

CHALLENGES PROJECT PRESENTATION I

Ambassador Michael Sahlin

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I see in front of me a huge crowd of experience in peacekeeping and peace operations and it is going to be a very interesting event for the next few days. So, on behalf of the wider Challenges Partnership, we wish to thank our Turkish friends for hosting this Seminar, the 13th of its kind. The number 13 normally means bad luck, at least in Sweden it does, but in this case it does not, I am sure.

We appreciate the importance of a seminar on peace operations being hosted in Ankara, given the experience of Turkish peacekeepers - military, police and civilian - in UN peace operations. We heard the Minister and now you, Ambassador, outline some of the highlights of this impressive record. Frankly, I did not know that Turkey has been in all or almost all UN sponsored peace operations. The Folke Bernadotte Academy is very proud to have worked with you on organizing this conference and I am sure that we are going to have some very interesting days. You have been able, as host, to give this topic a very high political profile here in Turkey and the attendance here is something that leads us to look forward to the next few days with much anticipation.

There was a moment of silence for Anna Lindh and for Sergio Vieira De Mello. Their tragic deaths are constant reminders that the force of terrorism strikes not only at foreign minister or high representative level, but strikes everywhere, including the other day at the level of ordinary people in Istanbul. We regret that event very much and share the feeling of sadness and outrage at what has happened and what continues to happen. In mentioning the topic of terrorism, I recall that the last time that the Challenge's Partners convened for a session was in Stockholm in May, where you, Ambassador, were visiting for the first time. There, apart from the discussions concerning the Project, a seminar on the theme of peace operations and counter-terrorism was held. The results of those deliberations are published in a book and now available, as from today, and I think you will find it interesting reading.

As Foreign Minister Gül and you have already pointed out, this seminar carrying the title of “Challenges of Change in the Nature of Peace Operations and the Continuing Need for Reform” is very timely.

This month the Project Director of the Brahimi Report has issued a study of the implementation of recommendations made by the highly useful and highly praised Brahimi Report. A brief look at that most recent text shows that whereas the UN is doing reasonable work by way of implementing the recommendations of the Brahimi Report, there are still problems. I am sure that Mr. Klein will later outline to us some of the problems concerning Member States and their willingness really to contribute to the extent that most of us believe is objectively needed. I am sure that this will be a theme throughout the three days of the Seminar. The momentum for reform of peace operations to make them more robust, more complex, more multidimensional is something that needs to be continuously nourished and I am sure that such a nourishment will flow from this Seminar. So, we look forward to having very open, frank, non-rhetorical exchanges during this week, which will allow us to put forward concrete recommendations and proposals.

Such recommendations and proposals will have different functions, and the host country will be able to use them in different ways: for example, by presenting them to the UN Special Committee for Peacekeeping Operations and in other forums where there is a need constantly for inputs from inside and outside. There are also different ways in which a host country of a Challenges Seminar may disseminate information. The results of this Seminar will also be an important step in the framework of the Challenges Project. It has already been mentioned that this project aims at a concluding event in 2005, and who knows what we shall decide to do after 2005. We shall have deliberations here in Ankara on how to conceive and develop this process. As steps towards this, we shall have other seminars following this one in Ankara, and I am happy to say that just before this session General Agwai has allowed me to announce that the Nigerian Government has declared its willingness to host our next seminar. Subsequently, there will be another seminar in China later in 2004. So ladies and gentlemen, distinguished participants, we are very happy to take part in this conference. It is very timely and will be remembered as an importing stepping stone in the Challenges process.

I will now ask my colleague Annika Hilding-Norberg, who has been in this project ever since its inception, to describe the Challenges Project and its objectives more fully so that you all may understand the larger framework.