

**5 March 2003**

Conducted by Raghida Dergham, Al-Hayat

Dergham: Mr. Secretary-General, thank you very much. Dr. Hans Blix said that there were already emergency plans for evacuating the inspectors if war becomes a reality. Do you have such plans for 48 hours, as he said, for the rest of the United Nations?

Annan: We always do contingency planning, and we are doing contingency planning for our staff if war should come. We all hope it wouldn't, but if it must come, we should be prepared and not caught unprepared.

Dergham: 48 hours. Is this a time-frame that you will have to get your people out safely?

Annan: Well, we haven't, I haven't gotten to the time-frame of 48 or 72 hours or that. But, we are prepared and we'll be ready to move if we have to.

Dergham: What is the procedure? What would happen? For example, would the United States tell you in advance, and then you'd tell the Security Council, or how does it go?

Annan: I think basically, I mean, we had pulled out our people from situations before. Obviously, in this situation, if it became apparent that war is going to occur, we would want to pull our people out and the inspectors before it begins. What I'm hoping is we'll be given reasonable amount of time to be able to take action.

Dergham: What is reasonable?

Annan: I think enough time for us to gather because our people are all over the place to be able to pull them out. I don't want to get into 72 hours, 48 hours or whatever.

Dergham: Hans Blix also said if no obstacles are put in the way. Are you worried that the Iraqis might put obstacles in the way of the UN employees in Iraq?

Annan: I hope not. I hope not because the UN employees, particularly those who are working for Oil-For-Food, and others have been there to help and work with the population to alleviate the humanitarian situation. And they should not be seen as people who are working against the Iraqi interest. And, I hope it wouldn't happen.

Dergham: Will you ask for such guarantees?

Annan: I have not asked for such guarantees, and I hope they will realize that they should not hold them and prevent them from leaving.

Dergham: You said that there is no document or plan for a post-war Iraq rule for the United Nations. But, you also said that your moral responsibility stipulates, dictates that

you should have such plans. You have preliminary thinking in that matter. What are you thinking?

Annan: I have indicated very carefully in the humanitarian front, given the history of these kinds of conflicts in the past Gulf crisis, we had to prepare to ensure that we are able to assist the people. About 60 percent of the Iraqi people live on the oil for food scheme, and our indications, our contingency figures are quite high in that when the war begins, during the war and immediately after the war we may have to help about 10 million people with food supplies. We may have to take care of about 2 million internally displaced. We may have to worry about 1.2 million people who may cross the border and become refugees. And, of course, already the situation is precarious because our figures indicate that there are about 5 million people who do not have safe water or sanitation. And, of course, there are the 1 million children who are chronically malnourished. So, if on the top of this, we do have crisis, and we are not prepared, the people are going to suffer. And, this has been one of our main concerns. So, our contingency planning has focused mainly on the humanitarian aspects. On the questions of post conflict Iraq, since the council itself hasn't taken any decisions on this we have tried not to be drawn into that. We've done some preliminary thinking as to what we may have to do or may become necessary to undertake.

Dergham: There is supposedly a confidential plan if not at your desk, it's at least on the desk of your deputy – Louise Frechette.

Annan: There is no UN plan for post-Iraq administration or an overall architecture of how the Iraq will be managed after the crisis. There are some preliminary ideas. Ideas that some of my colleagues have been asked to look at and think through the issues that we will be faced with if there is a war that is approved by the council or there is a war that has not been approved by the council, what will be our obligations and what we have to do.

Dergham: If such circumstance comes up, when do you foresee a UN role in Iraq? Three months after the war as has been reported?

Annan: That would be a decision for the council and I don't know what the council will do.

Dergham: You've been, at least your deputy again has discussed with Jay Garner from the US Army General who retired, who is said to possibly become the US governor in post Saddam Hussein Iraq. Do you sense that the administration would like the United Nations to come in quickly? Or, three months later?

Annan: I have no sense, because I haven't really discussed this with them. And, the meeting Jay Garner had with Louise Frechette was more exploratory, asking questions exploring, but it wasn't sort of the planning sessions on this. So, I really have no idea what will happen.

Dergham: In the thoughts that you are having, do you foresee, if such a need arises, do you foresee which example for Iraq? Is it the Afghanistan example by appointing somebody like Lakhdar Brahimi, or is it by a larger role for the United Nations since it's a huge place and will need a lot of control?

Annan: I think each crisis has to be tackled on its own merits. It has its own specificities and I don't think one can pretend that what was suitable for Afghanistan, or Kosovo, or East Timor for that matter, will be suitable for Iraq. And, one will have to look at the Iraqi issue specifically if we were to come to that.

Dergham: Mr. Secretary General, you must have taken a look at the communiqué that came out from Paris, the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Russia. What do you think of it? How do you read it?

Annan: I think they've made their position very clear. They've made their position clear that they do not support the resolution on the table and the French and the Russian foreign ministers have indicated that if it becomes necessary they will face their responsibilities.

Dergham: Does that mean to you that they will use the veto?

Annan: That is the implication.

Dergham: That is the implication.

Annan: Yes.

Dergham: I ask that because some American officials are reading it differently. They say, they've specifically said that they would not allow the passing of a resolution that authorizes the use of force, and the American officials point out that the draft, the American draft, does not have a reference to use of force.

Annan: I think they're entitled their interpretation of the statement out of Paris.

Dergham: But, as far as your interpretation is concerned that's a clear writing on the war.

Annan: That's the implication I read on it.

Dergham: And, then what do you think? How is it going to impact what you always wanted for the Security Council unity? How is it going to impact that?

Annan: No, I've tried to, even now I mean the last couple of weeks and months, I've been trying to work hard with the behind the scenes with the council members both here and at capitals to try and see if we can find some compromise, they can bridge their differences, and find a way forward. You will recall when we were discussing 1441 we went through the same thing and didn't even look to see that one would be able to pull it together. In

the end it was unanimous. But this situation is much harder because positions have hardened and I have spoken to many leaders and of course, they hold different views but they hold these views with conviction and honesty and sincerity and it's therefore very difficult to move positions.

Dergham: So, you don't think there is room for compromise, then?

Annan: Well, it hasn't emerged yet. I never give up trying to get a compromise. I never give up trying to get people to work together. But, as of today, we don't have it. What will happen next week, I cannot predict.

Dergham: I'm sure that you have heard of the idea, or maybe you are the author of the idea, if you are, please tell me so. That after a resolution, if there is an agreement that a resolution gets adopted, then 48 hours is given as a de facto notice, before implementing the military action. That is to say, the United States would go to the military strikes before 48 hours after the adoption of the resolution.

Annan: I've not been party to those kinds of discussions.

Dergham: Do you think that will save the day and bring about at least a resolution from the United Nations?

Annan: What we haven't been able to achieve over this past weeks. I don't see why you infer that it can happen in 48 hours.

Dergham: Then, do you feel that we are really down the road of a split in the council and possibly the United States going for unilateral action?

Annan: We have a split in the council as of today. US has indicated that it would like a resolution. They have also indicated that they may go to war with or without a UN resolution, but what will actually happen is a question for the future to answer.

Dergham: When you speak about the necessity of unity and for the credibility and the relevance of the United Nations are you indirectly trying to urge one party or another to sort of come forward and be more in compromise. Basically, would you like the French, and the Russians, and the Germans, to sort of ease up on their opposition given the fact the United States made it clear they'll go it alone if not through the UN?

Annan: I think you have a situation here where on the main issue of disarmament of Iraq and the obligations of the Iraqi leadership, there's no disagreement. The 15 council members are agreed. And, if you agree on that common objective, under normal circumstances it ought to be possible to find a way to deal with differences and move forward, and I have also indicated that it is when the council acts with a certain amount of unity of purpose and direction that they are most effective. And, also, if you begin to talk about finding common ground, you compromise, you give and take, people have to

moderate their positions to get that compromise and the common position. And, I had hoped that would be possible but we are not there.

Dergham: The Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov said if the decision is taken to go unilaterally through whatever it is called, the coalition of the willing, outside of a security council resolution, if that decision is taken to go to war that would be in violation of international law.

Annan: I think it's quite clear that, I have myself made it quite clear, that when we are dealing with boarder issues of peace or security, issues that concern the entire international community, you cannot get away from Security Council legitimacy. And, many governments attach great deal of importance to this legitimacy. And today, it's not just the governments. The peoples of the world seem to attach great deal of legitimacy to a security council action and we are hearing it in the demonstrations and all around the world, and so the security council legitimacy is a real one, and it's of importance to many countries and many people and I would hope the council can find a way of working together and moving forward on that basis.

Dergham: But, if the United States did decide to go unilaterally, do you agree with Sergey Lavrov that this would be against international law?

Annan: If they go unilaterally, obviously they will lack Security Council legitimacy and that would also have an impact on the kind of support one would have for that action. On the other hand, I have also indicated that if the council is able to manage this process successfully and effectively, the credibility and influence of the United Nations will be greatly enhanced.

Dergham: Is Iraq's compliance coming too late?

Annan: Well, Mr. Blix is going to give another report on Friday. He has indicated that there have been some positive developments while stressing that Iraq could have done more. And, in fact, what Iraq is doing now, it could have done earlier, but it is doing it now, and of course, this is what gives those member states who believe that the inspections should be given a chance, a hope that with this constant pressure Iraq may yet be disarmed peacefully.

Dergham: So, you don't agree that Iraq has failed to seize the last opportunity given to it in 1441?

Annan: This is a judgement that belongs to the council. 1441 made it quite clear that based on the reports of the inspectors the council will decide if there has been a further material breach and then determine what consequences will follow. And, the serious consequences that should follow.

Dergham: You know there is quite a lot of talk, in fact the United Arab Emirates broke the taboo in effect by calling for Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq to step down. Do you feel that his stepping is the only way to prevent a war at this sate?

Annan: That is one option but I'm not sure President Saddam Hussein is going to step down.

Dergham: You met the man, what do you think he will do?

Annan: I don't think, I'm not sure he's going to go into exile.

Dergham: Is there any possibility that if the council asks you to, that you would go to Iraq?

Annan: My good offices as Secretary-General as somebody who believes that we should do whatever we can to solve problems peacefully; given my strong believe that war is a human catastrophe and we should really resort to it when all possibilities have been exhausted. If it were to be helpful I will do it. But, at this stage I don't see what purpose it would serve.

Dergham: So, it's too late.

Annan: If it were to be helpful and if it will serve any useful purpose I would not hesitate but I don't see it now.

Dergham: Do you believe that Iraq still has weapons of mass destruction?

Annan: I don't know. That's what the inspectors are supposed to tell us.

Dergham: You've been given so many different reasons for this war. It was first about weapons of mass destruction, then it was about connections to terrorism and Al-Qaeda, then it was about regime change, then it was about democracy. If we go to war, what's all about from your point of view, what's it for?

Annan: I think as far as the United Nations is concerned there's only one issue. It's the question of disarmament of Iraq. The other reasons for going to war I think makes it very difficult for other member states. They have not discussed within the council. They have not bought into it. And, they should not be expected to take decision on those bases and so they are focused on disarmament.

Dergham: As honestly as you can, and I know you are in a very difficult position, you are the Secretary General of the United Nations, but what's your feeling? Is this war stoppable at this point?

Annan: Well, until it actually starts, I think we should do everything to stop it, and I'm working very hard to see what we can do to stop it.

Dergham: On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, reports by the World Bank and the United Nations have told us about the devastated consequences of what the Palestinians are going through on the average man's life, the children, the women. Have you done enough from your point of view? Are you satisfied that you've done enough on that issue?

Annan: It's a very tragic situation and I think I have tried very hard working with our partners in the European Union, the Russian Federation and the US to try and press this issue forward. I would have liked to see the road-map officially released and the parties already discussing. But, our American partners have indicated that they would prefer to do it after the Israeli elections, or after the Israeli government is formed. I am unhappy that we have not moved as aggressively as we could have on the Palestinian situation. I think we all seem to share a common dream of two states, Israel and Palestine living side by side, but have not taken the concrete steps that would make that dream a reality.

Dergham: You have tried as the United Nations. But do you think that the United States has changed [its approach] midway, particularly on the road-map?

Annan: Let's say that the US has not been as ready to push it forward the way we have. When we met in Washington on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, we had hoped that we could have released it then, but the US was not ready, and of course as a quartet, we work in a consensus, and therefore could not release it. And, even though the parties have a copy of a document, it has not been formally presented to them with the demands in the road-map that they should take parallel and sequential steps to achieve the objective.

Dergham: My last question then. You heard President Bush's speech and you have heard how he spoke about the road-map and the conditionality of the road-map. You also heard how he sort of pointed certain countries in the region to be responsible for acts. It's been interpreted as this is a threat to Syria. Noted also, that there was no mention of comprehensive peace in the President's speech. Do you believe that they share the view that Syria is next in as far as the American military operations are concerned for the region? And, do you believe, the second part, there is a possibility of democracy in the region as the President of the United States said without an actual real head-on tackling of the Arab-Israeli conflict?

Annan: First of all, I'm not a privy to American policy discussions or military planning. And, therefore, I cannot answer the direct question you put to me on Syria. I think today, almost every country and all peoples embrace and accept democracy. There are very few governments in the world today that do not claim to govern by one form of democracy or the other. But, democracy has to be home-grown. The people have to be encouraged to do it. There can be support and encouragement and assistance from the external community. But, for it to be long-lasting and viable, it does have to be home-grown. And, we at the United Nations have been working with governments to help them strengthen their institutions, strengthen their respect for human rights, and recently we showed a very, I believe, important report on the middle east which I think has been well received and those kinds of approaches working with government and the people to strengthen their local institutions to make available to the people the universal convention. Let them know

what their rights are I think is an effective way to go. And, I think the Middle East, like all parts of the world would want to see democracy, would want to see freedom, would want to see education of its young people and build a future that is based on the rule of law and prosperity for all. But, that leadership has to come from the region, from its leaders and they should be inspired to do them.

Dergham: I wanted to know actually if you were worried and scared at this time in our lives?

Annan: I spoke to lots of people. Both in official positions and ordinary people, and there's a lot of anxiety and there's a lot of benevolence. And, of course, when you're dealing with issues of war and peace, issues that affect individuals and their life issues that may uproot and disrupt peoples' lives, it is an awesome responsibility and you do worry. You do worry even if you are not directly involved as to what will happen to your fellow human beings and the people who stop you and say stop the war. What are we doing about this? How can we stop it? And, it's something you live with during the day and sleep with at night and it's not an easy period. But, we have to persevere. We have work to do.

Dergham: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary-General.