

SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN'S INTERVIEW WITH
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ACCRA - GHANA

QUE: Mr. Annan, what went wrong in Sierra Leone?

ANS: Let me say that Sierra Leone demanded a peacekeeping operation following an agreement signed by all the protagonists. Obviously when you get into these operations, it's never a risk free operation, there could be problems. But of course peacekeeping is predicated on the basis that those who signed the agreement, are determined to honour it. After so many years of war one would have thought that they would be tired, they would be ready for peace. They signed an agreement which wasn't a perfect one, and we were asked to help them implement it, so the peacekeepers went in determined to do their work. But one of the parties, more or less, tore up the agreement and behaved in a manner that was inconsistent with the undertaking that they had made in Lome. We have now stabilised the situation, reinforced the troops and we are going to work with the government, to establish peace in Sierra Leone. In time we expect to work with the government to extend this sort of administration throughout the territory and eventually take over the diamond mining area, so that this resource, this natural gift, that has been given to the people of Sierra Leone, will be exploited for the benefit of the people, and nation, not by RUF, to wage a war against the people of Sierra Leone.

QUE: Was the mandate that the peacekeepers had too weak?

ANS: I don't think the question was the mandate? I don't think the mandate was weak, I think the mandate was adequate. They had robust rules of engagement, and they had a mandate that was adequate. They had the right to use force to defend themselves in their mandate. That is one. The other thing is the willingness of the force on the ground to engage in that sort of military activity. In some situations, the Commanders will tell you, "yes", we could have made a stand, and we could have won the day, but we were so hopelessly outnumbered, that we would have had a problem later - so the judgement of the Commander on the ground wins. Be that as it may, we have reinforced the force, and I think we are now in a better position to get the job done.

QUES: So you are saying that the problem was not a mandate. I mean, that, a lot of people, a lot of analysts think that was the problem. That they didn't have, it didn't give them teeth, it didn't give them muscle, to fight back, to shoot back..

ANS: I don't know on what basis they make those judgements. The rules of engagement were clear. They had the mandate to shoot, and they had the mandate to shoot to defend themselves....., defend their army. Some of course did not have the equipment. The UN does not have an army, we borrow them from governments - some were given a list of items that they should come with. But I have always maintained that the best peacekeeper, is a well trained and well equipped soldier. Some did not have their

equipment and did not want to fight, but I hope with the reinforcements, they will gain greater confidence, and begin to assert themselves. They are not there to pick a fight but at least they should defend themselves.

QUE: Looking back, do you think that the Lome Peace Accord may have been a mistake?

ANS: It is always difficult to analyse a peace agreement, and call it a mistake. It is much easier to be wise actually, in hind sight. But let's look at the facts. There had been a very long war in Sierra Leone, people had been amputated, the economy was in tatters, the people wanted peace and those engaged in the war, decided to sign an agreement with the support of regional leaders. We were very hesitant about certain aspects of the agreement. One aspect which gave us quite a bit of a problem, was the blanket amnesty that was being given to the war leaders. Infact, even though we were not the direct party to the agreement, we were only to initial it, we entered with reservation. We initialled them, but indicated that the amnesty as far as we were concerned, did not apply to crimes against humanity, and genocide, and reserved our right, at a future date, to be able to deal with those who have committed such crimes.

QUE: Is that going to happen? What should happen to Foday Sankoh?

ANS: I think there's a very serious discussion going on about putting him on trial for the crimes committed, and I think it is going to happen.

QUE: So do you support that?

ANS: I don't think we should allow impunity to stand, we should not give the impression --- not in this region, not in any part of the world that impunity, is allowed to stand, and people can get away with these sort of atrocities.

QUE: What went through your mind when you heard that the RUF rebels had taken hundreds of UN peacekeepers hostage?

ANS: I was sad – furious of course, because these are men and women who had gone into Sierra Leone, to help the Sierra Leoneans, establish peace and implement an agreement that they had signed. They were not the enemies, they were not the protagonists. So to turn on men and women, who have come in the name of peace, is not something anyone must condone, or accept. I am gratified that now all of them are out, and are going about their business, but I think they are going to be much more determined, to ensure that this sort of thing doesn't happen again.

QUE: How will this influence, the UN's decision to send troops to the Congo?

ANS: It is not going to be very encouraging. I mean. As it is, we are

already having difficulties getting the number of troops and contingents that we need. Those who have committed are now asking fresh questions, seeking additional guarantees. Guarantees that the UN or myself are not in a position to give. It has to come from the protagonists on the ground. It has to come from the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and others involved in the conflict. Today we are living in a world where people, some of the most powerful - are operating on the basis of zero casualties. They don't want to take casualties, they don't want to risk their men, and therefore they sense that there is a greater danger, and that they could lose personnel. They are much more hesitant to go in. But I think there is a qualitative difference, between what happened in Sierra Leone, and what happened in Somalia, which I would like to emphasize. In Somalia, when the peacekeeping forces got into trouble, the countries providing the peacekeepers withdrew, and in the end we had to withdraw the entire UN force, and abandon the operation. And there, the message was that the international community did its best, but if those who are in the country, that is, the protagonists did not cooperate, and the presence of the UN force was not making any difference, then it was pointless for them to continue, and they withdrew.

In Sierra Leone, despite the fact that there were 500 hostages taken, the international community showed resolve. We were less than about 8000, since that incident, we have gone up to 13,000. The governments showed resolve, and reinforced their battalions. The Indians did, the Jordanians and the Bangladeshis. West African countries, have indicated that they would be

prepared to put in additional troops, once they are fully equipped. In addition to that, even though when I asked for a rapid reaction force, I did not get the response I had expected, the British troops eventually arrived, in a relatively short time, and made a big difference. It was from a military point of view, critical, and psychologically gave a very big boost to the force, and also to the people in Sierra Leone.

QUE: Do you get the sense that the world is getting tired of the conflicts on this continent?

ANS: It's not only the world that should be tired - We, should be tired of it. The leaders must be tired. The leaders must be advised. First of all, it is the responsibility of leaders to protect their people. It the responsibility of leaders to create the environment where people can go about their business peacefully. And I don't think some of the leaders are taking this responsibility seriously. When we talk of conflicts in Africa, we often look at half a dozen countries or so, but it has an impact on the whole continent. Yes, there are many countries in Africa which are at peace, that are organising clean and democratic elections, that are doing reasonably well economically, but we are all affected by the behaviour of some in our neighbourhood. When you mention Africa today, to investors outside, they think of a continent in crisis, and no one wants to invest in it. So it is in everyone's interest whether their country is at peace or not, to work together, to work with the UN, the international community, and amongst

themselves, to resolve these conflicts so that Africa can focus on the essential business of economic and social development.

QUE: How do these conflicts make you feel personally as an African?

ANS: It pains me as an African, it embarrasses me as an African and as an African Secretary-General, I expected a lot of support from my region and I do get it. But it is also the region that is giving me the biggest headache. Infact the Security Council spends about 60-70% of its time on Africa. We get lots of assistance for humanitarian purposes. These are because of the conflicts on our continent. We need money for the AIDS epidemic, we need money to be able to strengthen our schools, we need money to build stronger institutions, and yet quite a lot of the money is going into wars, is going into these conflicts, and these conflicts create refugees. They displace people internally, and we turn to the international donors, and they give us money for these emergencies. It all comes from the same budget. The money that is going to buy us out of these emergencies, is not going to be available for developmental assistance. So everybody pays a price, and this is a message that I think all Africans must hear. They should not leave it to the international community alone. The international community alone, cannot do it.

The inspiration for a viable peace must spring from the leaders and peoples of the countries and regions concerned. The international community can help, but they cannot do it alone. Where there is a will, a lot could be done.

You saw it in Namibia. You saw it in Mozambique, where the conflict was ended and Who was in rebel movement, a guerilla movement transformed his movement into a political party, and now stands as a loyal opposition. So, when the will is there, a lot could be done - and we have to back away from this tendency of not facing the issues ourselves as Africans, and asking the critical questions – what is it in our society that makes us turn on each other periodically? What is it that makes us pick up guns? Why can't we resolve our issues through dialogue, and politically. How can we reconcile and make sure that we do not have these conflicts, and quite frankly, anyone who knows Africa and African traditions, is baffled by this current violence in our continent. Africans have an enormous capacity for forgiveness, enormous capacity for reconciliation and if that is the case, why do we have this violence in our history?

QUE: And the answer is?

ANS: Look at what happened in South Africa. Nobody would have expected that the conflict in South Africa after apartheid would have been handled in the way it was. With the magnanimity of Mandela, and the South Africans. And this is the same continent that created Rwanda and today has the Democratic Republic of Congo on our hands. And we have Eritrea and Ethiopia. I don't think we should accept it as the norm. We should see it as a dangerous situation, and we must all focus on, and deal with it.

QUE: What do you think are the answers to these questions. Why?

ANS: I think when you look at some of the crises, you have greed, you have ambition of certain individuals who fight for power, and their drive for power reduces the conditions of their own people, and the misery they bring upon them. And this is why I started with the question of leadership, and the role of leaders, and I think we are also seeing quite a bit of change in the sense that, the African people – the man and woman in the street, are beginning to be aware of their rights. They are beginning to want to have their voices heard. They are beginning to want to have a say in decisions that affect them. Young Africans are determined also, to be able to play a role for the better, and these are hopeful signs.

QUE: Mr. Annan, there is a report out today. The OAU has put out a report in which it is recommending that reparation be paid to those who suffered in Rwanda - What do you think?

ANS: I haven't seen the report. I have heard it is out. And I am glad that the report is out, because I think it is in line with the report, that I myself commissioned, so that one would shed light on what happened, learn the lessons of the past, and prepare better for the future. Because quite frankly without a sense of history, we cannot have a real vision and make a way forward. On the question of reparation, I have to study the report of course, I don't know who is being asked to pay the reparation. The UN, the international community, specific countries? Which are these specific countries? So I will have to look at the report. It is not an easy question, if

one is to pay reparations for these kinds of situation. We have many situations like that in the world. Do we pay reparation for them as well? Who pays them?

QUE: You've had to apologise for the UN's debacle in Rwanda, why did you have to apologise personally?

ANS: We did a report, and when the report came out, basically I apologised for the fact that more should have been done, and perhaps could have been done and was being done - and that, what happened in Rwanda, was inappropriate to our common humanity, and I would hope in the future we would do better. I hope so, I cannot say categorically that it wouldn't happen. Some, pretended they did not go to Rwanda because they did not know. As I have told you, I am having difficulty getting troops to go to Congo, it is a question of will. It is a question of political will, and our countries see the engagement of their national interest, and a particular situation affects them. Each case will be judged by these governments, on its own merit, and in some situations they will go, and in other situations they will not go. But I apologised for the UN, because I felt it was a problem of our common humanity, and perhaps we could have done more. Whether we could have done more or not, only time will tell.

QUE: As head of the Peacekeeping Operations at the time, do you feel there was a personal failure on your part.

ANS: I think that obviously mistakes may have been made by all of us. We did make quite a lot of effort. I personally contacted 80 – 100 governments to get troops, nobody would give me troops. I cannot deploy troops. I do not have them.. I think, yes, there was a report from the General, saying that somebody had come to tell him that there may be an attempt to massacre people, but it also raised a question - “I wonder whether what this fellow is coming to tell me is it genuine? Is it the truth? Because intelligence reports have to be analysed, and you also have to make sure that, one is not manipulated by intelligence. So even though he sounded the alarm, he raised doubts as to the authenticity of the information. But also the question of his own capacity. Don’t forget, we had only three battalions on the ground, and we asked for more troops, which we did not get from the Council - and not only that. To show you how delicate these situations are, when 10 Belgian soldiers were killed, they withdrew their battalion, and the Bangladeshis also left, and it was only small Ghanaian battalion and a few others that stayed behind.

QUE: And you pay tribute to them today?

ANS: I paid tribute to them today. So really, I think, when one looks at the Council it made the case very clear. That the overwhelming reason for the failure in Rwanda was lack of political will to get engaged, and lack of resources. He also made an important point that those who did not commit troops, and those who were not involved, and those who were not on the ground, were also equally negligent and guilty for what happened.

QUE: Are you enjoying this job?

ANS: I don't know if enjoy is the word. It's a perpetual challenge.

QUE: When you started, you said a friend of yours said, this was a job from hell. You still think it's a job from hell?

ANS: There are days that I feel that, that is correct and there are other days when I feel a bit more encouraged.

QUE: And your kids? To us, you are the Secretary-General of the UN but to two women and the young man, you are Daddy. How do they reach Daddy. Can they just pick up the phone and call you?

ANS: They pick the phone and call me, and treat me as Daddy. Daddy has not changed. Secretary-General, has not changed, the Daddy in me.

QUE: If you could seek a re-election, a re-appointment. Would you, when your term is over?

ANS: I am so busy focusing on what I have to do. And I have noticed quite recently, that many more people, are much more concerned about a second term for me, than I am.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much.