

**BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY,
EMERGING THREATS, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL REFORM**

**Statement by David Smith on Behalf of BNP Paribas Regarding
The Bank's Role In The UN Oil-For-Food Program**

My name is David Smith. Since September 2001, I have been employed by BNP Paribas North America, where I serve as the Director of Corporate Banking Operations. In that capacity, I have been responsible for overseeing the Bank's letter of credit processing operations, including those operations as they pertain to banking services provided by the Bank to the United Nations in respect of the UN's Oil-For-Food Program. This statement responds to questions posed by Chairman Shays in his letter to the Bank dated September 23, 2004.

1. How Was BNP Selected by the United Nations?

The following is my understanding of how BNP was selected by the UN to provide banking services for the Oil-For-Food Program. You may recall that Resolution 986 of the UN Security Council gave the Secretary-General of the UN the responsibility of establishing a bank account for the deposit of funds generated by the sale of oil by Iraq. Notably, all of those oil sales were subject to the prior approval of the so-called "661" or "Sanctions" Committee of the Security Council.

The account also was to be used for the payment for the purchase of goods by Iraq, which likewise were subject to the prior review and approval of the Sanctions Committee. Pursuant to the Resolution, the Secretary-General was to select an international bank and negotiate the terms of the account pursuant to the Memorandum of Understanding between the UN and the Government of Iraq.

According to a report of the Secretary-General dated November 25, 1996, the selection process for the holder of the UN Iraq account began with the preparation of a "working list of major banks in all parts of the world with the necessary credit quality ratings, strong capital positions, and the capabilities to provide the services necessary for the account." The Report indicates that a short-list of those banks, including BNP, were asked in June 1996 to submit written proposals to the UN for the provision of the required banking services. The UN's Request For Proposals ("RFP") sought certain pricing information from each bank, and inquired into each bank's capabilities to handle business of the Program's size. The Bank understands that four major international banks submitted formal offers in response to the RFP.

The Secretary-General reported in 1996 that, "after careful consideration of the proposals received," BNP was selected on June 18, 1996 to be the holder of the UN Iraq Account. The Bank believes that several factors resulted in BNP's selection by the UN, including the following: (i) its large international presence; (ii)

its significant position in the commodities trade finance business; (iii) its high credit rating; (iv) its strong capital position; (v) its willingness to assume the credit risk of other banks by confirming the oil letters of credit to be issued for the benefit of the Program; (vi) its competitive pricing; and (vii) its substantial trade finance support operation located in New York City, where the UN is headquartered. Accordingly, after several weeks of negotiations, an agreement to provide banking services for the Program was signed by the UN and BNP on September 12, 1996.

2. What Has Been the Role of the Bank?

The role of the Bank under the Banking Services Agreement has consisted of delivering non-discretionary banking services to its customer, the UN. Those services have related both to the oil and humanitarian sides of the Program.

Generally, on the oil side of the Program, those services have involved the confirmation of letters of credit issued by various banks on behalf of UN-approved purchasers of Iraqi oil. When a bank confirms a letter of credit, it takes upon itself the obligation to pay the beneficiary, here the UN Iraq Account. The Bank's confirmation of the oil letters of credit thus allowed the UN to rely solely upon the credit quality of the Bank for payment.

The oil letters of credit under the Program conformed with standard practices governing letters of credit, with the following additional controls imposed by the UN: (i) each contract between the Iraqi State Oil Marketing Organization, or

"SOMO," and a buyer had to be approved by the UN; (ii) the price of the oil was established by a process approved by the UN; and (iii) the loading of the oil was supervised by an independent company appointed by the UN to ensure that the correct volume and grade of oil was loaded. At the payment stage, all shipping documents were presented to the Bank by the UN.

On the humanitarian side of the Program, the Bank's services to the UN under the Banking Services Agreement have involved the issuance of letters of credit at the direction of the UN for the benefit of UN-approved suppliers of goods to Iraq. Those letters of credit provide the necessary assurance to suppliers that they will receive payment for their goods once they have been delivered to Iraq in accordance with their contractual obligations.

As previously noted, the contract approval process took place under the supervision of the UN Sanctions Committee, on which all members of the Security Council were represented. A request by the Central Bank of Iraq for the issuance of a letter of credit could be processed by the Bank only after the UN had given its approval. Generally, the goods then would be shipped by the exporter. Once the goods arrived in Iraq, they were inspected by the independent inspectors appointed by the UN. The payment for these goods then could be processed by the Bank if the following three conditions were satisfied: (i) the shipping documents provided to the Bank under the letter of credit complied with the requirements of the

letter of credit; (ii) the UN had produced a certificate confirming the arrival of the goods in proper order, based upon the independent inspector's report; and (iii) the UN had approved the specific payment after notification from the Bank that proper documentation had been presented to it. The second and third of these controls went beyond standard practices for the handling of letters of credit, and were additional safeguards developed and implemented by the UN for the protection of the Program.

Significantly, the Bank has had no discretion over how money has been spent or invested under the Program. The Bank has had no involvement in arranging the relationship between the oil buyers and SOMO. Similarly, the Bank did not approve the supplies being purchased, the list of suppliers, or the supply contracts themselves.

It is important to point out that the Bank is not the only institution that has held funds for the Program. Other banks have been involved in holding such funds from the outset of the Program. Although 100% of the proceeds from the sale of oil initially were credited to the UN Iraq Account at the Bank, only 59% of those proceeds remained in that Account. The balance of those proceeds immediately were transferred to a UN account at JP Morgan Chase pursuant to instructions from the UN: 13% of the funds to be used by the UN to provide relief to the Kurdish provinces in Northern Iraq; 25% to be used by the UN to provide compensation to

victims of the first Gulf War; and 3% to be used by the UN for weapons inspection and to defray the costs of administering the Program.

In practice, the UN has directed the Bank's investment of every penny in the 59% account. On a daily basis, the UN has compared the Bank's rates for these investments against those of other banks, and has directed the investment of all funds, including those that are required to be held in cash-equivalent investments at the Bank in order to collateralize letters of credit that have been issued to suppliers of UN-approved goods. Although the Bank is not responsible under the Banking Services Agreement for the monitoring or auditing of funds transferred from the 59% account at UN direction to other institutions for investment purposes, the Bank understands that all interest earned on funds in the 59% account has been reinvested and has been available for the purchase of additional UN-approved supplies.

In short, BNP Paribas' role under the Banking Services Agreement has been to confirm oil letters of credit, ensuring that the UN Iraq Account receives all of the proceeds from the sale of Iraq oil; to credit the UN Iraq account with the proceeds from UN-approved oil sales; to transfer certain of those funds pursuant to UN instructions; to invest the balance pursuant to UN directives; and to issue, process and pay humanitarian letters of credit at the direction of the UN, all in accordance with traditional trade finance practice and the specified protections of the Program.

3. **What Legal, Ethical and Due Diligence Procedures Was the Bank Obligated to Follow?**

As a preliminary observation, the services provided to the UN by the Bank under the Banking Services Agreement were licensed by the United States Department of Treasury Office for Foreign Asset Control, or "OFAC." Moreover, all services provided by the Bank under the Program were performed within a framework designed by the UN and formalized via the Banking Services Agreement. Under that Agreement, the UN – a universally known international organization of sovereign States – was the Bank's sole customer. All aspects of the transactions under the Program, including the purchasers of oil and the suppliers of goods, as well as the nature, amount and pricing of the goods involved, were subject to prior review and approval by the Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council.

All letters of credit confirmed or issued by the Bank under the Program complied with the Uniform Customs and Practices for Documentary Credits, a set of detailed procedures for letters of credit published by the International Chamber of Commerce. Program transactions also were subject to U.S. regulatory requirements, including in particular the screening of any Program participant against lists of specially designated nationals published by OFAC. There also were, as described above, a number of additional controls unique to the Program that were designed to minimize potential abuse.

4. **What Particular Challenges Has the Bank Encountered, and How Have Those Challenges Been Met?**

From a banking perspective, the Program has represented an enormously challenging and unique undertaking. The Bank is not aware of any program of comparable scope or magnitude.

Since the Program's inception, the Bank has processed over 23,000 letters of credit. Many of the letters of credit for the sale of UN-approved goods, which in the aggregate have totaled approximately \$40 billion, have been subject to multiple amendments, and have involved the examination by the Bank of massive amounts of documentation to determine compliance with the terms of the letters of credit. The files with respect to these transactions comprise an estimated five million pages of documents.

The Bank also has handled the disbursement of billions of dollars for investment purposes at the direction of the UN. To date, the interest earnings on the investment of funds deposited into the UN Iraq Account have been in excess of \$2.7 billion.

The Bank believes that it has performed its obligations under the Banking Services Agreement in a professional and ethical manner. However, there have been occasions when the Program suffered backlogs in the processing of letters of credit, which created some dissatisfaction on the part of our customer, the UN, as well as on the part of various Program participants and the Iraqi Government.

Specifically, there was a sudden, three-fold increase in the volume and complexity of transactions for the supply of UN-approved goods under the Program around the time of the merger of BNP and Paribas in mid-2000, for which the Bank was not fully prepared from a staffing standpoint. Following the merger, however, the Bank substantially reorganized and increased its staffing of the Program, from 25 to 90 employees during one 12 month period, and significantly enhanced its electronic systems for the processing of letters of credit under the Program. As a result of the Bank's commitment of resources, the processing of letters of credit from the height of the Program through its current wind-down phase has been greatly enhanced.

5. How Might the Oil-For-Food Program Been Better Designed?

The Bank believes that the use of letters of credit provided the correct banking framework for the Program. Although outside the scope of our responsibilities, it appears with the benefit of hindsight that the Program could have been better structured in other respects to minimize the risk of abuse. Thus, a well-managed competitive bidding process, both for the purchase of oil and the sale of goods, might have been substituted for what was essentially a sole source procurement process. This would have eliminated the role of the Government of Iraq in the identification of prospective counterparties for UN-approved oil and goods transactions. It also might have reduced the possibility that the Program might not always have received the most favorable pricing.

