

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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PRESS CONFERENCE
New York, 11 January 2007

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to see you all again.

I feel as if some of you have become already my old friends. We've had two press conferences during the transition, several brief encounters along the way -- including a stakeout on my first day -- and today, we just meet a week after I took office. I hope I am well on my way to proving that I will not be avoiding you -- on the contrary, I may be pursuing you!

I have had a busy first 10 days in office.

I have met with the staff of the Organization, including representatives from all major duty stations around the world.

I have made five major appointments, including the post of Deputy Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet. Three of those five are women from developing countries. All of them are outstanding, and who should be judged on their merits.

I have met with my new Special Envoy for Darfur, Jan Eliasson, as well as the African Union Chief Mediator, Dr. Salim A. Salim, and I have chaired a series of meetings of all my senior advisors on the Darfur crisis. I have since deployed Mr. Eliasson to the region. I just spoke with Mr. Eliasson this morning, and he is encouraged by his meetings with President Bashir and other Sudanese leaders. He will continue his consultations and join me in Addis Ababa to attend the African Union Summit meeting.

On Lebanon, Iraq, Somalia, and other pressing issues, I have both held substantive meetings and made many telephone calls to the leaders concerned. I have outlined my vision of major peace and security challenges to the Security Council, and I have met with many Ambassadors, including representatives of all five regional groups, as well as a number of negotiating groups.

To ensure flexibility in forming my new team, I have asked all Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General to tender their resignations by January 15. And to seek to set a high ethical standard right from the start, I have submitted my financial disclosure form to the Ethics Office. Once the statement has been reviewed by the outside firm of Pricewaterhouse Coopers, it will be made public.

Those are just some of my activities during the last 10 days in office. The next three months promise to be even busier.

Inside the UN, I will work on three broad fronts:

I will strive to restore trust, both between Member States and Secretariat, and between senior management and staff.

I will seek to strengthen institutional capacity, and to ensure that the Secretariat is structured in a way that allows it to respond effectively to the demands placed on us. Today, I will begin consultations with Member States about a possible restructuring of Departments and Offices related to peace and security.

And I will strive to change the working culture of the Organization itself. My goal will be to build a staff which is truly mobile and multi-functional, through greater emphasis on career development, training, accountability, and recognition of work performed at all levels.

Meanwhile, the world will not stop while we work to get our house in order.

Africa will be the focus of many of my priorities, and my first major trip will reflect that focus. At the end of the month, I will attend the African Union summit in Addis Ababa, where Darfur and Somalia will be at the top of the agenda. I will meet with staff at the UN duty station in Addis Ababa, and in Nairobi, our African UN headquarters.

I will also go to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where we have our largest peacekeeping mission, and where free elections took place last summer for the first time in 40 years. I look forward to seeing at first hand the gains made in DRC -- a huge country in the heart of Africa, and the key to so much of the future stability of the region. While there, I will meet with peacekeepers and express my personal gratitude for the contributions they are making under difficult and often dangerous conditions.

I will also stress the UN policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeeping personnel and others: zero tolerance means zero complacency and zero impunity. In the coming months, I will work with Member States to forge an ever stronger partnership to ensure that accountability is brought to bear -- among the perpetrators, and among their commanders and superiors.

Another priority will be to inject new momentum into the search for peace and stability in the Middle East. On my way to Africa, I will attend the Lebanon reconstruction conference in

Paris. On Israel-Palestine, I am pushing for a Quartet meeting to take place as soon as possible.

In addition to those broad areas, there are a number of other major issues that cannot wait -- including the political and security challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the work for a conclusion to the status of Kosovo. The same applies to strengthening the global disarmament and non-proliferation regimes, as well as addressing the special challenges posed by the cases of Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

These issues of peace and security are considerable. But they must not be allowed to overwhelm our efforts in other areas. We must step up our work to reach the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015. And we must do far better in the mission to halt climate change. This, too, will be one of my priorities.

Finally, many of you have been asking about my views on the death penalty. Today, let me answer that question in person.

I believe that life is precious and must be protected and respected, and that all human beings have the right to live in dignity. International law affirms these values. I recognize the growing trend in international law and in national practice towards a phasing out of the death penalty. I encourage that trend. As Member States are taking their decisions, I expect they will comply with all aspects of international human rights law. As you know, I have also urged restraint by the Iraqi authorities in the execution of death sentences imposed by the Iraqi High Tribunal.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for letting me get that off my chest. Now I will try to answer your questions. Thank you very much.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, on behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet you again. I hope this will be as frequent as possible and as your schedule permits it.

Rather than ask you a question, I would like to ask you for something that is in the minds of my colleagues here, especially the working journalists who spend their daily life here. We need a pledge from you, as you begin your mandate as Secretary-General of the world organization, that your administration will be accountable for, and transparent, in providing information to the journalists, including information from your own activities and programmes. We would like that the Spokesman's office, the senior officials, departments and UN agencies receive immediate, real-time information and the mandate to share that information with us. And I won't make a speech, but I would like to ask you, to

hear directly from you, so that we can build trust between you and the media. Thank you.

The Secretary-General: Thank you very much. Before I answer your question, I would like to express my congratulations to you on assuming the very important but very difficult job as President of UNCA. At this time I would also like to also express my appreciation to Mr. Masood Haider, the former President of UNCA, for his contribution. I regard always the role of media as very important, because you are the person who connects the important activities of the United Nations into every corner of the people around the world.

For your question or suggestion, I thank you very much for your very kind suggestions. I think I share the same thoughts as you have in terms of our relationship. I know that the Spokesperson has been briefing you daily every noon. That, I hope, will be very much useful. At the same time, I will make sure that the senior-level department heads, officials and other senior-level officials will have a very close contact with you so that you will not be behind in getting real-time information, including myself.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, welcome. Echoing what Tuyet said, you are going to Addis Ababa, and you said that one of the top issues on your agenda is Sudan and Darfur. The Sudanese President yesterday rejected the deployment of UN troops in Darfur, saying they weren't required and that African Union troops could maintain order in the region. What's going to be your message to him when you see him? Specifically, what are you going to tell him?

The Secretary-General: I just spoke with Mr. Jan Eliasson, my Special Envoy, who had met President Al-Bashir about four hours ago from now. He said that he had very good discussions with the Sudanese President and other leaders, including the foreign minister, and what he told me that he had basically agreed on all and he was assured of very strong cooperation and assistance on the part of the Sudanese Government and President to have a very good cooperation among United Nations, Sudanese Government and the African Union. Therefore, I'm not quite sure about what he said about this so-called - you said "rejection" - of UN forces. Because of the sensitivity of this situation, I'm not in a position to tell you much in detail, but I can assure you that this is again on top of my priority agendas and I'll discuss myself on this matter with the President of Sudan.

Question: Sorry, just as a quick follow-up, are you going to be pressing the Sudanese President for the deployment of the hybrid force of some 22,000 people, which is what your predecessor had proposed, and DPKO [the Department of Peacekeeping Operations?]

The Secretary-General: Given the humanitarian situation and the very worrisome situation in Darfur, it is particularly important that we succeed in putting a strong, well-resourced force on the ground. We have been discussing this matter. There was an agreement in Addis Ababa and Abuja. We are committed to implementing this agreement which had already been made, and this is what we have been discussing, including the contribution, diplomatic negotiation and contribution, made by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. So the recent talk with Mr. Jan Eliasson with the President [Omar al Bashir] should give us some good prospect in implementing this agreement. And I will follow up this matter.

Question: Hello, Mr. Secretary-General. I am Raghida Dergham with Al-Hayat. Nice to see you again. Sir, yesterday, President George W. Bush made a very important policy statement on Iraq, new strategy, and I am wondering if you support his call, President Bush's call, on the Nouri al-Maliki Government in Iraq to disarm militias, including, of course, those of Moqtada al-Sadr? And do you read the message of President Bush to be an ultimatum to Iran, since he did not embrace the suggestion that he should engage diplomatically with either Iran or Syria?

The Secretary-General: This was just announced yesterday evening, and its impact is to be seen. Broadly speaking, however, the United Nations would welcome genuine efforts to improve security for ordinary Iraqis as well as to stabilize the country through a combination of security, political and economic means.

The United Nations will be closely concerting with the Iraqi Government and other key stakeholders to discuss how best to support such efforts to stabilize peace and stability in Iraq. In accordance with this mandate, the United Nations will continue to provide assistance on the constitutional review process in facilitating the political process.

Question: As a follow-up, do you think, Sir, that it is a good idea to demand the Government of Iraq to disarm militias? That's the principle. Do you think Governments in the position of Iraq should disarm militias?

The Secretary-General: It is very worrisome, and we are very much concerned about this continuing [sectarian] violence, so we hope that the Iraqi Government will take the necessary measures to ensure their own political and social stability.

Question: You mentioned the Middle East before, and you are going to a Quartet meeting. Your predecessor had said that it was time for the Quartet to set deadlines, take concrete action and not just issue vague statements. Do you have any proposals for what it should do?

The Secretary-General: It is very important to re-energize the Quartet process at this time to help facilitate the peace process in the Middle East, and I have consulted on this matter with the parties concerned, the participants in the Quartet process. I hoped to have it done during my participation in the international conference on Lebanon reconstruction, but we found that there is some scheduling conflict, and we are now pushing to have that Quartet meeting convened as soon as possible.

Question: I have a question about some of your early choices, and I want to make it clear I am not questioning the choices or their qualifications. My question is about the process by which they were chosen. We have learned, in several cases, that some of your highest-ranking choices were never really interviewed themselves about the jobs you were going to offer them and never had the chance to explain, therefore, how they would meet your expectations. My question goes to the demand for tight management at the United Nations. How can you be satisfied that these senior managers you have chosen can fulfil your expectations if you never took the time to explain to them exactly what your demands were?

The Secretary-General: There seem to be some misunderstandings on the review or selection process of senior management officials of the United Nations, including the selection of the Deputy Secretary-General and other senior officials. I have appointed five senior officials until now, including a spokesperson. I have interviewed them in person, privately. In cases when there was not such a necessity for having a private interview, I did it on my own decision, through my own experience and working relationship with the person concerned.

To tell you frankly, during the election process - the campaign process - I have been meeting many foreign ministers and very senior people around the world, and, in fact, I was interviewed by all of them as a candidate - one of the candidates. Maybe at the time they might not have known that I was also interviewing them about what I should do if I were elected as Secretary-General.

There was some report about Dr. [Asha-Rose] Migiro, whom I have chosen as the Deputy Secretary-General. I have worked with her closely as a counterpart, each as Foreign Minister of our respective countries, and I have spent more than 10 hours - coincidentally, I was flying together with her on an airplane from a certain point to Tanzania, while I was going to visit Tanzania. We were sitting together. We spent at least six hours talking together, knowing each other. I have engaged in many more discussions with her, and I have known her - I have known many other African leaders during my time as Foreign Minister.

I have interviewed Ambassador John Holmes, whom I chose as head of OCHA [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], and I have known Ms. Alicia Bárcena a long time. I have been very much impressed by her ability to manage this huge Organization. She served as Deputy [Executive Secretary] of ECLAC [the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean] for four years, and she served as Vice-Minister of Environment in Mexico for many years, dealing with many management matters. I hope that you will judge the people and appointments by what and how they will perform their duties, and I sincerely hope that instead of judging by what you heard from different sources, I hope that you will judge my appointments on the basis of merit and on the basis of their performance.

And to ensure tight management, I plan to conclude a compact with all senior managers, including the Assistant Secretaries-General and well as the Under-Secretaries-General, for their performance targets. They should submit their performance targets, and the performance management board will review their performance at the end of the year or at the end of their contract date.

Question: If and when you go to Washington next week, are you going to ask President Bush to shut down Guantánamo prison?

The Secretary-General: In fact, I am going to visit Washington, D.C., in my capacity as the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the invitation of President Bush, who is the leader of the host Government. I understand that today is the fifth anniversary of Guantánamo prison. Like my predecessor, I believe that the prison at Guantánamo should be closed. I also remember that President Bush himself has said that he would like to close it.

Question: Following your first statement on Saddam Hussein's execution and also your refusal in other interviews to back the former statement by [Kofi] Annan that the war in Iraq was illegitimate, are you worried, Sir, that you might have given the wrong impression about your level of independence from the United States positions, considering they backed your appointment strongly? And, finally, what's "as soon as possible" concerning the Quartet meeting?

The Secretary-General: All the staff of the United Nations, including the Secretary-General, are working not in their respective national capacities but are serving the interests of the United Nations, this global body. So you should know that, whatever decisions, whatever activities I am doing, I have been doing and will be doing in my capacity as the Secretary-General of the United Nations, as I have said in taking the oath of office.

About this exact date or timing of the Quartet meeting, I cannot tell you at this time, but I can tell you that I am very closely discussing this matter with Secretary [Condoleezza] Rice, Foreign Minister [Sergey] Lavrov, Mr. [Javier] Solana of the European Union and the European Union Presidency. We will let you know whenever we have some better prospects on this.

Question: Back to Darfur: given the humanitarian situation there, would you be willing to consider a deadline or a more specific timetable for the ongoing political dialogue to work out before you consider other options? And, can you briefly share with us your views on abortion, please?

The Secretary-General: I didn't exactly catch the point of your question. Could you repeat your question, please?

Question: Would you be willing to consider an ultimatum for the ongoing political dialogue on Darfur, to work out before you consider other options?

The Secretary-General: Of course, I would like to see the resolution of the Darfur crisis as soon as possible. As you may understand, this involves many difficult political dimensions on this matter itself, so I need to discuss this matter with, first of all, the Sudanese Government and the African Union Commission, as well as many leaders of the African Union who are involved in these issues. Therefore, I can tell you at this time that this is on the highest priority which I am pursuing.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, there are several news reports that North Korea is preparing the second nuclear test. What are you going to do to prevent them from doing the test, and what would you do if they did really do the test?

The Secretary-General: I'm closely following the developments in North Korea, including its nuclear programme, but at this time I do not have any specific, concrete information on your specific questions. On the nuclear issue, as you know very well, the Six-Party process has been revived, and I urge all parties to the Six-Party Talks to work hard towards de-nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. As to what I can do to help this process as Secretary-General, as I have repeatedly said, I will try my best to facilitate the smooth process of the Six-Party process and will engage myself in having dialogue with North Korean authorities if a situation requires me, in close consultation with Six-Party process members, as well as the Security Council.

Question: Mr. Secretary-General, last night again you know that President Bush spoke. Your predecessor was somewhat reticent to commit more staff to Baghdad and to Iraq after the tragedy at

the U.N. headquarters there. Will you be amenable to the inevitable United States request for more U.N. help in Iraq?

The Secretary-General: The United Nations has been participating in the process of stabilizing the Iraqi situation there - in the past, through participation in monitoring elections on two occasions and drafting the constitution. We still maintain some mission there. But we will continue to participate in that process as much as we can. But our participation and contribution at this time is largely dictated by the security situations on the ground. We will consult closely and monitor the situation. As you know very well, the United Nations has initiated an International Compact with Iraq. This is also a very important agenda which I am going to follow, in close consultation with the Member States.

Question: I have a question regarding the Somalia situation. Your Spokeswoman told us that you have concerns about the situation right now. Could you, in your own words, explain what these concerns are and how you feel about the situation at the moment?

The Secretary-General: I am also very closely following the situation in Somalia. I am concerned about all the impact on the reported loss of civilians. The situation in Somalia is a stark reminder of the need to redouble our political efforts to bring stabilization of the political and social situation as soon as possible. I believe that we must make every effort to protect civilians and be cautious of other, unintended consequences in this situation. I believe that it is in the best interests of all to go back to a political, negotiated process in this matter. My Special Representative is now closely discussing this matter with the concerned parties there.

Question (interpretation from French): I would like to have an answer in French, please, on Somalia. Could you tell us a little more about the unilateral intervention by the Americans? When you go to Africa, you said, you would be stopping off in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. What matters will be raised with the Congolese authorities when you visit that country?

The Secretary-General (interpretation from French): The last time I was a little disappointed, because I wasn't able to reply in French in the previous press conference. Now, my French perhaps could be improved, and I am continuing to work. I have taken French lessons over the last few months. I think that, even if my French isn't perfect, I will continue to study it. If you allow me today, I would prefer to speak in English.

(in English)

On Congo, as I told you in my remarks, I am going to look myself at how the peacekeeping operations have been doing there. Many people there have been serving honourably for the political and social stabilization of Congo. Congo is a good example. I think we have the longest experience as far as peacekeeping is concerned. I would, first of all, like to commend the contributions made by the troops there, and I would like to have a dialogue with the President of the Congo to continue this democratization process and to realize political and social stability as soon as possible. That is the main purpose of my going to Congo.

Question: I think part of Vikou's question was about the United States military intervention in Somalia and what you think about that. So, just a follow-up on that, if you don't mind.

My question is sort of to follow up a bit on Warren's earlier question on the hiring. Apart from the issue of qualifications, it's clear that in your selections you are looking at spreading out the key posts to key members of the Security Council and to key members of the developing world – sort of a balancing act. I think, if we go back to the report that Mr. [Paul] Volcker conducted, there was quite a bit of criticism about this practice of parceling out positions within the UN – in that case in the oil-for-food programme – to major Powers on the Security Council. I was wondering whether you could explain to us why you think that is a good idea, to preserve this system of political patronage, which looks a little bit like the political appointments in the US system, sort of playing out in the UN. Why is that necessary, if you agree that that is even happening?

The Secretary-General: I will try to answer your second question first, because I think I have already answered your first question, on Somalia. I think I have partially answered the question. I told you already that I am closely following the situation in Somalia – what I said through my Spokesperson the other day, immediately after the attack on the Somalia hideout of Al-Qaida. I was simply concerned about the possibility of an impact on civilians and the reported loss of civilians. I was hoping that – while I fully understand the necessity behind this attack – we should be cautious enough not to see this kind of situation lead to unwanted directions. This situation only is a very stark reminder that we need to redouble our diplomatic efforts to have some political process for the realization of a peaceful resolution of this issue.

On your second question, I think there seems to be some unsubstantiated misperceptions on the appointments of senior officials in the United Nations. My policy on appointing senior officials above the rank of Assistant Secretary-General, and in particular in the case of Under-Secretaries-General, is based on,

first of all, the merits of the person concerned, with due regard to gender balance as well as geographical distribution. You seem to have the impression that I have been distributing posts to some major P5s [permanent five members of the Security Council], or major developing countries. It may look so, but you see, I have been receiving many recommendations from many countries and many different sources, including from individuals. I have gone through carefully, reviewing all the candidates concerned. I have gone through some background checks. I have asked many people, to listen to their own views how capable and what kind of merit one has and whether, in particular, one is a team player. I regard one of the virtues and one of the important elements is whether one works as a team player. I think that is very important for me to harmoniously organize and perform the duties of the Organization as a whole. We have many distinguished candidates. It has been very difficult. It is very difficult to select one or two persons among so many qualified candidates.

Of course, due consideration sometimes has to be given to some important countries, like the P5, because they also have made very important contributions. But even though I would receive some applications from the countries which you are mentioning, I would have gone through a very careful and thorough review on the qualifications of the persons: whether one really has the qualifications and whether one is really a team player. That is my basic policy on that.

Question: One last try on Somalia: do you think - yes or no - that what the United States has done in bombing Somalia and having Special Forces on the ground is in any way in contravention of international law?

The Secretary-General: As a matter of principle, I will not answer anything in such a yes or no manner. I think I have answered that question already.

Maybe one final question.

Question: On your trip to Africa, you mentioned that Somalia and Darfur will be at the top of your agenda during your discussions with African leaders. Do you have a specific vision or a new proposal to end the crises in both regions?

The Secretary-General: I am not in a position to disclose all what I have been discussing with African leaders. We have been discussing since a long time. We have accumulated experience and know-how, all the records - I have to build upon what my predecessor had been doing to resolve the Darfur crisis. I have many very distinguished advisers who are working for me. I have built up good relationships with many of the African leaders. I would like to utilize that opportunity to further discuss these matters.

Question: You began your briefing here with a call on us to, of course, judge your managers, the ones you have selected, on the merits of their performance. You also spoke about how important it is to bring trust back to the Organization. Can you please explain the appointment for the position of UN management, Ms. Bárcena, the selection process that you went through specifically with her, and how that selection can explain concerns out there that this individual does not have the financial wizardry and other skills that perhaps her predecessor, Mr. [Christopher] Burnham, had, to ensure that the Organization is moving along financially in the right direction, and also to assure the global taxpayers that they are getting their money's worth with your selection of managers, and staff itself, to ensure that your staff – many of whom have complained about issues, from accountability to the justice system and other key areas to ensure that there is proper accountability within the Organization – how does that person fit that particular role?

The Secretary-General: If you want to find a perfect person who would be able to know everything about what is happening in the world, it may be impossible. Even for the post of Secretary-General, you may not be able to find a perfect person. I do not claim to be a perfect person, to know everything that is happening within the UN system.

As for the post of Under-Secretary-General for Management, one can have strength in finance; one can have strength in human resources; one can have strength in overall management leadership. I have valued her longstanding management experience while she was working as Vice-Minister in Mexico, while she was working as Deputy [Executive Secretary] of ECLAC and while she has been working as Chef de Cabinet. The post of Chef de Cabinet is one of the most important positions in the United Nations system, who deals with almost all aspects of the United Nations, advising the Secretary-General. Therefore, I have full confidence that Ms. Bárcena will perform her duties more than anybody else, than her predecessors.

Thank you very much.