



The President
of the
Economic and Social Council

**REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL AT THE CSIICS'S SUMMIT ON STAFF SECURITY
(December 11, 2003)**

Madame President of the United Nations Staff Council,
Members of the Staff Union,

First of all, thank you for inviting me to make a few remarks. Although I am here as President of the Economic and Social Council, I cannot separate my elected function from my personal capacity as an ex-member of the Staff Union. Thus, I am particularly sensitive to the issue that has gathered us here today, and will complement the institutional perspective with some personal reflections.

In fact, my functions as Executive Secretary of ECLAC between 1988 and 1997 included the security of staff in a duty station, which, at least at the beginning of that period, was not exempt from risk. Among the more conservative elements in our host country, the international civil service was regarded with suspicion and even hostility, for being partial to one of the parties in a highly polarized society. The dilemma at that time was how to reconcile the image of openness that I felt was essential to a United Nations compound with the control measures that our security services insisted on. As the democratic transition proceeded, and Chilean society became more tolerant and inclusive, the dilemma was largely resolved, and we were able to maintain the image of openness, which allowed our staff to function with virtually no concern for their security, and for visitors to easily gain entrance to our compound with minimum formalities. No armed guards, no daunting fences or unsightly wire-mesh.

To be sure, Chile in the 1990s turned out to be a privileged duty station from the viewpoint of staff security. I understood from my own country, Guatemala, that security and risk vary from one place to another. Still, those of us who were in the international civil service, or even those in the inter-governmental machinery of the United Nations, felt that our Organization was above good and evil; that our flag and emblem commanded the respect and moral authority that would at least protect our staff from overt aggression. And, to a large extent, this proved to be so. While our presence on the ground always entailed risks (witness the untimely death of Dag Hammarskjöld), including assaults, accidents and acts of vandalism, it appeared that the physical integrity of the United Nations' staff and its installations were, by and large, respected by all parties. The UN emblem, was, in fact, a shield.

The events of last August 19 were, of course, a rude awakening. They put the question of staff security in an entirely new light, especially since the loss of dear friends and colleagues hit so close to home. I now realize that the dilemmas we faced in Santiago absolutely pale by comparison to the major trade-offs the United Nations and its staff face today, as highlighted by the Independent Panel on the Safety and Security of UN Personnel in Iraq.

In the ECOSOC, we have been concerned with staff security for some time, especially in the area of humanitarian and development assistance, which falls within our purview. Last summer, but before the tragic events of August 19, the Council approved Resolution E/2003/5, regarding the Strengthening of emergency humanitarian activities of the United Nations. In said resolution, the Council urged all States to take the necessary measures to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and United Nations and associated personnel.

Now that the UN emblem has become a target instead of a shield, we face the risk, in my opinion, that the pendulum can move too far in the direction of caution, hampering the presence of the United Nations in situations where it arguably is most needed. Clearly, then, the topic of reconciling staff security with the indispensable role of the United Nations on the ground is more relevant than ever, and deserves the attention of the Secretariat and of the inter-governmental organs. I am sure that I can speak for all members of ECOSOC when I pledge that we will do our part in this discussion to commit to staff security but at the same time insure that the UN be present on the ground wherever and whenever it is needed.

Thank you