

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S  
PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Mauritius, 14 January 2005**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Let me thank all of you for coming this morning, and it's good to see you in such numbers. Let me start by thanking the President, the Prime Minister and the Government and the people of Mauritius for hosting a very successful international meeting on small island developing states – a subject made even more pressing following the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. And I would also like to congratulate the Secretary-General of the conference, Mr. Chowdhury, who is here on the podium with me to my left.

I arrived in Mauritius having toured the countries hit hardest by the tsunami disaster. The savage losses suffered by the people of those countries, and the nightmarish devastation and destruction they have endured, are almost impossible to put in words.

But I have also seen and been heartened by what the communities are doing – pooling together their efforts to rebuild and restore livelihoods. Governments of the region are working together with civil society, the private sector and the international community in the relief and recovery effort.

The generous response of the world community continues. And I welcome the pledges and, more importantly, the firm commitments announced this week in response to the UN Flash Appeal in Geneva.

As called for in the conference in Jakarta, and in order to ensure maximum coherence and coordination of relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts, I have decided to appoint a special envoy and I hope to announce the name by the end of next week.

Here in Mauritius, I have been impressed with the very high level of attendance at the meeting on small island developing states. This shows a renewed interest and commitment on the part of the entire international community for the issues of concern to these states -- from environmental vulnerabilities to small economies, remoteness from world markets, high energy costs and waste management problems.

And I am happy that my call for a global early warning system has been enthusiastically supported at the conference. Such a warning system should cover not just tsunamis but also the other threats, such as storm surges and cyclones.

While the world's attention has been focused on the aftermath of the tsunami, we must not forget the grave humanitarian crises that exist in other parts of the world.

At the same time, we have seen reasons for hope in some regions – such as the recent successful elections in Afghanistan and Palestine.

Our attention is also focused on the situation in Iraq ahead of the elections scheduled for 30 January. It is clear that the vast majority of Iraqis are eager to exercise their democratic right to vote. But it is equally obvious that the conditions in which the election is being held are far from ideal.

Beyond that, I have always made clear that the elections must be as inclusive as possible if, as I hope, they are to contribute positively to the political transition in Iraq.

Even at this late stage, outreach to the Arab nationalist component of society – especially the Sunni Arabs -- is critical to this. I encourage the Government to intensify its efforts, and I know the Government is making efforts in this direction.

I encourage all Iraqis to exercise their democratic right to vote. Iraq needs as broad-based a government as possible for a successful transition.

I will now answer your questions.

**QUESTION:** My name is Bryson Hull with Reuters, Mr. Secretary-General

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** with which organization?

**QUESTION:** with Reuters. Some delegates here say that the language that's been adopted is a little bit weak, particularly in the areas of climate

change and trade I wonder if you're disappointed that the language might not have been stronger and secondarily what do you think the chances are for a successful implementation? Thank you.

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** First of all let me say that I've been very impressed with the atmosphere and the constructive spirit with which the governments at this conference have discussed these issues. When you come to these conferences, you don't always get what you want, nobody gets all that they want, but I think that the language they finally adopted is a good one.

I am also impressed by the fact that the emphasis has been on implementation and they seem determined to set priorities and set about implementing them and I hope the international community will also support them in this. And on my part, we are going to advocate very strongly for their issues and to encourage the international community to support.

On the climate change issue, obviously there was lots of tense discussions and at the end of the day they agreed on the text that you have seen and I think people seem satisfied with it.

I don't know if the Secretary-General of the Conference wants to add something.

**CHOWDHURY:** The paragraph on climate change has a broad range of consensus and that is what we are aiming for in the negotiations. We wanted to be less divisive and more looking ahead to the implementation process. So the climate change paragraph has given that opening for the small island countries to pursue their objectives in other relevant forums, particularly the UNFCCC forum.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary-General, a question from AFP on Iraq you stressed your concerns about the conditions being far from ideal and your call for the government to insure that it is as inclusive as possible, what is your level of concern in terms of the legitimacy of these elections at this point?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** As I have indicated, obviously elections do not take place in a vacuum. So the political and the security context in

which the elections are held are very important. The UN is providing support and advice to the government. We have given them all the technical support necessary for the elections. So the technical preparations for the elections have been very fair and efficient and we are satisfied with. That and we hope that voters will be free to cast their votes as they wish.

On the question of whether it will be credible or not I think we need to see how things evolve. We still have about two weeks to go and efforts are being made to pull in as many people as possible, and obviously there will be attempts to intimidate, and there is regrettable violence but hopefully the attempts that are being made now both in the country and outside may lead to some mitigation of the situation.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. I am Joseph Guyler Delva.

I am working with Reuters in Haiti and also for CANAC. Haiti yes, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and also the Caribbean News Agency. I would like to ask you: you have talked about Iraq in terms of conditions for free and fair elections, but Haiti is also preparing elections and of course you know there are security problems and also problems of human rights. You talked about that last time, and Aristide allies and people with the Lavalas party have been jailed and--also the problem of national reconciliation and all that. So what do you think about the conditions being put in place so far for these elections? And second, I'd like you to comment also on special status that small island developing countries and also less developed countries are asking for to give them a better chance to go forward in terms of trade?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** Thank you very much for the question. I do agree with you that we have a difficult situation in Haiti. The UN troops are now fully deployed. We have about 6,000 troops with police components and other civilian players. We are concerned about the security situation and the peacekeepers are doing whatever they can to improve and calm down the situation. And of course we would also want to move on to voluntary disarmament and collect the arms which are circulating within the society.

We have also encouraged the government to engage in a dialogue with all groups and reconcile. And I think that process of reconciliation is as

important as the efforts of the international community and the peacekeepers. On some level, it is perhaps even more important than the presence of the troops, because if you were to pull everybody and you were able to reconcile, agree on the future of the country, agree on the acceptability of the results of the elections, we will be making progress.

On the question of preferential treatment of small islands states, I think, for example the European Union took a decision about two years ago to allow into their market, products from the least developed countries without tariffs and then so really opening up to them. And I expect other regions to react in kind. So there is some sensitivity and attempts are being made to respond to that need, understanding that most of these countries, however poor, would much rather trade themselves out of poverty rather than live on handouts.

**QUESTION** [translated from the French]: Good morning Mr. Secretary-General, Claudette Desmuges on behalf of RFO can I ask you what you think about what President Jacques Chirac said about establishing a humanitarian force like the blue helmets to deal with disasters?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL** [translated from French]: I wholeheartedly support that proposal.

**QUESTION** [translated from French] : I am Abdullahi Rali from Radio One and Radio France Internationale, the question that I would like to ask is about the Tsunami. A great deal has been said about this effort to establish a global early warning system. Should we not also think about these islands which are threatened with disappearance. Prevention is fine but as the phenomenon of the rise of sea level is virtually irreversible now so we have to think about protecting these islands and how we can do that.

**SECRETARY-GENERAL** [translated from French] : That's a difficult question. I think to start, first we must protect the planet. We must do everything possible to reduce green house gas emissions and try to protect the planet, because if we manage to control pollution world wide, the water will rise much more slowly. I have come here from the Maldives and of course it's a real issue there. There weren't many casualties but the disaster affected one third of the population, with flooding, some islands are uninhabitable. So it's a real question, a real

issue which we will have to find a solution to. I can't give you a solution this morning but we will have to work on that.

**QUESTION** [translated from French]: Mr. Secretary-General, I am from Mauritius broadcasting Corporation, you have met several people from the Civil Society during you stay in Mauritius the point they raised included demilitarization and the question of the sovereignty over the Chagos, I'd like to hear what you think .

**SECRETARY-GENERAL** [translated from French]: am not sure I quite grasp the thrust of your question.

**QUESTION** [translated from French]: This is a point raised by the civil society concerning demilitarization. Mauritius would like to regain it's sovereignty over the Chagos and I would like to hear your views on it?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL** [translated from French]: Well I haven't actually had the chance to discuss the matter and I don't know all the details so I can't really go into that.

**QUESTION**: Nita Ballah, from Reuters. Sir, I have two questions. One, you mentioned the elections in Palestine. How do you think the election of Mahmoud Abbas will push forward the peace process in the Middle East? and secondly, in the text of the document that will be finalized today, do you see a shift in sympathy towards small island developing states as a result, and do you think this could be as a result of the Asian disaster caused by the tsunami?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL**: Let me say that, first of all I have been very impressed by the way the Palestinians have handled the transition process after the death of President Arafat. It had gone quite smoothly and the elections were very well organized, perhaps one of the best prepared.

We have worked with them for a year in preparation--that is the UN-- in preparation on the elections. And with the election of Mr Abu Mazen, Mr [Mahmoud] Abbas, I believe that there is a legitimate leader, with the support of the Palestinian people and he has won by quite a sizeable margin, that the international community and the Israeli government can deal with.

At the same time, the Israeli government is pressing ahead with its withdrawal plan from Gaza and I hope they will be able to coordinate it with the new Palestinian Authority, with the support of the international community. So I believe we have a real opportunity--a window here--to intensify the peace efforts and move it forward. And as a member of the Quartet, I can tell you that all the other members of the Quartet are determined to take advantage of this new opening and ensure that in 2005 we do make real progress on this issue.

On the question of small islands States, I would say that there has been, I sense, a shift of sympathy because people saw it on their television screen the devastation that the tsunami caused. And they know its possible impact on small island states.

So even those who have been a bit skeptical about the impact of global warming cannot say that they have no idea of the damage water can do. And so I hope that one of the lessons that comes out of tsunami is the sensitivity towards the needs of the small island states. And of course part of that is this clamor for early warning system and prevention, and I hope that at the meeting in Kobe in Japan there will be serious discussions on this and concrete proposals will come out from that conference.

**QUESTION:** Geoffrey Lean from the Independent on Sunday. As a veteran of these conferences over thirty years, one can't help being struck by how less and less seems to be achieved each time in the environment/development field. It seems to be more and more of a determination to produce a text that offends nobody rather than one that makes change. And such progress has been glacial compared to the crises in the world. And it seems to take a crisis like tsunami to get world attention. Don't you, Sir, sometimes feel that you are running standstill?

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** Sometimes, yes.[Laughs]. But there are other times that we are encouraged by little progress and little successes and whenever we can help one person or one community we do feel encouraged.

On your broader question as to people attempting to agree on text, we sometimes, it's perhaps the lowest common denominator. In fact, in my own comments to the conference, I encouraged them to try and come to an understanding and a consensus on a solid text that will command the acceptance, broad acceptance amongst the members and with the determination to implement it. Because you sometimes can force the issue and come up with a document which is very contentious and people leave the room and forget it. So, sometimes you may not get a very strong language but you may get a language that people accept and will try and implement and you will get some results. And I think on this issue the Secretary-General may want to say some words because he was in the room when the give and take was taking place.

**CHOWDHURY:** Well the important element of the Mauritius Conference is that the last two days, the High Level Segment had been devoted to the way forward and a clear-cut implementation process has been identified in various sections of the document. And it will be upon us, the United Nations system, to pick up the challenge and start the process of implementation right away. And that is what is happening next week in Kobe, with the disaster dimension and then in the month of February, the General Assembly will be endorsing the Mauritius outcome. And then we will prepare a road map of implementation.

This will be the first time that we will be looking forward into a document with very clear expectation of implementation, involving all partners. And here all the stakeholders: the governments, civil society, private sector, all of them will come together to join in this process. Of course, as we always say, the primary responsibility for development rests with the government. But the governments of these countries are so vulnerable, they need the support of the International community. And that is where we come in and that is where the Mauritian outcome will be of big help to these countries.

**SECRETARY-GENERAL:** And I also hope, if I may add a word, that, the incredible generosity and support we have seen from the rest of the world, the outpouring of support and generosity that has been demonstrated this time around, I hope somehow we will find a way of capturing this moment, nurturing this spirit, this spirit of generosity, this spirit of assisting those in need and hopefully apply it to other crisis situations.

We have had some horrible crisis situations, where we've not been able to get the money we need. We are lucky if we get 15%. So we are seeing a new phenomenon, we have new donors, new donors have come forward. They are not necessary states; corporations and private sectors have come forward, but above all individual citizens who've been moved by the suffering and pain of their fellow human beings, and our common humanity really rose to the challenge this time and I hope we will do it time and time again. Thank you very much