

25 March 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
on the 19th Annual Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing
Persons**

Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan
Mr. Tony Jenkins, President of the United Nations Correspondents Association
Mrs. Elaine Collett, Wife of Mr. Alec Collett
Ms. Rosemarie Waters, President of the United Nations Staff Union
Staff Members
Members of the United Nations Correspondents Association
Ladies and Gentlemen

For most of us, it is inconceivable that a family member could leave home and never return, fate unknown. The pictures we see of death and destruction seem so far away, the name of that lone person abducted, shot or killed is another story on the news.

But there are incidences that can and do happen to the dedicated and brave women and men in the service of the United Nations. It has been 19 years since Alec Collett was abducted while on assignment for the UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He was never seen nor heard of again. Last year alone 241 civilian staff of the United Nations lost their lives in Kosovo, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere.

They are among the many humanitarian workers or other personnel who today and every day in every part of the world play an essential role in upholding the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter in adverse and dangerous conditions.

We have chosen today especially, to recognize and celebrate the memory and work of our colleagues, who have been arrested, detained, abducted or have disappeared. We are thankful to them today as we are every day for their contributions and sacrifices.

We can and must do better to ensure their safety and to bring to justice those who target them. We have begun processes to address safety concerns and must continue our efforts. Let us also not forget that an intentional attack on humanitarian or peacekeeping personnel is defined as a war crime under the statute of the International Criminal Court.

As President of the General Assembly, I am deeply committed to improving the security of UN staff and associated personnel. I repeat today my plea to those Member States who have not ratified the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel to do so without delay.

I wish to recognize the Committee on the Security and Independence of the International Civil Service, and the United Nations Staff Union, for organizing this event, and for their continuing efforts to highlight the importance of the safety of United Nations staff members and humanitarian workers.

I am honoured to have been invited to speak on this occasion.

I thank you.