

Staff Union
of the United Nations Secretariat



Syndicat du personnel
du Secrétariat des Nations Unies

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22 February 2008

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

The United Nations Staff Union wishes to express its alarm and disappointment that you appear to have no interest in seeking a determination of accountability for the 11 December 2007 terrorist attack on the United Nations premises in Algiers.

During a press conference on 7 January 2008, you were asked whether you thought it was "imperative for the credibility of the United Nations that there will be an independent investigation that is not being done by the person who was in charge of security, to see whether security procedures were actually followed."

Your response was, "I will see; I will reserve my judgment until I have a full report from DSS."

Following the receipt of the "full report from DSS," which specifically did not seek to establish accountability, on 14 January 2008 you were quoted in the media as saying "We are now going to try to find out more facts, and it's not only limited to the Algiers case" and that "We'd like to engage other member states, and other international experts on this issue, and try to find out ... what we can do more to strengthen our measures against all these possible attacks against the United Nations."

We fully agree that it is imperative to "find out more facts" and to "do more to strengthen our measures against all these possible attacks." We would expect the involvement of the staff in such measures. On 5 February 2008, however, you appointed a chairperson to lead a panel to review United Nations security worldwide in response to the attack in Algiers, without the involvement of staff.

We find it disturbing that on such an important matter no consultations with the staff were made prior to the announcement. There are many questions regarding the appointment of the panel and the definition of its terms of reference that must be answered before staff can find it acceptable. The panel, as presently announced, raises issues regarding lack of accountability and possible conflicts of interest.

We implore you to direct that the team led by Mr. Brahimi also examines, under its terms of reference, lapses in the UN security system which may have led to an increase in the loss of life in Algiers on 11 December 2007, compared to the loss of UN staff at the Canal Hotel attack in 2003.

His Excellency
Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General of the United Nations

cc: Mr. Dimitri Samaras

Following the Canal Hotel attack, your predecessor commissioned the "Report of the Independent Panel on the Safety and Security of the UN Personnel in Iraq" to, inter alia, "examine the adequacy of UN security policy, management and practices in Iraq prior to the attack." This report recommended that "In the case of Iraq, the Panel believes that the seriousness of the breaches in the security system by the UN managers in charge at Headquarters and in the field warrants the setting up of a separate and independent audit and accountability procedure to review the responsibilities of key individuals in the lack of preventive and mitigating actions prior to the attack on 19 August."

Your predecessor acted on this recommendation, and created the Walzer Panel which in fact found that several UN officials were responsible for their lack of preventative and mitigation actions. We respectfully request that you direct the Brahimi Panel to have the same responsibility that was given to the Waltzer Panel.

Unfortunately, the impression created by your public statements and those by your Spokesperson is that the Brahimi Panel will not examine the facts of the United Nations security system prior to the Algiers bombing, but rather will be a global examination of security threats. While there is merit in such an examination, it must not be allowed to overshadow the imperative question of accountability for Algiers.

On 10 January 2008, you stated to representatives of Member States that you "will work to deliver results; to create a stronger UN through full accountability of all parties." By avoiding the question of accountability for security failures in Algiers, you are not following your own words, and you are not leading by example.

On 4 February 2008, you stated that your "overall goal is to develop an accountability framework that outlines clear roles, responsibilities and authorities for all levels and stakeholders of the Organization."

We believe that without accountability, there is impunity. We ask that you not be complicit in a cover-up of what happened prior to the 11 December attack. The staff is sick and tired of the impunity extended by the office of the Secretary-General to senior managers for their failings especially in situations where it has led to death and disability.

We request for an immediate and public clarification of your intentions.

Please accept, Sir, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Kisambira
President,
United Nations Staff Union