

New York

09 September 2008

Secretary-General's statement at the Symposium on Supporting Victims of Terrorism

Mr. President [of the General Assembly], Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Cherished guests,

Today is a historic day for the United Nations. We come together with a common and unwavering purpose: the support of victims of terrorism.

We are honored and humbled to have as our guests individuals who bear directly the scars, physically and mentally, from unspeakable acts of terrorism and experts who have attempted to understand and help victims.

Some of you have been injured or disabled in terror attacks, your wounds a daily reminder of the viciousness of terrorism.

Some of you have been kidnapped and held captive, deprived of a most fundamental human right: your freedom.

Some of you have lost loved ones -- sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, daughters and sons, whose lives have been ended by senseless and indiscriminate murder.

Most of you have been haunted by images and memories too horrific to live with and struggled with ears deaf and indifferent to your plight.

All of you have dedicated your lives to denouncing the evil of terrorism, to making the voice of the victims heard, and to supporting others who have suffered.

You have come all the way to New York to bear witness to one of the great scourges of our time. From many different countries, religions, and ethnicities, you demonstrate that terrorism does not discriminate among victims. In your diversity, you stand for hundreds of thousands around the world who have suffered loss and injury from terrorism.

Together, we remember and pay tribute to all those who have been victims of terrorism in far too many places.

Let us remember Bali, Beslan, and Bombay.

Let us remember Algiers, Baghdad, and Casablanca.

Let us remember Kabul, Riyadh and Nairobi.

Let us remember London, New York, San Vicente, and Madrid.

Let us remember Istanbul, Islamabad, Jerusalem, and Dar-es-Salaam.

The list keeps growing longer, bringing with it greater pain and grief that cascades mercilessly through families, communities and nations.

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2008-09-09/secretary-generals-statement-symposium-supporting-victims-terrorism>

Each act reminds us that terrorism is global. It can affect anyone, anywhere. It targets all ethnic groups, religions, nationalities, and civilizations. It attacks humanity itself.

And it is for the sake of humanity that we must create a global forum for your voice and listen to you, the victims. Your stories of how terrorism has affected your lives are our strongest argument why it can never be justified. By giving a human face to the painful consequences of terrorism, you help build a global culture against it. You are the real heroes in the global struggle against terrorism. You humble the world by your strength and courage.

You deserve support and solidarity. You deserve social recognition, respect and dignity. You deserve to have your needs addressed. You deserve to have your human rights defended. And you deserve justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like many of you, I have witnessed the aftermath of terror. I was serving at the United Nations in New York at the time of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. My heart went out to the victims of that grim day who, like me, were New Yorkers going about their lives.

Six years later, in December last year, I was profoundly shocked when I visited the grounds of the UN compound in Algiers, which had been ripped apart by a terrorist bomb blast. I met with survivors and with the families of the victims, encounters that left me deeply moved.

I had seen the devastation from a distance in New York but in Algiers, I walked through the rubble of tragedy. I looked into the faces of the children whose parents had lost their lives while serving the United Nations. And I caught a glimpse, for the first time, of the reality that many of you here live with every day -- of what it means to be a victim of terrorism. I lost members of my UN family that day.

Since that time, I feel each loss more deeply. And the United Nations family has lost too many of our staff to terrorist attacks not only in Algiers but elsewhere. Just last week, I attended a ceremony in Geneva commemorating the heinous attack 5 years ago at the UN Headquarters in Baghdad, in which we lost some of our best and bravest staff. Twenty-two people were killed and over 150 wounded. I met with some 300 survivors, victims, and their families. And I was overwhelmed with grief at how fresh the wounds still are five years after the attack.

So today, it fills me with pride that we are convening at the United Nations to show solidarity with victims of terrorism, and to find better ways to support them. I am heartened by the overwhelming interest. It is a testament to the great importance we are attaching to supporting victims of terrorism.

I am equally encouraged by the high level of expertise here today. We are joined by a number of eminent terrorism experts. But we are also joined by experts whose focus of work is on violence and conflict situations. It is time to expand the small community that works on terrorism and see whether new insights can be brought to bear by those with experience in studying conflict and violence. And we will hear from Member States who have responded to terrorist attacks by developing assistance programmes.

I look forward to an open dialogue, in which we all share our experiences and practices. We have so much to learn from each other. In this way, we can strengthen the international community's solidarity with victims, and improve our understanding of their needs and how Governments, the UN and civil society can better support them.

That is the fundamental purpose of this meeting.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, unanimously adopted by all UN Member States in 2006, called on us to stop the dehumanization of victims of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

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In the Strategy, Member States committed themselves to consolidating national systems of assistance that would promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalization of their lives; they pledged to promote international solidarity in support of victims of terrorism; and they promised to promote and protect the rights of victims of terrorism.

Today, we must strive to give practical meaning to these commitments. Let us embark then on this journey together, in mutual respect and determination.

Thank you very much.