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TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF

KOFI ANNAN

BY

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THOMAS G. WEISS: This is Tom Weiss interviewing the Secretary-General, here on the 38th floor, at the United Nations headquarters on Monday the 29th of April.[1] I wondered if we could actually begin more or less at the beginning, and whether you might tell me a bit about your family background—World War II, growing up in Ghana—but with a particular reference to how you think this helped develop your own interest in international affairs, international cooperation, how this helped make you the person you are today.

KOFI ANNAN: You start with a real big question. My father worked—although he came from a family where some of them were chiefs—he worked for a company called the United African Company, which was part of Unilever, a subsidiary of Unilever, and one of the trading companies in Africa. We moved a lot. We lived in almost every part of Ghana when I was growing up, because he was a district manager and he moved from district to district. Sometimes he'd go there for a couple of years, and we'd go to school there. And then of course, when he became director, we moved back to Accra.

But in the process of moving around in a country that had many different tribes, speaking different languages, and sometimes people looking at themselves in terms of their tribe, rather than in national terms as Ghanaians, it was very interesting for me to grow up dealing with and getting to know so many different groups in Ghana. It gave you a sense of being able to relate to everybody and different groups at a young age.

It was also during the period of independence—the struggle for independence. To see the changes taking place, to see the British hand over to the Ghanaians, and have a Ghanaian prime minister, which was Kwame Nkrumah—he was the leader of government business, they called him, and he eventually became president. You grew up with a sense that change is possible, all

[1] Michael Doyle, Hua Jiang, and Tatiana Carayannis were present throughout the interview.

is possible, and that if you watch that monumental change from the colonial period to independence, with the Ghanaians taking over the reigns of government, which seemed so far-fetched and impossible—it really also impresses upon you that changes are possible.

As a young man I was also quite active on campus, not only as an athlete, but also I did my academic work and was a student leader. I had gone to attend a student meeting in Freetown, in Sierra Leone, when, at the end of the meeting, a gentleman approached me and talked to me about a Ford Foundation program where they invited young, foreign student leaders to come to spend a year or two on an American campus, and he said, "I think you are the type of person who would do well in this program, and I'm going to put your name forward. They will send you an application, and fill it out," which I did. That's how I ended up in MacAllister College.

Susan Beresford tells everybody that Ford Foundation has re-launched a leadership program, and she says it pays: "Look at the Secretary-General. He was one of our leadership students." So I went to MacAllister in Minnesota and experienced, if you can imagine, my first winter. I came in August, stopped at Harvard for an induction program, and straight on to Minnesota. It was a fascinating experience, because being from a British colony, we had the same syllabus as British students—Cambridge school certificate, ordinary level and advanced level. So we knew the seasons. You had read about snow, you felt you are familiar with it until you finally confront it. First of all, I was quite shocked by how light it was. You would have thought it would be heavier. And, as I've told people often, as somebody from the tropics, I didn't like putting on layers and layers of clothing to keep warm. But of course, I decided it was useful enough.

One thing I swore never to wear was earmuffs, until one day I had gone out to get something to eat and almost lost my ears. I went and bought the biggest pair of earmuffs I could

find. When I went back to MacAllister a few years ago, I told them this story. I said, "The lesson I walked away with was don't go to a place and pretend you know better than the natives. Listen to them and do what they do." That story has stayed with me.

My early years in Ghana, the boarding school experience, the teachers, my parents, and my father in particular—they all had influence on me, and perhaps made me the person I am. But of course, I also joined the international service very early, almost straight out of college. So for over forty years I have been in the system.

TGW: I wonder whether we could back a minute to Nkrumah, and that period of decolonization. Several people in their interviews have suggested that the initial view, that it was going to take seventy-five or one hundred years for independence, lasted for a while. And of course, Ghana was amongst the first. Do you recall what your impression was? Did this seem like the beginning of a snowball that would move quickly? And in particular, did Bandung (Asian-African Conference) and the first coming together of Africa and Asia—did this hit the papers? Did this come on your own radar screen?

KA: You mean the struggle for independence?

TGW: Yes. And how quickly decolonization would proceed.

KA: Yes, I was in the boarding school. It was quite remarkable that at a young age—we were politically alert and aware, and we had lots of political discussions. In fact, sometimes you could see the students breaking themselves up into almost political groups and discussing the issues. It was also one of those periods when you had the intellectual—a sort of intellectual group in Ghana had formed. They were the first to start the struggle, and they formed the United Gold Coast Convention. In fact, they brought Nkrumah on as a secretary to the group from abroad.

Their approach was independence step-by-step. They were prepared to be patient and move on slowly. Nkrumah was disenchanted with that approach, and his attitude was independence now. So he broke away from the group and formed his own party—the Convention People's Party, which challenged the established order within the group that had brought him in. In the end, he won popular support and won the first elections and took over.

I think for Ghana, in a way, the struggle was very brief. It started in 1919 by a group of intellectuals. Then it lay fallow for a while until 1948, when a group of ex-servicemen demonstrated in Accra and energized the movement. That was the first real movement that was sustained. I was ten at the time. So from that period of ten, my parents were discussing it at home a lot, and by the time I went through high school, and in my teens—we got independence on 3 March 1957, so you could imagine that throughout that period, I lived this experience intensely. There were no televisions available at the time. It was on radio and we had discussions. Everybody was very aware—at least kids at my age, and those who were at school with me and I played with. At home it was a constant discussion.

TGW: When you got to MacAllister without your earmuffs, I assume there weren't very many Africans. But I was also wondering whether there were many African-Americans around, and whether the beginning of the civil rights movement in the United States came into the classroom, or came into the city, and what kind of reception you received.

KA: There weren't many Africans, and for that matter, that many black Americans in the college. But there were some in the city—not as many in Minneapolis and St. Paul as there are here. But it was interesting there. For somebody who had gone through the independence movement, to come to the States and see the rumblings of Black Power and the civil rights movement is something that resonated, and I could relate to, and I could understand. But there

were also moments when you realized that there was a gulf—a gulf between Africans and the black Americans. I recall once I was invited to a dinner, and there were two black American women there. There were quite a few, but these two started talking to me. They asked me, "Where are you from?" I said, "I'm from Ghana." One of them asked me, "Where am I from?" I said, "You are American." She said, "No, I am now, but my ancestry." I said, "Africa?" She said, "No." I said, "Maybe Cuba or Jamaica?" She said, "No." I said, "Tell me, I'm lost." She said, "I'm Norwegian. My great-great-grandfather was Norwegian." The other one said, "What do you think?" I said, "I was so hopelessly wrong in the case of your friend, I don't think I want to try." She said, "I'm German. My great-great-grandfather was German."

It was understandable. Minnesota was all Scandinavian and German, and everybody wanted to claim the popular and the acceptable parents. So even if there's one drop of blood, this is what you claim and accept. It struck me because I never had that in Ghana. They may even have a mother or father who is Lebanese, or British, or French, but they will say, "We are Ghanaians." They would not tell me about, "My great-great-grandfather..." And that took me a while to digest, but then I understood what was going on. It was much later that I realized that when you have a sense of self, and where you come from, and your background, you tend to dismiss that sort of reaction. But when you think it through, you do understand, but you also see how much work one has to do.

TGW: What was the subject that was most controversial in bars, coffee shops and student lounges at that point? Were there any books that you recall that really struck you, or that many students were reading at the time? And which of your own mentors, either there or later in Geneva or at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), meant the most to you?

KA: It was interesting. At that time, there was quite a lot of turmoil. It wasn't just the black movement in the U.S. There was also support for the struggle for independence in Africa. It was also the time when Lumumba was killed in the Congo. So there was a sort of convergence in the circles—a convergence in the black struggle here and the African struggle for independence. You had students quoting Frantz Fanon; *The Wretched of the Earth*; *War and Peace*; *Cry the Beloved Country*; the American Constitution; and the UN Charter, and, not surprisingly, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln.

There was a professor at MacAllister—he has died—who was called Theodore Mitau. He was a professor in government—a very good teacher, very dynamic, and very direct, and very inspirational. I think if you talked to anyone who was at MacAllister in those years, who took a course from him, they will remember the impact he had on them as I do remember his impact on me, because a good teacher can really have an impact. There are others. The headmaster of my school, Mr. Bartels, who eventually ended up working in Paris with UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization)—when I was working in Geneva, he invited me once. I was in Paris, and he said, "Come and have lunch." And I recall very vividly the discussion we had at lunch, because when I was at school I thought he really did not like me, because each time there was a problem he sent for me. Somehow he thought I was a troublemaker or a ringleader. There was a measure of justification in those suspicions, I have to admit.

He thought I was a troublemaker, and I asked him bluntly, "Why didn't you like me?" He said, "Well, now that you are not my student—you are not a student and I am not a headmaster—I will tell you the truth." He said, "I did not dislike you. I and the teachers liked you because you were always questioning and challenging people in authority, and keeping us on our toes. But if I had allowed every student to be like you, there would be no school. So I had to

be very firm with you." And I reminded him that there were times when things went wrong, and he called me when I had nothing to do with it. Of course, there were other times, as I said, when he was right. I think the thing that really changed our relationship was a strike. I organized a strike at the age of fifteen about the food, which was bad, at the boarding school. We kept telling them and they wouldn't do anything, so we arranged it in such a way—about 600 or 700 of us—that on a Sunday nobody ate. Having arranged to make sure they had something to eat first, when we went to the dining room we all refused to eat. The housemaster tried to calm the situation down, but he couldn't. But of course, I, who had organized it and knew the headmaster would call for me, went to the dining room late. And when I got there, the place was in pandemonium.

The next morning, when he called me, he said, "Young Annan"—he called me young Annan because he knew my father—"I understand you had something to do with all this strike nonsense. If you have an issue to discuss, come to me and we'll discuss it man to man. You are reasonably intelligent. Given the chance, you may become a useful member of society. But if you keep on like this, one of these days you are going to cross a line and we will find out who runs this school, you or me." He was really quite rough on me. "And I will deal with you," he said, "You are always on the borderline." But it was an interesting thing to hear him, because when I was at school I thought this guy really didn't like me. Anything goes wrong, and he sends for Annan.

TGW: I am curious. How did you enter the international civil service? In many of our interviews, it turns out that there really was not much rhyme or reason to the beginning of international careers. So I am curious whether this was a conscious choice, or you fell into it.

And in particular, what led you in this direction rather than, say, going home, or going into business, or continuing immediately with higher education?

KA: From MacAllister, I went to Geneva because I had a Carnegie grant to do a year at the Graduate Institute for International Studies. Prior to that, I had worked with Pillsbury. I don't know if you know the company. I did a summer internship with them. They really wanted me to stay with them. They had a project to build a flour mill in Ghana and they had hoped I would join them. So I said, "Let me go to Geneva and do my studies at the institute, and then I will join you from there."

Whilst I was in Geneva, their deal with the Ghana government fell through because Nkrumah had become very socialistic and felt that he would much rather have the Bulgarian government build the mill. So the deal fell through. So after my studies in Geneva—at that summer, in 1962, I was working in Paris, when a friend brought to my attention an advertisement that WHO (World Health Organization) was looking for young administrators. So I applied for the job, and I got it. My intention was to stay for two years maximum and go home. And here we are.

TGW: What actually was being taught about development economics in Geneva at that point in time? I don't know whether this had become a theme as yet in graduate education.

KA: No, not really. We had some very strong and experienced economists—Professor Wilhelm Roepke, who is in fact given credit for having assisted the Germans in the economic recovery, and Professor Michel Heilperin, who was also very strong on financial economics. But development economics, as such, was never really a topic. I remember, in all the discussions we had, it may have come up tangentially. Years later, a development institute was set up in

Geneva, which was eventually headed by my roommate, Roy Preiswerk, who unfortunately is dead. You may know of him?

TGW: Yes, I do. I studied with him.

KA: Roy and I were together, but at the institute, at the time, development economics was not a topic.

TGW: How would you have characterized your own thinking about development, and the priorities in development at that time? And if we could fast-forward, what do you think has most changed as a result of four decades in this business?

KA: I think it was interesting that this debate took place among African leaders when they took over government. This also—before I get into African leaders, let me say that there was a phenomenon I noticed in Africa. The struggle for independence leads to the formation of national movements, not necessarily political parties. Independence is something that everybody wants, so sometimes you have one big movement, the national movement, that struggles for independence. And at the end of the struggle, people who may be very good at confronting the colonialists, and fighting for independence, and may have no idea about governance, become leaders. They forget that the talents you need to fight for independence may be quite different from the talents you need to rule and to govern.

So we had some wrong people in leadership positions in terms of governance. And on the economic issue, they reduced the development issue to whether you do it through agriculture or industrialization. Nkrumah, for example, wanted to industrialize Ghana very quickly, and overlooked our natural advantage of agriculture. Here's a country that was producing more than half the production of world cocoa. We produced more than half at the time—now we don't. We could have gone into coffee, which Ivory Coast, our neighbor, did—and pineapple, and all

sorts of things. But instead of that, they wanted to get into industry, and came up with the Ministry for Heavy and Light Industry—which was the Russian model—and other things. And in fact, when I look back, I see that Ghana and Malaysia got independence at the same time. They had roughly the same amount of reserves, and yet look at the two economies and where they are.

And at that point in time, the debate was over which model was more effective—the Soviet socialist model or the capitalist model. In fact, you had two countries, the Ivory Coast and Ghana, sitting side by side—Felix Houphouet-Boigny going the capitalistic and western approach, and Nkrumah going the other way. And in fact, Houphouet took a bet with him. He said, "You go your way, I'll go my way, and in ten years' time we will decide who has done more for his country." Nkrumah died before they could look at the scorecard, but in my judgement Ivory Coast did much better.

TGW: And your own thinking over this time?

KA: At the time, I was inclined towards the capitalist system, undoubtedly influenced by my sojourn in the USA. My own thinking has evolved, and also through the work of the UN on these issues. The UN has provided intellectual leadership on the subject of economic development. I think there had been a tendency for everybody to focus on university education and on preparing intellectuals, forgetting that to get to the intellectual scene you need to have good primary schools. You need to put the kids through all the system. We tended to take for granted some of the essential services, like health, education, infrastructure, and others. But now, of course, everybody realizes that without good health, without basic education, and others, you are not going to move forward.

I think in the past one paid lip service to it without really focusing on the basic issues. And there was also a tendency, at the time when governments and people were criticized for lack of respect for rights, lack of good governance—they could always dismiss it as a colonialist attack and as a game. But now we have a situation, in which the public's awareness has evolved. They know their rights, and the leaders are under pressure. And today, the pressure in Africa, not only on the issue of effective economic development, but good governance, is coming from the people and from the leaders themselves.

I sometimes say things in my speeches and statements, knowing that it will help those without voice. They can quote the Secretary-General, "As the Secretary-General said—" and they will not go to jail. If they say it themselves they will go to jail. So in effect, I give them voice by putting my thoughts and ideas in a way that they can quote.

TGW: Do you think that this function—since you've opened up this, I was going to get to this later—but the function of the Secretary-General, in terms of idea leadership, intellectual leadership, using the bully pulpit to preach on occasion—this has been something that you've done? Is this something that could have been done earlier, or are the peculiar political circumstances of the 1990s and now the twenty-first century—permitted you to do more easily than your predecessors?

KA: Well, I think each of my predecessors operated at a different time, and they had to tackle the job in their own way. But I believe that anyone in this job has a unique opportunity, and has a voice that should be used to assist those without voice, and to lead in areas that are sometimes neglected. I have not hesitated to speak out. I know not everybody likes it, but it is something that has to be done. And there are times when it is important that the secretary-general's voice be heard, particularly in situations where there is silence and indifference. You

need to break that silence and wake people up, and steer things in the right directions. I will continue to do that.

I think one thing, which has also helped, is the fact that I came in determined to open the UN up and bring the UN closer to the people. And in the process, we are now dealing very effectively with NGOs (nongovernmental organizations), with the private sector, with universities, and foundations, and realizing very early that the UN cannot achieve its objectives unless we reach out in partnership and work with others. I think there are times when—I won't say I have got into trouble, but there are times when some governments have not liked what I have said. But after a while, they get used to it, or they come to accept it, although they may initially object to ideas I put forward. But once others have taken up the debate, and written about it, and they have discussed it, they begin to accept it. For example, you remember my statement to the Assembly on humanitarian intervention?

TGW: Yes.

KA: Which led to the Canadian-created independent commission that produced the report, *The Responsibility to Protect*. I raised it again in my speech to the Human Rights Commission earlier this month. We are going to have a Security Council retreat next weekend, and one of the key topics is on this issue—responsibility to protect—for the Council to think through. When I made the statement three years ago, if I had suggested "let's go on a retreat and discuss this," they would have all run away from me. But today, not only are they going to do it, they are bringing the authors of the report to participate.

TGW: Yes, in fact, I was with Gareth Evans last week introducing the report, and he mentioned that he was—

KA: Who was?

TGW: Gareth Evans. And he said that he and Mohamed Sahnoun were going to join you. You mentioned NGOs and the corporate sector. We're interested in understanding the dynamics of the way that ideas move, or how the envelope is pushed out on what's acceptable or unacceptable. How do you think, specifically, that NGOs in particular have influenced what is considered the middle ground in the United Nations?

KA: Of course we have many, many NGOs. Some are extremely well-organized, extremely well-financed, and with a clear vision of what they want and where they want to go. And you have also some of the one-issue NGOs. What is important is that, through information technology and the information IT-revolution, they are coordinated and linked up in a way that we couldn't have imagined a few years ago. So you have a global civil society that is connected by the web and can really move issues. We saw their strength in the campaign for the ban of landmines. We saw the contribution they made for the ICC, the International Criminal Court. Not only were they here—I saw them also in Rome very active. They also have another advantage. Quite frankly, on some of the issues they are ahead of the curve. They can say and do things that we cannot say or do. And eventually we will catch up with them.

I mean, it's funny when Bono comes to see me and says, "Mr. Secretary, I know what you are trying to do. We support what you are doing. We are going to work with you." He said, "We can throw firebombs, you cannot, in terms of what we say—firebombs in terms of what we say. We will do this spot in an effort to support what you are trying to do and the direction that you want to go." So they have influence.

These days, they also coordinate and they write to governments. They write to their parliamentarians and to the press. And that capacity to speak out, to reach out to policymakers, I think is extremely important. I know sometimes it unsettles some of the ambassadors here, in

that we are an organization of governments—why all these NGOs? Why is the Secretary-General bringing in the private sector?

I tell a joke: "They were very nervous that I was going to bring in the private sector, thinking that they may take over this organization and influence decisions, when I told them they wouldn't be able to the way the structure is." But I think I won the argument when Ted Turner offered us a billion dollars and did not take over the Security Council. Then they realized it could work.

TGW: Well when you actually became Secretary-General, you had a certain amount of experience with agencies and regional commissions, UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees), and in the house itself—management side, and substantive side. I presume that in certain ways this has been helpful and in other ways, shall we say, a hindrance. In what ways do you think that, having grown up so to speak in the system, has helped you to do your job, and in what ways has this actually impeded you?

KA: I think the knowledge I had of the organization and the system was extremely helpful, and it came in handy when we introduced a reform process, when we are analyzing what sort of reforms we should undertake, what can be done quickly, what I can do under my own authority, and what needed the member-states' approval. And also the whole approach to move very, very quickly and to tell them, "This is what I am going to do, and that I am doing it under my own authority, and this is where I need your decision." So I came with various tracks—track one, track two, and others. And now we are launching another phase.

So not only did the knowledge of how the house worked and knowing where the weaknesses were help me, but I also knew how the governmental processes worked, how the General Assembly, the Fifth Committee, and all that worked. But where I had to be careful, and

it could have been a hindrance, is that old-timers in the house often will say, "Let's not do this." And I've often maintained that the biggest impediment to change and reform in the bureaucracy is the restraint bureaucrats put on themselves: "This will not work. The member-states will not buy it." So they don't even test it, and they don't try it. So I'm constantly challenging them to test.

And also knowing that I've been in the house for a while, I've always reached out to talk to others. I've always reached out to seek advice and views of others. The fact that Michael Doyle is here is an indication of my attempt to open up and reach out. We work with other's research centers, and we bring them periodically to discuss the issues with us, because that is the greatest injury, if you are not careful. There is a tendency for people in this house to say, "We are special. We are different. The rest of the world does not understand us." And you can really get into a cocoon.

I must say that even though I have been a bureaucrat—I have been in bureaucracy all these years—I think I can honestly say that I've never seen myself as a bureaucrat. I've always challenged. I've always pushed the envelope. I've always sought to do things differently. I think Michael and those who work with me can confirm that. I've always tried to. And that spirit has also helped me. I can try new things, I can reach out, I can challenge, I can test, and I can push the envelope, of course, without committing suicide.

TGW: Well, Michael can cover his ears, but I was going to ask you what types of idea-mongers, what types of outside experts, academics, working either inside the house or outside the house, do you think have the most influence and why?

KA: Have the most influence on me, or on—

TGW: Yes, on you, and on the way governments gradually become more receptive to ideas, or new ideas?

KA: I think there are institutions that we can work with, and individuals. For example, the work you are doing—you, and Jolly, and others—is going to be important. The work I've asked Jeffrey Sachs to come and do on the millenium development goals is going to help influence governments and the public. And in fact, the work he did with Gro Brundtland on health and development is an important issue. I have asked the Kennedy School (John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard) to look at Security Council reform and give me a paper. That is an issue for member-states, and they often don't like the Secretary-General and the Secretariat to get involved. I said, "Give me a paper on ideally how you see the reform of the Security Council, including the processes they should go through to get it reformed." And there is an issue: there is a lack of progress, a lack of process for decision-making, a complicated and ineffective process of decision-making but not necessarily a lack of ideas. When I get that document, I shall give it to the member-states and say, "It is your decision. But I want to help. By the way, I have a document here, done by a reputable institution."

And there are also times when I bring in studies done by universities or individuals that I may not have had anything to do with, that I think is of interest for them to see. For example, I am circulating Brain Urquhart's review of the book by Samantha Power on *The Problem from Hell*, on genocide. If we are going to discuss the question of responsibility to protect, I thought that was good background reading for them to see.

Then of course, there are times when I bring in groups to advise me on issues—use experienced leaders to give me advice, or periodically have somebody like Mike and others come in. So it's an extensive network, and it depends on the issue. For example, when I'm

dealing with AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), I reach out to experts in that field. And you go to a different group depending on the emphasis. I'm also happy, too, that lots of institutions and excellent intellectuals are very happy to work with us. It's quite remarkable how they are always ready to help.

The International Council of National Academies of Science (IAC), with Bruce Alberts as co-chair—that's another group that we are working with. For example, I have asked them to do a study for me on how to improve food production in Africa—the greening or agricultural revolution in Africa. So they are looking at the problem, and they will give us something that I hope we can pursue with FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization) and the governments. And your own institution with Ben Rivlin and others, we used to do quite a lot.

TGW: I am curious. Are there certain things that you think, in terms of the production of new ideas or new insights that are better done inside, and others that are better done outside? And why?

KA: That's a very good question. There are certain issues that are better done outside, and there are certain issues that can only be done inside. One of them was the Millenium Summit, when I decided that it was time for us to take a look at the UN fifty years on, and to pose a question—what should we be doing? I told the member-states, "I will give you a report. And we will give it to you six months before the General Assembly, so that you can study it and give us a declaration which will be our marching orders for the next fifteen years." That issue had to be done inside, because they are very jealous about their organization, their control over the direction of the organization. But we consulted outsiders extensively in preparation of the report.

But take a look at the intervention issue. I couldn't have done it inside. It would have been very divisive. And the member-states were very uncomfortable because, as an organization, sovereignty is our bedrock and bible—here is someone coming with ideas which are almost challenging it. So I had to sow the seed and let them digest it, but take the study outside and then bring in the results for them to look at it. And what I intend to do, for example, after the Security Council has reviewed it and discussed it, I may find a way of getting the document distributed to the membership at large, for them to continue their own dialogue and discussions on it.

I can give you another example. I find that when you are dealing with issues where the member-states are divided and have very strong views, and very strong regional reviews, if you do the work inside, the discussions become so acrimonious that, however good a document is, sometimes you have problems. And in fact, they begin to look at who did the report, where do they come from, who influenced them. But if you bring it from outside—that Professor Weiss investigated it, this is a really, very good document that could help our discussions—they accept it.

And I must say there are also times when I go outside because quite frankly I don't think we have the expertise in the house. If I go and ask my people, they will say, "We can do it." Bureaucrats never admit that they cannot do it. So there are, at times, areas where I think there is stronger expertise outside, and I should reach out to them. And in fact, the infusion of outside views would also help our processes.

TGW: So sometimes it's tactical, and some times it's—

KA: Substantive, yes. Content.

TGW: I was interested last week, when I was interviewing Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, and I looked at something he had written in his own memoirs. There seems to be a thread that comes out. He basically said that the political and administrative demands on the Secretary-General come first. We have had a little problem with this in the last couple of weeks ourselves. Can economic and social development on the 38th Floor be more than a residual item? It seems that over the years, if you track this, it gets pushed aside. I'm just wondering—is this inevitable, or not?

KA: It's not inevitable, and in fact I have tried to redress the balance. I have tried to redress the balance because I really take a keen interest in the economic and social issues, and not only a keen interest but also an active one. When you look at what happened on the AIDS fund (Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria), and the effort I put into its launching—I've been very active on Monterey (International Conference on Financing for Development), I'm active on Johannesburg (World Summit on Sustainable Development), and in Doha (Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization). I think, quite frankly I believe, that quite a lot of the crises we face in the political area have economic bases. And indeed, if you are going to resolve some of these issues, even good economic development can be good prevention.

So I believe very firmly in the economic. And the way I have structured it, and to show you how the 38th Floor has been actively involved—I have a division of labor with my deputy, who is down the hall from me. And Louise Frechette is very actively involved in all these economic issues—Johannesburg and all the other economic and social issues. We work very closely together, and I wanted it that way. So in effect we have brought a certain equilibrium between the political and the economic, and reduced the emphasis on the political. And besides,

as an organization, about 80 per cent of our budget is normally spent on economic and social issues. The political ones get the headlines. I cannot say that we are in a perfect equilibrium, but it is better and I am determined to push it further.

In my own speeches, you can see there is quite a bit of balance on the economic—partly this year, as we approach Rio Plus Ten (UN Conference on Environment and Development). But you have put your finger on a real issue. The other thing, which has helped, is that we have a cabinet meeting every week—every Wednesday—and UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), and the people from the economic commissions, are linked through teleconferencing. Our discussions are not just based on administrative and political concerns, but on economic and humanitarian issues. And I have tried to pull everybody in, for us to work in a harmonious way. So it is a very astute observation. You're right.

TGW: You've mentioned HIV/AIDS, which is an idea that you've been associated with pushing out considerably. I'm interested in how an idea changes over time, and in particular with this one in a relatively short period of time—how it went from being conceived as a sexual issue, a health issue, to being part of a much larger set of problems—development writ large. How did this occur? How did it happen?

KA: It's a very interesting question. We kept looking at the statistics, and we saw the havoc this epidemic is wreaking around the world. And I had a conversation with the council members just before they went to Africa. [Richard] Holbrooke was going, and it was his first trip to Africa. He said, "What should I do?" I said, "Focus on AIDS. You will be surprised." They came back, and he said, "It's amazing what I saw." We discussed it. He said, "I want to put this in the council." I said, "That would be great, but they may resist it." The only way we

could put it in the council was to say, "It is a security issue, because it has security dimensions to it apart from the economic and health."

The day AIDS was taken-up in the Security Council, Al Gore was in the chair as president. Gore came to represent the U.S., and the room was packed and it really lifted the level. And we were also going to organize a high profile for the General Assembly's Special Session on AIDS. And our own public information and others really did a lot. And prior to that, there had been a meeting in Abuja, where lots of African leaders had participated. That was where I launched the Global Fund and challenged all the leaders to speak out. Speak out, because when it comes to AIDS, silence is death. And they owed it to their people and to their nation, and more and more of them started speaking.

Then I talked to global leaders by phone. I went to see [George W.] Bush and others, to get them all involved—and [William] Clinton, before that. I think sometimes it is one event that turns the tide—and I think that Security Council session, and the General Assembly, and the changing attitude of leaders really helped.

TGW: Another idea that is now front and center—standard, almost predictable—but was not at one time, is the notion of gender. I am wondering whether you can recall when this came on your own radar screen as an institutional issue. The Mexico Conference (UN World Conference of the International Women's Year) was 1975. Some people point to that period, and some before that, and some people after. For you, when was it?

KA: I think for me it came earlier. In my early career, I was in the department of personnel here. And one of the key issues that people used to fight about was geographical balance—which you will recall from UNCTAD—and gender. And gender came in, but it was

rather timidly—there weren't enough women appointed in the professional category. How come they were mainly in the general service? And that we needed to try to improve.

One of the Secretaries-General—but it was after 1976—said we would try and make a push to appoint more female staff. The women said, "We want to make it fifty-fifty." So we set a target of fifty-fifty, and then of course, in the meantime, the pressure became enormous after the Mexico conference, and after constant pressure from the women's movement. And of course, if the UN is lecturing everybody, we had to lead ourselves. We can't go and tell people to have gender mainstreaming, to improve gender balance, when we don't have it in our organization. We are not at fifty-fifty yet, but at the professional level we are at about forty-two percent.

And I have personally been determined to bring in as many senior women as possible. Apart from the contributions they make, they are good role models. It also really encourages others. And I must say they are very, very good. Talk to Gus Speth about it sometime. One day Gus came in and he said, "Gosh, Kofi, I just came out of a meeting." He said, "Tough women! There was blood all over the floor. I was lucky to get out. They are tough. But they are good. It was really wonderful."

TGW: You mentioned that sometimes conferences are a good occasion, a good gimmick. In our interviews, the view about conferences varies widely from useless jamborees to important occasions for bureaucracies to take stock. I don't know whether it's possible to generalize about conferences, but maybe to generalize about which of these conferences you think made a difference, and whether there's anything structural. Or is it just serendipity that reigns?

KA: I think some of them have really made a difference. Rio did. I think Cairo (International Conference on Population and Development) did. Mexico and population. I was

going to mention nuclear, but there we have had a bit more of a problem. I think the conferences that put new ideas on the table and provide intellectual leadership, and sensitize the public to issues that they are not aware of are very, very good. Where we have a problem is going back. It's like movie-makers. They repeat it. They have a good movie, and then they have to have movie number two. And we are going through the plus fives, and the plus tens. This is where I see the problems. We ought to be able to review progress without having to hold these massive conferences. And sometimes they come to these conferences and try to dilute positions they agreed to five years ago, or ten years ago. We are there to take stock, but they want to reopen some of the issues.

So if it is Rio, which was very clear—we almost literally put the issue of the environment on the table and made it a household topic of concern. The conferences that put the empowerment of women and population on the table were very good. But it has to be very focused and provide some direction. As I said, I have been worried recently about the plus fives. And of course, a good conference is like trying to resolve a problem. If you set the problem properly, you can tackle it more effectively. But some of these topics for conferences are so amorphous that you are almost destined to run into difficulties from day one.

I was very nervous about the conference on racism and xenophobia (UN World Conference Against Racism) in South Africa when it was set up. Mary Robinson tried her best, and everybody tried to help her. But we did run into difficulties, and you ask yourself, "Did we need that sort of conference?"

TGW: How about the mother of all conferences, the Millennium Summit? How did this idea come up? And what was weighed, in trying to put it together and to convene it, as opposed to saying, "My God, this is going to be our worst nightmare?"

KA: I think it came up early in my term. We were bouncing around ideas of things that I wanted to do. So I promised a Millennium Summit boldly, in 1997, my first year in office, indicating that we needed to take stock, review what we've achieved over the past fifty years, and the issues we are dealing with, and what we should be focusing on, so that we can reorient our efforts and direct our resources. I think at the beginning, the member-states were skeptical. Because at all these conferences, what happens is that the member-states produce a document. And we are struggling with that approach as we prepare for Johannesburg now, through prepcoms (preparatory committees) and other meetings. For the Millennium Summit I offered to provide the document. I would provide a basic report on what issues were—in my judgement, the most important and pressing—and they would receive the report six months ahead of the summit. I expected the leaders to issue a declaration setting priorities for the organization over the next two decades.

Quite frankly, quite a lot of the ambassadors and the people in the house didn't believe it was possible when it was mentioned in 1997. As we got closer to it, and more and more of their leaders decided to come—because we were writing to them, phoning them—they all got quite excited about it. And we also did the report in such a way that the last few pages could form the basis of the declaration. So we had a situation where the process was quite well-managed and focused, and not diluted, as sometimes happens with these conferences. In fact, that leads me to wonder if we shouldn't find a way of planning future conferences leaving the document to one organization, one individual, rather than getting the member-states together to write the document, and agree on the document. Really, it wastes lots and lots of time and energy.

With the Millennium Summit, by the time the leaders got here, they had studied the document. And to have 150 heads of state, and governments, and kings here, under one roof,

was quite an achievement. Then they participated, for the first time, in roundtables where the heads of state talked amongst themselves, without aides, without assistants. One of them chaired, and then reported the findings to the plenary. What struck me was how much these people miss by not interacting with each other, talking to each other without aides and advisors. They loved it, and said, "Can we have more of this?" Because there was nobody there to whisper to them or to give them paper—"You shouldn't have said that." They felt free.

And some of the things that came up were incredible. I recall we were discussing the debt issue. And I raised the issue that we have to find some way of handling this debt issue—the relationship between the debtor and the creditor, and that some sort of arbitration may become necessary because the deck is so heavily stacked against the debtor these days. Of course, at the national level you have Chapter 11. I am happy that now the IMF (International Monetary Fund) is talking about national debt restructuring and trying to come up with a system. But as we were discussing this, the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) foreign minister—his president wasn't there—took the floor, and said, "I agree with you, Mr. Secretary-General, and all those who have spoken. I think that debt is the real problem, and I believe the real solution is to get rid of all the creditors." There was silence in the room, and then he added, "I don't mean kill them all." It was incredible. There was [Jacques] Chirac and Clinton. You can imagine.

TGW: I think it's fair to say that out of that meeting, one notion that you are still trying to pursue is this idea of a Global Compact, which some people see as an important device to learn and to make people accountable. And others, I think, would criticize it for playing into the hands of the dominant liberal and capitalist orthodoxy, and that the UN's role really is, in the world of ideas anyway, to be something of a gadfly, to try to challenge whatever the mainstream orthodoxy happens to be—economic or social. How would you respond to that criticism?

KA: I think the NGOs do that very well. Secondly, the Global Compact was intended to push companies to be socially responsible, and to get them to apply universally accepted norms. We are not inventing anything new. And secondly, it is not a code of conduct which is enforceable. We don't have the means to enforce it. But what we have discovered is that transparency and dialogue can be powerful tools. And we are asking them to post on the web what they have done in this area. And let's not forget that when you talk of the Global Compact, the participants are the companies, and the companies include management, and the trade unions, and labor. And they are very much in the room with us, as well as the NGOs.

They are all enthusiastic about this, particularly the workers, because it is also a tool for them. When a company signs on, they should be able to go to the management, and say, "You have signed on to the Global Compact to do this, and that, and that. And we know in this company you are not doing it." Because the idea is for them to make it part of their daily operations, and let it infuse their whole operation and organization. And some have done quite well.

So really, if people are looking for an enforceable code, this is not it. We don't have the capacity. But that does not mean that it should not encourage and push companies to do the right thing. The remarkable thing is that their workers get excited that the firm has values, and the firm wants to do the right thing. And doing the right thing is also good for business. Sometimes they accuse us of bringing in a company that doesn't have an entirely clean record. If they were all doing what they had to do, and they were applying these norms already, and they were all angels, I don't think we would need the Global Compact. It is precisely those who are not respecting these laws, those who are not respecting labor norms, that we should try and influence by bringing them on board.

TGW: I wondered if we could go back just a minute. I wanted to draw you out a little bit about your experience as head of human resources. Subsequently, as Secretary-General, you have said something like, "Corporations conduct global searches and get great people, and we cannot afford not to do the same." What would you see as the most important shortcomings in the civil service, the international civil service, and what are the most important two or three things that you think might be done over the next twenty years to upgrade this?

KA: I think one of the difficulties we have is the nature and structure of the organization. This year we will be 191 member-states, and each one of them tries to have a say on how this organization is managed. And under our rules, we should try and bring in people from each of these member-states. Sometimes people seem to think that geographical distribution, or geographical balance, and competence is not compatible. I disagree. You can have a geographic spread and still have very competent staff.

The difficulty is that we have tended, in the past, and even now, to rely on governments to give us names and good candidates for our positions. Sometimes they give you good candidates. Other times, they give you friends, or people they cannot place in their own system. So you need to be able to overcome that, and to challenge that. I think one of the best ways to do this is to organize a search. In fact, recently a government has spoken to me and said they would give me money to go to a search firm. Until now, we do a search by talking to lots of people. When I travel around the world, I am always recruiting. I mean, I do not offer them a job on the spot, but I take a mental note—"What a brilliant woman. What a brilliant man. When I have something in this area, I would want to come back to this person."

So what I try to do, when I have a vacancy, is to draw up a long list. And I encourage people to give me candidates. Even when, because of traditional and political reasons, I have to

recruit somebody from County A, I prefer to go and look for my own candidate from Country A, and tell the government, "I want so and so." And I think we should be able to do that. And if the government says, for some reason or other, "We cannot let you have so and so," you have set the standard. You say, "Give me someone comparable, or better, to look at," and many times we are able to insist, "I have other candidates from around the world, and I will take a better candidate from Country B or C, unless you can produce a top-notch candidate." We should try and get away from countries inheriting posts. There's a certain political reality, but I think as we move on into the future, when governments are cooperating a bit more, and the organization hopefully becomes stronger, we should be able to do more of that.

So, I will say, a search for the best man or the best woman, even when it's agreed that candidates from certain countries be appointed—you can push them to do better. For example, I have had two experiences which I could share with you. After Speth left, I had decided that the U.S. had held the UNDP (UN Development Programme) job for too long. And at that time, they had UNDP, UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), and World Food Programme (WFP), and I wanted UNDP to go to a European. So I asked the European Union (EU) to give me a list of candidates. They came with a list of one. So I called them, and I said, "I asked for a list of candidates. You gave me one name." They said—and the German ambassador here was the chairman then—"Let me go and discuss it." He came back and said, "We have reviewed it. We have a list, and it's the same one." So I said, "Well, let me be clear. You may be embarrassed, because I will go outside your list of one. I will appoint a European, but it may not be yours. If you don't want to be embarrassed, give me a wider list." They insisted on that person, and I did not appoint the person. I took someone who was from Europe—Mark Malloch Brown—but it wasn't the candidate the entire EU had selected.

I had a similar situation with the Americans on the World Food Programme. When Catherine Bertini left, I asked the U.S. government for several candidates, but they gave me one. I explained to them that we wanted somebody with strong managerial experience, because it is a big managerial, logistic operation. So I went back and said, "I need other names to review." That is how Jim Morris got appointed as executive-director of the World Food Programme.

But the tendency, in the past, was for us to acquiesce. You don't want to take on the whole of the EU if all of the governments have all decided together. You don't take on Washington—whilst you can explain even to the president that we have a problem, and ask for help. And I think we should do more of that.

TGW: More than one person in our interviews has compared unfavorably UN officials with Brettton Woods officials, saying that they have the freedom to publish, they get paid more, et cetera. Do you think that is a fair criticism, or not?

KA: It is fair. They are much better paid than we are. And because they are better paid, they perform better, because you are competing for talent internationally. And we should have the right incentives to be able to attract, recruit, and retain competent people over a long period. If your conditions are not right, you have two problems. You may not be able to attract them. And if you do get them, they do not stay. We've lost quite a few people to the World Bank, but the reverse is not true. The traffic is one-way. Their conditions are much better. I think the governments are reviewing it now. How well we will do, I don't know. But they are taking a look at it. I think it is also that once the conditions are improved, we ourselves should also aim higher and lift our standards of recruitment. We should also allow our staff to publish.

TGW: As you look back over these years, which ideas in the economic and social arena, that have either come out of the UN, or been massaged in the UN, do you think have been the

most important in terms of forcing governments to change their own policies—reframe the issues?

KA: Since the inception of the UN?

TGW: Yes. For instance, many people, I think, would say the dominant one has been that nothing has been more revolutionary than human rights. And probably the evolution since 1948 is certainly one of those. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that's the one that seems to come up a lot. But other people have picked the environment.

KA: I think human rights is one. But I had mentioned the environment earlier in our talk, because quite frankly we almost put it on the map—to get ordinary people and governments thinking seriously about the environment. The other area where I think we have really pushed for the poor countries is this whole idea of the importance of ODA (Official Development Assistance). ODA is helping the poor and the weak get off their ground. And now recently, I think one of the most important issues which we are pushing, which has also become a focus for the UNDP, is the issue of governance and institution-building and its impact on development—the idea that if you do not have these institutions and good regulatory systems, you are building on sand. I think this is more or less universally accepted now. It was very much on the table in Monterrey, and in all discussions that we are having with the developing world and the developed world. It's the basis of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development). So I think the governance issue is one.

The other area where—I'm giving you a few, you can choose—the other area, which has become very important, is that we have defined what development means, what development should mean for the individual through our Human Development Reports. It is not a question of statistics. You are dealing with health, you are dealing with clean water, you are dealing with

education, and all that. So we have given a functional and meaningful definition to poverty and development, which wasn't there before. And I think this is very important for policy-makers and for people who want to measure progress.

TGW: You have used the word "measure" several times. And when we came in, Michael was saying you were revisiting certain goals and targets. Are targets really a useful way to frame issues and progress on issues? Or do they come back and haunt us, as [Marcel] Proust said—that what we tried to do in the first place was silly?

KA: I think in some cases, in some situations, you are right. But in the case of—let's take the millennium goals. On the millennium development goals, what I told the member-states at the end of that summit, when they adopted the declaration, was to thank them for coming and adopting the declaration. But I said, "It is your declaration. You are the ones who have to go back home and implement it. It can only work if we take action at the country level. This is not something you are going to leave with a secretariat and go home. It's your responsibility to implement." I think by having goals and challenging the governments to implement, and telling them we will monitor and produce annual reports, so we can see where we are succeeding and where we are failing, we are really challenging everybody to step up and really deliver.

I think in the past we would do these reports and they were put on the shelf. Nobody pays any attention. Take the issue of 0.7 percent. It hasn't been met, but it's a target that is useful. In Monterrey, we were able to get the Europeans to move collectively to say we will go to 0.39 percent by 2006, or 2005, and that we are all going to get to 0.7 percent. You have a benchmark, something to refer to, a goal to push them to achieve. So from that point of view, it is helpful. If it wasn't there, you would ask "Can you give more? Can you give more development, more aid?" But you have no benchmark.

In fact, even in the U.S., it is becoming an issue that the U.S. is at the bottom of the pile when you do these comparisons. So in some situations, that can be extremely useful. Other times you set yourself up, as you say, for failure, or to be giving them whips to be used on you at some date.

TGW: You've mentioned human development, which is obviously linked to the notion of human security. We have another new commission. So the notion of security has expanded over time. Some people would say that there is nothing that is not in it. I was just wondering just how useful is this notion in terms of institutional policy, or staffing, or analysis? We have a book on the subject.

KA: Oh, you produced a book on human security?

TGW: We are going to.

KA: It's an interesting question. I know Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen are also doing some work on it.

TGW: I asked her. She didn't give me a good answer.

KA: OK. Maybe we should wait for Sadako. But let me put it this way—that one has to be able to define it more narrowly than is being done presently for it to be meaningful and helpful to policy-makers. If one defines human security not in terms of physical protection, but in terms of economic, social, and legal protection, in terms of human rights, and all that it takes to give people their dignity, then you are moving somewhere. On the other hand, it frightens governments. They think you want them to be responsible for somebody from cradle to the grave. And they keep saying, "Where do we get the money for this?" So we have to find a way of defining it in a way that it will not frighten them, but they will come to see it as a useful tool

and definition as to what they should aim for in terms of the welfare of the individual in their society. And I'm not sure we've done that yet. I don't know if this is a good answer for you.

TGW: One more question. I understand your wife was delighted the other day to learn that you were going to go back to farming after you finish this term. I was just wondering, if you were going to stay on for the next fifteen years in directing the organization, where would you invest resources in terms of pushing out ideas? What would be the biggest intellectual payoff over the next, say, couple decades? Where could we push out knowledge that would have a real impact, not just on the organization, but on world politics?

KA: First of all, I would not want to stay on for the next fifteen years. I may be a glutton for punishment, but not to that extent. In terms of ideas and where the organization should put the emphasis, quite frankly I would return back to the issue that you think we have tended to neglect. I would want to push for ideas in the economic and social area. How do we deal with the question of inequality within and between states? How do we bring in the marginalized, and challenge economists and political scientists to try and come up with the idea and approaches that will free countries from poverty and the debt trap. To try and challenge them to work a way on food production, particularly as I mentioned the green revolution in Africa. I would challenge them to work on water, because it is going to be a major problem for us and the countries that are under water distress.

And finally, one area which I have pushed them to do something about, and I challenge every scientist I see, is to resolve the need for cheap and renewable sources of energy. And I am not talking about a renewable source of energy for the city dwellers like New York, but for the farmers and others who cut every tree in sight to heat water to cook—so that they will not have

to do that. So it's energy, water, and sustainable economic development. On the political side, there is enough attention. People are paying enough attention.

TGW: Thank you. You have been very kind indeed. We were beginning to wonder whether Ariel Sharon did not like our project.

KA: He was competing for attention. He was taking pity on you today. [To Michael Doyle:] Were you here the day when I had to send them back? I felt very sorry. I don't like to do that[2].

[2] This interview was rescheduled due to unforeseen events in the Secretary-General's schedule.

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