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## PRESS RELEASE

### **UNIFIL Force Commander holds meeting with local authorities in south-eastern Lebanon**

Ebel Es Saqi, South Lebanon – The Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Major-General Claudio Graziano, today held an open meeting with local authorities from the towns and villages in the eastern sector of UNIFIL's area of operations, with the aim of strengthening relations with the local communities.

Today's meeting is the latest in a series of meetings Major-General Graziano has held with representatives from local authorities throughout southern Lebanon. The meeting was attended by the Governor of Nabatiyeh and the mayors and mukhtars of local towns and villages. In addition, also present were members of parliament with constituencies in the areas, representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and UNIFIL peacekeeping contingents deployed in the area.

At the start of the meeting, all of those present observed a minute of silence in memory of the six fallen peacekeepers from UNIFIL's Spanish contingent who were killed in a terrorist attack on Sunday, 24 June, 2007. The Force Commander was welcomed at the meeting by the Governor of Nabatiyeh. In his opening remarks at the meeting, Major-General Graziano spoke about issues ranging from the security situation in southern Lebanon and UNIFIL's cooperation with the LAF to relations between UNIFIL and the local communities. Afterwards, the Force Commander fielded questions from the attendees.

Speaking at the end of the meeting, Major-General Graziano echoed his opening remarks.

*"UNIFIL's role is to maintain peace and stability in the south and to improve the situation of the civilian population and protect them if there is an imminent threat of violence coming from any party,"* he said. *"For those reasons, I consider the relationship between UNIFIL and the communities in the area of operation a high priority. It is essential that these relations are characterised by trust, confidence and mutual respect."*

He added that the recent terrorist attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers would not deter them from carrying out their mission: *"At this difficult moment I want to stress that all UNIFIL troops remain committed more than ever to its mission and resolve to implement the tasks mandated by the Security Council."*

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