

UNITED NATIONS INFORMATION CENTRE LONDON

**We The Peoples: The Role Of The UN In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century**  
**"International Question Time" BBC World Service,**  
**Monday, 4 September 2000**

**BBC** Welcome to a special edition of "International Question Time". Answering today's questions is the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan. Kofi Annan, thank you for joining us.

**Kofi Annan** Thank you very much, I am happy to be with you

**BBC** Kofi Annan is in New York hosting this week's Millennium Summit, which is being attended by over a hundred and fifty world leaders, the biggest meeting of its kind ever. A parallel event is being held at the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London, where a distinguished group of academics, aid workers and commentators are gathered and they are going to be asking the questions for the next hour. Both these events have similar themes, what is the role of the United Nations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Secretary-General, let me exercise chairman's privilege and ask the first question. Your preparatory document for this Millennium Summit is called *We the Peoples*. Now, surely the peoples of the world are represented by their national governments, how can individuals around the world see the United Nations, as representing their interests?

**Kofi Annan** I think it is important that even though the UN is an organisation of member states, that we all accept that the ideals and the principles the UN exists to protect, belong to the people and therefore whatever we do in a way, we place the human being at the centre and I believe the peoples of the world should be able to join hands with the UN in making the world a better place and by peoples of the world I mean NGO groups, private sector foundations, all of us, should be able to work in partnership to tackle some of the major problems that we are facing, from poverty to disease, to education of girls and so forth, and I think the peoples of the world, should see the UN as their organisation, as their forum, and work with us in making the UN what it ought to be.

**BBC** Thank you very much. That is a very positive interpretation. One of the areas of discussion for this week's Summit is "Freedom from Fear". So let's take some questions which relate to that theme and the first one comes from John Dickie

**John Dickie, a member of the Institute** A simple question. First of all, Secretary General, Why does the UN take so long to engage in effective peacekeeping? For example, in Sierra Leone where the Lomé Accord is now over one year old, there are still not enough UN troops on the ground, and even though the United States is training 3,000 Nigerian troops they will not be in Sierra Leone until next year. Again, the diamond region is not under control of the central government and the disarmament centres have failed to retrieve even 50% of the weapons in the rebels' hands. Why does it take so long?

**Kofi Annan** Let me start by saying that, as you know, the United Nations does not have a standing army. We borrow the armies from the governments of the organisation. In effect, it almost some times seems as if it is when the fire breaks out that we begin to think of building a fire house. I often say if you were to compare the UN to the city of New York, were you tell the mayor we know you need the fire house but we will get you one when the fire breaks. The UN does not have an army, we approach our member states to help us, sometimes they respond very promptly other times they do

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not. And this is one of the reasons why I set up a high level panel, led by Lakhdar Brahimi, the former foreign affairs minister of Algeria, with many eminent persons including General Naumann of Germany, who was head of the NATO Military Council, to help us think through what we should do to be able to improve UN peacekeeping and they have given us a superb report, a report (that deals) with the quality of the mandate we get from the Council and urging the member states to give us the support that will allow us to deploy much more rapidly, perhaps within a month in some cases, and definitely not much longer than that. And if governments were to earmark trained units at home, that could be deployed for these operations, we can reduce a delay time perhaps from the four-five months that we require today, to possibly a month to six weeks.

**BBC** Are you encouraged John Dickie?

**John Dickie** Well, with all due respect to Lakhdar Brahimi, who was such an excellent ambassador for his country here in London many years ago, Why is there not an attempt to shorten this time band by having for example a rapid-reaction force available to take troops into the area immediately?

**Kofi Annan** I think to have a rapid reaction force of the kind you refer to, implies a standing army. The member states have shown no desire or inclination to set up a standing army for the UN. They have raised the question of legal issues, question of location, question of budget, and this is why we have gone the second best route of encouraging the governments to have the units on stand-by at home for quick and prompt deployment. The idea of a standing UN army has been around for a long time but unfortunately the member states have shown no interest and no inclination and I think the approach we are adopting probably will help us ameliorate the situation if not get ride of it altogether.

**BBC** Secretary-General, the British government in tandem with another main British party, the Liberal Democrats, has called for fundamental changes in the United Nations. It says "UN peacekeeping forces need more robust rules of engagement and better training, and it advocates a military staff College, possibly in Britain, to train officers to operate more effectively". How would you respond to that suggestion?

**Kofi Annan** Well, I am encouraged by the announcement because I have always made clear that the best peace-keepers are well-trained and well-equipped as soldiers. And so, any training we can give to the boys before they get into the theatre will be extremely useful. I said boys but today we have lots of women in peacekeeping troops, I'd better be careful. And I think the idea of training them and sending them in would be extremely helpful and the question of robust mandate, also falls in line with the study that the Brahimi team came out with. And I share that view because in the past we have tended to base our planning on best-case scenarios, in that we expect those who signed the agreement to be acting in good faith, to be prepared to cooperate and work with us. But of course, experience has shown us that this is not always the case. So we should go in with the clear rules of engagement, with the robust mandate, with the right force structure and strength to be prepared for all eventualities. And to be able to defend our mandate and ourselves.

**BBC** This report that you and the questioner are talking about that was the report by the UN Panel on Peace Operations, was it?

**Kofi Annan** That is correct, which was released a month ago.

**BBC** Let's have another question.

**Roger Williamson, Wilton Park Conference Centre** Secretary-General, How do you follow up that report? What is the process for follow-up? And when will we see results?

**Kofi Annan** We are beginning to follow up quite urgently. I have asked Louise Frechette,

the Deputy Secretary-General, to take charge of implementation of the plan. The UN Summit begins on the 6<sup>th</sup>. The Security Council has decided also to meet at the Summit level during the three-day period here in New York and I expect that they would take up the report and also give us their support. The General Assembly would also have to act on it, but we intend to pursue it very aggressively. Of course it means more money and I would hope that the member states would be prepared to put up the money required.

**BBC** Let's have another question.

**John Owen, with the International Journalism Foundation, the Freedom Forum.** Secretary-General whether it is Bosnia or Rwanda, East Timor, or Kosovo, there are always short, bitter disagreements about whether stability and reconciliation should be taking priority over the victims' demands, that those who have been accused of war crimes or human rights violations should be arrested and brought to justice. Given the excruciatingly slow process that we have been witnessing, Does he believe that the UN is putting peace and stability ahead of satisfying the victim's need to see that their tormentors have paid for the crimes?

**Kofi Annan** I agree with you that in the end justice is as important to peace as any other steps we could take, but we also need to move the society forward and we try to do both. If you look at the case in Rwanda, Bosnia, we set up a tribunal, we are in the process of setting up a similar tribunal in Sierra Leone, so we are sending now the message that impunity will not be allowed to stand and those who committed crimes against humanity will pay for it and at the same time we try to get the society to reconcile and move beyond conflict to peace-building and post-conflict development. But of course, there is always the question, Can one have perfect peace? And we are often caught with the question of, what do you do when search in some situations for perfect peace can derail a fragile peace agreement or would make some other people walk away? In those situations, do you abandon justice and just go for reconciliation? And can there be a reconciliation without justice?

**BBC** Although of course, Secretary-General, in the last couple of days we have learned that fifteen highly dangerous detainees have escaped from a UN guarded prison in Kosovo. I wonder, Is the United Nations the right force to be holding criminals?

**Kofi Annan** Obviously, this is a new area and a new activity for us but we also have to understand that the situation in Kosovo is very volatile and we are operating in a very difficult environment and KFOR and the UNMIK, the UN team under Kouchner are trying to do their best. Prisoners escaping from jail happens in many countries, but in a situation like Kosovo, which is fragile, where the institutions are weak, it is not surprising that this would happen. We are embarrassed, of course, and we are doing whatever we can to return them to jail.

**John Owen, with the International Journalism Foundation, the Freedom Forum.** Just a follow-up, Secretary-General, it also in my area, journalism, also gives local journalists to feel that justice is not being done quickly enough, ammunition to publish what, I think most of the free press would consider irresponsible reporting, as did the (deed) editor in Kosovo to name so-called collaborators with the UN, in a sense acting as a journalistic vigilante group, because they feel that the UN and the international groups are not pursuing these war criminals quickly enough. So I just wanted to say that also it spills over into the journalist community as well.

**Kofi Annan** Yes, but I would appeal to the journalists to understand the circumstances under which the UN is operating and therefore be a bit more sensitive in their own reporting, and take into account the state of the judiciary that we found and the fact that we almost have to build it from scratch including bringing in foreign judges and prosecutors, which is a very complex and unique situation. So, yes, there may be

some delays, it may be slow, but I hope that journalists will make the point that slow as it is, we are moving forward and we are determined to take action against these people.

**BBC** Another question.

**Christopher Lord, Institute of International Relations in Prague** You have talked about the problem of setting up courts and sending in international judges and of course, recent UN peace operations have included important civilian police elements, and one of the recommendations of the Brahimi Report, which you mentioned, on the future of peace operations, is that the UN should study the possibility of formulating an interim criminal code for using in its operation. So could you tell us what your first thoughts are about the feasibility of this? And do you think, for instance, that the General Assembly could in principle adopt a resolution endorsing such a code one day?

**Kofi Annan** We are studying, and my legal team is looking at it, and I think the entire report is before the General Assembly. Obviously we are looking at this. Also at the same time when we are trying to press ahead with the establishment of the International Criminal Court, which I would hope in time would also be responsible for trying some of the criminals that we are talking about on this programme. But I think the idea of the UN operations being prepared both on the judiciary, the penal and the police aspects as we go in, is a positive suggestion and I will have my team look at it and I hope that the General Assembly will go along with us because we have run into these kinds of problems from Somalia to Kosovo as someone has referred to other places.

**BBC** Next question.

**Cyril Townsend** I work for a British-Arab Council and I wonder, Secretary-General, if I could turn to the Middle East. The Gulf War ended over ten years ago. Sanctions have been imposed for that period, they are working for the extent that the population are suffering in a horrendous way but meanwhile smuggling is allowing Saddam Hussein and his cronies to do very well, thank you. The most recent Security Council Resolution is unacceptable to Saddam Hussein and you have no crucial UN inspectors in Baghdad. Could I suggest, Sir, this is a good moment for the UN to have a rethink and drastically change its policies towards the regime, and in particular target that regime rather than the long-suffering people of Iraq?

**Kofi Annan** Thank you for that question but let me say that the Council members are very conscious about the points you have raised and particularly the plight of the Iraqi population and that it was that consent that led to the creation of the Oil for Food Scheme, which obviously was not intended to take care of all the uneasiness and has not. We are at a critical stage, as you say, we have a resolution, 1284, that the government has rejected, we have no inspectors on the ground and on the whole issue of sanctions, members have been doing a lot of thinking here in this house, and I trust that in time the members of the Council will decide to make adjustments if they deem it necessary.

**BBC** We have a question from Melanie Bright

**Melanie Bright, Janes Defence Weekly** Richard Holbroke recently said "UN peacekeeping needs more funds, more and better trained civilian and military personnel, and a coherent command structure with better central direction out of New York." This to me sort of implies creating an administrative defence within the United Nations. Now, I am wondering, is there the will among UN members to create a peacekeeping department using military models?

**BBC** And Richard Holbroke, of course, is the United States permanent representative to the United Nations

**Kofi Annan** Yes, I think Ambassador Holbroke is right, that we need to strengthen UN peacekeeping and in fact, the report which has just been issued confirms the observations of Holbroke. And what we are trying to do is not only try and get well-

trained and well-equipped soldiers in the field but here at headquarters trying to set up proper back-stop and arrangements to make sure those who are here, who support the operations in the field are well-prepared, well-equipped and can do it effectively. We do it with a mix of personnel, both military and civilian, and I would hope the member states will support our initiatives, our efforts to reform and strengthen peacekeeping because after all, it is the soldiers who are on the ground whom we are trying to support better, whom we are trying to help protect and I think that they will see it not only that it is in the interest of the organisation as a whole but it is also in the interest of their own armies and soldiers at a time when we are all very concerned about casualties.

**BBC** This might be an appropriate time to take a question from Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire, who is the former Commander of the UN forces in Rwanda in 1994, which of course were unable to prevent the genocide.

**Romeo Dallaire** If we could go back to your report *We The Peoples* and look into the future regarding peacekeeping. Is it one of your aims with that report to move sovereign states from their current self-interest rules of participation in peacekeeping to in fact raise them to a higher reason, higher vision, of global humanism or human security around the world?

**Kofi Annan** Thank you very much. Romeo, it is great to hear you, it has been quite a while and I am very pleased that you are able to participate in this forum and I think Chatham House has done very well by bringing you out there. Let me say that that is precisely what I have argued, that in this global era we need to have a broader definition of national interest and that if we continue to pursue our national interest in narrow and selfish terms we will be doing ourselves a disservice, because in this global world, no one can afford to think in purely local terms. And it is also in that spirit that I raised the question regarding sovereignty and the tendency to use it as a shield, and that is also being challenged and questioned.

**BBC** Romeo Dallaire, let me ask you a blunt question. Given your experience, Are you suggesting that there has been something of a racist element to decision-making at the UN?

**Romeo Dallaire** You are asking to define self-interest in different nations, and from the response to Rwanda versus the response to Yugoslavia, which is in the back door of Europe, one will tend to believe that that was a component in the decision-making of the big players, certainly.

**Kofi Annan** I should say here that when Romeo was in charge in Rwanda and was very short-staffed and did not have capacity that he needed to get his job done, those governments with capacity did not offer, he was also faced with an awkward situation where he had very few men to try and cope with a very difficult situation whilst governments with large armies and capacity went in to evacuate their nationals and gave him no support at that critical period. They just removed their nationals and left Dallaire and his several hundred men to cope on their own. And that is the kind of behaviour, I hope we will not see in the future

**BBC** Secretary-General, I am sure you are aware that a book has been publicised this week that documents the Rwanda genocide and the events leading up to it and it claims very authoritatively that your predecessor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his previous existence as Egypt's minister of state for foreign affairs, did a secret arms deal with Rwanda which ran between 1990 and 1994 and provided the then Rwandan administration who took power with many arms. Six weeks after the last delivery, the genocide began and subsequently, Boutros Boutros-Ghali inadequately briefed the Security Council. Do you feel that his actions critically enabled and exacerbated what happened in Rwanda?

**Kofi Annan** I really do not have the details of that report and would hesitate to comment on

it. But I think while he was Secretary-General and the question of Rwanda came out, the Council members, the entire membership and everyone was aware of what was going on in Rwanda. I do not think anyone can use lack of information as reasons why we did not act. It was a question of lack of will.

**BBC** It so happens that the author of that book who spent six years writing it, is with us today. Where is she? Linda Melvern, What will your response to the Secretary-General be?

**Linda Melvern** I find his remarks quite strange really, because I have interviewed some of the ambassadors who were on the Council at the time. Colin Keating (the then Permanent Representative of New Zealand), who was President (of the Security Council in April) 1994, when the genocide began, has told me that with better information the Council may have acted quite differently and indeed, Sir David Hannay, (the then Permanent Representative of the UK) that I interviewed in December last year, has said to me that the Council was very badly informed about what was going on. I do know that Boutros Boutros-Ghali controlled the flow of information to the Security Council. Indeed, Secretary-General, I think you were sitting in a Council meeting once to be asked a question by Colin Keating only to tell him that you could not reply because, without the authority of the Secretary-General, you were unable to do so. I think people find this a puzzling way for the Security Council to behave.

**Kofi Annan** No. Let me say that we had in place a different system, there was a gentleman, former Indian Ambassador, Chinmaya Gharekhan, who served as, if you wish, Secretary-General's special representative to the Council and he passed information from the Secretariat to the Council, and in effect, for a long time, was the only person allowed to brief the Council. This changed when I took office and the responsible officials as the head of Peacekeeping Department, Mr. (Bernard) Miyet; the head of Political Affairs Department, Sir Kieran Prendergast, and Sergio Vieira de Mello, when he was in charge of Humanitarian Affairs, and the agencies the heads of the UN Programmes, UNHCR, World Fund Programme, now go directly to brief the Council. But let me say this, I think that the point is correct, that the information flow was channelled and controlled through one person. But what I cannot accept is for Council members to say that they did not act and do more because they were not getting reports from the Secretariat. There were members in the Council who knew more than the Secretariat knew, who through their own intelligence, their own reporting, their own ambassadors, had much more information than the Secretariat had. It is a question of dialogue often between the members themselves, between the Secretariat and the members. And so the idea, that if we had known more, we would have acted and taken greater action, I think is something that I personally cannot accept. And not only that, Mrs. Albright has made it quite clear that her mandate was clear not to encourage the deployment of additional troops to Rwanda. And so the question I maintain was not one of information but one of will, with all due respect to Colin Keating, whom I know and I respect and I worked with when he was on the Council. Thank you.

**BBC** Linda Melvern, Rwanda remains a scouring and wounded country. What in your view might the UN do now?

**Linda Melvern** I am very bothered as a journalist that the Council conducts its business in closed sessions. This is a recent development. Twenty years ago, we could have seen what the options were, what the information was. And yet, the Council now a days is completely unaccountable and I find that very worrying indeed.

**Kofi Annan** I think there are quite a few other people who share this concern and the Council has come under some pressure to open up and it is responding by having a few more open sessions. But you are quite right, that all their deliberations were open

and the members had to argue their positions and take responsibilities for positions they took publicly, and I think maybe as part of the (.... ) as we pursue our reforms, this may eventually be one of the areas the members states may open up.

**BBC** Let's have a question from **Hella Pick**.

**Hella Pick** Secretary-General, since you have now been talking about the Security Council, How do you see the reform of the Security Council, not only just in terms of greater openness but to open up the membership to Africa, to Asia, to the continents that are now not represented as permanent members? The British government in its report, in its recommendations, has now made this proposal, but of course, these are old proposals which have been around for a very long time and the Security Council in its present configuration simply does not want to take these kind of decisions. And linked to that, I would ask you if you would comment a little bit how you intend to gain greater support from the United States, particularly given that this is an election year. Do you see that after the election you will be able to do something to gain the support of the United States for all these various issues that you have been discussing but in particular also the reform of the Security Council?

**Kofi Annan** You have asked me two tough questions in one minute. Let me say that on the Security Council reform, almost every member state I have spoken to, agrees that the Security Council needs to be reformed. So, on that there is almost total unanimity, but beyond that, you have no agreement as to how the Council should be organised and the nature of that reform. But I think the debate breaks...you have two debates going on. There is a group who believes that you have to keep the Council small in order for it to be effective. And then you have those who believed that the Council ought to be brought in line with today's realities and that its current structure, and composition, reflects the geopolitical realities of 1945, and that we should make the Council more democratic, more representative, and thus allow it to gain greater legitimacy with the world's people. I personally believe that it ought to be possible to reform the Council to achieve both objectives, effectiveness, make it more democratic and representative, and in a way, permit it to gain in legitimacy. In the past, member states got stuck on the question of numbers. The US at one stage said no more than twenty one and others wanted to go to twenty six. I think given the British statement and an earlier statement by the Americans that they were prepared to be flexible on the number, I would hope that at this Millennium Summit, there will be some serious discussions among heads of state to move the process forward. I am not suggesting that we will get a decision on the Summit but at least we should be able to move forward. On your second question, I hope whoever wins the White House and whoever comes, whoever takes the Congress or the Senate, that they will realise that the UN, in this global era, is an indispensable organisation that they should support. The US has a natural leadership role in this house, but to lead the others it has to pay its way, it has to assume its bigger responsibilities with the organisation, and work with other like-minded governments to strengthen this organisation. We have lots of support with the American public, poll after poll indicates that about 65-70% of the American public supports the UN. I would hope that we will find some way of translating that popular support into action in Washington, and hopefully, there will be some indications of this after the elections.

**BBC** We have moved on to one of the other areas of discussion that today and the Millennium Summit, which is renewing the United Nations. And going back to Hella's first question, Lord Desai, you asked a similar question, What did you make of the Secretary-General's response?

**Lord Desai** The crucial question, Secretary-General, would be whether the veto can in any way be modified. Now, what I would like to hear is this, Is there any movement to

move from a veto to even a qualified majority voting which might make the Security Council more efficient, although I am sure that the big five may kick up their heels about that?

**Kofi Annan** Yes. This is an issue which has been floating around for a while, but first of all, some have suggested let's do away with the veto. I do not think that is a realistic one, because the five permanent members are not going to give up this privilege. And to do away with the veto you need their agreement and I do not think you are going to get it. There has been the suggestion that, maybe, the veto should be qualified and prescribed and one should have a clear understanding as to the circumstances under which the veto can be used. The other suggestion has been that we should come up with a mechanism to override the veto, let's say two thirds of the members of the Council can override a veto, and that also has not been embraced. And so, the discussions on Security Council reform seem to be veering more towards creating additional vetoes, with some arguing that one veto is as effective as ten. And so the issue of limiting the veto or eliminating it, does not seem to be going anywhere. Whether at the end of the day, when the Council has expanded, and the Council is reformed, the member states would have the courage to tackle this issue, which most people are beginning to see as a real democratic issue, and of course they tell the UN; they often tell me, you go around the world, as the United Nations, promoting democracy, promoting the rule of law, promoting a say for the people in the way they are governed and decisions that affect them but you are not practising in your own house.

**BBC** Let's move on to another theme of this week's Millennium Summit and we have a question from Percy Guge.

**Percy Guge, Member of Chatham House** Regarding Freedom from Want and overcoming famine and starvation, Could I ask if there could be two approaches to this, and immediate approach and a long-term approach? The immediate approach is this: that where there are areas in the world where starvation prevails and there is terrible famine. Could there not be some kind of crash-programme where planes could be flown bearing food stuffs to these areas straight away in order to relieve the hungry millions? Regarding the long-term approach, Could there not be some kind of strategic thinking on the matter and try to forestall famine where we know that draughts and floods occur in order that we may say that there is indeed Freedom from Want, which is one of the four freedoms from the Second World War? Thank you.

**Kofi Annan** I agree with the approach that you suggested and in fact this is what we try to do. Let me give you a real concrete example. Today we have famine in the Horn of Africa and it has affected several countries, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, and to some extent, Somalia. What we did, was mount an immediate programme of assistance and organised a donors conference to raise money to be able to give them immediate support. I set up a team headed by Catherine Bertini, the head of the World Food Programme, who went to the area with the team, made an assessment and we began moving in food by air, by rail, by ship, and distributing the food to the needy population. At the same time, we set up a task force, for long-term food security planning for the region, headed by the head of FAO in Rome. So Mr. Jacques Diouf, (the Director General of FAO), went to the region with his team, and they are doing a very serious work with the governments in the region, in the hope of ensuring, taking steps that would ensure longer-term food security. This has been done in other regions around the world, and he is quite confident that, with the support of the governments, this can be done. And so, I share your approach and we are trying to apply **them** around the world. Thank you.

Secretary-General, **Simon Burall, from Charter 99.** Five years ago, the Fiftieth Anniversary Declaration from the General Assembly made some fine commitments to



poverty reduction and so on, and yet little movement has been made on those and other commitments made on the UN events. What is there to prevent this declaration coming out of this Summit leading to lots of fine words, and yet not actually seen much progress towards the goals that it set? And specifically, I am wondering whether you will be willing to set up a technical review team to monitor progress on the declaration? And technical being a way of removing it from the politics of the UN and narrow self-interest, and also a way perhaps of looking at greater accountability of member states themselves to have them implementing the progress towards these goals.

**Kofi Annan** I would hope that the results of the Summit would be implemented by all. I think this time we are taking a different approach. In the past, there had been a tendency for us at the UN, or for others to think the UN can do everything, we identify a problem, we identify an issue, and we expect the governments to give us the money to go out and deal with it. In this report, and since I came, I have taken a slightly different approach, because governments have cut back on their development assistance, so I did not want us, as the UN and as organisation, chasing diminishing dollars to be able to tackle these huge problems that we are dealing with. So what I am saying is yes, we have a problem of poverty, we have a problem of girls education, we have a problem of Aids, and it is a problem for all of us. I would expect the Summit to come up with the programme of action that will give much notice, not only to the UN, but to the individual member states and that they all should go back home and come up with a programme of action for fighting poverty, and we have set targets that we believe are achievable. We will monitor it (by technical monitoring), and give periodic reports to see how far we have gone, and who is doing what and who is not keeping up. And I think if we all bring our collective effort to bear, governments, NGOs, private sector foundations, universities, and international organisations, we will make a difference on these issues. This is not a celebration, it is a working session and I hope they will all leave satisfied that they have worked and they have given us a plan of action that they all go home and implement with us.

**BBC** Secretary-General, you have said if all these various sectors come together they can make a difference, but that is a very big "if", is it not? Are you something of an idealist?

**Kofi Annan** I think not only am I an idealist, I dream and I hope all of us dream. First a dream. Without a dream you would not go anywhere, and I think quite frankly when you talk of my being an idealist, we are beginning to break grounds in several areas. Take the question of Aids. The issue with Aids is unaffordable medication, and delivery systems in the third world. We are talking to governments, we are talking to private sectors, there are very active NGOs doing very good work in this area. We have been in discussions with the consortium of five pharmaceutical industries asking them to make these medications affordable and some have discussed the possibility of selling them at 80-90% discount. We are pressing them to allow governments in South Africa and Northeast to produce generic versions of these medications which would be affordable to the population. This is how you work with the private sector, this is how you work with NGOs in setting other areas. I do not think I am being naïve, or just dreaming blandly, but yes, I am optimistic, yes I dream and I will keep dreaming.

**BBC** I think we have a relevant question from Malcolm Harper.

**Malcolm Harper** Hello, Secretary-General, I am from the United Nations Association.

**Kofi Annan** Hello Malcolm, How are you?

**Malcolm Harper** I am very well thank you, I hope you are well.

**Kofi Annan** Good, yes.

**Malcolm Harper** I was going to ask you a question about HIV-Aids, because it seems that success in the struggle against HIV-Aids is as crucial as anything to the well-being of

humanity indeed, possibly to the survival of humanity. And, How can you assure us that the Heads of state of this week Summit are seriously going to address this issue?

**Kofi Annan** I think I have been pushing the heads of states whenever I meet them and I think the report is also clear. And the Plan of Action or the Declaration that they will be signing at the end of the Summit, also embraces the recommendations I made on HIV-Aids. And in all my contacts with the heads of states, either individually or collectively, I always challenge them to take action on Aids, to speak out against Aids, and that in this situation, silence is death and that they should take up the challenge and I think, as you know in Africa, it is not only taking away Africa's present, is also taking away the future. In some countries, about 25% of the population are infected and those infected are often the professional class, the teachers, the doctors, and the lawyers and people who normally would be expected to help developing an economy. And so you are right that it is a fight which we cannot afford to lose and we need to find ways of arresting the spread of the Aids and finding ways of getting affordable medication to those who are already infected and particularly (...) protecting pregnant women and the children. Of course, today we already have millions of orphans who at the age of 10 are sometimes forced to look after their siblings. So, it is a real problem, and this is why I believe when we are dealing with these kinds of problems we cannot leave to governments alone, we cannot leave it to the UN alone. It is such a huge problem that all hands have to be on deck, and this is why I have been proposing and pushing the kinds of partnerships that I referred to earlier.

Secretary-General, **William Shawcross**. You have been in this job four years almost, four long years I imagine. And as an idealist, What would you say are your greatest disappointments in this job so far? And, What have you learned, what new lessons have you learned about the way in which the world tries to deal with evil?

**Kofi Annan** I think my disappointments have been those situations so far, that are of our darkest failures, Sebrenica, Rwanda, and of course you will recall in East Timor we fought very hard to get help to the East Timorians. In the end, we did, quite a lot of destruction had taken place but we were able to do it. But my disappointment and frustration has been the fact that, evil does exist, we know it does exist, and yet we often do not have the courage or the will to confront it. Not only do we not have the will to confront it, in some cases where action, rapid action, could contain or nip the problem in the bud, we do not move. It is when the situation is hopeless that we suddenly wake up and want to do something. Usually by then is late. What I would hope is that as we move into the next century, we will be prepared to take preventive action, we will be prepared to act in the interest of humanity, that we will be prepared to stand up to protect those whose rights are grossly and systematically attacked. So in effect what I am saying is, when we have the capacity to do good, we should muster the will to act. It is that inability to develop that will, to move the international community to do the right thing, which often disappoints me most. If the capacity was not there, it would be different, but to know that is there but it is not being offered and no one wants to move, is sometimes very difficult to explain to those who are caught in those deplorable and painful situations I have to deal with sometimes.

**William Shawcross** Do you think that in the case of Sierra Leone, the world has mastered the will to act and do you think in retrospective list, the Lomé Peace Agreement last year was a disastrous peace agreement, an agreement too far and that the United Nations should not have been associated with?

**Kofi Annan** It was not an ideal agreement. The parties of the conflict and the leaders in the region wanted to sign it and were determine to sign it. We entered the reservation, particularly with regard to amnesty, indicating that amnesty that they referred to, in our judgement, cannot apply to crimes against humanity and probably just as well we did

because we are now in the process of setting up a tribunal to put Foday Sankoh (the rebel leader) and some of the others on trial. But even in Sierra Leone, I think the kind of will that we had expected has not been forthcoming. You will recall that when the 100 peacekeepers were taken hostage, and I asked for a rapid reaction force, no government responded. But luckily the British did go in with the force albeit not under the UN. But their arrival was very crucial, they came at the right psychological moment and their presence helped us to contain the situation, to stabilise the situation and begin to reinforce the peacekeeping operation, and hopefully we will be able to continue to build up and work with the government to expand its administration throughout the territory. But I will say I am not entirely pleased with the kind of support and will that has been exhibited so far. We have (secured Security Council approval to) increase the force from 13,000 to 20,500 with the possibility of going to 26,000. I do not have the troops yet, and those who have well-trained troops are not offering. The US Government has agreed to train Nigerian battalions but that will take months and we probably will not see them in the theatre till some time next year. And when you run an operation like that you cannot take advantage of momentum even when you have created it, following the operation in Kailahun and the action we took against the West Side Boys. So, it does make it extremely difficult running this operation and we will keep pressing and cajoling and encouraging governments to give us the forces we need.

**BBC** I will tell you what disappoints me about this session, is that we did not have any questions submitted about one of your priorities, Secretary-General, which you talked about under the headings "Sustaining our Future". Now, Why did you see the world's environment as a priority for the UN?

**Kofi Annan** This is an extremely important area and I must say, during the eighteen months that we consulted member states as we were preparing the report *We The Peoples*, not a single ambassador raised the issue of environment, which is an indication that it is going out of the radar and yet, the way we are plundering the resources of the earth, we are not going to leave a very healthy air for our children and their children and when you look at the weather pattern and the need and the floods and changes that we are having. In 1998 alone, natural disasters cost governments 100 billion dollars. We had more natural disasters in '98 than in the decade preceding, in the 80s. And I think unless we are able to protect the environment and, we continue to, to....and sign the Kyoto protocol, and contain the greenhouse gases, we are going to create a situation that will perhaps during your life time and mine, will be a very dangerous situation to have. And of course, my concern is for the children, the future. There is an African proverb, let me end with that, which says that "The earth is not ours, it is a treasure we hold in trust for our children and their children" and I am not sure my generation has been worthy of that trust".

**BBC** Thank you very much Secretary-General, and thank you to all of you who contributed and participated. Apologies to those of you whose questions we did not have time to...but above all, thanks to Kofi Annan for being so thoughtful and so thought-provoking and so forward- looking. So how will the United Nations perform in this new century? The debate has just started. Thank you for listening. Good bye.

