



World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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GUEST: Fred Eckhard
Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General
"The UN Year in Review 2003"

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

"UN Year in Review 2003"

2003 may well prove to have been a watershed year in the history of the United Nations. First, the notion of a 'pre-emptive war' sorely tested the organization, which was founded in 1945 to 'avert the scourge of war.' Then, on August 19th, the United Nations became a target of terrorism, suffering the worst-ever attack on its personnel.

Is the crisis over Iraq forging a different United Nations? Will the new security environment affect UN operations worldwide? And if the organization is really 'irrelevant' – as so many critics claim -- why is the UN's role in Africa on the rise?

In this edition of World Chronicle, these issues are addressed with the help of Fred Eckhard, the Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General.

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Executive Producer:	Michele Zaccheo
Director:	Livingston Hinckley
Production Assistant:	Lebe L. Besa

ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York an unedited interview programme on major global issues. This is **World Chronicle**.

And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

2003 may well prove to have been a watershed year in the history of the United Nations. The notion of "preventive war" sorely tested the organization – founded in 1945 to 'avert the scourge of war". And for the first time ever, the United Nations became a target of terrorism.

Is the crisis over Iraq forging a different United Nations? And – beyond Iraq – what are the UN's main challenges as we look to the future?

My guest today is Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the UN Secretary-General.

Fred, welcome to the programme.

ECKHARD: Thank you Michael.

LITTLEJOHNS: Fred after the attack on the UN offices in Baghdad on August 19, the Secretary-General, who was deeply moved, said that it left an ache in our souls that's almost too much to bear. Do you think that this bombing which left 22 people dead including Sergio de Mello, the chief of the mission, has forever changed the way in which the UN does business in the field? Can do business in the field?

ECKHARD: Well, this was a direct attack on us. Not the first but probably the worst. And I think it is also taking place at a time when we're all faced with the threat of terror and we've had to re-evaluate our security worldwide, not just in Baghdad. So I think, like probably all humanitarian organizations as well as governments, we are beefing up security, being more cautious about how we go about our work, and re-evaluating very carefully where we should be and not be in carrying out our humanitarian and peacekeeping mandates.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now, there's an initial report by a panel headed by Marti Ahtisaari, former president of Finland and a former high official of the UN, which spoke about mismanagement in the handling of security for the UN. There is also a question that was raised about whether the United Nations was wise to decline security services, which the United States had wanted to provide, because they didn't want to become too closely aligned with the United States. Now the Secretary-

General also said that he suspects some people may want heads to roll as a result of these lapses. Will heads roll?

ECKHARD: When Marti Ahtisaari finished that report, he raised such fundamental questions. I think you probably see the United Nations in Baghdad on the cusp of facing the new threats that terror poses to the UN, because the old attitude was, we are not targets, we are there to help people, and if there is danger, well, it won't be the result of direct targeting. Now, we have to say that we might be direct targets and we have to take a different approach. Ahtisaari's report as I said raised fundamental questions about how we assess security, who makes final decisions on whether to stay or whether to go, on whether to move an office from the periphery of the building, to the center of the building, which apparently according to the Ahtisaari report, Sergio Veira de Mello personally said, "I'll leave that decision to my successor."

So as a result the secretary-general said, "I want a fuller more careful and detailed analysis of accountability", and he named four people who should report by the middle of January. Whether heads will roll or not, I think, depends on what this accountability panel comes up with. But I'm sure the Secretary-General wouldn't hesitate to relieve people...

LITTLEJOHNS: to roll a few heads.

ECKHARD: To relieve people of their responsibilities if he felt it was warranted.

LITTLEJOHNS: What about the situation here at this headquarters in New York? Is this considered to be more or less vulnerable as a result of the events of 2003 particularly the UN's controversial role or lack of role, whatever, in the Iraq situation?

ECKHARD: Well, everywhere we work, we're in the hands of the host country in terms of our primary security, so here of course we have the United States with all its many resources protecting us. We worked very closely with the New York City Police and with Federal Security authorities. But still, we're taking extra measures. Just this week, we'll begin covering our windows with shatterproof film to reduce the risk should someone try to attack this building. No one is immune from attack even with the best security measures and I think probably we all feel just a little bit nervous about going to work in the morning, yet you try to put those things in

the back of your mind rather in the front as you go about your daily duties. We just hope that we can take whatever measures will give us maximum protection while never giving us the guarantee that we won't be targeted.

LITTLEJOHNS: There are thousands of brave, dedicated people in the UN Secretariat and they are prepared and have been prepared to put their lives on the line. And a good many of them have lost their lives. What has been the reaction of among the members of the Secretariat? Are they less willing to go to hot spots than they used to be?

ECKHARD: Probably that's true, although immediate reaction in Baghdad was, "let's soldier on", and I know from personal experience when you go to an overseas mission area, particularly one that's dangerous, you go with a sense of idealism and purpose, and you realize you're taking a risk. Now, if you have family you might think twice about volunteering for a dangerous mission. And I think it's probably true of people the secretary-general might want to name to be a special representative or special envoy to a dangerous place. I think the number of people signalling their availability might be somewhat less, I think that's natural.

LITTLEJOHNS: Does the idea of preventive war or pre-emptive war, pre-emptive action, that we referred to in the introduction, change anything for the United Nation's interpretation of the Charter, perhaps requiring reform of the Charter since this is uncharted territory?

ECKHARD: I think fundamentally the Charter defined a system of collective security that nations will work together to preserve international peace and security. Pre-emptive war suggests that one nation decides for itself when it is so threatened that it can take military action on its own and even without the concurrence of other nations, namely the members of the security council. So it's a fundamentally contrary view to accepted international security arrangements since 1945. The secretary-general has named this eminent high level panel to give thought to the new threats to peace and security that we all face, and that are driving some member states to consider pre-emptive action as a solution, to try to find a way to bring it back to a collective decision-making approach to maintaining security. That panel won't report until the end of 2004, and we don't know what recommendations they'll make. But it's a fundamental issue that really challenges all the assumptions that the UN Charter is based on.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle** 2003 Year in Review, with UN Spokesman, Fred Eckhard. Let's take a look at some of the year's major stories in this video:

VIDEO ROLL IN

NARRATION: 2003. A war in Iraq divided the membership of the United Nations and the world...

A deadly bomb in Baghdad showed that the Organization itself was a target...

And a year the UN around the globe fought for peace – and against disease, poverty and hardship.

Iraq dominated the news in 2003.

As the year began, UN inspectors in Iraq continued their search for weapons of mass destruction. Hans Blix, Chief of the UN's inspectors, argued for sufficient time...

BLIX: "It would take not years, nor weeks, but months. Neither governments nor inspectors would want disarmament inspection to go on forever."

NARRATION: The eyes of the world were on the UN Security Council as diplomats debated the case for war or peace, decision or delay. US Secretary of State, Colin Powell called for prompt action.

POWELL: "The gravity of this moment is matched by the gravity of the threat that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world."

NARRATION: Others counseled restraint... French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin...

VILLEPIN (VO): "To what extent do the nature and scope of the threat justify the recourse to force? How do we make sure that the tremendous risks of such intervention are actually kept under control?"

NARRATION: But efforts to reach a consensus were unavailing. Without the support of the Security Council, the American-led Coalition forces set a deadline for military action. UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan...

ANNAN: “This is a sad day for the United Nations and the international community. I know that millions of people around the world share this sense of disappointment and are deeply alarmed by the prospect of imminent war.”

NARRATION: The attack was launched. The result was the fall of the regime and the occupation of the country.

When major fighting ended, the UN and other agencies began to return to Iraq - to feed the hungry and prepare the way for the rebuilding of the nation.

And then, for the first time in its nearly 60-year history, the UN itself was the target. Hit by a suicide bomber in a truck. An unknown assailant left more than 200 injured, many seriously. And 22 UN staff and Iraqis were killed.

Among them, Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN's special representative who was internationally known for his humanitarian work around the world.

For the UN – and the world – it was a time for profound reflection, and a time for mourning. The UN Secretary-General spoke for all...

ANNAN: “The work of our United Nations colleagues in Baghdad was driven solely by a desire to help the Iraqi people build a better future. When we lost them, our Organization also suffered another loss: a loss of innocence for the United Nations.”

NARRATION: In the wake of the war, the Security Council recognized the new Iraqi Governing Council. Diplomatic efforts to return sovereignty to the Iraqi people were stepped up as the year drew to a close.

2003 was also the International Year of Fresh Water. It underlined the essential fact that even this most basic commodity is a luxury for all too many.

While the UN has led the worldwide effort that has brought water to some 1.3 billion in recent years, more than a billion people still have to contend with unsafe supplies. Six thousand children around the world die every day from water-borne diseases.

Efforts to close the gap continue. In Syria, for example, women and girls used to spend hours every day gathering untreated water from the River Euphrates. Now, with help from the UN Environment agency, water treatment plants have been built and pipelines laid, bringing clean water directly to nearby households.

And elsewhere in Syria, watercourses and tunnels built thousands of years ago are being repaired to bring water to arid lands.

Dramatically increasing the number of people who have access to safe water is one of the Millennium Development Goals. They're a set of targets and timeframes endorsed three years ago by world leaders in the General Assembly to address the most crucial issues facing humanity in the next few decades.

And no Millennium Development Goal is more important than the global effort to reverse the spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Forty-two million people carry the virus. Each day, 8,000 die from the disease. Dr. Sylla treats AIDS patients in Mali.

DR. SYLLA (VO): "As a doctor the problem I encounter is I have a lot of patients but I don't have the means to help them all. Ethically, that poses a problem for me."

NARRATION: The lack of HIV treatment is a global emergency. Pharmaceutical companies have started to lower prices for anti-retroviral drugs. Now, UN agencies have launched an initiative to train tens of thousands of community workers to dispense treatment to three million HIV-infected people. To reduce new infections, prevention programmes must be scaled up dramatically.

In African countries like Lesotho, where nearly 25 percent of the adult population is infected, the UN system is supporting youth volunteers who visit villages to raise awareness of how the disease is caught.

And it is not just an African problem. Incidence of the disease is rising in Asia and elsewhere. In Thailand, with UN help, Buddhist monks are playing their part in the educational effort to inform the population at large. It's a problem where not speaking out can be deadly...

ANNAN: "We need complete mobilization of society. Everyone has to get involved and join in the fight, but above all the leaders have to lead."

VIDEO OUT

LITTLEJOHNS: Fred, despite the Secretary-General's deep concern with the AIDS pandemic, the fund to combat AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis is independent of the UN. Why is that? And perhaps the UN is not taking a bigger role as it might?

ECKHARD: Well, the fund was never intended to supply the money needed to deal with AIDS worldwide. It was really intended to generate more governmental support and commitment to fighting AIDS. Governments of course spend whatever they are able. And the Secretary-General says that society at all levels has to be involved, not just the top. And he's focussed on the top because where the leaders don't face up to the disease, you really have a major problem. But also at the grass roots level you need full commitment. We've seen real progress most recently in China, where the new prime minister visited an AIDS clinic and went on national television expressing concern. China is very important because of its huge population and the fact that the AIDS pandemic has not taken over the country the way it has devastated Africa. If there hadn't been government action in China and it went the way of Africa, the global figures would be inflated enormously. So, don't just look at the global fund, it was an instrument to generate awareness, to generate funds. Look at what national governments are doing and look at involvement at the top as well as the bottom.

LITTLEJOHNS: Back to politics Fred, there was a lot of talk during 2003 about the relevance or lack thereof of the United Nations specifically if the United Nations Security Council did not play ball on Iraq then it would rue the day. What has been the outcome really in terms of the relevance of the UN? Has the relevance of the organization suffered as a result of the events of 2003? There is some relevance? Or would you say that it has recovered and is getting back in public esteem?

ECKHARD: I prefer to step back a bit and look at it from the deeper historical perspective. The UN's work in the humanitarian and development areas has always been successful and the US played an influential role. During the Cold War, remember, the Security Council wasn't permitted to address many of the major threats to international peace and security of the day. The Americans didn't want Vietnam discussed; the Russian didn't want Afghanistan discussed. So it was only with the end of the Cold War that you've seen the blossoming of the UN's role in the peace and security area. And the '90's were a learning exercise for all of us. It was a period of chaotic growth in the area of peacekeeping, and increased activity on peace building. And we didn't really hit a philosophical crisis, if you will, until Iraq, where this issue of who defines the approach to national security – is it going to be the Charter and the ground rules since 1945? Or are we dealing with a new world,

where one nation can decide for the rest? That debate is still taking place. Governments are still quietly, more quietly than earlier in 2003 when the decision was – should we go to war against Iraq or not, with Security Council blessing? Until that's decided we won't know what the shape of the new international regime for peace and security will be, and whether the United Nations will be at the center of it, or the periphery of it.

LITTLEJOHNS: We haven't spoken about peacekeeping Fred. The peacekeeping operations plainly, most recently had been mainly in Africa, and not much anywhere else. Is the UN going to be concentrating more and more on peacekeeping in Africa where it seems to be a bit more easy to get involved than in some other places?

ECKHARD: I think we are so heavily in Africa today only because that's where the major threats have been concentrated in the last few years. And after the pull out of the UN from Somalia in the early '90's, we didn't think we would see UN Peacekeepers going back to Africa for a long time. So, in a sense the return to Africa starting with Sierra Leone followed quickly by the Congo and then, now Liberia and so on -- very big, substantial peacekeeping missions -- we've seen a return to growth in peacekeeping numbers, in the cost of peacekeeping activities as well, and I think it's an accident of history that we're concentrated in Africa, not that it's somehow easier to put peacekeeping missions in Africa.

LITTLEJOHNS: But there seems to be a trend now more toward multi-national peacekeeping operations than precisely UN operations. Is that trend likely to continue?

ECKHARD: Well, I think the Charter always said that: deal with the issue regionally before you bring it to the UN. And what we've seen in recent years is the growth in capacity of regional organizations. The Economic Community of West African states has played a very important role in West African conflicts; they are then backed up by UN peacekeeping, sometimes replaced by UN peacekeeping troops. So, I think this is just a natural evolution and one that was anticipated by the Charter.

LITTLEJOHNS: There's another African problem, namely Sudan. Do you foresee a UN peacekeeping operation in Sudan in 2004?

ECKHARD: I think we're bracing for possibly a very large peacekeeping operation in the Sudan national...

LITTLEJOHNS: Very large country.

ECKHARD: It's a huge country and the political process there has been very promising. Recently the anticipation is, there'll be an agreement by the end of this year and then it'll be in the hands of the Security Council, whether or not to create a peacekeeping mission. If they say yes, and they're serious about it, it'll have to be a huge one.

LITTLEJOHNS: The so-called Millennium Goals that everybody agreed at the Millennium Summit attended by scores of heads of state seemed to be far from being fulfilled. Is there anything the Secretary-General can do to push that effort along and perhaps satisfy the aspirations particularly of the developing countries, who feel short changed.

ECKHARD: I think the fact that you have Millennium Development Goals are a signature of Kofi Annan, the Manager. It has provided context and goals for the United Nations long-term work. We know where we would like to be in 5 years, 10 years, and 15 years, and that was signed off by a record number of heads of states, who came here to New York to agree on the plan. So, if there's rational to our work, are we falling short of the goals? Yes, but the goals give us something to measure progress or failure by. And I think we can always try to rally them when we say, "Oh look we're falling behind, we're not going to make the five year goal or the ten year goal". If we get to ten years from now and we're we should have been at 8 years or so, we fall short by a bit that may not be bad, it may not be best case, but at least we've focussed our energy towards specific objectives and moved towards the subjectives single-mindedly.

LITTLEJOHNS: Fred, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining 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 your

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