Beat: Local

UN peacekeeper from Austria falls to death in southern Lebanon

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USPA News - A United Nations (UN) peacekeeper was killed early Wednesday when he fell from a balcony in the southern Lebanese port city of Tyre, UN officials said, but few details about the circumstances surrounding the incident were immediately released. The incident happened in the early morning hours when a United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observer from Austria fell from a balcony at his residence in Tyre, a port city in Lebanon`s south.

The peacekeeper was immediately taken to Jabel Amel hospital where he was pronounced dead. In a statement released by the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Force Commander Major-General Paolo Serra and UNTSO Chief of Staff Major-General Michael Finn expressed their "deepest condolences" to the Austrian government and to the family of the military observer, who was identified as Peter Sieman by the Daily Star newspaper. "[The victim] was a well-respected and dedicated peacekeeper actively working in supporting UNIFIL`s mandate under Security Council resolution 1701," the force said in a brief statement. It said UNIFIL was working with the Lebanese army and local authorities to determine the circumstances surrounding the fatal fall. A security source told the Daily Star that Sieman fell from the 11th floor of a building and may have hit electrical wires before hitting the ground. Other Lebanese media, including the state-run National News Agency, added that the peacekeeper may have jumped from the balcony while under the influence of alcohol. UNIFIL has been deployed to the region since 1978 when tensions increased along the Israel-Lebanon border. The force was originally created to confirm Israel`s withdrawal from Lebanon, restore international peace and security and assist the Lebanese government in restoring effective authority in the area. The UN peacekeeping force currently has around 10,300 troops and naval personnel in Lebanon. After the month-long war between Lebanon and Israel in the summer of 2006, the UN Security Council enhanced the force to monitor the cessation of hostilities, accompany and support the Lebanese armed forces as they deploy throughout the country`s south, and extend its assistance to help ensure humanitarian access to civilian populations and the voluntary and safe return of displaced persons.

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United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com