

Speech at Staff Memorial Service

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Secretary-General, Presidents of the General Assembly and Security Council, Dear Colleagues,

Firstly thank you to those who organized this ceremony. A deep and moving occasion to mark the lives of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for this organization.

In doing so, let me recognize, on behalf of all the staff and unions, for whom I speak today, the courage and resilience of the families: parents, siblings, spouses and children of those who perished in the line of duty. Also the current and former colleagues who survived horrifying attacks to be here with us. Let me tell you that for the staff here and around the world, you will always be part of our family, which is the UN family.

Let me also congratulate Jason Pronyk and Laura Dolci-Kannan who spoke just now. I think that their testimonies were brave, clear and show

the impact of violence against our colleagues and what they face every day.

The attack that took place in Baghdad ten years ago was tragic. We lost 15 colleagues there. Sadly, it was the start of more to come.

Seventeen killed in Algiers, 11 in Abuja, 5 in Kabul, 3 in Mazar-i-Sharif. The list goes on.

You know, it's hard after a ceremony like this to go back to the office and pretend we can just continue like before.

Let me share a statistic. Over the last ten years the Aid Worker Security Database tracked 555 UN related staff and contractors who were attacked and over 200 who were killed. Added to this were 102 colleagues we lost in Haiti. And together that's a huge number for a civil service. Does any other civil service lose so many? 300 over ten years.

The latest attack was two months ago in Mogadishu. So picture the scene. Terrorists are roaming around the compound over several hours. Terrified colleagues are hiding behind their desks. Many can't get to the safe room because they don't know where the terrorists are and they don't know

what's going on. Some call their families back home, tell them they love them and say goodbye. They thought they were living their last moments. And for eight UN staff and contractors, that was indeed the case.

You know, after every attack or disaster we say that the terrorists won't deter us and we'll continue our mission.

Maybe. But we're no longer the same UN. We're more and more in conflict zones. And we've taken certain decisions that mean we're no longer seen as neutral. The UN flag is now a target instead of a shield. That means we have to change how we go about things, because right now our colleagues and their families are paying too high a price.

For example, colleagues who survive an attack. It's normal that they want to move to a safer duty station. But there's no policy to help them do that.

Some resign, as they have done in Mogadishu. Others stay on. They have to live with their mental scars knowing that their attackers may come for them again. This is on top of the everyday stress of living in containers, with substandard facilities.

You don't need me to tell you how hard this can be on colleagues.

We've got the families left behind as well. They are here today. The organization needs to keep looking after them long after the body has been laid to rest. Because their loved-one did pay the ultimate price. And the families have to live with that every day.

Firstly families deserve a fair and honest answer on why a spouse or a parent, a son or a daughter died in the field and who killed them. So the UN must set up an independent judicial coroner. They also need a fair package of medical and educational support. And the same families need a permanent memorial where they know that their loved one's name will remain forever, and an internationally-recognized UN day to remember them.

But we also have the staff today, in this room and around the world, who the organization wants to be able to assign to hostile locations. Much more must be done now for their health and safety, so they can focus on their work and not always be looking over their shoulder.

We need to mobilize proper funds and ask ourselves and member states some difficult questions:

- Should we open a field mission and send staff there, if we cannot provide the resources to protect them, and to ensure that health, counseling and basic needs are met?
- Why have only 90 of 193 countries ratified the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel?
- And why aren't security chiefs in the field, who work so hard in trying circumstances, not always backed up by professional UN security staff, and instead have to rely on unscreened private security companies out to make a profit?

In short, what can we do to reduce staff deaths to zero?

Colleagues and families, this organization has moved increasingly and boldly into the field, but the way it functions has not kept up. It isn't working well enough for colleagues, it isn't working well enough for survivors and it isn't working well enough for their families.

In this letter, signed by the staff unions and by staff serving in some of

our most dangerous duty stations, we explain what policies staff and management need to renegotiate together, back at the table. We are talking policies on medical issues, safety and security, reassignment. It's addressed to the Secretary-General and we're sending it today.

Colleagues, families - and as I said, you are all members of the UN family. Our organization is asked to work in tough places. But if it wants to succeed, it must take care of its staff, keep them safe, look after survivors and never forget the families who will forever carry the memories of colleagues who paid the ultimate price.

Never again should we have what we had in Baghdad. And never again should colleagues have to hide in their offices, in fear of their lives, as terrorists roam the grounds.

So I ask you all, staff and management, to focus on that. Not just today, once a year at this ceremony, but every day that we serve together, under the UN flag.

For all those who have died or suffered, and their families, let's do all we can to bring staff deaths to zero and ensure that everyone who is in this room today and watching around the world is here with us next year and the year after that, and the year after that.

Because even one staff death is one death too many.

Thank you