

LEADERS

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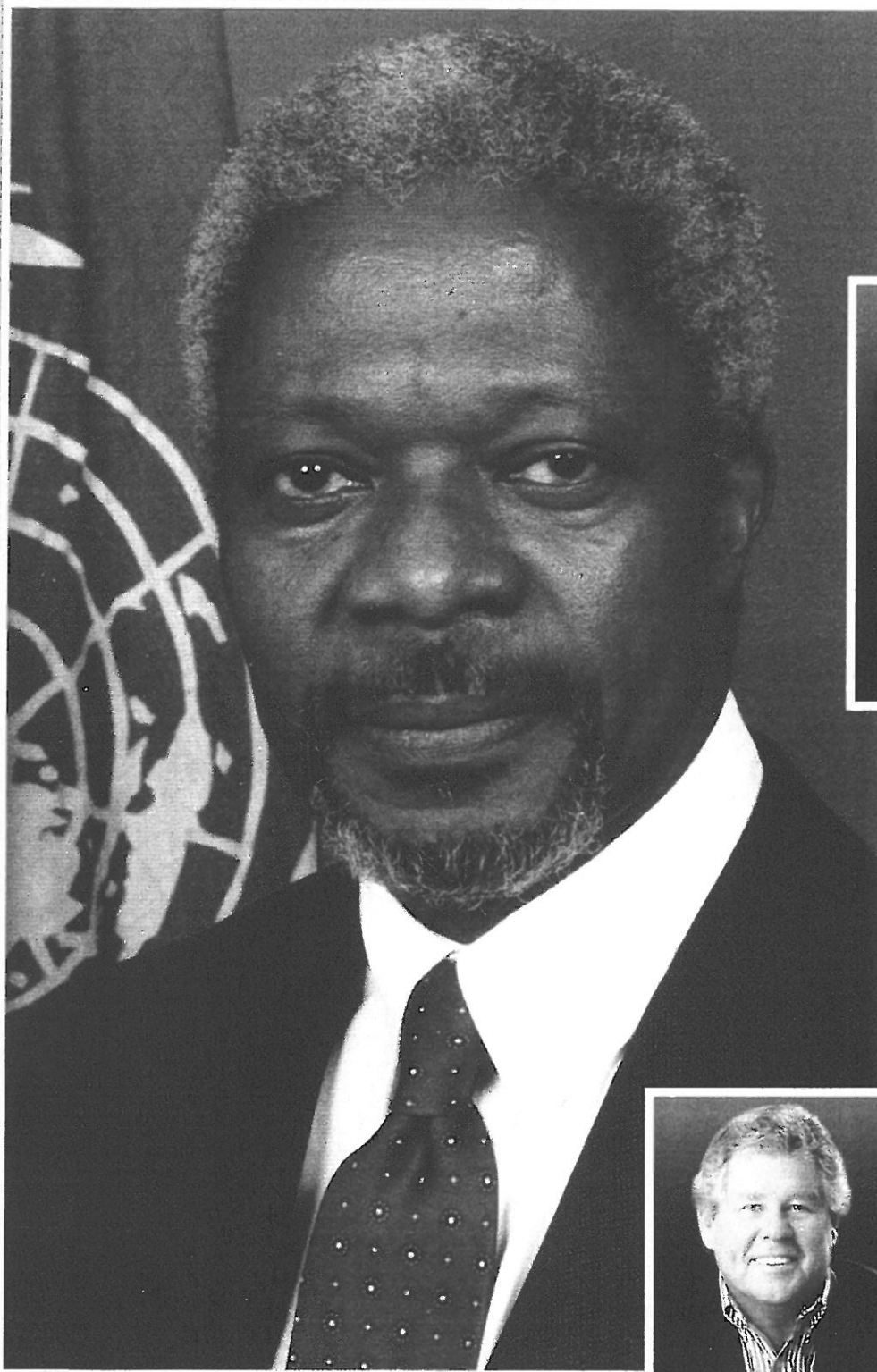
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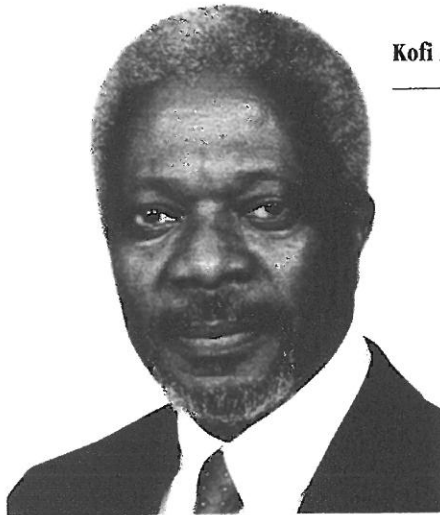
FACING
GLOBAL
CONCERNS/14
KOFI ANNAN
EAGLEBURGER



ESCAPING
GLOBAL
CONCERNS/64
STEWART
BARRINGTON



Obstacles To Global Progress



EDITORS' NOTE

"For too long," reflects U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, "nation-states have put their own sovereign interests above those of the collective. I strongly believe that this must change." The good news, however, is that, in his estimable opinion, "it will." For not unlike the situation in the corporate sector, "state sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined by the forces of globalization and international cooperation." In addition and perhaps "most importantly, the state is now widely understood to be the servant of its people, and not vice versa."

With countries and companies similarly feeling the effects of worldwide trends, it is unsurprising that Annan also believes "the United Nations and business are natural partners." For example, "when it comes to business, the U.N. is able to assist through its charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have also made a lot of progress in the area of trade law, we have set up standards in the shipping industry, and we protect intellectual property." Further, "we are helping governments create an enabling environment that will encourage investment, both domestic and international." By the same token, though, he continues, "we cannot fight poverty, or think in terms of eliminating poverty, by relying on governmental systems alone. Today, the private sector has become the

**An Exclusive Interview with His Excellency
Kofi Annan, Secretary-General, United Nations, New York**

real model for the generation of world development, and we want to work in partnership with companies."

The secretary-general reiterates: "If we can create an enabling environment, working with companies as well as in conjunction with governments, we can really do a lot of good in this world," fostering "such basic United Nations values as democracy, pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law."

With all that you've done to promote global peace as secretary-general of the United Nations, why haven't you been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize?

I think the people who award the Nobel Peace Prize have been quite ingenious in their choices. They have always found a way of giving the award to people who are engaged in a situation of conflict: to encourage them, to send a message to keep trying, and to focus attention on these issues, whether it's John Hume and David Trimble, who got it for their efforts in Northern Ireland, or Aung San Suu Kyi, for her fight for democracy in Myanmar. I'm doing what I'm paid to do. The others are displaying much more individual courage than I am, so they probably deserve the prize more than I do.

Which world leaders have inspired you the most?

I am very fortunate to be personally acquainted with a number of world leaders whom I greatly admire and who inspire me. One who comes to mind immediately is Nelson Mandela. He stands out as a person of unparalleled courage and personal dignity in the fight against one of this century's great evils: racism in its most extreme form, the apartheid system. By overcoming the evil of racial discrimination in South Africa, Mandela set an example of hope and persistence that will last forever. When I think that he spent 27 years in prison and then went on to become president of a free Republic of South Africa, I am reminded of the invincibility of truth and courage.

Another person who has inspired me is Ralph Bunche. During my years as head of United Nations peacekeeping, I always kept a picture of him on my wall, hoping to gain courage and inspiration from his life and work. From Cyprus to Kashmir to the Congo to the Middle East, Bunche exemplified the highest values of the United Nations charter, and in 1950 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his historic role in Palestine. He maintained that the United Nations exists not merely to preserve the peace, but also to make change possible without violent upheaval. This is a value I cherish.

Most world leaders, as the heads of nations, are concerned most about their own people. Must this change, and can it?

I agree that, for too long, nation-states have put their own sovereign interests above those of the collective. I strongly believe that this must change, and that it will.

In September 1999 I made a statement at the opening of the General Assembly's general debate on the concept of intervention. I pointed out that state sovereignty, in its most basic sense, is being redefined by the forces of globalization and international cooperation. Most importantly, the state is now widely understood to be the servant of its people, and not vice versa. There is now a universally recognized imperative of effectively halting gross and systematic violations of human rights with grave humanitarian consequences.

I told the world leaders who gathered for the General Assembly that a new, more broadly defined, more widely conceived definition of national interest in the next century would induce nation-states to find far greater unity in the pursuit of such basic United Nations values as democracy, pluralism, human rights, and the rule of law.

I believe it is possible to broaden the definition of national interest because I have seen states, through the United Nations, go farther than they would on

their own in advancing shared goals. This was true throughout the '90s at the global conferences sponsored by the United Nations on the environment, development, and human rights. At these events governments adopted global action plans that they may never have pursued on their own.

You're dealing with this vast organization and with every country in the world. What frustrates you the most?

I think the most frustrating part is that we all know what's wrong and what needs to be done, but we often can't act upon it. Sometimes a secretariat led by the secretary-general is given a mandate to do something about it, but the resources needed to carry through the decisions are not forthcoming. At times, when incredible things are happening and we want to awaken the conscience of the world, no one wants to move because of bad experiences in the past. To be specific, after the peacekeeping operation in Somalia, where several U.S. troops were killed and dragged through the streets, it became extremely difficult to get the Security Council to get involved in any other situation where the United States would be leading the troops. In fact, I would say that what happened in Somalia

dictated international response, or nonresponse, in Rwanda. It has also dictated international action, or inaction, in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in other areas.

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Sometimes it gets frustrating that mistakes are made. We have had some tragedies, but we are not learning the right lesson from them. The right lesson is not to say that we are not going to get involved. The right lesson should be to work out what went wrong: How did we get into this situation, and what do we have to do next time to stop starvation, to

stop genocide? What sort of force do we need to make sure that we can defend our mandate and ourselves? When I am faced with a situation of helplessness, I don't give up. I'm a born optimist. In fact, sometimes my wife asks me, "How can you do that, aren't you scared?" I answer, "Let's just say I'm a happy fool," and I just keep going, hoping everything will work.

So what you need are more money and instant worldwide media attention.

And above all, awareness, insight, and the will on the part of governments to act. Without the will no amount of information or early warning systems will help.

Which governments need to have the will to act more quickly?

I would say all the members of the U.N. should be prepared to act whenever they can, but we should be focusing particularly on the permanent members of the Security Council, which have a special and historic responsibility for peace and security around the world.

There are some countries that owe the United Nations a lot of money and are not fulfilling their obligations. These countries are led by the United States, which owes the largest amount. Why don't they pay?

The United States has paid back a bit



LEADERS Editor-in-Chief Henry O. Dormann interviews Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

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The U.N.
needs the United
States, but the United
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of its debt, but it still owes over \$1 billion, which is about 62 percent of the entire amount owed to the U.N. There are many other countries that owe money, and I've put a lot of pressure on all of them to pay. I've told them we are reforming this organization, and prompt payment of their obligations to the organization should be part of that reform. We have restructured, cut positions, brought good leadership into the organization, and now we are focusing on our core activities. It is very difficult to reform when we are performing on a shoestring budget, so I hope they will pay.

In some cases the country that owes the money genuinely has serious economic problems and cannot cope with the payments it has to make. That is not the case with the United States. What's happened there is that we've been caught in internal politics. An amount was passed by the U.S. Congress – about \$926 million – and was about to be paid when a congressman, Chris Smith from New Jersey, attached an abortion amendment to the payment. The administration doesn't accept abortion, so the president vetoed it and has promised that, unless they give me a clean bill, he will veto any bill about the U.N. with that amendment. So we've become a hostage to this internal debate.

What needs to be done to correct this?

I have been talking to some of the key Congress people, and the administration has also tried very hard. We haven't been able to get the repayment yet, but we haven't given up. What is encouraging is that the American people are with us. They support the idea that the United States must pay its debt to the U.N. and are rather appalled that this big nation does not meet its commitment. I must say, it's been very refreshing to have an ordinary American asking: "Why aren't they paying? It's an obligation, and a contract is a contract." I just hope the message gets through to Congress. I think most members know that they have to pay and want to pay, but the U.S. system

is such that a small group of congressmen or senators can hold everything up.

There are some people in countries outside the United States who say the U.N. is a puppet of the United States, and they resent the perceived influence that the United States has over U.N. proceedings and decisions. What's your view?

The United States does have considerable influence in the organization, but it doesn't get everything it wants. In fact, it had a big disappointment when it put up a candidate for the administrative and budgetary committee – which is like the appropriations committee in the Senate that votes on a budget before the membership at large votes on it – and its candidate was hopelessly defeated. That was mainly because the United States is not meeting its financial obligations to the organization. The membership doesn't see why a country that is not paying its way should sit on a committee that decides how money, put in mainly by others, should be spent. This is something that would not have happened a few years ago, when the United States was paying its way.

But I think it is not entirely fair for the membership at large to blame the United States to such an extent. The U.N. needs the United States, but the United States also needs the U.N., and if all the other countries were to play their roles effectively as well, I think we would have a relatively balanced organization. Ultimately, I don't think the United States dominates the organization the way it is sometimes perceived.

In the past the United Nations has been criticized for wasting funds, and one of the primary thrusts of your administration has been to stop that. How is it working?

I think we have done quite a bit on the reform front. In fact, as part of the reform project, we cut 1,000 positions, saving about \$123 million. In real terms we have been operating under diminishing budgets for the past six years, and we

are now getting to the point where it may not be possible to keep reducing the budget because we've reached a stage where we need to stabilize.

We've also managed to restructure the organization so we can focus on our core activities: peace and security, economic and social affairs, economic cooperation, and humanitarian affairs, with human rights cutting across these four areas. We are also much more coherent in our management approach. For the first time in the U.N.'s history, we have a cabinet comprising all the heads of departments – including the heads of UNICEF, UNDP, and the population fund – and our colleagues in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi. We meet once a year. Those away from here come in through teleconferencing, so we are much more coordinated at the leadership level than we've ever been. One could say that's a normal way of doing business, but unfortunately, it's relatively new to this organization.

Many multinational, multibillion-dollar companies around the world support various causes, but mostly ones that have some interest to their shareholders or help them with their quarterly dividends. Is there a way they can help the United Nations while still satisfying their shareholders and making themselves feel good?

Today we are living in an interdependent world: what some have called a "global village." There are certain values that hold this international community together, and that's where the United Nations fits in. When it comes to business, the U.N. is able to assist through its charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have also made a lot of progress in the area of trade law, we have set up standards in the shipping industry, and we protect intellectual property. So we are already doing a lot for businesses worldwide, and I think there is a lot that they can do for us.

One area is the environment, which is a contentious issue affecting a lot of

companies. I tell my corporate friends that they make lots of money polluting the environment, but they can make much more cleaning it up. Clearly, we should work together to make our environment a better place.

I was very encouraged at the Rio conference on the environment in 1992. Corporate leaders sat across the table from us and played a very active role in discussions about the development of a framework of standards we were trying to establish, telling us what was possible and what was not. They had direct input, which is a very healthy way of going forward. Perhaps the most prominent example is what Rotary International did with the World Health Organization, when it came up with a global, \$400 million program to eliminate polio. Most of the money was raised by Rotary International, and the World Health Organization did the work through its offices around the world. Because of that joint effort, we are now very close to eliminating polio.

Is it possible for corporations to give to funds that specialize in areas concerning their businesses?

Yes, and UNICEF is a good example. A lot of companies give money to UNICEF because they want to help protect children. Other organizations have mechanisms for setting up funds if companies want to contribute, and sometimes companies give money for a specific project — for example, to help with the rebuilding mission in Bosnia. So there are lots of ways that we can work with businesses.

There are two concerns companies often have when it comes to giving money to large government-type organizations: The first is how can they cut through all the red tape, and the second is how can they be assured that the money will be used honestly? How can you reassure them on those two issues?

I think both questions are legitimate, and we are aware of these concerns. We have tried to cut down on the red tape and simplify our procedures so they become quite direct. We went through this not so long ago with a \$1 billion gift from Ted Turner.

As for how the money is used, we can assure companies that their donations will be used effectively and for projects where they can measure results. That way, we can give them feedback on how the money has been used and show them what results we have achieved, so that they know they are getting value for their money. I think that's essential. Once people give you money, you have to be responsible and spend it properly.

Whom should corporations contact if they want to follow up on a donation?

They can direct their letters to me, and I will make sure that the appropriate department responds to them.

How important to the United Nations are the contributions private corporations make?

By working with corporations, we can help spread development. We are working with governments at the grassroots level to help them strengthen their institutions and create the right legal framework so they can privatize their industries. In effect, we are helping governments create the enabling environment that will encourage investment, both domestic and international.

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However, we cannot fight poverty, or think in terms of eliminating poverty, by relying on governmental systems alone. Today, the private sector has become the real model for the generation of world development, and we want to work in partnership with companies. In some areas we can even do joint training at certain national levels. If we can create an enabling environment, working with companies as well as in conjunction with governments, we can really do a lot of good in this world. I think companies are beginning to respond to some of these approaches, and hopefully we will be able to work together.

What we are also trying to do is to encourage governments around the world not to turn their backs on globalization just because there has been a crisis in Asia and we are having problems elsewhere. We want them to try to see how we can maximize the benefits of globalization and mitigate negative effects. Because of that, we're encouraging them to follow the right policies and make the right political decisions. So the United Nations and business are natural partners, and I hope we will work in partnership to accomplish some of the things we have in mind.

How are the Web and other technological developments affecting the way nations interact on the highest

levels and the way they interact with the United Nations?

I would answer that question by thinking about the ways in which the Web is changing the way people interact with one another, and the way that is impacting interaction among nations. Since I took office as secretary-general, I have witnessed the remarkable ways in which peoples of the world have harnessed the new electronic media to foster governmental change. Two examples that readily come to mind are the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines, and the efforts of people and nongovernmental organizations to push for the establishment of an international criminal court. In both cases the peoples of the world came together across borders by using E-mail and the Internet, and they achieved concrete results, in the form of the Ottawa Convention banning land mines and the International Criminal Court.

Do you personally E-mail the heads of countries?

No, I don't use E-mail to contact heads of state. I am fortunate enough to have their telephone numbers, and I prefer to speak by telephone because dialogue is critical to my work. Dialogue is everything. I appreciate the value of E-mail for sharing information, but to discuss and negotiate sensitive issues, it is essential to have the back-and-forth that only a conversation can provide.

Is the United Nations looking into misuse of the Web?

There are many ways that the United Nations is looking into the potential harm that can come from the Internet. For example, UNESCO — the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization — recently organized a seminar against child pornography on the Internet. It gathered Internet specialists and service providers, media practitioners, law-enforcement agencies, and government representatives, who adopted a declaration and program of action to combat this evil.

The United Nations special rapporteur on measures to combat contemporary forms of racism and racial discrimination is also looking into the serious problem of racism on the Internet. He has called for this issue to be addressed at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance that the United Nations will sponsor in the year 2001. I wholeheartedly endorse this proposal.

You mentioned earlier that Nelson Mandela and Ralph Bunche have inspired you. As you work closely with so many other world leaders, do you have the courage to say which one today impresses you the most and which one frustrates you the most?

I have the courage to name them, but I also have the wisdom not to. ●