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SECRETARY-GENERAL ON ANNIVERSARY OF BAGHDAD BOMBING: IT WAS A PERSONAL TRAGEDY FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US

Following are the comments delivered on 19 August by the Secretary-General Kofi Annan at a ceremony at the Palais des Nations commemorating the first anniversary of the attack on UN Headquarters in Baghdad.



account, and do not get away with this cold-blooded murder.

To the families and loved ones of those who died; to the survivors; and to those injured on that awful day, let me say this:

I would like to thank you for joining us today, especially those who have travelled long distances to be with us here. I am deeply moved by your presence. Our hearts and prayers go out to all of you. I can only imagine the strength and courage you have had to muster to survive the past year. Yet I know that your ordeal continues, and that some of you may not recover fully. I and the United Nations family will stand by you, in your grief and in your suffering.

“What happened in Baghdad a year ago today was a personal tragedy – above all for the families and loved ones of the 22 people who died and those who suffered injuries, be they physical, psychological or emotional.

It was a personal tragedy for each and every one of us, because of the dear friends and close colleagues we lost, and because of the direct attack against the blue flag and we who have devoted our lives to the United Nations.

All of us have struggled, and are still struggling, to absorb that shock.

I know that the past year has done little to relieve your heartbreak. Despite active efforts on our part, and despite the ongoing investigation by the United States, we are still waiting for answers. However long it takes, I pray that the perpetrators are held to



The Secretary-General unveiled a plaque in memory of those killed in the bombing of United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August 2003

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Let me now speak to the larger United Nations family.

We are no strangers to violence and intimidation. Over the years, we have mourned the loss of hundreds of colleagues and friends. Indeed, since the Baghdad attack, another 17 UN peacekeepers and civilian staff have lost their lives to hostile acts in the line of duty and in the service of peace. Their sacrifice, too, should be recognised today.

But the attack on the Canal Hotel was a really unique blow for us as an organization. It brought us face to face with danger in a new and more intimidating form – the danger that we, servants of the United Nations, will no longer be victims simply by virtue of the times and places in which we are called upon to serve, but may have become in ourselves one of the main targets of political violence.

We are now wrestling with wrenching, fundamental questions:

How do we improve security without unduly impeding our work and effectiveness?

Our work is with people. We must be able to get to them, and they must be able to get to us.

How do we balance this need for openness with security in today's world?

How do we operate in places like Iraq and some parts of Afghanistan, where many people want and expect us to help – and this includes the Security Council – but some are determined to block our work at any price?

Are we witnessing a paradigm shift, or a tragic phase that will pass?

We have been working hard to find answers, and to correct our own systemic weaknesses. Much has been done, but much more is still to be done. I assure you that I will always insist on the most stringent precautions for our staff, and do my utmost to keep any such tragedy from again befalling our precious family.

I know that the past year has been difficult for each and every one of us. For me, the past year has been not only difficult, but has also been deeply introspective. Earlier, we had lived through a war that I genuinely thought could have been avoided. Then I lost 22 wonderful, talented and generous friends and colleagues whom I had sent to Iraq to help deal with the aftermath of that war, to help bring stability and peace – the greatest yearning of the average Iraqi. Their mission was cut short when they were brutally and viciously taken away from us.

Their faces are constantly in my mind's eye. Precious memories mix with painful ones – none more painful than those of conversations we had just before they left for Baghdad and during their stay there. You can imagine my agony, discouragement and deep sense of loss – not only as a friend, but also as the individual who is ultimately responsible for the welfare and security of United Nations staff. I don't think anyone could ever fully know the impact these tragic events had on me – except perhaps my wife, Nane. They touched me to the core.

Let me conclude by sharing with you something from my culture. We, the Akans, believe that death does not separate us from good family members. Rather, their spirit is not only with us constantly, but so alive that we feel their presence and can even talk to them from time to time. That is why we seek their help and guidance on important occasions -- in victory and in defeat, in happiness and in sorrow.

We will long feel the pain of the trauma we have all been through. But our belief in the cause of peace is undiminished, our sense of mission is intact, and our work goes on. And every day we work to further the cause of peace, we feel beside us those we have loved and lost, and we pay tribute to the cherished memory of those who perished a year ago.

May I ask you now to stand and join me in a minute of silence, in honour of all the victims, and in sympathy with all the bereaved”.



The Memorial which stands in the grounds of the Palais des Nations in honour of United Nations staff who have lost their lives in the service of peace. The Memorial was unveiled on 24 October 2003 by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

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