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**Representative of the Secretary-General on
Internally Displaced Persons**

Sergio Vieira de Mello: What a Loss

By Francis M. Deng
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The death of the UN Envoy to Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello, along with many other UN officials in Iraq, has shocked many around the world. Those who knew Sergio Vieira de Mello have every reason to be particularly devastated.

It is extremely rare to find an individual who achieved the level of excellence in virtually all aspects of his work. Sergio Vieira de Mello did. He was outstanding intellectually, charismatic, witty, charming, diplomatic but forthright, courageous and firm. There are really no words to adequately describe this most remarkable man.

His service to humanity through the United Nations, which took him to trouble spots around the world -- Sudan, Cyprus, Mozambique, Peru, Lebanon, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Congo, Kosovo, East Timor and tragically, Iraq -- attest to his dedication to the ideals of this world organization: the search for peace, security and the dignity of the human family.

I have known Sergio Vieira de Mello for over a decade, ever since my appointment as Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons. No individual was more supportive and encouraging to me, my co-director of the Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, Roberta Cohen, and our colleagues, in our efforts to promote the highly sensitive cause of international protection and assistance in what is inherently an internal problem: internal displacement. Even we who were directly involved with the development of the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were most pleasantly surprised when Sergio Vieira de Mello successfully tabled the Guiding Principles for adoption by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a group comprising the heads of all UN and other humanitarian, human rights and development agencies. This initial leadership by Sergio Vieira de Mello has proved to be a wise and farsighted move. Since their adoption, the Guiding Principles have been widely accepted and are being promoted and applied around the world, at all levels, national, regional, and international. For this, we, and all who are concerned with the plight of the internally displaced, remain forever grateful to Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Our heartfelt condolences go to his family, all his loved ones, his dear friends, and his colleagues. In the African indigenous religions, perception about the life-hereafter combines with an aspect of immortality that is founded on the memory of the departed by the living: family, friends, and all those whom one has touched in one's life. It is through the living that identity and influence in this world are maintained. Sergio Vieira de Mello's identity and influence among the living will undoubtedly continue among many around the world. And may God rest his soul in the world he has just joined.

