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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON IRAQ**  
**20 AUGUST 2003**

Mr. President,  
Excellencies,

- ◆ Yesterday was one of the darkest days in the history of the United Nations.
- ◆ So far, 16 bodies have been recovered from the wreckage of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad. Many remain trapped in the rubble.  
  
The recovery effort is continuing. So is the process of identifying the bodies. Both processes are slow and time consuming, given the effects of the massive explosion.
- ◆ We must brace ourselves for the fact that the death toll will rise beyond the 16 bodies so far recovered.
- ◆ Scores of survivors, some still unidentified, are being treated in various hospitals and clinics around Baghdad. Many of these are seriously injured. Many are unconscious or unable to speak.  
UN doctors are in the process of visiting all the hospitals to try to identify individuals.
- ◆ We are distraught at the loss of so many beloved colleagues and friends. Among them was Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the most outstanding servants and brightest stars of the United Nations and a close personal friend of mine. This is a terrible loss to the United Nations family, to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and to the people of Iraq.
- ◆ The loss of so many others, both international and local staff, is shattering. Our thoughts are with the relatives and friends of those who died in the service of the United Nations. Only once relatives have been informed are their names being released. This will take time.
- ◆ The Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, Ramiro Lopes da Silva, is acting head of the United Nations operation and is directing our response to the crisis on the ground.
- ◆ It is a source of great sadness and dismay that the United Nations has been so brutally targeted in this way. But Iraq was also a target. The people who were killed were fulfilling the mandate given by this Council with one – and only one – purpose in mind: to help the Iraqi people recover their independence and sovereignty, and to rebuild their country as fast as possible, under leaders of their own choosing.
- ◆ They were doing difficult and important work in dangerous conditions. They were doing that work with skill and devotion. They were working under the blue flag of the United Nations – a symbol of impartial aid and international solidarity and unity. They

were victims of an outrageous, inexcusable act of terrorism against the United Nations and the people of Iraq itself.

- ◆ My first concern in the aftermath of this attack is the security of United Nations staff in Iraq. Yesterday's events clearly require that measures be taken to strengthen their security.  
An intensive review to determine what is required has begun.
- ◆ The issue of staff security is, however, inseparable from the general security situation. If we, and others, are to be able to contribute effectively to the recovery of Iraq, it is essential that an environment of security be created in Iraq. That is ultimately the responsibility of the Coalition Provisional Authority. The United Nations has worked closely with the Authority and will continue to do so, while continuing to encourage it – as Sergio did – to take steps to build security in Iraq and win the confidence of the people of Iraq.
- ◆ Obviously, yesterday's events have broader implications for the United Nations beyond Iraq. Wherever the United Nations goes in to help, and whatever measures are taken for staff security, it is sustained by the perception among the local population that the United Nations is there to help them. The blue flag has never been so viciously assaulted as it was yesterday.

Mr President,  
Excellencies,

- ◆ Whoever attacked the United Nations was trying to stop us from helping the Iraqi people recover their sovereignty and rebuild their country. They must not be allowed to succeed in that goal.
- ◆ Allow me to conclude with the words of Sergio Vieira de Mello, who had this to say on the day that I announced his appointment as my Special Representative in Iraq:

“The people of Iraq ... have suffered and have suffered enough. It is time that we all – the Iraqis, the coalition authority and the United Nations – come together to ensure that this suffering comes to an end.... We must not fail.”

- ◆ Those words are as true now as they were in May. Let us be resolved here today that he and his comrades did not die in vain.
- ◆ Thank you very much.