**19 August 2003- 19 August 2013 Memorial Service**

**Statement by Laura Dolci-Kanaan, staff member (OHCHR) and family survivor from the Baghdad bombing**

***-as delivered-***

We have gathered here today to hear your names be called aloud once again– one after the other. You were and remain our husband, our wife, our father, our mother, our son, our daughter, our brother and our sister. We were and are fortunate to have had you in our lives – some for many years, some only for a few days. To have shared our intimate selves with you; enjoyed your laughter, your smell, your voice; cooked and eaten around the same table; travelled with you; listened to your humour; admired you for your generosity and profound respect for your fellow human beings.

10 long years have passed since 2 tons of explosive were thrown against you, while you were putting your expertise and passion to the service of the United Nations and the Iraqi people the UN was expected to protect. 10 years, during which at times your loss was almost too hard to bear, the sentiment of injustice and solitude close to overwhelming. We had to learn to live without your presence, realize that the phone would no longer ring, feel an excruciating pain each time it is your birthday, see seasons pass and children grow ***despite*** your absence, ***in*** your absence. We have missed you and loved you every single day since that Tuesday in August.

During these 10 years, we have also felt your continuous presence. While criminal minds unilaterally decided to turn off the light on your lives, your life choice in support of the most marginalized and vulnerable of this world continues to illuminate the life of your children and grand children. Your strong determination for a better world, in which indifference is defeated and more equality is being enjoyed by all, has galvanized others. Many have chosen a life path of engagement because of the legacy you left behind, made of high ideals and actions.

We have gathered here today to also embrace the colleagues and friends who were with you in the Canal Hotel. The many women and men, who were part of the A team that Kofi Annan and Sergio Vieira de Mello had put together and survived that horrific terrorist bombing. Some excavated with their hands in the rubble in search of you. Some ensured that your belongings reached us safely and then wrapped the blue flag around your coffin on the boiling tarmac of Baghdad airport. Later, they swallowed their tears to reach out to us and share accounts of the last minutes of your life before that switch was turned off at 4.30 pm on that hot summer day. With some we bundled a special friendship that keeps us warm to this day.

Many were seriously injured; lost limbs, sight and hearing; have undertaken countless surgeries over the last years, in some cases until a few months ago. They all endured stress, pain and long-lasting nightmares.

We are here to honour you and them today.

We have gathered here today to also feel the embrace of the United Nations family. This was and is your professional family. On the 19th of August 2003, the UN experienced ‘its longest and bleakest day’, as stated by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The bomb that killed you was a terrorist bomb purposely aimed at a UN building. You died because of that very UN flag flying over the Canal Hotel. Any UN staff could have been you. Since that day of shock and sorrow the UN family has suffered many more tragic losses as a result of violent terrorist attacks and bombings, in Kandahar, Mazar-al-Sharif, Kabul, Abuja, Algiers and more recently Mogadishu. Hundreds like us in the 4 corners of the world had to experience loss and mourning over the last decade. Our thoughts and solidarity goes out to them on this special day.

The UN is increasingly called to deploy in complex situations, where the blue flag no longer provides for safety. You responded to that call, and so continue to do thousands of other competent and dedicated officers of this noble Organization.

Finally, we gather here today, in the presence of the Secretary-General and the senior management of the Organization, to also share our experiences in the aftermath of such a devastating event. And we appreciate the time that was set aside in today’s programme to do so. Our experience tells that the Organization has still a long way to go to fully acknowledge and deal with the physical and psychological damage suffered in the line of duty by UN staff and their families, in the immediate and long-term. It cannot claim to be able to care for others, when it cannot adequately take care of its own staff in need. Doing so is not about charity: it is about upholding rights and dignity –which is at the core of the UN’s global mandate.

We have all endured at different levels the limitations of the UN rules in support of victims’ family members and affected staff, and the inadequacy of the Organization to stand besides its own victims in the pursuit of a prompt and effective investigation into this horrific malicious attack. Many of the staff who survived the blast in Baghdad have left service prematurely due to the Organization’s inability to re-integrate them with dignity, taking into full account their disability and trauma. Orphan children had to receive a lesser quality education because of no after-death provision for their education. Too many brave national staff and their families were abandoned to their destiny.

Today, we are also here to honour and remember those who were left behind - having succumbed to a bureaucratic system, whose rules and framework must be further improved in order to respond to the needs and consequences of today’s UN operations. Many of us present here have been and are available to contribute constructively to this important reflection.

\*\*\*

We have gathered here today to hear your names be called aloud once again, one after the other:

Nadia, Sergio, Fiona, Ihssan, Richard, Christopher, Reham, Martha, Jean-Selim, Manuel, Emaad, Leen, Ranilo, Reza, Basim, Raid, Gillian, Khidir, Arthur, Saad, Alya, Omar.

May your names continue to resonate for many years to come.

\*\*\*