



Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Nomination Hearing for Senator John Danforth to be U.S. Ambassador to the UN
June 17, 2004

OPENING STATEMENT AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Senator Danforth, welcome. It is great to see you again. I commend you for your commitment to public service – and your willingness to return to government to take on this critical assignment.

This is also a critical time. The June 30th deadline for transfer of sovereignty in Iraq is looming. And the U.N. has several other urgent issues on its plate – including Sudan and Haiti – which I hope we can discuss.

The Administration seems to have finally discovered the virtues of the U.N. in working to obtain unanimous consent on Security Council Resolution 1546 last week.

That's good news – but we still have a long, long way to go. We have squandered several opportunities to meaningfully share the burden in Iraq. I hope that we do not miss any more – and I know that Senator Danforth's leadership can make a real difference on that front.

I also fear that the truculence displayed by the Administration in the run-up to the war will be matched by allies who will remain on the sidelines. President Bush is right to seek NATO's help in Iraq – our allies are wrong to rule it out. The President is also right to push meaningful debt relief – and our allies, many of whom spent the 1990s blaming us instead of Saddam for the plight of the Iraqi people, are wrong to stand in the way.

In short, now that the Bush Administration has finally moved in their direction, it's time for our allies to stop complaining and start doing what is right for the Iraqi people and for their own interests. I hope Senator Danforth will use his impressive powers of persuasion at the U.N. to encourage them to do more.

For today, Jack, I look forward to hearing your thinking on steps that can be taken to enhance the UN's role in Iraq's future, especially in the run-up to the planned National Conference in July and in supporting elections next December or January for a transitional government.

Ambassador Brahimi played a pivotal role in establishing the interim government. I'd like to know your thoughts on engaging him in the effort to hold the National Conference. I also hope you can shed light on the where matters stand with the naming of the Special Representative of the Secretary General that is called for in Security Council Resolution 1546.

Obviously, security concerns are weighing heavily on the Secretary General as he contemplates the return of UN staff to Iraq. The recent Security Council resolution endorses a separate international force under the overall command of the multinational force, with the specific task of providing security to the UN. I hope that you can update us on the Administration's recruitment efforts for this force.

Regarding Sudan, Senator Danforth, you laid the framework for continued U.S. engagement in the North-South peace talks. That's a tremendous achievement.

But the success of these talks has been obscured by Khartoum's reign of terror in Darfur. I would like to know what you plan to do in the Security Council to encourage our international partners to assist us in condemning Sudan's actions, and preventing genocide in Sudan.

On Haiti, the UN Peacekeeping Force moved in at the beginning of this month and we are contributing to the civilian police contingent.

That is good news – we should contribute. Haiti has been through too many political crises. I hope that we are now seeing the beginning of a mission that will lay the foundation for lasting stability in Haiti. I will be interested in getting an update from you on the first weeks of the Peacekeeping mission in Haiti, and on recent UN humanitarian efforts in the country.

Finally, I know we will get into several of other UN budget and reform issues, as well as the plan to renovate the UN Headquarters, the establishment of a Democracy Caucus within the UN, and the timing of when we pay our dues to the UN.

We have come a long way in improving U.S.-UN relations under the stewardship of Dick Holbrooke and John Negroponte. This Administration's attitude toward the UN has also improved. I am confident that you will do much to keep relations on an even keel.

There's a lot more to say, Mr. Chairman, but in the interest of time, I will stop here. I look forward to hearing from Senator Danforth.