

# **CIMIC from the point of view of NECBAT – UNMEE**

**( No peacekeeping without peacebuilding )**

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## **1. Introduction**

From 30 November 2000 until 18 June 2001 the Netherlands took part in the UN-mission for Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). What made this mission special was that it was the first time that SHIRBRIG (Standby Forces High Readiness Brigade) was deployed operationally. Under the leadership of the UNMEE Force Commander, who was also the SHIRBRIG commander, the Netherlands, together with other SHIRBRIG countries like Canada and Denmark gave the mission a flying start, in accordance with the SHIRBRIG deployment concept, and subsequently carried it out almost without any problems for six months. Through this way of operating a very useful footprint was left behind for a smooth take-over by subsequent relief units. On 11 June 2001 the Netherlands/Canada battalion (NECBAT) handed over its task to an Indian battalion. From the Dutch point of view the mission was very special and instructive because of the joint-combined composition of the battalion under Dutch command.

This contribution will first present a brief description of the organisation and the mandate of NECBAT, after which a more general picture is given of the special entourage and civil-military situation in the central sector of the border area between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the AOR of NECBAT. Subsequently, there will be a more detailed discussion of three CIMIC aspects of the UNMEE mission, viz.

- 'Hearts and Minds' projects;
- Quick-impact projects;
- Host Nation Support.

Finally, a conclusion is presented.

## **2. Organisation of the Dutch contingent**

### **2.1 Structure**

The Dutch contingent consisted of a reinforced Marine Corps battalion, supplemented by a helicopter detachment of the RNLA of four Chinook transport helicopters and a Canadian motorized infantry company group. Furthermore, the RNLA supplied a unit of 80 engineers and some twenty drivers for specialist vehicles. In addition, there was the contingent commander with his staff (a national command element of approximately 30 personnel) and a detachment of the Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary of about 15 persons. Finally, the Landing Platform Dock HMS Rotterdam was employed during the deployment and redeployment phases. The contingent as described above, including HMS Rotterdam, totalled roughly 1,500 personnel.

### **2.2 Activities**

The Marine Corps battalion formed the core of the Dutch UNMEE contribution and carried out its tasks, laid down in the framework of the UN mandate, in the central sector (300 kilometres) of the 900-kilometre border area between Ethiopia and Eritrea. The helicopter detachment's main task was to provide a day-and-night, 24-hour air medevac helicopter, and it had a great variety of additional transport tasks. The engineer unit lent its support during the

deployment phase by building the company locations and the Logbase. Apart from that it was employed to improve a number of unmetalled roads that suffered badly from the heavy supply convoys. The Royal Netherlands Military Constabulary was charged with police tasks and movement control of large logistic convoys. The national command element consisted of a very mixed staff of personnel from the four Services and it functioned as the eyes and ears in the mission area for the Chief of the Defence Staff. HMS Rotterdam fulfilled two important tasks during the deployment and redeployment phases by transporting vehicles and by acting as the 'primary casualty receiving ship' when the FDS (field dressing station), which was part of the Logbase, was not yet operational.

### **3. Mandate and task of NECBAT**

The UN mandate for UNMEE was laid down in Resolution 1320, which was passed unanimously by the Security Council on 15 September 2000. The mandate is based on Chapter VI (peacekeeping missions) of the UN Charter. The military operational mission as specified in the mandate, is concrete. The mission for UNMEE is that of a 'monitoring force', with as its main task the monitoring of the Temporary Security Zone in the 300-kilometer central sector. An important task for NECBAT in the initial phases of the mission (prior even to the establishing of the Temporary Security Zone) was monitoring the withdrawal of the Ethiopian and Eritrean forces and creating a secure environment for UN activity. NECBAT had various additional tasks which are less relevant here and will therefore be left out of consideration.

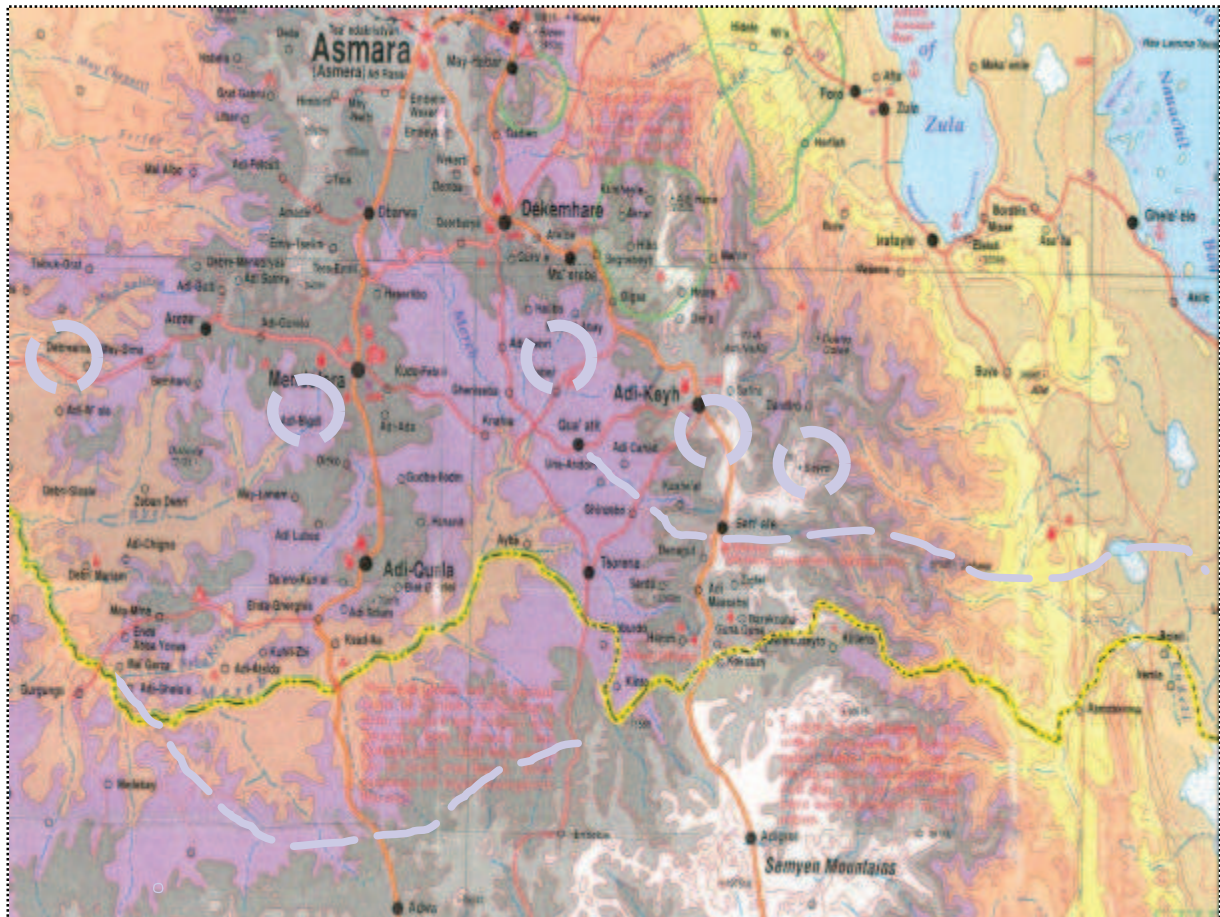
An important factor for the 'mindset' during the execution of the mission was the fact that UNMEE was not a humanitarian mission. The Dutch Parliamentary Letter of 9 October 2000 was clear about this: 'For the reception and protection of refugees UNMEE has neither the mandate nor the means. The same applies to the provision of medical aid to the local population. It must be emphasised that UNMEE does not have a humanitarian task; that is the responsibility of other UN organisations and NGOs'.

The mandate did give NECBAT the task to fulfil a coordinating role with regard to the activities of the various aid organisations operating inside the Temporary Security Zone from the moment this zone was established by the Force Commander. At the outset, however, it was not quite clear yet what this coordinating role meant, but as the mission progressed and eventually the safety zone was established, it became apparent what NECBAT could do for the NGOs. The Eritrean government did not allow the NGOs to move inside the border area before the Temporary Security Zone had been established, which hindered them in their relief activities in preparation of the return of the displaced people to the area. As NECBAT knew its way about very well in its AOR, this coordination and assisting role could be realised concretely by informing the relief workers about the current situation in the area, such as the location of the armed forces, police and militias, villages and hamlets that did not show on the map, supplying road maps with the latest information on mine threat and the situation of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). In the following section the refugee situation and the coordinating role of NECBAT will be viewed in closer detail.

### **4. General refugee situation**

The Temporary Security Zone was established by the Force Commander on 18 April 2001. Before that time, the Eritrean government did not allow relief organisations to enter or set themselves up in the border area. This also applied to the tens of thousands of Eritrean IDPs who had been accommodated in a large number of refugee camps.

Before the repatriation got under way in late April and early May 2001 an estimated 75,000 Eritrean refugees found shelter in camps and approximately 250,000 were spread out over the country, many having found a roof over their heads with relatives or host families. Although there were some Ethiopian camps south of the safety zone, the IDP problem mainly manifested itself in the north, in Eritrea. The reason for this is the fact that during a final offensive in May 2000 Ethiopia penetrated deeply into Eritrean territory, causing the great numbers of Eritrean refugees. The Eritrean government considered the IDP problem as its



own problem, and not that of the NGOs or UNHCR. Relief was accepted, but all coordination had to go through the Eritrean Refugee and Relief Committee (ERREC). Thanks to this strong governmental grip on the IDP situation no uncontrolled refugee deluge occurred in the border area after the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone. ERREC had an effective instrument of control to keep the refugees in the camps through the system of food distribution there. Only in the camps food would be given on production of vouchers. Outside the camps no food was available.

#### 4.1 Concerns about harvest and mines

The possibility of a massive refugee deluge did cause UNMEE some serious concerns. First, there was a growing impatience among the IDPs to return to their homes, after the Temporary Security Zone had been established. The IDPs were mainly farmers and their families who wanted nothing more than to return, in order to till and sow their fields before the rainy season set in. If they stayed on too long, it would mean a third consecutive crop failure. This urge to return could cause a refugee deluge.



A second concern was founded on the fact that there were still many mine-dangerous areas and battlefields littered with unexploded ordnance (UXOs) inside the safety zone.



An uncontrolled return on routes that had not been cleared yet could cause many civilian casualties. UNMEE and several NGOs, therefore, offered mine awareness courses, but, nevertheless, mine accidents were reported, as adults and children sometimes walked seemingly mindlessly into marked minefields. A directly related worry of NECBAT concerned the risks involved in giving emergency aid to casualties in a minefield. This is an exceptionally dangerous and complex operation. All efforts, therefore, were directed at prevention and charting the mine threat as clearly as possible for the NGOs, and, in doing so, indirectly for the IDPs as well.

#### **4.2 Familiarity with the situation**

Already during the deployment phase NECBAT began undertaking reconnaissance patrols. In addition to this, the CIMIC section of the battalion staff carried out activities in their terrain.

##### *Composition and task S5 CIMIC.*

The Staff section consisted of eight persons, including a staff element with a major and a captain. In a later phase during the mission the section was reinforced with a number of French service personnel, mainly coming from Djibouti

The section was divided into Tactical Support Teams (TSTs) of two persons each. The section head and his adjutant had followed relevant training in Ankara and Sarajevo.

The TST personnel was not specifically trained for CIMIC, but by on-the-job training, common sense and flexibility, this hiatus was soon overcome.

The main tasks of the TSTs consisted of mapping the area, making contact with the local administrators and establishing their identity. It was tried to ascertain the correct names, locations and the numbers of inhabitants of all living areas and camps. Simultaneously, an



assessment was made of the housing/living conditions and the food situation, in order to be able to indicate where the most pressing humanitarian problems occurred. Naturally, contact was established with the humanitarian organisations. In anticipation of the coordinating task with regard to the activities of the NGOs and the refugee deluge ensuing from the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone, the CIMIC section built up a clear picture of the refugee situation in the central sector. It contained the locations of the IDP camps in Eritrea, their sizes and the effects of the repatriation of the IDPs (numbers, from which direction, which destination and which routes) on the execution of the battalion tasks from the moment the Eritrean government would allow the IDPs to return. Once the refugee deluge began from the north, NECBAT, and in its wake the NGOs, had an up-to-date picture.

When on 10 May 2001 the return of Eritrean refugees, coordinated by ERREC, began, the NGOs were not prepared, as they had not been informed by the Eritrean government. Many thousands of refugees were transported by government buses to the Senafe land corridor and dropped there, after which they continued their journey on foot. In and near Senafe temporary camps sprung up, where water, food and sanitary provisions were very poor indeed in the beginning. The CIMIC section had already a work location in Senafe, located in a derelict hotel (the CIMIC house). In this location the representatives of the various NGOs were briefed about the current situation in the area.

## **5. 'Hearts and Minds' projects**

By the end of January 2001 the deployment phase of the battalion had come to an end, which meant that all supplies, matériel and vehicles had been transported from the port of Massawa to the deployment area and the company locations and Logbase had been set up. The

deployment phases seamlessly went over into the employment phase, the phase in which the battalion could fully concentrate on its primary tasks in the AOR. This phase was characterised by intensive foot and mounted patrolling by day and night and the establishment of patrols staying in one place for a couple of hours or bivouacking during the night and observation posts. Apart from that much time was spent on making and maintaining contacts with the military and civilian authorities. Simultaneously, the CIMIC section of the battalion staff, as described above, began to build up its picture of the civilian military situation. Because of this work a good idea began to emerge of the generally very poor circumstances in which the local population were living.

From the start of the operation it was clear that UNMEE was not a humanitarian operation, and as a consequence of that structured help to the population (for instance, repairing war damage) was not an issue, with the exception of emergency aid. It was UNMEE's policy, anyway, to limit contact with the population to the necessary functional level, in order to avoid any appearance of partiality or prejudice for either Eritreans or Ethiopians. UNMEE's position would become completely untenable if its neutrality became an issue. To minimise that risk the personnel was not given permission to leave the company location, except on military business. Sports and relaxation had to be found inside the compounds.

### **5.1 Doing something for the population**

Through the many patrols and frequent contacts with the local administrators a picture began to emerge of the deplorable state of maintenance of the public services, schools, hospitals, water supply and overall hygiene. For many Marines this situation was very similar to the ones they had experienced during peace missions in Cambodia and Haiti. There, small projects had been set up with the help of the so-called 'Potje Pronk' (the Pronk Money Box), named after the then Minister of Development Cooperation. In the following paragraph the 'Potje Pronk' construction is described by the example of how a Marine Corps Detachment worked when it was part of the United Nations Mission in Haiti from February 1995 until February 1996.

#### *CIMIC-Haiti.*

The detachment was given f 100,000 by the Ministry and a Development Cooperation specialist was detached to the unit to assist the detachment commander. An inventory of possible projects was made by the patrol commanders. Subsequently, the platoon commanders made a project plan in which a number of Wh-questions ('what, where, why and with what?') were worked out. Per project the necessary money was made available and then the unit went about purchasing the required materials and carrying out the construction work. It was important to do something in a thorough, but pragmatic manner for the population. This kind of small-scale project can quickly make a considerable positive contribution to the execution of the mission, whereas a bureaucratic approach can be disastrous in situations like these.

With this experience in mind the battalion command felt the need to carry out small-scale CIMIC projects for the population. An extra argument was that it would enable them to do something in compensation for the inconvenience caused by the UNMEE presence. The large number of UNMEE vehicles led to a considerable extra traffic pressure on the narrow, unmetalled and very dusty roads. Pedestrians and cattle making use of the same roads had to make way for the many vehicles that would pass them in great clouds of dust. Nevertheless, the friendliness and hospitality of the population, in Ethiopia as well as in Eritrea, was overwhelming from the beginning and it remained so until the last day. This positive attitude of the population was one of the success factors of the mission. It was desirable, indeed



necessary, therefore, to do something to keep their hearts and minds.

At the same time it was of importance to do something for the population from the perspective of good management of the own unit. Carrying out such projects was extremely motivating for the personnel, on the one hand, because it meant a welcome change from the long patrols, and because it gave a great deal of pleasure from a human perspective to be able to do something for the poor population with relatively few means, on the other.

## **5.2 Preconditions**

On the initiative of Commander of NECBAT an inventory was made of possible projects that were submitted by the company commanders and the Logbase commander. This yielded a total of twenty possible projects, more or less equally divided over Ethiopia and Eritrea. This inventory and a motivated request for funding were submitted in the middle of February 2001 through the national command element to the Defence Crisis Response Cell in The Hague. The proposals by NECBAT to carry out 20 small-scale projects in the Temporary Security Zone were approved by the Defence Secretary, after consultation with the Minister of Development Cooperation.

The following conditions were set for the carrying out of the projects:

- The primary goal was winning/keeping the 'hearts and minds'.
- The projects had to be divided as much as possible equally over Ethiopia and Eritrea.
- There was to be no direct relation with war damage.
- They should be small-scale and terminated before 11 June 2001.
- The Addis Abeba and Asmara Embassies had to monitor the projects.
- A project bookkeeping had to be set up for the money spent.
- The budget was f 250,000.
- There were to be periodical progress reports.

## **5.3 Organisation and execution of the projects**

The entire coordination and monitoring of the execution of the 'hearts and minds' projects was given to the CIMIC section by the Commander of NECBAT. Subsequently, a budget for each of the projects was set up and an assessment was made whether the job could be done within the available time. A detailed project list and budget was then presented for approval to both Embassies, after which the work could begin in early April 2001. For each project a project leader was appointed who was responsible for monitoring the progress, employing, if necessary, own personnel and the budgetary control. There were frequent coordination meetings between the CIMIC section and the project leaders in order to solve any problems that might come up and the Commander of NECBAT sent fortnightly reports to both Embassies. The work was partly put out to local contractors, and although that was not the primary objective of the 'hearts and minds' projects, it did give an impulse to the local economy and employment.

In some projects the own per-sonnel did the work with locally purchased building materials, such as wood, corrugated iron and paint. The building of the school in Adaito, a hamlet in the Danakil Depression, is an example of a project that was carried out completely on their own



by two Marine rifle groups. As indicated above, it was a welcome change from the daily routine, and very rewarding, also because of the sincere gratitude of the population.

On a small scale, even individual Marines and their families took the initiative to buy toys, sports gear and books, which were presented to libraries, orphanages and hospitals. The population often showed their gratitude in a cultural fashion by inviting the Marines to their traditional coffee ceremonies, which might last up to one and half hours. On 9 June 2001 the last four projects in Dekemhare were completed over two coffee ceremonies and a big lunch.

#### **5.4 Mereb Bridge**

A special CIMIC project, initiated by the UNMEE Force Commander himself, was repairing the Bailey bridge across the Mereb river, between the towns of Rama (Ethiopia) and Adi Quala (Eritrea). This bridge is the second important land corridor, beside the one at Senafe, in the central sector. It had been partially destroyed during the conflict and was impassable for traffic. Near the bridge there was a ford that could be used by pedestrians and terrain vehicles in the dry season. During the NECBAT period the crossing at Mereb was quite frequently used by the Eritrean authorities to extradite interned Ethiopians. With the approach of the great rainy season that would become impossible. In order to ensure the passage across the Mereb, the Netherlands gave a Bailey bridge in April 2001, at the request of the UNMEE Force Commander. This bridge was then constructed by an Indian UNMEE engineer construction company. Two Dutch engineers gave advice and assistance during the construction works. Shortly after the departure of NECBAT the bridge was officially opened by the Force Commander.





## 6. Quick-Impact Projects

For the sake of completeness the so-called Quick-Impact Projects (QIPs), initiated and managed by the UNMEE HQ in Asmara itself, are worth mentioning as CIMIC activities. QIPs funded from UNMEE's budget are intended to provide a flexible disbursement option to support small-scale quick-impact projects on short notice in the Temporary Security Zone and adjacent areas. QIPs are implemented under the authority of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). A committee representing the SRSG approves and subsequently authorizes expenditure for such projects, up to a ceiling of US \$ 15,000 per project. Suggestions for potential QIPs can be submitted from the Force, from UNMOs, from NGOs, from diplomatic sources, etc. All requests should be channeled through the local Senior Sector UNMO, via the battalion level S-5, who will process the request through G5-CIMIC Force HQ.

Each project proposal has a Project Officer to provide a point of contact for the Secretary of the Committee. QIPs are undertaken with the close consultation and consent of the local parties and benefiting communities concerned. For each project, a Memorandum of Understanding and other appropriate agreements are concluded between the SRSG and the organisation or agency (where possible a national or international NGO) undertaking the project.

Potential QIPs include but are not limited to the activities listed below:

- restoration/enhancement of water services and water purification facilities;
- provision of public sanitation and rubble clearance;
- acquisition of basic medical equipment and medical supplies;
- repair of school buildings and provision of basic school furniture and materials;
- repair of hospitals/medical facilities;
- repair of basic community infrastructure and municipalities;
- assistance in the establishment of housing for returning IDPs;
- training programmes for demobilized soldiers;
- restoration of electricity supply at critical points/areas.

## 7. Host Nation Support

The second CIMIC aspect during the Dutch contribution to UNMEE was the Host Nation Support (HNS), an essential and widely known logistic concept in crisis situations. UNMEE's operational concept dictated a forward deployment of the battalion in, or in as close proximity as possible to, the intended Temporary Security Zone. Besides, the company and platoon locations were chosen in places which were politically and strategically sensitive, near the fronts where the heaviest fighting had taken place, the border areas, therefore, the most hotly disputed territories by both parties. This meant deployment in a very thinly populated area, making use of existing infrastructure impossible. All operational and logistic units, including the helicopter detachment, therefore, built up their compounds from scratch.

During the deployment phase of the Contingent a great number of very labour-intensive logistic and construction activities had to be carried out. Without HNS the execution of all these activities could not have been completed within the given time frame. Below, a number of situations, involving HNS, will be discussed.



### **7.1 Third line transport**

The transport of 750 containers and 400 organic vehicles during the deployment as well as the redeployment phases by the Massawa (seaport of debarkation) to Dekemhare (location of the Logbase) route may well be called the greatest logistic challenge (including the risks) of the Dutch UNMEE mission. It was estimated that this 'container push' between Massawa and Dekemhare, bridging a difference in height of more than 2,000 metres, would take several weeks, in view of the narrow winding roads and early indications of available civilian transport.

Thanks to the influence of the Eritrean Secretary of Transport a great number of trucks suitable for container transport were made available. The Eritrean drivers clearly were not bound by any national regulations for driving hours or work and rest times (they slept in their trucks). They managed to bring up the initial shipment of 500 containers in a record 30 hours. Without the enormous Eritrean civilian transport capacity the deployment of NECBAT would not have been so swift. It was an extraordinary logistic operation and it was carried out without any accidents. It was a true example of how effective civil-military cooperation can be, but it also illustrates the vulnerability of operational logistics during crisis missions. For the redeployment another successful appeal was made on third line transport, although this time a more gradual time schedule was used.



### **7.2 Construction of camps**

For the construction of four camps a period of eight weeks had been estimated. As said before, a considerable part of the work was done by the engineer detachment, but there was also extensive use of Host Nation Support. The huge quantities of gravel for the construction of roads and paths in the camps are still vivid memories for the participants in the mission. The gravel was purchased from civilian suppliers in Asmara, Mendefera and Adrigat and it was used to limit dust formation from the heavy traffic in and around the camps. Apart from gravel, asphalt was used for the heli platform in the Logbase. This, too, came from a large

asphalt factory in Asmara. For reasons of hygiene the compound kitchens were placed on concrete floors, which were built by local contractors.



### **7.3 Other local facilities**

Contracts with local bakeries were concluded for the delivery of bread to the entire contingent. Bottled drinking water for the entire contingent was purchased centrally by UN and delivered at the Logbase in Dekemhare. From there the units were supplied weekly by unit-owned transport. The camp in Adrigat (Ethiopia), where sector HQ and B Company were located, was connected to the local power net. Bulk water for the laundry and toilets and shower facilities was daily transported from Adrigat. In most other camps similar arrangements were made with local suppliers. Logbase (because of its size) and the location of C Company at May Mine (because of its remoteness) had their own supply of energy with the help of generators. Logbase was the only location that was connected to the local telephone net of Dekemhare. Finally, all camps hired tens of local employees for cleaning work and the laundries.

## **8. Conclusion**

The experiences with CIMIC during UNMEE can be called very positive. By making use of Host Nation Support an important financial injection was given to the poor economies of both countries. Carrying out 'Hearts and Minds' projects not only proved to be a very effective way in maintaining a positive attitude of the population towards UNMEE, the projects also brought about a larger commitment and motivation of the personnel for the UNMEE mission. A good execution of CIMIC tasks and handling of CIMIC responsibilities by NECBAT, beside the carrying out of their primary tasks, added another success factor to the Netherlands/Canadian UNMEE contribution. CIMIC helps to influence the political, civilian and military situation in such a positive manner that optimal conditions and a maximum



support are created for the military-operational execution of the mission. In other words, *no peace keeping without peace building*.