

UN accepts our offer to send troops to Lebanon

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MUSTAPHA KAMIL

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THE United Nations has accepted Malaysia's offer to send troops to serve under the world body in war-torn Lebanon.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was informed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan yesterday that Malaysia may send 360 personnel to serve under the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (Unifil). Malaysia has offered to send a 1,000-strong force.

Abdullah said 160 Malaysian personnel would serve under a special force section of Unifil while the rest would come under the multi-national force's headquarters.

He said the Malaysian troops would largely be involved in maintaining discipline and order within the Unifil.

"The secretary-general informed me that as and when necessary, the UN will request for additional troops."

In his meeting with Abdullah at his office at the UN yesterday, Annan said Unifil was now a truly multi-national force and that he was happy with the response from nations which contributed troops.

Abdullah said the UN secretary-general thanked Malaysia for its continued support towards the world body's peacekeeping operations. Kuala Lumpur has never declined any UN requests for peacekeepers.

A UN report said following arrival in recent days of troops from France, Italy and Spain, Unifil now has about 5,000 personnel on the ground.

Resolution 1701 that ended the fighting in Lebanon mandated strengthening the UN force up to a maximum of 15,000 troops.

In his latest report on the resolution to the Security Council, Annan said there was a general understanding that Israeli troops would completely withdraw from Lebanon once Unifil reached 5,000 troops and the Lebanese army was ready to deploy at the full strength of 15,000 troops.

"We are ready to send the personnel and the Ministry of Defence has been informed of the UN's acceptance of our offer," Abdullah said.