlister, highlighted that "to achieve and operationalize the objectives of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, we need to look at what does and does not work in really achieving structural change. Otherwise, we can also risk having unintended consequences that work against real change."

On his part, Military Gender Focal Point, Hashmat Ullah Khan, explained that "a gender responsive action plan is in place in UNFICYP, specifically for the military component to ensure integration across military activities and addresses all relevant elements of military activities. A focal point network is established, with ongoing oversight and capacity building by the Mission's gender adviser, to ensure that considerations and accountability are at all levels and sectors".

The Elsie recreational space was established in response to the United Nations efforts to ensure gender parity in its operations and to respond to the needs of both male and female peacekeepers equally, including ensuring adequate and diverse recreational spaces. This multi-purpose recreational space provides a place for gatherings, physical activities and games, a working area and kitchen facility.



A group of young people are gathered in a workshop setting. In the foreground, a woman with curly hair, wearing a white shirt with a colorful paint splatter pattern, is smiling and laughing, with her hand near her mouth. Behind her, another woman with glasses and a white shirt is smiling. To the right, a man with glasses and a light blue shirt is smiling. In the background, a man in a brown shirt is standing and smiling. The setting appears to be a bright room with a whiteboard or screen visible in the background.

In October, we welcomed the 2024 group of UN Youth Champions for Environment and Peace, they took part in a series of workshops to equip them to develop their own environmental actions across the island. Stay tuned for more news about their initiatives in our next edition.

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