

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message on the International Day of Solidarity with Detained and Missing Staff Members, observed on 25 March

"Scores of United Nations staff and personnel were victims of detention, abduction, kidnapping, assault, harassment and even murder again over the past year.

Every attack on a United Nations staff member is a tragedy for the individuals involved, a serious crime that must be prosecuted and an attempt to undermine our Organization's global work for peace, human rights and development. We must respond with prevention, protection and justice.

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security has documented 189 cases where United Nations civilian personnel were detained or arrested by Member States in 2011. The problems continue this year. As of today, four staff are being held.

The United Nations Department of Safety and Security has further reported that 18 United Nations civilian personnel were abducted and held hostage by criminal elements and extremist groups in 2011. During the first two months of 2012, 10 United Nations personnel were abducted. All but one have been released.

I am closely following all staff security incidents. I will never forget the words of one peacekeeper I met after his release from months in captivity. He described how he had worried about his loved ones, coped with being in chains for hours on end and struggled through days and nights of uncertainty and isolation. "It's not so easy to stay alive — but it's also not easy to die just like that," he said.

This peacekeeper, like so many other staff, returned to work for the United Nations following his release. I am inspired by the dedication of our staff. I am outraged by attacks against them. And I am determined to protect every single person serving under the United Nations flag worldwide. I thank the Staff Union for keeping the spotlight on this problem and pledge to fully support their efforts.

True protection demands collective action. Yet only 90 Member States have ratified the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, and only 27 have ratified the 2005 Optional Protocol which extends protection to United Nations personnel delivering humanitarian, political or development assistance.

On this International Day, I demand the immediate release of all detained staff members, and I call on all countries to join forces to protect the thousands of United Nations personnel who risk their safety to help suffering people in some of the most dangerous parts of our world".