



World Chronicle

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GUEST: Jan Egeland
UN Under-Secretary-General for
Humanitarian Affairs

JOURNALISTS: Colum Lynch, *The Washington Post*
Susannah Price, *BBC*

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

“Funding Humanitarian Emergencies”

There are currently 70 million victims of conflict and natural disaster who depend on the international community to survive – with food, shelter and medicine. The UN is asking for more than 7 billion dollars to do the job. But with the mounting costs of assistance in places like Iraq, can donor countries be motivated to fund the world’s “forgotten emergencies”? Is the global security climate affecting humanitarian aid operations? What is the scale of humanitarian assistance needed in Iraq compared to that in Zimbabwe, Burundi, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo? In this edition of World Chronicle, these questions are addressed with the help of Jan Egeland, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I am Michael Littlejohns and this is **World Chronicle**. This year there are 70 million victims of conflict and natural disaster who will depend on the international community to save their lives – with food, shelter and medicine. The UN is asking for more than 7 billion dollars to do the job but with the mounting costs of assistance -- in places like Iraq and Afghanistan – can donor countries be motivated to fund the world's “forgotten emergencies”? Our guest today is the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland. Joining in the studio are Colum Lynch of *The Washington Post* and Susannah Price of the *BBC*. Mr. Egeland, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

EGELAND: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: You are the former Secretary-General of the Norwegian Red Cross, I noticed, so you must have been more shocked, or as shocked as many people in the humanitarian aid community, by the attack on the Red Cross headquarters in Baghdad. And I believe you were in Baghdad only a short time before that happened. What effect do events of this sort have on the morale and the ability to operate of the various units of the international humanitarian aid community?

EGELAND: It has a terrible effect. We are supposed to be there to help. We are impartial humanitarian aid workers. When we are targeted in this way we see that our existing programmes are crippled and that we are not able to reach the most needy. However, in Iraq, we have, in spite of the two terrible bomb attacks against the UN in August and September, been able to carry out many programmes due to having very committed and very competent national staff, Iraqi staff. We are, however, reassessing it day by day at the moment. We're in close contact with colleagues in the Red Cross and we hope that we will be able to carry on the programmes because we have an obligation, not to any political actor in Iraq, but to the Iraqi people.

LITTLEJOHNS: We referred in the introduction to the demands on aid donors of Iraq and Afghanistan – these very large operations – and the so-called forgotten emergencies. Are the forgotten emergencies really forgotten now or are they still getting a reasonable share?

EGELAND: Well, Iraq and Afghanistan are not forgotten. Iraq is....

LITTLEJOHNS: I meant apart from them.

EGELAND: ...on the radar screen all the time but, of course, those who are forgotten are the many disasters and conflicts in Africa, as well as in parts of Asia and in

Colombia, Latin America, for example. What we see is that there is, unfortunately, little correlation between the actual needs and our collective international generosity where we issue appeals for the Democratic Republic of Congo, in Africa, year after year. A people have been suffering perhaps more than any and we've had one-third of what we asked for. And we asked for actually less there, in relative terms, than we do, for example, in the Balkans or in the Middle East.

LYNCH: I mean you notice in some of the figures that, particularly with the onslaught of the Iraq crisis, that a lot of the aid is dominated by money going to Iraq – a lot of that coming from the coalition powers primarily – and then you have other traditional donors that aren't providing that much money to the Iraq operation. But then you see many of your other crises in Africa, in Burundi, in Southern Africa where UN humanitarian sort of appeals are only being sort of complied with seven percent, fifteen percent, thirty percent. I mean are other governments starting to fill the gap in any way? It sounds like nobody is. And also just sort of curious; there a number of countries -- I was surprised to see France representing only say a third of the amount that is provided by countries like The Netherlands and Norway and Sweden. Is there a reason for that and a reason why countries like Saudi Arabia aren't on the top lists?

EGELAND: These statistics generally relate to our consolidated appeals that we are issuing at this time of year and where we ask the international community to help the international community, or the donor countries, public and private. We tell them that these are the 25 most needy places in the world. And we see big differences in the level of generosity and we saw also big differences in terms of being even-handed and giving where the needs are biggest. I think, yes, some of those you mentioned – the Nordics, The Netherlands, the UK –have been exceptionally good in focusing on forgotten places. There are other donors who go for the more politically focused areas. I think it was very good that the aid conference, donor conference in Madrid this autumn went very well, but I would have hoped for a more even-handedness also vis-à-vis other parts of the world. I'm now going to Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo and we probably have much greater humanitarian needs there than we have at the moment in Iraq.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you go to these places essentially as a fundraiser or in another capacity?

EGELAND: I go there with many hats. One is as a fundraiser and as one who tries to drum up interest for our work there but also try to solve questions of humanitarian access and of UN effectiveness and efficiency. Because we have a country team that we

would want to work very strongly to get the country team, meaning all the UN agencies as such.

PRICE: Are you aware though that this large amount coming to Iraq will really distort the whole way donors give money? If you're looking ahead towards, for example, having a similar conference for Liberia, will you just get to a point where donors say, "We've given so much to Iraq, we really can't bring out more"? Or do you think that they do have enough to continue funding?

EGELAND: Well, they should have because Iraq was supposed to be mainly, also for political reasons, a major international effort to get that country on the right road. The Secretary-General Kofi Annan appealed to donors to make additional funds available for Iraq and we hope that countries do that. It remains to be seen. We have seen one or two examples that have been very worrying of donors taking money from, in one case from Zimbabwe, where there is a great need, to give it to Iraq where we actually have a great deal of money now being channelled.

LYNCH: You talked earlier about the UN's obligation to the Iraqis in terms of continuing to deliver humanitarian aid. There's been a lot of discussion about the obligation of the UN leadership to staff particularly in light of the August 19th attack and the more recent attack against the ICRC. There was a report that suggested that – put out by Marti Ahtisaari, the former Finish leader, and he indicated that there were many prior reports, threats, warnings that the UN was a target of a potential attack and it seemed that very little was done to address those concerns. I mean, given these kinds of concerns and these kinds of risk, I mean is it – at what point do you say it's no longer responsible to keep staff in the country when they so clearly a target?

EGELAND: I think the difficulty now is for, and a tremendous responsibility for the Secretary-General is to weigh whether the work we can do by being there is commensurate with the risks we take by staying there. Certainly, when I was there now I saw that we are taking nearly extreme security measures compared to before. Were we imprudent before as the Ahtisaari report seemed to suggest? This is now the focus of a major internal review and we certainly have learned a lot from the terrible things that happened. But I think the Red Cross bomb attempt was one also example -- and so our colleague, Red Cross colleague outside was saying you know, "What do you do to prevent these kinds of things? How can you in any way envisage what it is? How do you avoid it?" It's a totally new security environment. Sergio Vieira de Mello, my friend and predecessor in my present post, was one of the most experienced people we have in the UN and in the

world humanitarian community. He's been to many wars but I don't think he even was dreaming of this kind of an attack happening against these headquarters.

LITTLEJOHNS: The head of the mission who was killed in Baghdad.

EGELAND: Indeed.

PRICE: Even before the August 19th bombing there were a lot of restrictions on UN international staff. Now, the situation must be much more extreme. It must be very difficult to get out and operate in the field. I mean how much of the actual work, how many of these projects can really realistically keep going on? What can the international staff contribute towards that?

EGELAND: Well, the international staff now plays a very minor role. This we have to admit. We have a small group in Baghdad and another small group in Erbil, in the north, in the Kurdish areas and that's it. We have 1/20th part of the staff we had in August. However, we have 4,000 national staff. That number will go down dramatically after we hand over the Oil- for-Food programme to the coalition and to the Iraqi authorities at the end of November. However, we will have between one and two thousand national staff and they are exceptionally good. We have more Ph.D's among our Iraqi staff than we have among our international staff. Over the last one month we have provided some – well, we have facilitated, organized, some one million vaccinations of children, distributed a couple of million school books. We truck out 14 million litres of drinking water to the slum areas of Baghdad and Basra, et cetera. We provide health care, medicine to hundreds of medical institutions every month, and I could go on. So I was really struck myself – I was surprised how much we still are doing under extreme threats in Iraq at the moment.

LYNCH: So in that case do you think that it would be useful to keep staff -- that you really need to keep staff in the country in order to continue those programs and, also, if you could perhaps characterize the state of security for the 4,000 national staff? Are they not such an easy target? Are they doing, taking steps to -- trying to blend in?

EGELAND: Well, we're having of course security measures for all our staff and our Iraqi colleagues are asked, press us for assessing the situation as international colleagues. In general, the internationals have been seemingly a bit more targeted than the nationals and especially our headquarters have been more targeted. What we now have as an impossible dilemma is the following: by withdrawing from Iraq further we would reduce our ability to create humanitarian services for a people who have suffered so much; by staying on we may take unreasonable risks on behalf of our colleagues there. It's a very, very difficult dilemma and, therefore, we are assessing the situation on a daily basis. We get reports from our colleagues there every day on the security situation and we try to step up

security all the time. Here is another dilemma of course: can we and should we be living in fortresses when we're there to help the average civilian population and be there for them?

LYNCH: Have you made up your mind?

EGELAND: I have made up my mind and I've given my recommendation to the Secretary-General but I am only part of a team of advisers. In the end, it is his difficult choice and he – not even the Security Council decides this. The Security Council have unanimously said that the UN has a big role to play in Iraq but it is the Secretary-General, as the chief executive, who is responsible for the safety and security of his staff.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

Mr. Egeland, let's move to Africa. Tell us a bit about your operations in Africa and how much support you're getting from the donor community for Africa? You mentioned earlier on Zimbabwe. I imagine that one of the problems with Zimbabwe is President Robert Mugabe. People perhaps are not happy about contributing funds to a country which is in such a state of instability.

EGELAND: Zimbabwe is, indeed, one of the many countries in Africa where we have major programmes and where we have under-funded appeals, where we see the great needs are not being met because we have too little money. And here we really go out to donors, to rich countries -- Europe, North America and Asia and elsewhere – and say come with more funds because we can save more lives in that way. There are a number of countries, including Zimbabwe, where there are big concerns related to good governance. Zimbabwe was the breadbasket of that region. At the moment it has an enormous deficit of food and millions are totally dependent on food aid. However, I think we have an obligation as human beings now to provide lifesaving assistance to the average citizen. I was in Zimbabwe myself some months back and it is a population so hard-hit by the AIDS pandemic you wouldn't believe it. The grandmothers now look after 15 grandchildren alone--

LITTLEJOHNS: Orphans you mean?

EGELAND: --which are orphans of course, and she is there to take care of them. Or the older sister of 13 looks after five young brothers and sisters and then...

LITTLEJOHNS: All victims of AIDS?

EGELAND: Of the AIDS pandemic. In other countries, like in Rwanda, they are orphaned because of AIDS and because of the massacres and past troubles. In all of these situations I think we should not condition humanitarian assistance due to the sins of the leaders but we have a big responsibility, as the UN, to be watchdogs for good governance

and to criticize where criticism is due and try to change the behaviour of leaders. And in this we also need partner governments to help us.

PRICE: How successful do you think the UN has been in moving from this kind of emergency crisis relief into more sustainable development which, of course, is important for stopping countries falling back into the conflict and emergency situations? And especially, again, when you have donors looking down the same list of countries in Africa and saying we're giving to these countries year after year and we're not seeing any progress.

EGELAND: I think we have never been better and I think we are far from getting where we should have been. This transition from emergency relief to reconstruction and development is so difficult and at times we have even bigger problems in funding important reconstruction and development than we have for emergency relief. I mean, my colleague, Mark Malloch Brown, the leader of UNDP, can often be with even scarcer funding to try to do the recovery in many of these places. Ethiopia is a country where we shouldn't be coming back every three or four years now for a generation with food relief. It's a country that should be able to feed itself. But then we need to do two things. We need to have donors to invest in these food security programmes and we need the UN, and other actors, to encourage in a muscular way the government to really go about better policies in this area.

LYNCH: There's a discrepancy even within Africa in terms of who gets the sort of lion's share of the financing. It's interesting that in a country like Burundi you only get less than 30% of what your needs are and in a country like Sierra Leone you're getting a much higher figure and closer to 80%. I mean what is it about the situation in Sierra Leone that enables you to attract funding in a way you can't in others? And also you had mentioned earlier about money flowing out of Africa into Iraq. I think you mentioned Zimbabwe. Who are the countries that are doing that and how much are they taking out?

EGELAND: Well, the one case, Zimbabwe/Iraq was actually European donors and it was not a large sum but we felt it was not a very good example really. The reason that some are more forgotten than other places, I think, is a combination of whether they have the intention of you gentlemen and ladies of the media, whether there is one government really playing a leadership role. Sierra Leone, the UK tried really to get a lot of attention for the needs there, as the US is now doing enormous efforts to raise funds, as you know, for Iraq. And then we have certain countries which are really forgotten by everybody. Nobody is really there to help. And some of the Central African region countries, also some of the Western African and East African countries, fall in that category. I would say actually, perhaps the Central African region, which is the world's worst conflict area, the world perhaps most disaster-prone area, has also been one of the most forgotten areas. And that's why I will go

there now and try to see what I can do to drum up some more support. There is a good donor's initiative now among donors -- Canada, Scandinavians, others -- who try to say that we should be able to be more even-handed and you, the UN, and actually me in my role as Emergency Relief Coordinator and head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, should guide them in where to channel their money. And Burundi is a case which they will actually treat as a pilot case for all good donorship.

PRICE: I wanted to move on. There was a poll carried earlier this year finding that UN credibility was down worldwide -- apparently in the States because the UN failed to support the war and in the rest of the world because it failed to stop the war. Your organization is involved in information, how do you think you increase global awareness and understanding of all the different roles that the UN is playing?

EGELAND: Well, we tried to play a very active and pro-active role in information. We have a special department, the Department of Public Information, having offices all over the world. I think, however, the dilemma that you cite that those against the war felt we failed and those pro the war also felt we failed because we had some sort of a middle road. It just shows how difficult it is to navigate in a world of different opinions. Where I see we have the biggest problems is not however in the West, it is in parts of the Arab world and in parts of the Muslim world. And we must be very honest in saying that we need to be able to better communicate why we undertake our international work. That we are unbiased, that we are not some Western invention or Western tool. But then we also have to recruit less people like me coming from the northwest and more local people, more Arabs, more Muslim, more Shias, more Sunnis. And I would also want to go...

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean as aid workers?

EGELAND: As aid workers and representatives of our organization.

LYNCH: Right. This goes back to my earlier question, which was that I noticed the sort of discrepancy between say the French and the other Europeans. Any explanation for France? You mentioned the Middle East, Saudi Arabia. I mean here is a government with great interest in the region; the UN had great difficulties in initially persuading Saudi Arabia to provide aid to the operation in Afghanistan where they had a long history of involvement. They have a history of giving to charities. And, you know, why governments are like this?

EGELAND: I think it's a combination of several things. I come from perhaps the country in the world with the highest per capita contribution, which is Norway. Norway is one of the seven biggest donors in absolute terms and the country is empty. Nobody lives there. It's four and a half million inhabitants. I don't know, it's like New Jersey.

LITTLEJOHNS: With fairly high taxes so that the government gets a lot of money.

EGELAND: High taxes and also some kind of a tradition in providing funding for international organizations. Norwegians generally in public opinion polls say that they don't find the international aid budget being too big. It's fair. Some of them find immigration being too big, which is very low. In America, where there is big immigration at times people say well, this is the way it should be but we pay too much to the UN, which is 1/20th of what each Norwegian does. Saudi Arabia is another good example. Very rich country. Some of the other Gulf States as well. We haven't been able to succeed in attracting them to spend the money through us as an investment in a better future for all, including for the Gulf countries. And we need to engage them. At times we have this circle. We consult with our old donor friends, they feel part of the whole thing, they support us more, we recruit the people. We need to break that and bring non-traditional donors on board. I see India as a big potential donor, I see China as a future donor. If they put people out in outer space they can also provide assistance for us.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Egeland, briefly; we have less than a minute left. What happens when you just don't get the funds that you need, do you have to close down operations? I noticed in the papers we received for this programme that there's a shortfall for practically everything.

EGELAND: There is a shortfall for practically everything and I've seen in many places – actually for example that in the African refugee crisis the High Commission for Refugees has had to scale down even when he was saving lives. But we tried to balance out. We have some core contributions so that we take from a core funding and give to the least funded and that is one of the ways where we try to balance this out. But we have also to be better and to cry out and say it's a moral outrage that the rich country doesn't give more to where the needs are the greatest.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Egeland that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland.

He was interviewed by, Colum Lynch of *The Washington Post*, and Susannah Price of the *BBC*.

I am Michael Littlejohns, thank you for joining with us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting World Chronicle at the address on this screen:

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