

11 December 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Summit on Staff Security**

United Nations staff members, Ladies and Gentlemen:

What happened in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 was a shocking, and some would say a defining moment for the United Nations system. Yet, it is important for us to bear in mind that Baghdad was not the first instance in which UN staff lost their lives while carrying out the responsibilities of the organisation.

Dag Hammarskjold, our second Secretary-General, died in an aircraft accident while on a peace mission in the Congo.

Alec Collett was abducted 18 years ago, while on assignment for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. His fate has never been determined. Only three months after Baghdad, Bettina Goislard, while working with the UN High Commissioner of Refugees, was killed by a gunman in Ghazni, Afghanistan.

The terrorist attack in Baghdad that claimed the lives of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his United Nations colleagues puts them among the more than two thousand persons who have died serving the United Nations as civilian staff or peacekeepers since the organisation was founded in 1945. In 2003 alone, 241 civilian staff lost their lives in Kosovo, Somalia, Afghanistan, Baghdad and elsewhere. We have all been deeply affected by these tragic events. These dedicated and selfless United Nations staff were family, friends, colleagues, countrymen and fellow world citizens.

The Baghdad terrorist attack has, I believe, signalled a profound change in how the UN is perceived by militant groups and in how the UN is to operate in the future. The targeting of the United Nations makes the safety of our personnel one of the most critical issues facing this organisation. Importantly, it has underscored the need for new security measures to be put in place for all United Nations and associated personnel, but in particular, for those working in high risk areas. We must ask ourselves, "What can we do to improve the security of our staff?"

The primary responsibility for the protection of international humanitarian workers falls on the host government whose people they are there to serve. Humanitarian workers, in particular, can only help people in need in difficult areas if they are alive and safe. Once protected by their status, they are increasingly seen as parties to conflicts, making them targets. Host governments must ensure that Humanitarian and other United Nations workers are granted safe and unfettered access to those they are seeking to help.

Those who target United Nations or associated personnel must be brought to justice. I deeply regret to say that this occurs all too rarely. Let us not forget that Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines as a war crime intentional attacks against humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel.

It is also necessary for all Member States to make a greater commitment to the security of UN staff. Member States must ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. This convention, which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1994 and which entered into force on 15 January 1999, makes it an international crime to abduct or kill a United Nations staff member. Only one-third of Member States have ratified this convention.

We must also address what happens when there is no "host government" -- or when in an internal conflict the authorities face so great a breakdown of civic and legal structures that protecting anyone is illusory. At a time when internal conflicts have eclipsed conflicts between states in both frequency and ferocity, this is a pressing question we must address.

The Secretariat also has a crucial role to play in protecting UN staff and associated personnel. We must all congratulate the Secretary-General on the speed with which he acted, following the Baghdad attack. The report presented by His Excellency, Matti Ahtissari, was an honest and thorough response, but just a beginning. The team subsequently appointed by the Secretary-General is working to take it a step further, and we can only give them our full support in reaching their conclusions and recommendations.

Without pre-judging the results of their work, I believe there are certain conclusions that we can already draw. If we are to improve the security of our staff, better use of information on threats must be made, security regulations must be observed and implemented, adequate financial resources must be available and there must be accountability for security decisions.

We must also be mindful of the need to treat each dangerous situation in which our people must operate as singular and unique: one model, no matter how carefully developed, will not serve for all situations. I believe we have also learned the hard way that when we send our people into situations of crisis and danger, no effort must be spared to ensure that the host population understands exactly why we are there, and what our mission is.

I also want to highlight the place of civil society in our security discussions. Organizations of the United Nations have increasingly worked closely with Inter- and Non-Governmental Organization in hostile environments. A need to provide a framework for security collaboration between the UN and civil society was recognized last year and embodied in the guidelines published for UN/NGO/IGO security collaboration. Implementing and fleshing out these guidelines, where needed, is a potentially positive move.

As President of the General Assembly, I am deeply committed to improving the security of UN staff. I personally met with the UN Staff Council's Standing Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service to discuss staff security concerns. I also recently

organized a very informative briefing for the General Committee by Deputy-Secretary General Louise Fréchette on this topic. I pledge to continue to address this issue throughout my Presidency.

I welcome this opportunity to commend the dedicated staff of the United Nations system, who continue, in adverse and dangerous situations, to play their essential role in upholding the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

I want to conclude by congratulating the Standing Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service and the U.N. Staff Council for your dedication and hard work in making today's Security Summit a substantive and significant dialogue on this sadly urgent topic and for your continuing efforts to highlight staff security concerns, to advocate on behalf of your colleagues, to commemorate the lives of our staff who gave their lives for peace and to continue their work in trying to secure and better the lives of others.

I am honoured to have been invited to address you today for this event and I wish your meeting every success.

I thank you.