

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL
WITH TELEVISION SUISSE ROMANDE

Following is the transcript of the interview which United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan gave to Anne Cueno of Télévision Suisse Romande today:

Question: How do you think the international community can intervene in Liberia, what can it do (with) clashes, hundreds of dead?

Mr. Annan: I think the international community has a major responsibility in a situation like the one we are witnessing in Liberia. Let me say that the West African leaders are doing their best. They had organized peace talks in Acra where considerable progress was made. They got the parties to sign a cease-fire, and put forward a proposal to President Taylor which would have required him not to seek re-election, to step down and allow the formation of a national government and that national government would prepare for the next elections, and that in my mind is the way to go. But of course to monitor a cease-fire, a force would have to go in. The West African countries are prepared to make their own contribution, but there is expectation that a wider international community will also be helpful, and that is why I wrote a letter to the Security Council urging the deployment of a multinational force because the West African countries do not have the capacity, the logistical support, the airlift, to be able to do it urgently. And I hope the Council will approve my recommendation.

Question: Do you think as many Liberians do that the United States has a privileged role because of their origin?

Mr. Annan: The United States has had very historic and special relations with Liberia and most Liberians often look to the US for support in such situations. Besides, in that particular region, we have seen other countries, other developed countries, other Western countries, come to assist the region. The British working with the UN forces in Sierra Leone helped calm the situation a couple of years ago. Today, we have the French working with the ECOWAS forces and some UN observers in dealing with the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, in addition to the recent deployment of multinational forces led by the French in the Democratic Republic of Congo where their presence has made a difference in Bunia where there was gross violations of human rights and senseless killing of innocent civilians. And (now) we have a similar situation and of course the US does have (the) capacity and everyone is looking to the US to come in and help.

Question: Okay, then in the Middle East, what is your perception after the cease-fire, after the visit of Mrs. Rice to the Middle East?

Mr. Annan: I am very encouraged by the developments over the last 24 hours. I am pleased that the Palestinian groups have agreed to a cease-fire, and I would appeal to

the Palestinian groups and the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to ensure that we really seize this opportunity to end the cycle of violence. I also hope that this withdrawal by the Israeli Government, I commend them for withdrawing their troops last night and this morning because this will really open up the access we have been demanding for humanitarian assistance and it will also be important for economic and social activities. And it is extremely important for the Palestinian population whose economic and humanitarian situation is deplorable. And I hope with the opening, things will begin to pick up and the international community will step in with the necessary assistance.

Question: What can the United Nations do in the new situation?

Mr. Annan: You know the United Nations is very active on the ground. First of all, UNRWA is responsible today for feeding about 2 million Palestinians. We offer education, we run schools, hospitals, and other social services. In addition to that, my own representative to the Middle East, Terje Roed-Larsen, on the ground has been very active maintaining contacts with the two parties and of course the UN is a member of the Quartet. Recently, we met in Amman, myself, Secretary of State Powell, Russian Foreign Minister Mr. Ivanov, and Mr. Solana and the Foreign Minister of Greece George Papandreou. And the Quartet is going to work together to maintain the pressure. Also, I want to applaud the leadership of President Bush and his team, Secretary of State Collin Powell and National Security Advisor Ms. Rice. And I hope that with the sustained effort of President Bush and the Quartet, we will be able to press about this, to implement the Road-Map for themselves, for their people, for the future. I think this is a test for their own leadership and they have a chance to really offer something to their people and to the region. And I hope they will seize the moment.

Question: You are hopeful?

Mr. Annan: I am hopeful but I also have to admit that we have major hurdles ahead. I mean I know the history of this crisis. There were moments when we thought we were very close and then things were derailed. And this is why I have been appealing to the leaders that they should really focus on the peace process. Yes there may be violence here and there, but they should not let the extremists dictate the pace of negotiations. The extremists must not be able to deflect from their purpose and asserted objection of peace, a peace leading to two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side. I am hopeful but I am not so naïve to think that it will be smooth sailing. We have many hurdles ahead, but we should persevere in a determined manner.

Ms. Cueno: Thank you very much.

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