It is a great privilege to be here in Brazil with you on the tenth anniversary of the bomb attack that took the lives of 22 people including Sergio Vieira de Mello.

The attack on the Canal Hotel is still shocking, horrifying to us ten years on, because it was deliberate and targeted against Sergio and his colleagues who were in Iraq to help people in need. It violated every principle of humanity and solidarity, the principles on which the UN is founded.

Today we not only remember Sergio and his colleagues, but also so many friends and of course colleagues who survived the attack. We commemorate Sergio’s life and work in Brazil and on the international stage through the marking of World Humanitarian Day, when we remember all the humanitarian aid workers who have given their lives in order to help people in need.

Sergio’s name resonates in the UN building in New York and everywhere he worked around the world: the charismatic leader, the fearless humanitarian. His ideals, commitment and energy remain an inspiration to us all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The attack on Sergio Vieira de Mello, and the other people who died at the Canal Hotel that day, was a senseless waste of human life and by forcing the UN to reduce its work in Iraq, it was an indirect attack on some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

Tragically, such attacks have accelerated since 2003, from Algiers to Abuja, from Kabul to Islamabad and elsewhere. Aid workers are increasingly seen as targets, with serious consequences for our ability to reach people who urgently need help.

It has not prevented us from our work but we do constantly have to work for new and better ways to get to people while keeping our staff safe. We are seeing more fragmentation in our world even as a revolution in communications brings us closer together.
The whole point of the United Nations is to use those opportunities for contact to bring people together, help them to resolve differences. Work to bring peace and stability to find connections, not the differences, something Sergio did so well - in so many different parts of the world.

The loss of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, in the prime of their lives, is a constant reminder of what we stand to lose if we do not succeed in promoting the path of peace. Sergio stood by the principles which are the centre of our work: neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity. These principles were formulated 150 years ago and remain as true and relevant today as they were then.

As humanitarian work expands globally and as we work in increasingly challenging and difficult environments we continue to seek new ways to deliver aid safely and in a principled way.

That is the best memorial we can offer to Sergio, and to all the aid workers who have been killed and injured in the course of their work.

Together we remember them and we thank them for their sacrifice.