



When world leaders gather in New York at the General Assembly it is the responsibility of the Chief of Protocol to ensure that all goes according to plan.

The UN General Assembly in New York could be described as a minefield of possible diplomatic incidents. When up to 190 heads of state and government attend a summit it is the role of veteran UN Diplomat Desmond Parker of Trinidad and Tobago to take on that challenge. A tall order when his predecessors have had to deal with challenges such as a gun waiving Palestinian guerrilla commander, a shoe banging Soviet leader and a Libyan openly opposed to any diplomatic traditions.

Q - The high-level segment of the General Assembly is coming up - can you describe what it is like, when the corridors of the General Assembly are filled with more than one hundred world leaders?

Of course it is an extremely busy time, with so many events taking place in a short time frame and so many delegates - not only world leaders, but thousands of other diplomatic officials - in such a small area. Protocol Officers are on hand to coordinate with other offices to make sure that everything runs smoothly for all involved. During the critical week of the general debate, the United Nations in New York welcomes over 8,000 delegates from all Member States and Observer Organizations. The Protocol and Liaison Service is responsible for the accreditation of these delegates so it is a huge undertaking with no room for error.

Q - What is the main role of the Chief of Protocol?

The Chief of Protocol is the key liaison between the United Nations and its Member States and Observers. He is responsible for communications from the Secretary-General and the Secretariat to the Permanent Missions, welcomes dignitaries upon their arrival to the United Nations, escorts Heads of State and Government when they deliver their statements at the General Assembly and when they meet with the Secretary-General for bilateral meetings. The Chief of Protocol is responsible for the registration of all diplomatic and non-diplomatic staff of all Permanent Missions and Observer Organizations to the United Nations resident in New York. He also provides protocol guidance and support for various functions and ceremonies taking place within the United Nations Headquarters, especially those involving the Secretary-General. The Chief of Protocol also provides protocol guidance to all Departments Funds and Programmes of the Organization and is the Head of the Protocol and Liaison Service

Q - In your job as chief of protocol you have met some of the most powerful men and women in the world? Who is the most memorable?

Each one of the High Level dignitaries is memorable in his or her own way; they all have their own unique personalities, their habits, their quirks. They are, after all, only human, and it is a unique aspect of the job of Chief of Protocol to be able to see these men and women up close and encounter and work with them at a more personal level.

Q - You have also met some people who have been accused of atrocities; have you at any time found it difficult to escort such a world leader to the podium at the General Assembly?

Regardless of anything that an individual leader may have been accused of, the job of the Chief of Protocol is straightforward, and the Chief of Protocol cannot be influenced by external factors. Within the UN, we have a duty and an obligation to be neutral. There is no difference in escorting one leader or another to the podium. I have not had any difficulty in doing my job in this regard.

Q - Have you ever had embarrassing moments as Chief of Protocol? Can you give an example?

We all encounter embarrassing moments in our work lives, and in my capacity as Chief of Protocol I have, but it would not be wise or discreet for me to disclose.