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READ THIS AND FIND OUT WHY WE ARE AT WAR

**BYLINE:** Kofi Annan

**BODY:**

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke for the world on the horror of the Kosovo tragedy and why babies like little Manika, pictured above, should have the right to live without persecution.

His moving address to a Geneva human rights commission was the strongest testament yet to back the UN's stand against ethnic cleansing. AS Secretary -General of the United Nations, I have made human rights a priority in every programme the United Nations launches and in every mission we embark upon.

I have done so because the promotion and defence of human rights are at the heart of every aspect of our work and every article of our Charter.

Above all, I believe human rights are at the core of our sacred bond with the peoples of the United Nations. When civilians are attacked and massacred because of their ethnicity, as in Kosovo, the world looks to the United Nations to speak up for them.

When men, women and children are assaulted and their limbs hacked off, as in Sierra Leone, here again the world looks to the United Nations.

When women and girls are denied their right to equality, as in Afghanistan, the world looks to the United Nations to take a stand.

This year, I have chosen to dwell not only on our common aims and shared accomplishments, but also on the magnitude of the human rights abuses we are committed to ending.

I have, in particular, sought to draw your attention to the importance of combating the most outrageous violations in the field of human rights - the gross violations which in too many cases include summary executions, widespread forced displacement, massacres, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians.

I have done so because this last Commission on Human Rights of the 20th century is meeting under the cloud of the crime of genocide.

Of all gross violations, genocide knows no parallel in human history.

The tragic irony of this age of human rights - where greater numbers are enjoying human rights than perhaps ever in history - is that it has been repeatedly darkened by outbursts of indiscriminate violence and mass killings.

In Cambodia, in the 1970's, up to two million people were killed by Pol Pot's regime.

And in this decade, from Bosnia to Rwanda, thousands upon thousands of human beings were massacred for belonging to the wrong ethnicity.

Though we have no independent observers on the ground, the signs are that it may be happening once more, in Kosovo.

Every time, though, the world says "never again". And yet it happens.

The vicious and systematic campaign of 'ethnic cleansing' conducted by the Serbian authorities in Kosovo appears to have one aim: to expel or kill as many ethnic Albanians in Kosovo as possible, thereby denying a people their basic rights to life, liberty and security.

The result is a human disaster throughout the entire region.

We all deeply regret that the international community, despite months of diplomatic efforts, failed to prevent this disaster.

What gives me hope - and should give every future "ethnic cleanser" and every State-backed architect of mass murder pause - is that universal outrage has been provoked.

Emerging slowly, but I believe surely, is an international norm against the violent repression of minorities that will and must take precedence over concerns of State sovereignty.

And let me therefore be very clear: even though we are an organisation of Member States, the rights and ideals the United Nations exists to protect are those of peoples.

**GRAPHIC:** CHILD OF WAR: Two-week-old Manika is among 14,000 refugees struggling for survival at a camp in Albania; **RESOLVE:** UN chief Kofi Annan

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