

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESS ON ACCEPTING THE 2003 DEUTSCHER MEDIENPREIS
(GERMAN MEDIA AWARD)

Baden-Baden, Germany, 21 January 2004

President Thierse, [of the German Parliament]
President Clinton,
Herr Kögel,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply honoured to receive this award, which puts me in such distinguished company. And I am greatly flattered by the kind words you have just heard from President Thierse and President Clinton.

To qualify for your award, one is supposed to have made “a major contribution to world peace, and achieved press coverage of unusual significance”. In 2003, it was easier to do the latter than the former.

Indeed, we at the United Nations found ourselves receiving more intense media attention than ever before. But alas, we cannot claim to have preserved world peace. We certainly tried, but peace is not in our gift. If only it were!

We shall remember 2003 as one of the most difficult and painful years in our history. We lost some of our most beloved colleagues.

We also witnessed sharp divisions among our leading member states – perhaps the most acute and acrimonious we had seen since the end of the cold war. Consensus seemed to shatter, even on points of fundamental principle that we thought all nations shared.

Understandably, given the issues at stake, media attention focused almost exclusively on the conflict in Iraq. Even today I find that most of the questions I am asked by journalists have to do with the role that the United Nations is playing in Iraq – or is not playing, or ought to play, or might play in the future.

Those are very important questions, but I’m afraid I have no new answers to give you this evening.

We would like to be able to help the Iraqi people rebuild their country, and to recover their national sovereignty, under a government that everyone can recognise as legitimate and genuinely representative. And it is widely accepted that the United Nations will have a major role to play, subject to security constraints, and if the Iraqis ask for it, in the constitutional and electoral process that will begin once a provisional Iraqi government is in place. The Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi Governing Council have agreed that this phase will begin on 1st July.

The scope for us to play a **major operational** role in the phase before that – the political transition leading up to the transfer of sovereignty – is **a matter of lively debate right now. It involves a complex set of considerations, and some difficult decisions. It is clear that many people in Iraq, and in the Coalition Provisional Authority too, would like us to advise them about the feasibility, or not, of holding elections in the next few months.**

Technical discussions about the possibility of us giving such advice are now under way. Meanwhile, all I can say for now is that we remain committed to doing whatever we can to help the people of Iraq, within the very real constraints imposed by the security situation, which is still difficult.

In any event, I hope the world will not allow its attention to be monopolized by Iraq in 2004, as it was in 2003. I see three major tasks confronting us in the year ahead.

The first is, precisely, to remind ourselves of the enormous needs that there are in the rest of the world, and of the fear, pain and misery that dominate so many people's lives, far from the headlines and the TV cameras.

In the daily lives of most people in the world today, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are remote and hypothetical threats. The fears that stalk most people are those of poverty, starvation, unemployment, and deadly disease. When they are threatened with weapons, it most often with those that we might call weapons of individual destruction – Kalashnikovs, machetes, land-mines and the like – in societies where law and order have broken down.

Little more than three years ago, at the Millennium Summit, all states agreed on the importance of dealing with those threats. They adopted the Millennium Declaration, which includes the eight Millennium Development Goals – precise pledges to achieve measurable results by 2015.

I make no apology for reminding you of those pledges.

- To reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger, or without access to safe drinking water.
- To achieve universal primary education.
- To ensure that girls and boys, women and men, have equal access to education at all levels.
- To reduce child mortality by two thirds, and maternal mortality by three quarters.
- To halt, and begin to reverse, the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
- To improve the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers.

- And to build a global partnership for development between rich and poor countries.

Those pledges should be engraved on the heart, or at least the desk, of every political leader in every country. Indeed, they should be known throughout every society, so that in each country the people can monitor performance, and hold their leaders to account.

In that process, you in the media have a vital role to play. And I am glad to say that only last week, in New York, the chief executives of major broadcasting organisations throughout the world came to see me to talk about one of those goals: turning the tide against HIV/AIDS. They promised an all-out effort to inform the public of the terrible damage this epidemic is doing, of ways for societies and individuals to protect themselves against it, and of how much more can be done to help those already infected.

This is the deadliest epidemic in human history. It has already killed tens of millions of people. It may kill hundreds of millions, if we fail to meet it with an effort on the scale of the challenge. But if we do make such an effort, in rich and poor countries alike, we can halt it – and I thank President Clinton for devoting so much of his time and energy to leadership on this issue since he left office.

Stopping the spread of AIDS, and achieving the Millennium Goals, requires a great effort in every country. But you in Germany, which is such a tremendously prosperous country by global standards, have a special responsibility to play your part in meeting the eighth Goal – the global partnership for development, on which all the other seven may depend.

Many poor countries cannot hope to reach the targets unless rich countries help them – with official aid, with investment, with advice, with debt relief, and perhaps above all with a reform of the international trading system, so that producers in poor countries no longer face barriers to their exports, or unfair competition from subsidised imports.

That is why it is so important to fulfil the promises of assistance given at Monterrey and Johannesburg in 2002, and to complete the Doha round of trade negotiations.

Last year we let ourselves be distracted from these vital tasks. We were concerned – and rightly so – with issues of peace and security. But there will be no peace and no security, even for the most privileged amongst us, in a world that remains divided between extremes of wealth and poverty, health and disease, knowledge and ignorance, freedom and oppression. Surely we should have learnt that by now.

So our first great task for 2004 is to re-focus the world's attention on development. The second is to start re-building our system of collective security.

The Charter of the United Nations is very clear. States have the right to defend themselves – and each other – if attacked. But the first purpose of the United Nations

itself, laid down in Article 1, is “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace”.

We must show that the United Nations is capable of fulfilling that purpose, so that states do not feel obliged or entitled to take the law into their own hands.

That is why I have asked a small panel of distinguished individuals to make recommendations on ways of dealing with threats and challenges to peace and security in the 21st century.

People have described this as a panel on UN reform. It may indeed propose changes in the rules and mechanisms of the United Nations. But if so, those changes will be a means to an end, not the end itself. The object of the exercise is to find a credible and convincing collective answer to the challenges of our time.

So I would beg you not to focus on the nationality of the individual Panel members, or even on whether Germany may become a permanent member of the Security Council.

Germany has a great contribution to make to international peace and security, and it is making one at present, both inside and outside the Security Council. But the issue is not a matter of status or pecking order among states. What is needed is a system that will enable all states to look with confidence to the United Nations as a guarantor of their security, so that no state feels the need to resort to force unilaterally.

This, I am sure, is the objective that the Panel will keep firmly in mind. And it will need the support and advice of people with good ideas in all countries.

Finally, the third task I believe we should all focus on this year is that of rebuilding trust and confidence between people of different faiths and cultures.

Many recent events – including notably the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the war in Iraq, and the continuing tragic conflict between Israelis and Palestinians – have pushed us dangerously close to the “clash of civilisations”, which an American scholar predicted after the end of the cold war.

We must resist this. We must deal with all our fellow human beings fairly and objectively, judging them by their own individual words and actions, and not on the basis of generalisations or preconceptions about the group to which we think they belong.

Far too many Muslims have been made to suffer distrust and discrimination in western countries, because of the acts of terror to which a few Muslims have resorted.

There are also parts of the world where Christians have been attacked because of their presumed connection with western imperialism.

And alas, in many countries Jews are again beginning to feel insecure because they are blamed for Israel’s actions against Palestinians.

We must get away from this kind of thinking. Let those of us who believe in one God remember that we are all equal in His sight – and that if we call Him by different names, and worship Him in different ways, or not at all, that must be part of His divine purpose for us all.

Let all of us make it a priority, in 2004, to discover what we have in common with people of other faiths and cultures. Let us value, rather than despise or fear, what makes them different from us.

Tolerance is essential, but it is not enough. I believe we must go further. We must make a positive effort to learn more about each other, and to discover what is best in each other's beliefs and traditions.

And so I thank you once again for the honour you have bestowed on me, and through me on the United Nations. And I invite you to join me in dedicating this year to those three great tasks:

To re-focus the world's attention and resources on the needs and fears of the poor;

To strengthen our system of collective security, so that no state feels it has to face global threats on its own;

And to overcome distrust and division between people of different faiths and cultures, so that we can all live together in harmony and mutual respect.

By doing those three things, let us make 2004 a year of kept promises, and of restored hope!

Meine Damen und Herren: vielen, herzlichen Dank!