

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

12 March 2004

Excellency,

I have the honour to refer to the forthcoming General Debate of the 59th General Assembly which commences at United Nations Headquarters on 21 September 2004. The General Debate will provide a distinct opportunity for States to demonstrate their continuing commitment to the central role of the rule of law in international relations by participating in the annual treaty event of the United Nations entitled *Focus 2004: Treaties on the Protection of Civilians* to be held from 21 to 24 September 2004.

Civilians have increasingly become the primary victims in violent conflicts. Consistent with the pledge made by Member States in the Millennium Declaration to "expand and strengthen the protection of civilians in complex emergencies", the treaty event will highlight this tragic situation. As I have also stated in my 2003 report on the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, "...since the Millennium Summit, the international community has had to deal with both new and old threats to international peace and security... Civilians inevitably bear the cost of the complex and intractable conflicts that have led to the death or forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people and which can only be addressed by a more integrated collective approach to their deepening protection needs".

Continuing the tradition established during the Millennium Summit, the Treaty Event will be held in a specially designated location in the Secretariat Building with facilities to accommodate the media.

I wish to extend this invitation to you to make use of this occasion to reaffirm your State's commitment to the rule of law in international relations and, in particular, treaties on the protection of civilians by signing and ratifying or acceding to those treaties deposited with me to which your country is not party already. Of course, this opportunity could be used to sign and ratify or accede to any other treaty deposited with me. In addition, I would also encourage you to become party to the range of treaties deposited with other depositaries, which are designed to protect civilians, particularly those pertaining to international humanitarian law.

In addition to undertaking actions to participate in the international treaty framework, countries may also need to take adequate measures to implement the relevant treaty obligations within their domestic jurisdictions. I wish to underline the call made in my Millennium Report, and repeated subsequently, to those States in need of assistance in this respect to advise me of their needs.

I note in this regard that the Secretariat has collated the legal technical assistance programmes available within the United Nations system and placed this information on an easily accessible website. Additionally, the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs continues to offer training programmes, both at Headquarters and at the regional level, to familiarize government officials on the technical aspects of undertaking treaty actions.

In connection with this event, the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs has published *Focus 2004: Treaties on the Protection of Civilians*, which summarizes the objectives and key provisions of the selected treaties.

I would like to request that you inform me by 1 September 2004 of your intention to sign, ratify or accede to any of the treaties deposited with me during Focus 2004 so that the necessary arrangements can be made by the Secretariat. I am also attaching a list of all multilateral treaties deposited with me to enable a more comprehensive review of your country's participation in these multilateral treaties.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kofi A. Annan