

## **New York, 21 December 2005 - Secretary-General's year-end press conference**

**SG:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Let me start by wishing each and every one of you happy holidays, and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

The year about to end has been a really difficult one -- from the tsunami to events in Lebanon and Darfur and beyond. I will not attempt to sum up here the complex challenges that have confronted us over the past 12 months, you are all keenly aware of them.

Rather, let us look forward to what we can and must do next year, and what we have to build on.

The 2005 Summit made important strides in a number of areas, even if it did not fulfil all expectations.

One of the things it did is that for the first time, it gave a broad definition of threats as we know them and they came up with five categories of threats: poverty, infectious diseases and environmental degradation; second, armed conflict, both within and among states; third, organised crime; fourth, terrorism, and fifth, weapons of mass destruction. And I think for the first time we have given a broad and fair definition of threats faced by all regions.

The other important thing that I believe came out of this Summit, is the fact that we were able to link very clearly, establish the link between development, security, human rights and the rule of law. And I believe at the end of that conference, delegates went away with the understanding that you cannot have development without security and you cannot have security without development. And you would enjoy neither unless there is respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I think what is also important is that the lead-up to the conference stimulated important new pledges to help us achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We urged a commitment by European leaders to set a time table to meet the 0.7 % of GDP, [Gross Domestic Product] or the debt relief to the 18 least developed countries, and so forth. And I think these were important achievements in the lead-up to the conference.

It also made progress on peace and security with all Member States accepting their responsibility to protect their citizens from genocide, ethnic cleansing and war crimes.

And it gave us a serious programme for reform to work on. That programme now hangs by a thread if the United Nations is stalled by lack of a budget. I therefore appeal to all Member States to resolve their differences promptly, and agree on the budget.

We now have agreement on a new and improved Emergency Relief Fund, and a Peacebuilding Commission.

I hope that, in the New Year, Member States will follow that up by agreeing on an effective, impartial Human Rights Council.

And I hope they will agree on a package of management reforms that I shall put before them in February.

The topics I have just mentioned all fall in three priority areas I will focus on next year: the fight against poverty and disease; peace and security; and reform of the United Nations.

If there's one thing I would like to hand over to my successor when I leave office next year, is that it should be a UN that is fit for the many varied tasks and challenges we are asked to take on today.

That is how I would like see the year ahead – in my last year as Secretary-General.

Let me now open the floor and take your questions.

**Q:** Secretary-General, welcome, on behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, and happy holidays. You just briefly touched on the question of budget negotiations. This is not the first time where political initiatives or political reform movements have been stalled on budgetary questions. I mean, this is almost an annual event. Is there some way that this process can be short-circuited so that the political agenda is not derailed through budgetary disputes?

**SG:** You're right. We have seen budget struggles over the past. But this time, it is different. It is different in the sense that we are looking at major reforms for the Organization. We also have our ongoing activities, which must continue as the new year begins. We have various proposals on the table. My concern is that Member States do not take any initiative, or take any decisions regarding the budget that will jeopardize not only reform but the ongoing activities of the Organization. I have indicated that we ought to be careful not to create a financial crisis for the Organization. The financial situation of the Organization is precarious. I can assure you that we will probably end the year with about \$35 million in the kitty. Of course, there will be operational reserves. But we will need to have assessments and money beginning to roll in as of January. I have appealed to the Member States to maintain the pressure on reform but, at the same time, approve a budget that will allow us to continue our ongoing activities while we press ahead with reform.

**Q:** Sir, I have two questions, both of which you touched on. Can you elaborate more on what kind of a danger a lack of a budget would be? It seems that just the last few days, the European Union, which is sort of taking up your cause, and the G-77 have not been able to initiate a dialogue.

Secondly, since everyone says that there is no job description for your job of Secretary-General, what do you think it should be, and what advice would you have for your successor?

**SG:** How much time do I have for the second question?

Let me say that I think, on the budget, I know there have been some differences between the G-77 and other groups of countries. But I think that they all want to see reform and they all want to see the United Nations move ahead. I am hopeful that they will be able to come to an understanding and agree a budget.

Last night, they were supposed to come up with their five top priorities on either side. And I don't think that exercise was entirely successful. Discussions are going on this morning, and I hope they will be able to succeed. I spoke to the President of the General Assembly this morning, who is very actively engaged. I, myself, will be talking to some delegations. I suspect that we will be able to find a solution. I haven't given up hope yet.

On the question of my job description: of course, the Secretary-General is supposed to be the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization, which is a rather loose term. But, of course, the Secretary-General, in addition to being perhaps the chief diplomat of the world – and his good offices and all the work he does in areas of peacekeeping and humanitarian work – also has to ensure that this place is run properly. I hope that the reforms that we are trying to put in place will assist my successor.

**Q:** Do you have any advice for him?

**SG:** Advice for him... This is an interesting question. I think it is easier to give advice to somebody when you know the person, when he or her is in place and you know their personality. But I think what they need, as I have been advised over the years by quite a lot of experienced leaders and politicians, they need thick skin. They need a sense of humour, and they should laugh a lot inside and outside, and at themselves, if need be. They also need to be able to reach out and listen to their constituents within the Organization and beyond and work effectively with leaders across the world. I think that is enough.

**Q:** Secretary-General, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that the situation in Lebanon is posing one of the main challenges to the United Nations this year. In an interview last week, Mr. Mehlis told me unequivocally that he believed Syrian authorities were behind the killing of Mr. Hariri. When asked about the United Nations reaction, your spokesman downplayed the significance of the statement and said that, in fact, there was nothing new to it. Do we infer from this that you concur with the views expressed by Mr. Mehlis? And in your opinion, where does it leave the investigation? And doesn't it, in fact, complicate the task of his successor, whom you are about to appoint?

**SG:** I would much rather not get into the subject. There is an ongoing investigation, which could also lead to a judicial process. So, I do not want to say anything that might have a negative impact on the investigation or on the judicial process. So, I will let the investigation take its course. Yes, you are right. I am about to name a successor to Detlev Mehlis. I have worked out practical arrangements with Detlev. There will be no gap. He will continue until the successor arrives. I am hoping that they will be able to spend about two weeks or so together for him to hand over properly. And then the successor will take over. We do take the responsibility and the investigations very seriously, and we are going to press ahead. I will name a very competent successor to Mr. Mehlis.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, you started out by saying that it had been a difficult year for the world. But it is also been, I believe, a difficult year for you personally, especially with all the oil-for-food and Volcker reports. I wonder if you could comment on your own feelings at the end of what I believe must be a very difficult year for you, and what you are hoping that your legacy to this Organization is going

to be? And in your opening remarks, you talked about the key priorities for you here at the United Nations. But what do you see as the big, global issues that are going to be confronting the world next year?

**SG:** When I said that it was a difficult year, I wasn't externalizing. It was both a difficult year for the world and, obviously for me and the Organization. You did mention the Volcker report. We have all looked at the report and drawn the right lessons from it, and we are trying to take steps to correct the situation.

I hope you ladies and gentleman of the press would also do some reflection on your own as to how you have covered that event, how you allowed deliberate leaks and others to lead you in one direction, and when, in the end, the actual story came, when the full investigations were completed, with the documentation on the companies and the countries, you missed a story. But anyway, I leave you to reflect on that. It is not up to me to tell you how to do your job. But we all have to be careful, whatever the responsibilities we have, not to be fed by people with agendas.

You have two questions. And you did talk about my legacy. That will be for others to describe. But I think I have, in my term, done as much as I can for the Organization whether in the area of development and the fight against poverty or HIV/AIDS or reaching out to the private sector and civil society, bringing them into partnership with us on the peace and security area and my own good offices. There is quite a lot that has been done. But I will leave others to judge. I think history will judge us quite fairly, I believe.

On the global issues, I think the issue of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction is going to be a major issue for us. I also see the situation in the Middle East. Here, I'm talking about the broader Middle East. I'm looking at Iraq. I'm looking at the situation in Lebanon and Syria. And I'm looking at the Palestinian-Israeli situation. So, the Middle East will be a major issue for us. I dare say that we should also keep a very close eye on Sudan/Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

**Q:** I want to go back to the election year next year. Do you think the next Secretary-General should come from Asia? As you know, there is a current of opinion saying that non-written rules might change and that it might be the term of an eastern European. What are your thoughts on that? And, secondly, do you regret having taken a second term?

**SG:** There is always a second term curse, and I think lots of leaders and people who have gone through a second term would probably tell you about that. But that too will pass, and one overcomes it and moves on. The first term was easier than the second term; you are right. But I still have work to do, and I have work to do next year.

On the question of the next Secretary-General, I think it is generally accepted among the membership — in my contacts with them — that it is Asia's turn. I know some delegations do not accept that. But that is an issue for the membership to decide. But as you look back historically, we have established a pattern of rotation. Most Member States that I talked to feel it is Asia's turn.

**Q:** It is no secret, Sir, that you met with Serge Brammertz here at the United Nations on Thursday of last week. We spoke to the spokesman of the International Criminal

Court, who confirmed that he got an offer and that he is very keen to take over the position. I am not asking you to pre-empt your announcement, but the fact that a six-month period has been determined in advance, like last time — seven-month period by Mehlis ... . The people in the Middle East do not think that befitting the Lebanese problem: that a person comes for six months; has a learning curve; by the time he gets really involved in the intricate question of the problem, he is gone, and we are looking for somebody else. Mehlis himself said it might take months, even years if there is no cooperation forthcoming. Are you happy with six-months' period stint for these very high-level investigators at this committee? And my second question: the Lebanese people support an international court. And I am sure we would like to hear from Kofi Annan if he himself supports establishing a court with an international nature.

**SG:** First of all, let me say that Brammertz is one of the candidates I am looking at. There are of course quite a few issues to work out. The highly qualified prosecutors that one would need for this kind of job are usually employed or in some situation that you have to negotiate to get them released. The Council's mandate is for six months. In fact, originally when the Commission was established and Mehlis was appointed, we thought it could be done in six months. Now it has been extended for another six months. I am looking at candidates and I will take all these factors into consideration and appoint the best available candidate. My mandate is for six months. I cannot appoint anyone for more than six months. So the appointment will be for six months, as mandated by the Security Council. Obviously, if there is a need for extension it will be another story that we will have to deal with.

On the question of a court with an international character, the Council has asked me to consult with the Lebanese Government, with the prosecutor and my own legal office to make a report to the Council. And I intend to submit a report to the Council on the issue of the court and on the issue of assistance to the Lebanese for the investigation of all assassinations dating back to October 2004. So I will be submitting reports covering these two issues.

**Q:** (inaudible)

**SG:** I think that is a question for the Council to decide. I do not think my personal support or lack of support should make a difference here.

**Q:** On the reform of the Security Council — or mainly on the enlargement — do you still believe that this could strengthen multilateralism and revitalize the international Organization? How do you put a priority on Security Council reform? Which part do you put on your to-do list for the next year?

**SG:** The Member States have a broad agenda of reform before them, including the Council. And I have made it clear that I would want to see them tackle all these reform issues. I have also made it clear that I am one of those who believes that United Nations reform will ever be complete until we deal with the issue of the Security Council, and that the Security Council should be reformed to reflect today's realities.

**Q:** This is an end-of-the year press conference, and you said you would need a thick skin for the post. So here is a rare chance to go over some of these issues.

You said the press blew the story on oil-for-food. I mean, here in the United Nations we did cover the United Nations side of things, and others covered other aspects of it. Number one, did . . . . Paul Volcker has said that he changed your testimony, or offered advice, in that retreat where you took questions from the investigators. Can you give your side as to what happened in that room? Joe Stephanides wants an apology, and the United Nations appeals panel says he was treated as a sacrificial lamb. Why was he not, in your view? And could you use your time now to clear up the many questions people keep asking about this Mercedes? Did you use your offices to give, and authorize, a diplomatic discount for your son in this matter?

**SG:** First of all, let me say that the report of the Volcker commission is clear, and you have all read the thousands of pages of that report. And I am not going to rehash it here.

On the other issue of conversations between Volcker or the investigators and me, it was part of the investigations. And the report, as a result of all these conversations, has come out. And I think, let the report stand by itself.

On Stephanides, yes, we did cancel the decision to terminate his appointment and allowed him to retire; which is an indication that the punishment was too harsh, and we admitted it and corrected it. And I think we have also written to him indicating our position. And I do not think there is any further action on our side. I understand that he may appeal to the Administrative Tribunal, which is also his right.

[On the car,] it is part of the report. I know you are all obsessed about the car. My son and his lawyers are dealing with it. If you want to know more about it, please direct the questions to his lawyer or to him. I am neither his spokesman nor his lawyer.

**Q:** People who do not know much about the United Nations do know that it has something called the Commission on Human Rights, on which notorious rights violators sit. You yourself have acknowledged that, when you proposed the Human Rights Council. You said that the Commission on Human Rights brings discredit on the entire Organization. My question is, at the moment the movement on the Human Rights Council is very slow. There are major countries in the General Assembly that have declared their opposition to it and, basically, have said they want to keep the Commission on Human Rights. The way it looks right now, the Commission on Human Rights will be back in existence in March and April. My question is, since you have declared yourself on this, can you personally get involved, or have you personally gotten involved, speaking to some of those nations, saying, This is unacceptable and you have got to yield?

**SG:** Yes, I am involved behind the scenes, working with delegations and Member States. And, as you may know, over the past 10 days to two weeks, I have spoken to all the Member States, individually and in groups. I have addressed all the regional groups. I have addressed the G-77. And I have met with smaller groups of Ambassadors, and individually. Human rights is very much part of the issues I have been raising with them. I have not given up the prospects for a Human Rights Council. It is slow, but I am still hopeful that we should be able to establish a Human Rights Council, if not by the end of the year probably early in the new year. And I would want to see the Council established before the human rights group resumes its work in Geneva in March next year.

**Q:** (interpretation from French) You once said that poor governance was the problem in Africa. Do you believe that there has been some improvement, or has there been no progress?

**SG:** (interpretation from French) There has been some progress in some countries, but there has been none in others and, in fact, the situation has deteriorated. We need to continue to work with Member States and civil society to improve the situation. But the question of poor governance is a reality. In some countries, it has worsened and thus complicated the situation in Africa. That weakness needs to be corrected.

**Q:** Well nobody will accuse me of trying to spread Christianity, so “Merry Christmas.”

**SG:** You listen to a radio station I don't listen to. I wished you “Happy Holidays”, but I accept your “Merry Christmas”.

**Q:** To follow up a little bit on Richard's question, last year you basically punished two people based, one, on oil-for-food – which was Stephanides – and the other for another transgression, which was your election advisor, Carina Perelli. However, people that were mentioned for much larger transgressions in the Volcker report have not been punished, including, of course, Benon Sevan, who was allowed to leave the country, and Iqbal Riza, who asked for the shredding of documents, and Abdoulie Janneh, who helped with that Mercedes-Benz out there in Africa. The investigation into Dileep Nair is continuing way over the deadline that was set for it, and last night there was a report that your Chief of Staff, Mark Malloch Brown, was taking two salaries at the same time. I don't know the veracity of that report yet; maybe you can enlighten us. There is a feeling among some staffers at the United Nations that there is a double standard applied to punishment at the United Nations.

**SG:** I don't know if there is a feeling among staffers or if it is your feeling, but, be that as it may, we have taken action where action is required. I think some of the things you've said this morning, for a serious journalist, are quite libelous. I mean when you ask a question about my Chief of Staff taking two salaries, it is patently false and you must know that that sort of story is not even logical for you to accept and use as a basis of a question.

On the question of Mr. Riza, there was no finding against him. He is a staff member who served this Organization well. What was destroyed were extra documents which staff members often keep close to them for their work and, under the rules, are allowed to destroy after a year. The papers that were destroyed did not impede the work of the Commission, so do let that go. This is not something similar to the eight minutes in the Nixon White House. I think you all see that kind of similarity, and I think you should understand and let go. We have dealt with the transgressions in the Organization according to the rules of the Organization, and I stand by what we have done and I have nothing more to add.

**SG:** The reunification efforts on Cyprus failed last year in April. You have said that you regretted the Greek Cypriots' rejection of your plan. The Greek Cypriots are still adamant about not coming to the negotiating table under your plan. You said at the same time that it was a great disappointment for you, and you called on the European

countries to help alleviate the plight of the Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots still live isolated from the world, especially Europe.

Mr. Gambari is going to go to the region very soon to rehash the issue and restart bringing the parties to the negotiating table. Why should the Greeks come to the negotiating table? What do you have in mind? Are you going to make another plan carrying your name?

**SG:** I don't think the name of the plan is important. What is important is that, in the end, there is a plan on the table that rallies both sides and they both agree and unify and live in peace. I indicated that the last time I spoke to the leaders, but during the General Assembly session I saw both the Turkish and the Greek Cypriot leaders and indicated to them that my good offices are still available, but of course I will have to make a judgment as to whether the situation is ripe for us to resume negotiations and if the parties genuinely are ready to get into the necessary give-and-take that will lead to a settlement.

I have not concluded that we are there yet, and I had also, as you know, engaged the Greek Cypriot side as well as the European Union. The European Union has attempted to assist the Turkish Cypriots and did approve a substantial amount of money to help with economic development, but there are some bureaucratic issues which have not permitted them to move ahead with the disbursement. I hope the issue will be resolved shortly.

I also gave a report to the Security Council indicating that we should make attempts to assist the North. The Council is still sitting on the report; they have not reacted yet. But we will keep engaged. I will be sending envoys periodically to test the ground, to talk to the leaders concerned, for me to make a judgment if and when the time is right for me to proceed.

**Q:** In the vein of my colleagues – shalom. In the spirit of what Edie was saying, one of the most important things that the Office of the Secretary-General has, the most sacred thing, is high moral authority. The Office of the Secretary-General has taken a lot of beating in the last year. What is it that you can do and ask your advisers to do in order to elevate it back to the position so that your moral voice is heard across the world?

My other question is: There is a great divide between the developing and developed world in the thinking and the perception and so forth, which is reflected in the talks on reform and management and budget. What is it that can be done to overcome that and to bridge the divide?

**SG:** I think, on your first question, obviously we need to press ahead and do the important work that is ahead of us, and speak out when we have to. I am pressing ahead with my work and dealing with leaders around the world, and I think, interestingly enough, quite a lot of the leaders around the world and quite a lot of the Member States understood what was going on in the past year, and I think quite a lot of you also knew exactly what was going on. There has been no difference in my dealings with them and we do have lots of work to do that we are going to press ahead with.

On the question of the North-South divide, I think the only way to deal with it is for them to dialogue, is for them to sit across the table, look each other in the eyes and explain their positions and work in the spirit of give-and-take to make progress. They should put the interests of the Organization above all else, and if they do that I am sure they will succeed.

**Q:** Happy holidays, Sir. In the spirit of that, I am wondering if you think that the complex budget and reform negotiations down in the basement will be done by Christmas, or whether you think it will be more of a New Year's cliffhanger. Also, I am sure that you or your people have been spending a lot of time down there in the negotiations. Can you describe why, in this now-or-never moment, as you put it, on United Nations reform, there is so much resistance or inability of these delegates to come to some kind of conclusion?

**SG:** Let me say that I would prefer to see the budget issue and the reform discussions brought to a conclusion before Christmas. But, of course, if we fail that, then we will have to come back after Christmas. And I think the Member States realize that they don't have much time, and they may have to come up with some creative ways of ending their work. One option they are looking at is instead of going through the resolution of 250 paragraphs, perhaps come up with a shorter document that they can agree on, and complete their work and move on. As of yesterday, of the 250 paragraphs, I think only four paragraphs had been approved, and so I don't see them finishing if they continue on that track.

I think the atmosphere is also a bit tense, and once again, I think they need to really talk to each other. Tempers are high, and there's quite a bit of mistrust. There is a sense that they are operating in an atmosphere of threats and intimidation, which some of them say they resent. But quite frankly, I think the only choice they have is to sit down and talk honestly and sincerely and frankly to each other and try and come to an understanding. But they have to put the interests of the Organization first, not narrow interests.

**Q:** (inaudible) If you don't know what that means, that's "Happy New Year" in Arabic.

**Q:** Don't look at me!

**SG:** But it's not Arabic.

**Q:** It is Arabic, but it (inaudible) doesn't mean "Happy New Year"; it means something else.

**Q:** It had the word "Mercedes" in, but I took it out. Just to comment on the Mercedes before I ask my question. The Volcker report says that the Mercedes was bought in your name, so as the owner of the car, can you tell us what happened to it and where it is now?

Now, my question is that, it's true that we missed a lot of stories in the oil-for-food scandal, and the UN hasn't made it easy. And even your answer today on the Mercedes so far hasn't made it easy. Some of your own stories – your own version of events – don't really make sense. I'd like to ask you particularly –

SG: I think you are being very cheeky here.

Q: Well, let me – Sir, let me ask my question.

SG: No, hold on. Hold on. Listen, James Bone. You have been behaving like an overgrown schoolboy in this room for many, many months and years. You are an embarrassment to your colleagues and to your profession. Please stop misbehaving, and please let's move on to a more serious subject.

Q: (inaudible) my question.

SG: No, move on to a serious –

Q: There are inconsistencies –

SG: No, move on to serious journalists. You go ahead.

Q: James, are you finished?

SG: No, go ahead.

Q: Okay. Mr. Secretary-General, I was waiting for this question. I believe that I was even before James Bone. But, anyhow, here is my question. On Kosovo, Sir – and it's my destiny to ask you only questions of Balkans – do you foresee, as your Special Envoys did say yesterday to us, that the question of Kosovo will be somehow solved in the last year of your mandate, although somebody is seeing it as a “mission impossible”? And do you think that if it is going to be solved (inaudible), is going to improve or worsen the legacy of the United Nations in the Balkans?

SG: I have put in charge of that dossier a very experienced mediator, and Mr. Ahtissari, whom I spoke to also yesterday, has been travelling the region, consulting with other leaders. He's been to other capitals in Europe and in Washington and is going to begin his work in earnest in January. Obviously, when you start any negotiations of that kind, you try to have a target date and a time frame within which to operate. And ideally, he would want to complete his work in the course of 2006. What the final decision will be and what the outcome of the discussions and mediation will be I cannot prejudge. But if we are able to come up with a solution – a solution that does not create additional problems in the subregion, a solution that helps clarify once and for all the situation in that subregion, and of course we also have the issue of Montenegro, which is building up – then the United Nations would have made a contribution. But I don't want to judge the outcome.

Q: But do you think that is going to improve or worsen the legacy, which is a very bad legacy in the Balkans?

SG: I think that's an awkward question – to say whether the solution to the case will worsen or improve the United Nations' legacy. I think let's see what happens with the mediation. You are jumping the gun a bit.

Q: Since it's directly under the auspices of the United Nations, Sir.

SG: I still don't get your question.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, given that there is a possibility that we'll enter the new year with a budget crisis, what role would you see for the Organization on a shoestring budget?

**SG:** It would be very disruptive, and we may have to take some drastic measures. I'm not sure if the light in this room can – will be on. But I really, really hope the Member States understand the implications of a budget crisis and will do everything to avoid it.

**Q:** Secretary-General, this morning US Ambassador Bolton described the reform situation thusly: he said the pressure to reform is coming up against a culture of inaction at the United Nations and there is a question now of whether this irresistible force meeting this immovable – it is a question of this irresistible force meeting this immovable object and the question of who will win. So my question to you is: do you agree with that characterization of the, sort of the United Nations culture of inaction, an immovable force? And, also, has Ambassador Bolton's rhetoric on a number of issues, such as the allegation that you mishandled the situation of Carina Perelli and that Louise Arbour's comments were illegitimate – has he contributed with this kind of rhetoric to the intimidation – atmosphere of intimidation and fear that you just referred to?

**SG:** Reform is an issue for the Member States, and the only way you make progress in this Organization is for the Members to talk to each other, to persuade each other and to move ahead. The most effective ambassadors I have known in this building are the ones who've been able to sit across the table, reach out to their colleagues and persuade them to take a course of action. They are the ones who have been able to build alliances across regions and have been able to work with like-minded ambassadors to move a reform, or whatever agenda they have on the table. And I would suggest to all ambassadors who want to make progress to go that route.

On the question of remarks by Ambassador Bolton, and its impact on the other delegations, I will leave them to speak for themselves.

**Q:** Secretary-General, what are your thoughts on some of the criticisms we heard yesterday that the Peacebuilding Commission will actually pave the way for the big Powers on the Security Council to even strengthen their hand further in the GA? And as a follow-up to that, when you look at what the Americans, the French and the British, and possibly others, are trying to do in the Middle East and Africa south of the Sahara, do you feel that the battle for sovereignty and independence of the fifties and sixties is being waged all over again? Or are you more positive about what those Powers are trying to do?

**SG:** In Africa, you mean?

I think on the Peacebuilding Commission, we have got a Commission. There are aspects of it that not everybody is pleased with, and I think the problem they have with the P-5 was the fact that the P-5 will automatically be there, and some of these Governments feel they have a privileged position in the Council and this need not be repeated in any new body that is set up. But they have been able to come up with a compromise which everybody seems to have accepted. But I think the key here, with the Peacebuilding Commission, is that you do have the Commission, which will offer

advice and all that, but when it comes to country-specific, the composition will be quite – let's take, for example, if you were to have a country-specific group in Haiti, it will include the troop-contributing countries on the ground in Haiti, countries that are making major contributions to Haiti and the World Bank, IMF and the others. The composition of the group that would be looking at a similar situation in Sudan or Liberia could be quite different, again based on who is involved and who's on the ground. And it is those country-specific committees that are really going to make the real difference. And I think we should really focus on those groups, rather than so much on the Commission as such, which will offer advice and policy.

On the question of whether we are going through the wars of the past, it is a difficult question to answer in the sense that, at the end of the cold war, everybody thought, “The world is moving on to a new phase”. But we should also remember that some of the wars – civil wars and wars in Africa and other parts of the world – were proxy wars. The big Powers had influence; the big Powers were involved; they could influence it; they could turn it off; they could supply weapons; they could refuse to supply weapons. At the end of the cold war, it became almost free for all: each one for himself. And some of these rebel leaders and groups have been supported by all sorts of groups, or they have exploited natural resources of their own countries to sustain the conflict and the civil war. There is some outside involvement, but I would not say that we are reliving the colonial era.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, happy holidays. And we know you have made a great effort on the United Nations reform in the 60-years celebration of the United Nations. And you just mentioned the next year is last year you're being UN Secretary-General. And my question is: In your last year, which – what things the most important thing for the UN reform? In another word, if you – there is only one thing you can do for UN reform before you're leaving Secretary-General's position, what thing you will take?

**SG:** I don't want to pick and choose. I've given them a broad agenda for reform, and I think they are interrelated, and I would want the Member States to work on that agenda. And I would not want to give them an item that I think is the most important that they should focus on. I would urge them to act on all the reform proposals.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, in defence of James Bone, he's a hard-working journalist trying to get to the bottom of issues of transparency within the Organization. As a public servant, you understand the need for transparency, and when issues of money and conduct – professional conduct – come into attention, they need to be looked into. But be that as it may, we'll leave that aside.

A couple of questions I've got. In the wake of the oil-for-food scandal, the ongoing bloodshed in Darfur, we've got issues of misconduct within the procurement division that are still going on, and investigations. In your estimation, as you reflect on this, in lessons learned and that you are learning, are there certain things that maybe the UN should not be involved in?

And then a couple other follow-up questions. What, in your estimation, is the single most important reform that you would like to see happen within the Secretariat?

And then, lastly, as you reflect on the year that's passed, what one thing stands out most that, if you were given the chance to go back and fix it or make it right or put it on a different course, what would that be?

**SG:** I think James would be happy to know he has a lawyer in the room. Unfortunately, he's gone, but I'm sure others will tell him.

I think, on the issues that you've raised, we are, as I said, taking action on quite a lot across the board, not only on the Volcker, but on the procurement area that you asked for. I would also ask you to put things in perspective, and also to look around you. We have submitted ourselves to incredible scrutiny, and I think very few organizations, as far as I know, have subjected themselves to such scrutiny. And, I daresay, if any organization were to do that you will find things wrong; it's normal. Organizations are not perfect, and each organization has something to – And when you look around you, and you read your press, which I'm sure you do since you gather the news, you discover that there are quite a lot of things going that have also gone wrong in other areas, in other systems, in other Governments, in other institutions, which are being corrected and should be corrected. The important thing is for us to recognize that things have gone wrong and action has to be taken. And we are taking them.

On your question of the – the most important thing that I would have – I think if I go back in the recent years, I think one thing I would have liked to see done is for us to have done everything that we could have done to avoid a war in Iraq that has brought such division within this Organization and the international community. And that is one thing that I must say still haunts me and bothers me: that as an organization, as an international community, we were not able to do. I did speak to lots of Member States, lots of organizations; I was on the phone. Anyway, we were not – and with our inspectors – but we were not able to do that.

**Q:** And in terms of things that maybe on reflection the UN should maybe not be involved –

**SG:** I think one of the things, and I have said it very clearly: I've said it very clearly that the oil-for-food programme, which was a sui generis programme that was given – it's not a normal United Nations activity – I have said very clearly that I hope the United Nations will never be asked to take on an operation of that kind again.

**Q:** Since you brought it up, I hope you won't mind me resurrecting the ghost of the oil-for-food programme again. It's a ghost that seems to have been haunting very, how should I say, discreetly. The oil-for-food web site says that the currently – \$10 billion had been handed over to the Iraq Development Fund. And I saw last week newspaper reports that American military officers were taking \$200,000 a month in bribes for disposition of those funds to contractors. And I was wondering, in view of the fact that the international monitoring board that was tasked by the Security Council with examining the disposition of those funds, and the US Government inspector who failed to find out what had happened to them, whether there's been any recent information on what happened to the \$10 billion from the oil-for-food that no one seems to care about.

But secondly, last year also, perhaps your biggest achievement that no one also mentioned was the “responsibility to protect” being smuggled through, without the

delegates being aware of what they were doing, perhaps. But people are still dying in Darfur. Will you – do you expect to see, before you finish, any sort of ratification or codification of the responsibility to protect, beyond a vague declaration that we will be nice in future, and put some teeth into it in, for example, Darfur.

**SG:** Let me start with your first question. Obviously, the auditing board is still in action. I haven't spoken to the Chairman lately. And they have issued several reports, and I'm sure other reports will be coming out. But I think it is important, when these things come out, that each Government follows up and takes action. And some Governments are taking action; others have not been that active. But I hope all of them will pursue the information that has been put out.

And you are also right that the “responsibility to protect” was a major achievement. It didn't get much press space, but it was one of the, I think, major achievements of the Summit. Having said that, I would hope that the Member States, having pledged solemnly to protect populations at risk, will honour that pledge when the time comes.

And you have mentioned Darfur. In fact, recently I've had lots of discussions with Governments on it. We have an assessment mission on the ground with the African Union Force, and the United Nations has sent members along with that. And one of the mandate is for them to look at the way forward, how we strengthen security on the ground. We are also dealing with the African Union and finding ways of re-energizing the political discussions on Darfur, which is taking place in Abuja, because I think that is the only way for us to have long-term stability in Darfur and in Sudan. The Government itself has set end of December as a deadline for achieving agreement on Darfur with the rebels, but at this rate I don't think that is going to happen. What is important is all those with pressure should maintain that pressure, both on the Government and on the rebels, to come to an agreement. The situation is very difficult, and I think the United Nations will have to take much more active action. And I have raised this with the Council. And as we move into the next year I think that is going to be necessary, and the Council will have to act.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, you appointed a new Special Envoy to the Western Sahara this year, and he's scheduled to deliver his report next month. Are you confident that 2006 will be the year to resolve the Western Sahara question?

**SG:** I think that that issue is too complex for 2006. But we will persevere.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, this is a question that's sort of evolved as this conference has gone along. At the beginning, you talked about having a thick skin, thick skin being important. We have seen a side of you, though, that we don't often see. I have two questions. One, how do you feel when you receive this sometimes well-intentioned, sometimes fairly well-researched criticisms of you personally, your family, your policies and the United Nations? And second, given the criticisms, are you bracing for a difficult year ahead in 2006?

**SG:** Let me say that when you talk of criticism, I am not afraid of criticism. Some criticisms have been constructive and helpful, and I accept that. Some have been out of place and have really gone beyond the zone of all reasonableness, and you wouldn't expect me or anybody in this house to accept that. But as we move into next year, as I

have indicated, I have given you an idea of the agenda I have ahead of me. I have lots of work to do, and I'm going to focus on that and get my work done.

**Q:** (inaudible) in terms of your family and of the United Nations?

**SG:** I think that I have answered that by saying that some are fair and are unfair, and I don't accept it when it's not fair.

**Q:** Well, thank you to give me this, because I was the first one to come to the theatre and the last one to ask.

Secretary-General, first of all, do you think the Iranian nuclear programme will come soon to the Security Council? Secondly, the election in Iraq finished, but the violence is still going on. What's the meaning in the election then, in this case?

**SG:** I think the nuclear – Iranian nuclear issue is now being dealt with by the Atomic Agency in Vienna. I don't think that process has been exhausted yet, and there will soon be a meeting between the Iranians and the European Ministers. How well that will go I do not know. Whether it is going to be talks or talks about talks, only time – we will know fairly shortly. But I think the preference of everyone will be if they can sit at the table and find a solution. If, of course, they are not able to find a solution, the process at the atomic agency will have to be exhausted before the issue comes to the United Nations, if it does come to the United Nations.

On the question of Iraq, I mean, let's be clear here. Elections are an important signpost, but it is not everything. It's a beginning, not an end. I think what is required in Iraq is reconciliation of all groups. And we have been maintaining this here for a long time: that you need a political process that is inclusive, that brings all the groups in. Most people have been worried about the ethnic and sectorial conflict, but the divide now seems to be between secular and religious, which is emerging in Iraq. And I think it is also something that Iraq will have to deal with.

Now that the elections are over, the next important thing is to establish the Government and to move ahead with the constitutional review process, which is to take four months. I hope the constitution will be adjusted meaningfully to be able to bring all parties on board and make it a unifying exercise, which up till now it has not been. And I think once you have gone through the reconciliation, with the constitutional process and determination on the part of the Iraqis to work together, you will see an end to the violence. But elections alone was not expected to end the violence.

**Q:** Mr. Secretary-General, happy holiday to you too.

**SG:** Thank you very much.

**Q:** As this is the ninth year into your two terms as Secretary-General of this Organization, at this stage, how are you feeling physically and psychologically? And unrelated to that, what is your position regarding the suggestion that the Republic of Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia be added to the Quartet?

**SG:** Physically and psychologically, I am fine. I am in great shape, raring to go next year. Thank you very much.

On the second question: Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Jordan have played an important role in the situation in the Middle East. In fact, on the reform of Palestinian security, Egypt has been extremely helpful, working with the Europeans and the Americans to reform the Palestinian security authority. The Quartet, in the past, has broadened its meeting. We had a meeting once where we brought in the three countries Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. And at our last meeting, in September, this issue came up: that we should in the near future allow room for a larger discussion, bringing in the partners in the region. I don't think there's intention to expand the Quartet as such. But the Quartet can meet in an expanded format with the three countries that you mentioned, and I think that is not excluded, that it will take place in the course of this year.

Thank you very much.

**Q:** Sir, I'm sorry. I really have to do this for the record, Sir.

On behalf of the United Nations Correspondents Association, I have to tell you that James Bone is not an embarrassment. He's a member in good standing of UNCA. He had every right to ask the question (inaudible).

**SG:** No, I agree with you: he has a right to ask questions, and I came here to answer questions. But I think we also have to understand that we have to treat each other with some respect. You can ask questions – there are ways of asking questions and ways not to ask questions. We also know – I am not the only one – you know what has been going on in this room. You know how my spokesmen have been badgered, mistreated, insulted. They have been professional. They have stood there and taken it. And you should also have taken that up with those who behave that way. I'm not worried about answering questions. You have the right to ask all questions you want to ask. I reserve the right to refuse to answer questions I don't want to answer. But there is a certain behaviour and a certain mutual respect which we have to respect.