

Tensions quickly mounted and intercommunal violence broke out four days before Christmas. The Security Council met to consider the Cyprus issue on December 27, 1963 and in the meantime British troops stationed on the island sought to restore order. However, it was quite evident that this task could not be exercised by Britain alone for an indefinite period, and on March 4, 1964 the Security Council passed a resolution, the heart of which authorized the establishment of an international peacekeeping force and the appointment of a mediator.

Canada was asked to contribute to this force and, meeting in an emergency session on Friday, March 13, 1964 Parliament authorized a contingent of 1,150 officers and men. This country's decision to respond favourably to the request of the United Nations Secretary General was based on the fact that the Canadian -- and the general -- interest would be served by U.N. collective action to prevent intercommunal conflict while a political settlement was being sought.

The first Canadians landed in Nicosia on March 16, 1964 and other national contingents from Ireland, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Austria arrived during the following weeks to join the British who were already on Cyprus. The force became operational on March 27, 1964. It was charged with the tasks of (1) preventing a recurrence of fighting, (2) contributing to the restoration and maintenance of order, and (3) contributing to the return to normal conditions.

During the next eleven years, the United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) was largely successful in carrying out its principal objective of preventing a recurrence of fighting. Although the fundamental frictions and animosities remained, no major outbreaks of violence occurred. In fact, tensions on the island were reduced to such a degree during this period that it eventually proved possible to implement major changes in both the size and duties of the peacekeeping force. By 1974, the size of the force had been reduced to 2,800 men from an original strength of 6,200 military personnel. In addition, its role was altered. Although the main task of the force continued to be the prevention of violence, greater emphasis was placed on preventative action involving measures such as patrolling, persuasion, and negotiation rather than the deployment of forces interposed between the two contesting parties.

But this restructuring of the force occurred also as a reaction to one of the fundamental difficulties in the peacekeeping and peacemaking process.