

Statement on Behalf of Benon V. Sevan

More than a year and a half after Benon Sevan left the United States to return to his home country, the United States Attorney's office has decided to use Mr. Sevan as a scapegoat and a distraction from the United States' own massive failures and mismanagement in Iraq. Mr. Sevan ran a \$64 billion program that delivered food, medicine and essential infrastructure to the Iraqi people under nearly impossible conditions. In the nearly four years since Mr. Sevan turned over the program's assets to the Coalition Provisional Authority, the United States has done none of these things. Now the United States Government has repackaged the same discredited allegations made by the Volcker Committee-- that Mr. Sevan took some \$144,000 in cash, funds that he fully reported as family gifts on his UN disclosure form beginning more than seven years ago. These allegations are not only trivial; they are without basis.

Benon Sevan has served the UN for forty years in some of the most difficult assignments in the world—including Afghanistan and Iraq as well as Angola, Burundi, Kosovo, Rwanda, Somalia and South Lebanon. Suicide bombers tried to kill him, blowing up his office in Baghdad and killing his dear friends and colleagues. Mr. Sevan ran the largest humanitarian program in UN history, a program that literally saved tens of thousands of innocent people from death by disease and starvation. Mr. Sevan rebuilt the Iraq infrastructure, including the oil fields, that had been devastated by nearly a decade of sanctions. Mr. Sevan confronted both the Iraqis and members of the Security Council without fear or favor. He turned over more than \$10 billion to the United States in 2003, money that has effectively vanished and has not been accounted for since then. Mr. Sevan accounted for every penny of the \$64 billion under his control.

It is important to note what the indictment does not charge. This indictment does not charge-- because it cannot—that Mr. Sevan ever took any action or failed to take any action other than in the best interests of the Oil-For-Food Programme and the United Nations. Apparently, however, the US Attorney has simply adopted the Volcker Committee's unfounded conclusions. Mr. Sevan had fully accounted for and reported any payments he received beginning in 1999. The only acts referenced in the indictment by Mr. Sevan are two cash deposits, one of \$5,000 in August 2001 and \$1,200 in January 2002. Mr. Sevan fully disclosed all of his banking records as well as the fact that, throughout his career traveling for the United Nations, he made and withdrew such sums in cash frequently. The indictment also charges that surcharge payments were made by a certain Mr. Nadler, an acquaintance of Mr. Sevan, to Iraq. Mr. Sevan knows nothing about any of Mr. Nadler's arrangements, but it was Mr. Sevan who brought reports of such surcharges being paid to the Saddam regime to the attention of the Security Council, as the internal UN documentation will substantiate.

It is ludicrous to contend that in 1999 Mr. Sevan disclosed fictitious gifts from his aunt on his forms in anticipation of misleading investigators eight years later. These same baseless allegations were made nearly two years ago, while Mr. Sevan still was working for the UN. No action was taken. Instead the US Government has waited nearly two years to issue a ceremonial charge long after Mr. Sevan's retirement and return to his home country. There is no doubt that there has been financial fraud and ineptitude by the United States in Iraq on an unprecedented scale, which has significantly contributed to the crisis in Iraq. Instead of focusing on the devastating wrongdoing in Iraq, the US Government has chosen to focus instead on fully disclosed family gifts from a deceased relative. Mr. Sevan is being used to distract attention from the political and humanitarian disaster in Iraq from which the world will not soon recover.

Eric L. Lewis
Baach Robinson & Lewis, PLLC
Counsel to Mr. Sevan
Contact: eric.lewis@baachrobinson.com
202/833 8900