



### **The Protocol and Liaison Office prepares for the 66th Session of the General Assembly**

By: iSeek/Cathy Smith

While some UN offices in New York enjoy quieter period in the summer, others are switching into high gear to prepare for the upcoming 66th session of the General Assembly. The Protocol and Liaison Office is one such office, and Desmond Parker,

Chief of Protocol, sat down recently with iSeek to talk about the work of his office.

“The main focus of the office is to support the work of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the President of the General Assembly, explained Mr. Parker. “We are an office of twelve people, and coordinating the preparations for the General Debate is a massive undertaking”.

One of the biggest jobs of the office is to provide accreditation to Permanent Member States, representatives from intergovernmental organizations, and other visitors. During last September alone, the Office accredited 8,500 individuals to attend the General Debate.

Another function is to receive high-level dignitaries and their spouses at United Nations Headquarters. “They are escorted into the building by Protocol, and if they conduct business with the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General they are escorted”, said the Chief of Protocol. “During the General Debate the Secretary-General holds close to one hundred bilateral meetings”. The Protocol Office solicits staff volunteers to help with the added work during this busy time.

Another important job of the Protocol and Liaison Office is to organize the Secretary-General’s annual State Luncheon. The Office relies on support provided by the Facilities Management Division (FMD) and the Department of Safety and Security (DSS).

When asked if the Office had any funny stories to share, the Chief replied, “We have thousands of stories, but we can’t share them due to the nature of our work”.

Still, “an episode occurred last year, at the height of the General Debate, when electric power in the North Lawn building failed for several hours, which produced a strange blend of frustration and amusement”, said Mr. Parker.

At the time, the Secretary-General was holding a series of bilateral meetings with Heads of State and Government. “It was indeed very interesting to see several Heads of State and Government, and their entourages, climb four levels of stairs to the Secretary-General’s Conference Room,” he added.

Such events cannot be predicted, and it is the job of Protocol staff to be able to react quickly to smooth things over as much as possible. “It is Murphy’s Law that things will go wrong, but we try to prevent Murphy’s Law from being legal”, he laughed.

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