

**UNITED NATIONS INTERIM FORCE IN LEBANON
(UNIFIL)**

Naqoura,
24 July 2006

PRESS RELEASE

Heavy exchanges of fire continued along the length of the Blue Line in the last 24 hours, with somewhat reduced intensity in the eastern sector. Hezbollah fired rockets from various locations, and the IDF continued the shelling and aerial bombardment. The IDF maintained its presence on the ground inside Lebanese territory in the area of Marun Al Ras in the central sector, and somewhat advanced north of the village in the direction of Bint Jubayl. Their presence in this area was significantly reinforced during the night and this morning with a number of tanks and armored personnel carriers. Exchanges of fire were reported in the same area yesterday afternoon and this morning.

One unarmed UN military observer, a member of the Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), was seriously wounded by small arms fire in the patrol base in the Marun Al Ras area yesterday afternoon. According to preliminary reports, the fire originated from the Hezbollah side during an exchange with the IDF. He was evacuated by the UN to the Israeli side, from where he was taken by an IDF ambulance helicopter to a hospital in Haifa. He was operated on, and his condition is now reported as stable.

There were nine other incidents of firing close to UN positions during the past 24 hours, with two positions suffering direct hits from the Israeli side. Two aerial bombs impacted inside the Ghanaian battalion headquarters in the area of Tibnin, and three mortar rounds impacted inside an Indian battalion position in the Adaisseh area, causing extensive damage to the buildings and vehicles in both cases, but no casualties. Four aerial bombs impacted in the immediate vicinity of a Ghanaian position in the area of Brashit, and eleven tank rounds impacted in the immediate vicinity of a Ghanaian battalion position in the Rmaich area causing significant material damage.

All UNIFIL positions in the area of operation remain permanently occupied and maintained by the troops. A number of positions, including forward positions in the eastern sector, were re-supplied yesterday. Some additional re-supply convoys to the forward positions are planned for today. UNIFIL is still facing serious restrictions in its freedom of movement due to the ongoing hostilities and extensive destruction of roads and bridges throughout the area of operation. A key road artery between Tyre and Naqoura has been heavily bombed, and traffic along this road is not possible at the moment. UNIFIL Engineering Contingent is attempting to make some repairs and open the road for traffic today.

UNIFIL carried out a medical evacuation of one person from Alma Ash Shab to the UNIFIL hospital in Naqoura, yesterday. Four wounded civilians from Shihin were also evacuated early today to the UNIFIL hospital in Naqoura. Some local civilians from the village of El Mari were evacuated today by UNIFIL to Ibil as Saqi, and bread was distributed to the inhabitants of Al Jibbayn. UNIFIL attempted to escort trucks with humanitarian assistance provided by CARITAS from Hasbayya to Rmaich, but the condition of the road south of Hasbayya was impassable for heavy trucks. UNIFIL is dispatching medical teams and aid to the eastern sector today.