

25 March 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,  
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,  
on the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing United Nations  
Staff Members**

Soldiers pounding on the door at midnight. A roadblock on an empty road. A threatening anonymous phone call. A kidnapping outside a UN office in broad daylight. It is difficult to imagine the terror that our colleagues feel when they fall victim to violence, especially when they are targeted because they are United Nations staff members.

As the report of the Secretary-General points out, attacks on UN staff, particularly locally recruited staff in the field, continue to escalate year after year. We must denounce these attacks and respond quickly when our colleagues are subject to kidnapping, arrest and arbitrary detention.

We can and must do more to protect and assist them in their assignments. We must be relentless in our efforts to secure their release in the case of detention. And we must think as well of their colleagues and friends and loved ones. They too suffer from the traumatic experience of living with the unknown, even if the detention lasts for a matter of hours. Or decades, as in the infamous case of Alec Collet, who was kidnapped in Beirut in 1985 and never heard from again.

As an Organization, we have stepped up our security measures and trained our staff in mission preparedness to reduce the opportunities for attack and enhance their capacity to survive in the worst of circumstances. After much delay, we now have programmes and staff to provide psychological counseling for victims. We need to be more proactive in reaching out to staff who suffer from post-traumatic stress and other symptoms of trauma. We must do more to enhance our capacity to meet their psychological needs when they return from service in the field.

In the new environment where UN personnel and their offices, convoys, schools and camps are targets of aggression, the onus of responsibility is on our Member States. They must respect and defend the security and safety of UN staff that they are committed to through international law. They must put an end to the impunity of these attacks and bring criminals to justice.

It is a bitter irony that UN staff members, humanitarian aid workers from non-governmental organizations and members of the media are increasingly the preferred targets of abuse and intimidation. This is a community of people who are risking their lives to try to help vulnerable populations and bear witness to the moments and places of awful darkness. It is a community of sisters and brothers who deserve our fullest support. We thank them today and every day for their dedication and sacrifice.

As President of the General Assembly, I am deeply committed to improving the security of UN staff and associated personnel. I take this opportunity to call on the 192 Member States of the General Assembly to ensure the implementation of international law related to the safety and security of United Nations personnel. I appeal specifically to those Member States that have not ratified the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel to do so without delay.

I also want to recognize the Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service and the United Nations Staff Union for their continuing efforts to highlight the importance of the safety of United Nations staff members and humanitarian workers. I hope that more staff will join them to help to raise awareness of conditions of safety and security so that we are prepared to act quickly in solidarity with our brothers and sisters under attack anywhere in the world.