



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

21 December 1998

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The year just past has been one of achievement and setback, of joy as well as grief, of challenges both ancient and new. Through it all, no matter what the task, you, the staff, have continued to meet the high expectations held by Member States and people around the world for our United Nations. I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your outstanding work.

The holiday season is a time for retrospection and introspection. Looking back at 1998, we can see important anniversaries relating to human rights and United Nations peacekeeping; new milestones such as the agreement on the Statute of the International Criminal Court; and an organization beginning to hit its stride through the process of reform. And yet, we have made insufficient progress in the age-old fight against poverty. The threats of globalization have overshadowed, at least for the moment, its many opportunities. And as the year ends, we remain humbled by the persistence of hatred, violence and conflict in many parts of the world, and saddened by the death and destruction that ensue. Our agenda brims with unmet needs and unresolved questions.

Tragedy visited the United Nations family repeatedly in 1998. The crash of Swissair flight 111 in September took from us nine exceptional colleagues. Other crashes and assaults brought further losses. Our colleague Vincent Cochetel of UNHCR has arrived home, after 10 months in captivity, in time to spend the holidays with his family. His safety is a gift to us all, but his ordeal reminds us of the dramatic escalation of attacks on personnel, both civilian and military, who dare to wear UN blue in serving the cause of peace. And let us not forget that many staff members are still missing or in captivity. Staff security remains a cardinal concern and I will be looking for decisive action in this area in 1999 so that staff have the protection to which they are entitled.

The United Nations operates year-round on the basis of resolutions, so I hesitate to suggest adding a New Year's resolution to an already long list of mandates. But let us pledge at least this: to continue pulling together as a team, for that is the path to success. In that spirit, I would like to express my hope that you and your loved ones have a very happy New Year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan', written over a horizontal line.

Kofi A. Annan