



Annan: 5-10 Years to Rebuild from Tsunami

Interview: U.N. Head Says He'll Personally Attend Meeting on Donations for Biggest Disaster Agency Has Dealt With

Jan. 2, 2005 - U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan personally will attend a high-level Jan. 6 conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, to coordinate donation pledges in the relief effort for the deadly tsunamis in South Asia, which he called "the largest disaster we have had to deal with."

Annan expects it will take five to 10 years to complete the recovery effort.

Annan made the comments in an exclusive interview with ABC News' George Stephanopoulos that will air Sunday, Jan. 2 on "This Week."

Following is a transcript of the interview:

George Stephanopoulos, host, ABC News' "This Week:" Mr. Secretary-General, thank you so much for joining us.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan: Happy to be here.

Stephanopoulos: I just saw your chief of humanitarian aid, Jan Egeland, describe this as an exploding crisis. It literally came out of nowhere for so many in the world. A week in, do you think we now understand the dimensions of this disaster?

Annan: I'm not sure we've quite got to understand the dimensions of it, the sheer vastness, the speed with which it happened. And it is growing by the day. I spoke to one of the leaders in the region three days ago -- four days.

We know the count: It's 22,000 and another hundred [thousand]. This was 22,000 in Aceh 100[,000] in Sumatra. And today it is 80,000. We have 120,000 confirmed dead. And the numbers are likely to grow. Some estimate it may grow to 150,000.

Stephanopoulos: And that would put it beyond the numbers that were killed in the Hiroshima disaster?

Annan: Absolutely.

Stephanopoulos: Has the U.N. ever had to deal with anything like this?

Annan: This is the largest disaster we have had to deal with. The sheer complexity of it -- 12 countries have been affected. And here this week I had a meeting with the ambassadors of the 12 countries affected. And we are trying to operate in each of them and give them assistance, help coordinate the national, regional and international assistance as well as mobilize the resources and the logistical requirements to go in and be effective.

Stephanopoulos: And the exploding crisis has been met in recent days by this outpouring of compassion from the world. How would you characterize the response from the world so far?

Annan: I think this has been, perhaps, one of the most generous responses that I have seen, or we have seen in a long time. And as Jan Egeland indicated today, in seven days we've got more money in response to the tsunami crisis than we did for all the humanitarian appeals we issued in 2004.

Stephanopoulos: That would suggest that the world had not done enough for these other disasters.

Annan: We call them the "orphaned disasters." Nobody -- they are not on the headlines; they are not on TV, and they are ignored and overlooked. Were they not in Uganda or elsewhere. You take care of the Congo -- Eastern Congo -- thousands of people die every month.

Stephanopoulos: What is the most immediate need right now?

Annan: I think the most immediate need really, is to try and save lives. We to try and get in the logistics to be able to distribute supplies. We are moving to the center of the area, but because of the devastation of the infrastructure --

Stephanopoulos: They are backed up.

Annan: They are backed up. So we need to have helicopters. We need trucks. We need air traffic controllers to be able to really move the goods as quickly as we can, and get to the people who need it. In fact, we began doing air drops-- The World Food Program, the U.N. World Food Program is doing air drops in areas that are not accessible. And we [are] going to continue to do that until we are able to open up. And this is where the core group, which has been set up with logistical and military capacity are going to play an important role.

Stephanopoulos: There was some suggestion when the core group was set up that it was an attempt to bypass the United Nations. Are you confident now that everyone in the core group, that all of the industrialized nations, recognize the leadership role of the United Nations here?

Annan: Yes. I think they all do. They all do it because I have spoken to the core group. I had a meeting with them three days ago, and Jan Egeland has joined the group to be able to make them aware of our needs, our requirements. And I've spoken to other leaders around the world, including the Chinese, and they all want to accept the U.N. leadership. And they want to work with us.

Stephanopoulos: Have you spoken to President Bush about this?

Annan: I haven't spoken to -- I spoke to him before Christmas. But I haven't spoken to him about this. I've been working with Secretary Powell on this. And as you know, he was here yesterday to pursue the discussion.

Stephanopoulos: And Secretary Powell is now on his way to the region. And I know that many of the nations in the region have invited you to go to a pledge meeting on Jan. 6. Are you prepared to go?

Annan: Yes. We have planned our own pledging conference here in New York on the 6th of January. And the leaders of the region are also getting together on the 6th. And so we've joined our efforts. I've told them that we need to do it together. So I will go to Jakarta to launch the appeal from there and work without the leaders of the region who are also determined to play a role. And I think that's a very

positive (inaudible)...

Stephanopoulos: And when you look beyond the immediate crisis, what kind of appeal are you going to be making? What needs to be done over the long term?

Annan: I think once we have been able to go beyond the relief and emergency phase, you have to get into recovery. In fact, some of the recovery has to start now. People need shelter. They need food. They need health, sanitation, clean water. So there are quite a lot of things that we need to do.

And then, of course, there's the whole reconstruction of not only of houses, but of the infrastructure and schools and all that that has been destroyed. So the international community is going to have to support some of these countries. Some can manage themselves. India has said they can manage on their own. I think Malaysia was hit, but not as bad as the others. And I suspect Malaysia can manage. But some of the others really need assistance. And it's going to be major, major support.

Stephanopoulos: And how do you avoid the problem we see so many times with natural disasters: You see this outpouring of compassion, but then the immediate crisis passes, the cameras go away, the money dries up and the aid doesn't reach its intended target. How do you avoid that this time?

Annan: That's why I think what we need to do is to stress to everyone that the governments and the compassionate individuals who are giving money that this is a long-term problem, and that it is not going to go away tomorrow, and that one-time giving may not be enough and we may need more.

The other thing is for us and the governments who are getting the assistance to organize this effectively to make sure we get value for the dollar, that resources reach those who are intended for. And not only do the work, but tell those who give the money what we are doing with it, what we have achieved and how the money is being spent.

Stephanopoulos: But even in recent history -- A year ago we were all dealing with the Bam earthquake. A billion dollars was pledged immediately, \$2 billion has been pledged this time. But only a fraction of the Bam money just a year later had gone through.

Annan: This is the major problem we have. It's a classic problem we have with all these humanitarian issues. And I hope this time, given the fact that this is really an international crisis. Yes, it hit Thailand, it hit Indonesia, it hit Sri Lanka, but over 30 countries are involved. They have victims.

If you go to Scandinavia or Germany and others, they're all very concerned, looking for missing citizens. So in a way, it's a crisis affecting one, which at the same time it's a globalized issue. The response has been global, but the victims were also international.

Stephanopoulos: And how long do you think this process, this reconstruction process is going to take?

Annan: It will differ from country to country, but my own sense is that you probably have five to 10 years.

Stephanopoulos: Five to 10 years?

Annan: Five to 10 years.

Stephanopoulos: To rebuild?

Annan: To rebuild.

Stephanopoulos: And billions of dollars, no doubt?

Annan: And billions of dollars. Because the devastation is enormous, it will require billions of dollars. Of course, the governments themselves will have to do what they can. But they need international support to be able to do it.

Stephanopoulos: This comes at the end of what you called a horrible year for the United Nations, the shadow of the oil-for-food scandal. Given that, how do you convince the world this time that you can handle an effort on this scale with confidence, with credibility and without corruption?

Annan: I think the oil-for-food issue was a unique issue. It was a unique scheme. Yes, there may have been some corruption. There may have been some mismanagement. But the program achieved its results. It was effective against -- the sanctions were effective. Iraq was disarmed. Iraq is well-fed. We will make sure that they get their basic necessities with regards to health and others. And, in fact, the distribution system was so effective that today we use the distribution cards as the basis for voter registration for the elections.

So, yes, there were, there has been some wrongdoing, which is being looked into, but we should not forget that it achieved its results.

Stephanopoulos: Yet, ... it also made the U.N. a target. And I guess what I'm asking you, does it prove -- can you prove that this, the handling of this crisis, that you can achieve those results without the corruption?

Annan: Let me say that before Iraq, we had done many crisis operations and we have not had the kinds of accusations which have come up with regards to Iraq where we're dealing also with a very special leader and a very special circumstance. So we've run many operations without these kinds of accusations. And I think we're going to be able to run this one in the same effective manner with our partners with the International Red Cross/Red Crescent, local organizations and national governments and our international partners.

Stephanopoulos: From all of your experience with crises in the United Nations as secretary-general, your previous work in Kosovo and Bosnia, what lessons do you draw -- positive and negative -- from those experiences that you can bring to bear ... on this crisis?

Annan: I think one of the major lessons now says that we should pull in the nationals, the individuals, much more quickly. We sometimes go in and we want to build shelter and houses for everybody.

In Kosovo, we tried an experiment. [head of the U.N. administration in Kosovo] Bernard Kushner was the one who suggested, he said give the nationals the material and a bit of money and let them build their own houses. And that will verify because there was a vested interest. It wasn't waiting for someone else to do it for you.

And so this is -- if you engage the community, which has a real vested interest in it, you can move faster and you can also, perhaps, do it much more cheaply. So we should engage the community.

But it's also important that the international community must be absolutely coordinated so that there's not ... duplication of efforts and competition, unnecessary competition, between each other. If we have a

common objective and coordinate that approach, and we pool our efforts, we are going to have much more effective impact on the crisis and offer the people the relief they deserve.

Stephanopoulos: And if you do that, could this crisis, as horrible as it is, become an opportunity for the U.N. to prove to the world what it can do?

Annan: It could be, and I would hope so. I would hope so. We want to help the people in need. We want to do it as effectively as possible. We have only one U.N. It's not perfect, but we have to be efficient and effective. And we are going to try to do that.

Stephanopoulos: Mr. Egeland described himself as the bad conscience of the world. Is that how you see your job now?

Annan: To some extent, we both have that job. But I say Jan puts it -- since he's the humanitarian coordinator, and it's often both of us speaking out for the poor, the voiceless, and the weak, trying to get assistance to them, you tend to become conscience of others. And nobody wants you to be their conscience. And sometimes it can be irritating for them.

Stephanopoulos: But yet that irritation at least seems to have had an effect this week.

Annan: It sometimes helps.

Stephanopoulos: Mr. Secretary-General, thank you very much.

Annan: Thank you.

Copyright © 2005 ABC News Internet Ventures