STATEMENT ON STAFF SAFETY AND SECURITY
BY THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT GROUP (UNDG)
AT THE JOINT BOARD MEETING OF UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA AND WFP

(Delivered by Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF)

New York – 26 January 2001

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates:

Our most precious resource is our UN staff – and their safety and security is a matter of the greatest importance for all of us in the UN System.

The work of assisting civilian populations in crisis situations has always involved a higher-than-average risk of life and limb. Our courageous staff members accept that, and they have always accepted it.

But in recent years, the risks have grown sharply, and they have done so in direct proportion to the spread of armed conflict and instability.

That is why staff security has become a matter of growing concern to the United Nations Development Group; and it is why the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) addresses the issue of staff security at every meeting.

Mr. President, the statistics speak for themselves: Between 1992 and the end of last year, 198 civilian staff members of the UN System died violent deaths.

Most of these were national staff; 50 were international staff.

In addition, between 1994 and last September, 240 UN staff members were caught up in 63 cases of kidnapping and hostage-taking.

What is more, these outrages have been carried out with almost total impunity: To date, only five accused perpetrators have reportedly been brought to justice.

All of this, to say nothing of the instances of staff being raped, beaten, robbed or car-jacked. In 1999 alone, 292 violent incidents involving UN staff were reported throughout the world.

Nor does it take into account the repeated occasions when UN staff have been denied the use of crucial communications systems – and of the many tens of millions of dollars in UN property that has been destroyed, damaged or looted.

While the toll of dead and injured has predominantly affected those working in hard-duty stations, no location can any longer be considered exempt.

Exposure to HIV/AIDS is an increasingly serious threat, especially in countries where the disease is rampant.

And the spectre of sudden accidental death is never far away, as we were cruelly reminded this month by the tragic helicopter crash in northern Mongolia that claimed the lives of four UN staff members and five other people during a relief operation.
Distinguished Delegates: We, the members of the UNDG and all our partners on the ground, from NGOs to the Red Cross Movement, are working tirelessly to protect and assist civilians at risk in the vast majority of them women and children.

It is a struggle made all the more difficult as the issue of humanitarian access becomes politicised. But it is one to which we remain totally, and unshakably, committed.

Mr. President, our determination to protect UN staff is no less resolute.

To this end, UN agencies with large field-based programmes are working closely with UNSECOORD to train our staff and bring training procedures into harmony.

Together we are strengthening the role of UN Country Teams on staff security issues, and we are supporting UNSECOORD with staff.

Indeed, Mr. President, we are doing everything in our power – and within our resources – to improve the safety and security of UN staff.

But more must be done – and we cannot do it alone.

There is an urgent need for additional resources for better training, better equipment, and better communications capacity – but not at the expense of development funds or of even more scarce humanitarian funds.

And we need concrete action – action to bring about significant improvements in staff security in the field.

In short, we need the support of governments.

Only governments can provide the political will and the additional resources to ensure the access, the means of communication, the logistics and air operations, the travel permits, the visas, and all the myriad other essentials of humanitarian work.

And, most importantly, only governments can institute measures to end the culture of impunity, beginning with the extension of legal protection to UN staff in humanitarian operations, as the Secretary-General has asked – and ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, under which attacks on humanitarian workers could be considered a war crime.

As you know, the Secretary-General, after consultation with affected UN agencies, drew up a series of proposals designed to establish minimum staff security arrangements in the field as well as at headquarters. He also defined minimum operating security standards (MOSS) to be followed by Designated Officials and Security Management Teams.

Under these proposals, costs for additional posts were to be included in the UN’s regular budget.

The Secretary-General has also requested that an additional $5 million be placed in an existing trust fund set up to provide supplementary financing for staff security training, counseling and communication. But up to now, contributions to the fund have lagged.

The General Assembly generally agreed to the posts that the Secretary-General proposed. However, it maintained the current arrangements, including the requirement that the Funds and Programmes must reimburse most of these expenses on a cost-sharing basis.

Establishing posts, recruiting, training and deploying staff, investing in communications equipment and other staff safety measures, deploying UN staff
counselors, conducting system-wide safety and security awareness training for both national and international staff – all of these are essential.

They also must be paid for, as we are well aware – and that is why we appeal to you, our Executive Boards, to make a firm commitment to allocate additional resources, including contributions to the trust fund, to put staff security on a solid financial basis by the end of this year.

Distinguished Delegates, we urgently need your help, for the sake of all the millions of civilians at risk – and for our valiant UN staff, who struggle, day in and day out, to help them.

Thank you.