

## **Statement on Behalf of Benon V. Sevan on the Interim Report of the IIC**



It is unfortunate that the Independent Investigative Committee (“IIC”) has succumbed to massive political pressure and now seeks to scapegoat Under-Secretary General and former Executive Director of the Iraq Programme, Benon Sevan, for problems within the Oil-for-Food Programme. After eight months of investigation with more than 60 employees and a \$30 million budget, the IIC needed to produce a “smoking gun.” As Mr. Volcker has conceded, there is no smoking gun. Mr. Sevan never took a penny.

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. He is enormously proud of his service and the thousands of his colleagues who served with him, both at UN Headquarters and in Iraq.

The difficulties with running a program of this magnitude and sensitivity under a severe sanctions regime were all identified by Mr. Sevan throughout the life of the program. Mr. Sevan confronted both the Iraqis and members of the Security Council without fear or favor.

It is important to note what the IIC has not found. They have not found—because they cannot—that Mr. Sevan ever accepted anything from anyone. They have not found—because they 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 IIC has concluded, based on undisclosed statements by officials of the former Saddam regime, that Mr. Sevan “cited” a company to Iraqi officials, one of thousands of companies that received contracts for oil and humanitarian supplies. Mr. Sevan had no interest in that company or in any of the other companies associated with the program. Mr. Sevan’s goal throughout the life of the program was to expedite the pumping of oil in order to pay for urgently needed humanitarian supplies in full compliance with the mandate established by the Security Council.

The IIC also makes the bizarre claim that Mr. Sevan’s statements concerning income duly and properly reported on his financial disclosure forms years ago “are not adequately supported by the information reviewed by the Committee.” The Committee admits that it bases this specious statement on a conversation with someone in Cyprus who purports to be familiar with the finances of Mr. Sevan’s late aunt. Mr. Sevan has been entirely forthcoming with respect to the timing and manner of income received from his late aunt. It is ludicrous to contend that in 1999 Mr. Sevan disclosed fictitious gifts from his aunt on his forms in anticipation of misleading the IIC, which would not even be created until 2004. Moreover, the IIC made this “finding” without ever bothering to question Mr. Sevan regarding this subject.



Unfortunately, in the current political climate, the IIC needs to find someone to blame. And so the IIC tries to scapegoat Mr. Sevan for mentioning a company to the Iraqis as part of his role in advancing the process of trading oil for food. As Mr. Volcker's statements to The New York Times on January 7 made clear, the IIC was looking to blame Mr. Sevan before they ever interviewed him. The IIC has turned its back on the principles of due process, impartiality and fairness which were to govern its investigation and it has caved in to the pressure of those opposed to the mission of the UN.

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