

AFP sends 50th contingent to Cyprus



Members of the AFP's 50th contingent to the United Nations Civilian Police in Cyprus during pre-embarkation briefings opened by Director International, Federal Agent David Schramm. Pictured back row from left are: Sergeant Alf Turketo, Constables Lexie Bowring and Tony Crowe, Sergeant Larry Pope, Constable Mike Watkins. Front: Constables Sean Leech, Paul Morris, Federal Agent Schramm, Constables Louise Van Galen and Peter Sykora. (Absent: Superintendent Steve Polden, who took up his post before the other members).

Australia's continuing commitment to peacekeeping operations on the island of Cyprus was affirmed when the AFP's 50th contingent to the United Nations Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL) on the island left Australia recently.

In a joint statement, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, and the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Daryl Williams said that Australia had a proud record of involvement in international peacekeeping operations and our contingent was highly regarded by Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike.

The 10 members will be part of the 20-member rotational team which is being led by Superintendent Steve Polden, who has had extensive experience as an AFP overseas liaison officer in Jakarta, Islamabad and Bangkok.

"The utilisation of civilian police is an integral part of Australia's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping operations," the statement said.

"Australia has been there from the start and we are committed to continuing that involvement. This involvement is underpinned by the AFP's extensive community, national, international and

United Nations policing experience."

Reiterating his previous public statements and those of the Prime Minister, Mr Downer reaffirmed Australia's policy of recognising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus.

As called for in numerous United Nations Security Council Resolutions, the Australian Government agrees that the State of Cyprus should comprise a bi-zonal, bi-communal federal republic with one sovereignty, a single citizenship and one international personality, the statement continued.

Australian police have been peacekeepers on the island since 1964 when they were drawn from the ranks of the Australian Commonwealth Police as well as state police services. The role was transferred to the AFP when it was formed in 1979.

The UNCIVPOL role is that as observers, investigators and reporters. Members patrol the buffer zone which extends the length of the island. It varies in width from a few metres in central Nicosia to several kilometres in other parts of the island. The AFP contingent covers three sectors in the zone, supporting Danish troops in sector one, British troops in sector two, and Canadian troops in sector three. UNCIVPOL members have no

powers of arrest and are unarmed while on patrol. The major policing duties are carried out by the Turkish and Cypriot police in their own areas, while UNCIVPOL members use diplomacy and tact to defuse tense situations involving civilian threats within the zone itself.

Peacekeeping in Cyprus began after the island's population was on the brink of war in December, 1963. Greek Cypriots, who comprised about three-quarters of the island's population, sought union with Greece, a move resisted by the

Federal member for Adelaide, Patricia Worth, commended AFP peacekeepers in Cyprus during private members business in the Spring session of parliament.

Ms Worth visited Cyprus soon after the outbreak of violence on the island with the federal members for Grayndler, NSW, Anthony Albanese, and Watson, NSW, Leo McLeay, at the invitation of the Cypriot Government.

"It is now some 22 years since Turkish troops invaded Cyprus and first occupied 37 per cent of

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Turkish Cypriots who made up just under a fifth of the total population. UNCIVPOL was the result of an appeal for UN member countries to provide civilian police to carry out a purely liaison and observer role in the tense situation.

More recently, inter-communal violence which broke out on the island in the UN buffer zone in August this year left one person dead and about 50 others injured.

The professionalism and courage of the AFP contingent serving on the island at the time of the violence was commended by Mr Downer, who said that Australia consistently supported UN efforts to promote a solution to problems on the island.

the island," Ms Worth said.

"Today there are still 40,000 Turkish troops occupying the northern end of the island. This action has since divided the Cypriot community and raised questions over human rights violations and the preservation of basic freedoms for the people in Cyprus.

"Whilst many international efforts, including United Nations resolutions, have been made intending to progress towards a peaceful resolution to the so-called Cyprus problem, tensions remain.

"This was so tragically illustrated by the violent deaths of two unarmed Greek Cypriots in recent, supposedly peaceful demonstrations."



Federal parliamentarians Patricia Worth, Anthony Albanese and Leo McLeay with AFP peacekeepers in Cyprus recently.

During the visit Ms Worth said her delegation gained valuable impressions and first-hand information about the violence in Cyprus when they visited the AFP peacekeepers' headquarters at the disused Nicosia international airport.

"One of the members of the Australian Federal Police contingent was next to a United Kingdom colleague at the time he was shot when there was indiscriminate shooting into the crowd following the murder of Solomos Solomou.

"Despite recent tensions and the fact that they are unarmed and without riot protection, the members of the Australian Federal Police remain in good spirits and enhance Australia's reputation in Cyprus," Ms Worth said.

"An impromptu drive through the old part of Nicosia close to the buffer zone also left an indelible impression: barbed wire fencing, the space of the non-combat zone and the inflammatory sight of a huge Turkish flag painted on the rocky face of the distant hills are constant reminders to the residents of Nicosia of the divisions facing their island.

"Even the most neutral commentators said that the painting of the Turkish flag could be judged only as the most provocative of actions."



Members of the 48th and 49th contingent to Cyprus, from left: Peter Schiller, Darwin; and Dave Hall, Geoff Whiley, Peter Crozier, Bruce Hayward, and Mike Lucas, all from ACT Region.



The Greek Cypriot side of the exclusion zone dividing Nicosia is a cosmopolitan, ritzy shopping area, a world away from the Turkish sector of the divided city. Nicosia is the world's only divided city. **Photos this page by Ian McPhedran, The Canberra Times. Photos and caption reprinted courtesy The Canberra Times, from Section C2, Saturday, November 2, 1996.**