

United Nations



Nations Unies

19 August 2013

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

Today marks the tenth anniversary of the tragic bombing of the United Nations building in Baghdad and the risks faced by us, the staff are now greater than ever before.

In the ten years since Baghdad, our premises in Abuja, Algiers, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul and Mogadishu, among others, have come under fire. In total 555 UN colleagues have been victims of attacks in the line of duty, of which more than 200 lost their lives. Another 102 colleagues lost their lives in the earthquake in Haiti. Taken together, this is an astounding number of deaths in the line of duty for a civil service.

In our mission to increase peace and security around the world, we have become a target. As our role has changed and we have stepped up our operations in conflict zones and areas where we are not always welcome, the dangers posed to us, as well as to the peacekeeping personnel of troop contributing countries, have increased.

The structures we have in place to support us need to reflect this increased danger. As it stands, we are left vulnerable in too many ways. But, Mr Secretary General, by refusing to meet with union leaders to discuss how to improve matters you are denying us a voice with which to speak and ultimately failing to assure our safety and protect us in the locations to which we are assigned.

We ask you to restore the UN's staff union negotiating arrangements, which you unilaterally withdrew from in July, so that we can work with you to protect staff and address the following issues together in a constructive framework:

- It is essential that safety and security services should not be motivated by profit; security chiefs in the field deserve to be supported by professional UN security officers, not unscreened private security companies.

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Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General

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- Families of our deceased colleagues should not be left behind. Surviving family members need a better defined package of care. Children should receive medical and educational support as an official entitlement, not as an act of charity.
- The UN needs an independent judicial coroner to get a fair and honest answer for bereaved relatives about why a spouse, parent, son or daughter dies in the field.
- More must be done to protect colleagues whose mental health has suffered as a result of witnessing or being the victim of malicious attacks. Sick leave, disability and selection policies need to be reviewed so that we aren't unfairly terminated or find that our contracts aren't renewed on health grounds. Training is also required to ensure we can understand these challenges and do our best to reintegrate affected colleagues.
- There should be an annual, internationally-recognized memorial day for fallen staff. A permanent memorial should be established and a list kept of all colleagues who have died or been affected by malicious acts against them whilst working for the United Nations.
- Strict criteria must be developed for situations where we may be deployed to the 103 member states that have not ratified the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel or the 165 countries that have not signed the 2005 Optional Protocol to the Convention.

There are still many ways we are vulnerable and face ongoing risks in our working lives a decade on from the Baghdad bombing. In 2012 alone, for instance, 200 United Nations colleagues were detained and arrested by national authorities and some 30 were abducted, in many cases leading to hostage situations.

We believe that union rights save UN lives. In order to help ensure the safety of colleagues who serve in the field, a credible negotiating framework between representatives of staff and management is essential. Without the ability to challenge decisions that may prove to be harmful to them or even to speak up for themselves, our colleagues are helpless. Far-reaching institutional change has become a necessity.

We call on you to reopen the channels of communications with your staff unions which you closed down in June, so that we might work together to ensure a safer future for UN staff. Whilst it is commendable that you will honour the lives of our fallen colleagues today, by refusing to meet with your staff to negotiate their rights and working conditions, the lives of those who work selflessly on the front line every day are needlessly jeopardized further.

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Mr. Secretary-General, a large number of colleagues have been killed in the line of duty in order to carry out the noble goals of our organization. As mentioned above, reducing the death toll and better reintegrating affected colleagues requires us to work together for the good of all UN staff.

Yours sincerely,



Ian Richards

Vice-President of the Staff-Management Committee

cc:

Mr. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly

Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General

Ms. Veronica Luard, President of the Staff-Management Committee

This letter is also signed by the following colleagues working every day in hardship locations:

Dorani Salah Omar, Chairperson of the Staff Council, UNHCR Djibouti

Ahmed Abdullahi Farah, UNHCR staff representative in Somalia

Assadullah Amin, SC-Field Office in Gardez, Afghanistan

Abdul Basir Sediqyar, SC-Filed Unit Maimana, Afghanistan

Hamed Mardan, Protection Associate and staff representative, Sub Office
Herat, Afghanistan

Mohammad Azim Naqibullah, SC-UNHCR FO Bamyan, Afghanistan

All staff representatives of the Staff Council of UNHCR Malaysia

Ahmad Suhail Akbari, UNHCR SO, Mazar-i-Sharif

Jackline Lollis, Staff Association Chairperson, UNHCR South Sudan

Samuel Francis Paul, former field staff member, UNHCR South Sudan

Abid Wadid Mufti, staff representative at UNHCR Peshawar

Tanveer ul Haq, staff representative at UNHCR Peshawar

Wajiha Afzal, staff representative at UNHCR Peshawar

This letter is sent on behalf of the staff unions and associations listed below:

Field Staff Union
ESCAP Staff Association
Staff Council of ESCWA
Staff Council of ECA
Staff Council of ECLAC
Staff Union of the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia
Staff Union of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
Staff Council of UNHCR
UNDP/UNOPS/UNFPA/UNWOMEN Staff Council
UNICEF Global Staff Association
UNOG Staff Coordinating Council
UN Staff Union (New York)
UN Staff Union Nairobi
UN Staff Union Vienna
UN University Staff Council