

## Humanitarian Efforts Face New Obstacles

By Amanda McGrath

Providing humanitarian assistance to war-torn countries is becoming increasingly difficult as the line between impartial aid and partisan political organizations is obscured, United Nations Undersecretary for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Jan Egeland said Wednesday afternoon to a crowd of about 150 people in the ICC Auditorium.

A Norwegian diplomat, Egeland asserted that the ability of humanitarian aid workers to be perceived as outside of the political divisions of a crisis is becoming more challenging.

"Too many groups are saying 'you are with us or against us,'" he said. "It is blurring the line between what armed, military groups do and what we do as international humanitarian entities."

Some theorists believe there has been a paradigm shift in the nature of humanitarian aid in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, saying that aid workers are more often targets for terrorists and that aid work has encountered new barriers in accessing and funding initiatives to help in less-publicized crises. Egeland said he did not believe that there was a definitive shift

and said these problems were not new.

"I've been dealing with humanitarian work for 20 years," he said. "We had similar problems earlier and we're overcoming them."

Instead, Egeland said, humanitarian relief efforts are facing a "crisis of perception," in that aid workers no longer bear an unspoken badge of immunity because their work is increasingly seen as partisan.

"I've crossed the front lines of dozens of conflicts, and we were protected as humanitarians," he said. "Now, nothing can protect us from violence, and I don't think we can easily convince them to change ... but it is our right and obligation to provide [aid] and it should be protected by all leaders and cultural groups."

"There are one or two politically-focused emergencies that get more assistance than all other humanitarian crises combined. I want to rally for the forgotten emergencies," he said, specifically citing the current crises in Uganda and western Sudan. Egeland condemned the Sudanese government's refusal to permit humanitarian aid workers access to the troubled

Dafur region, calling it the "greatest humanitarian drama of today," and said that assistance was necessary to salvage the region.

The speech marked the second annual Fritz Institute Lecture on Humanitarian Relief and was dedicated to the memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General in Iraq, who was killed along with 22 others, including a Georgetown alumnus, in the August bombing of U.N. headquarters in Baghdad. Lynn Fritz, the director of the Fritz Institute, announced the establishment of an endowed internship in de Mello's honor before Egeland's remarks.

Egeland called de Mello a great leader and described standing in the rubble of his office in Baghdad as "overwhelming," but added that "as much as we grieve for colleagues we lost ... we must understand that this is a challenge to overcome."

Egeland has 25 years of active experience in humanitarian work through the United Nations, the Norwegian Government, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other non-governmental institutions.