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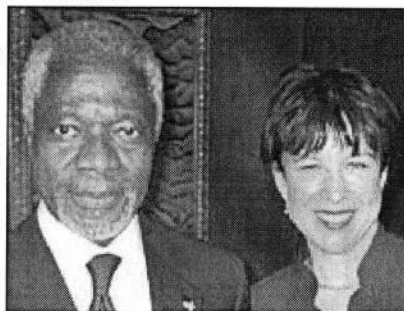
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# Kofi Annan interview: Text

The outgoing UN secretary general Kofi Annan gave his last BBC interview to Lyse Doucet. He is due to step down on 31 December when he will be succeeded by South Korea's foreign minister Ban Ki-moon. Below is an excerpt from the interview:



Kofi Annan was interviewed by the BBC for the last time

**BBC:** Was the invasion of Iraq in 2003, without a Security Council resolution, the most difficult point for you in your term?

**Kofi Annan:** It was extremely difficult, because I really believed that we could have stopped the war and that if we had worked a bit harder - given the inspectors a bit more time - we could have.

I was also concerned that for the US and its coalition to go to war without the consent of the Council in that particular region, which has always been extremely controversial, would be extremely difficult and very divisive and that it would take quite a long time to put the organisation back together, and of course it divided the world too.

It is healing but we are not there yet. It hasn't healed yet and we feel the tension still in this organisation as a result of that.

**BBC:** And you watch with mounting alarm, like many people, what's happening. In September, you said Iraq was in danger of sliding towards civil war.

**Kofi Annan:** Civil war, yeah.

**BBC:** A few days ago, you said it was almost civil war.

**Kofi Annan:** Yeah.

**BBC:** Is it civil war?

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**Kofi Annan:** It is an extremely dangerous situation and I think we all are interested in getting Iraq right and we would want to get it right, but the Iraqis will have to come together and make it happen. Obviously, they are going to need help, given the killings and the bitterness I'm not sure they can do it alone.

They would need help from the international community and their neighbours, but some of the key things they have to do is the constitutional review, really, looking at issues of revenue sharing, oil and taxation revenues, how do you share it fairly amongst the three groups, or four groups? How do you share power?

I mean, all the struggle is about each group's position in future Iraq, and if you don't deal with those issues, which during the constitution were swept under the rug, they are going to face very serious problems and I think they should be tackled.

**BBC:** Is it civil war?

**Kofi Annan:** I think, given the level of violence, the level of killing and bitterness and the way that forces are arranged against each other. A few years ago, when we had the strife in Lebanon and other places, we called that a civil war. This is much worse.

**BBC:** You must in some way feel sadly vindicated - in 2003, in March, you said that: "A war can lead to unintended consequences, producing new threats and new dangers."

It is sad - it is sad in the sense that it had to come to this.

**BBC:** Was it a mistake? Some Iraqis say that life is worse than it was under a dictator.

**Kofi Annan:** I think they are right in the sense of the average Iraqi's life. If I were an average Iraqi obviously I would make the same comparison, that they had a dictator who was brutal but they had their streets, they could go out, their kids could go to school and come back home without a mother or father worrying, "Am I going to see my child again?" And the Iraqi government has not been able to bring the violence under control.

The society needs security and a secure environment for it to get on - without security not much can be done - not recovery or reconstruction.

**BBC:** Do you believe that the Iraq Study Group led by James Baker and Lee Hamilton which is about to publish its report is a recognition that the US and others have to change course urgently?

**Kofi Annan:** Yeah, I think it's a recognition that things are not working the way they had hoped and that it is essential to take a critical review - take a critical look at what is going on and, if necessary, change course.

**BBC:** Because there's no denying the risks at stake here - you met Middle East leaders this summer, they said to you that the whole region had been radicalised and destabilised. In fact, they said it was a disaster.

**Kofi Annan:** This is the feeling of the leaders in the region and in the streets as well.

The people are worried - they are worried about the future, they are worried about the broader Middle East, they are worried about the tensions with Iran, they are worried about Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and some would even stretch it as far as to Afghanistan.

So we have a very worrisome situation in the broader Middle East and we also need to look at them as a whole, not as individual conflicts. There are linkages between these crises.

**BBC:** But when you see this unfolding, in the dark of night, do you ever think: "I, as the secretary general, could have done more to stop it, personally"?

**Kofi Annan:** You mean the war or the situation?

**BBC:** The war.

**Kofi Annan:** I think as secretary general I did everything I could. I worked with the member states, and you've read some of the comments I made before the war.

**BBC:** But you made many comments, for example, you waited until 2004 in a BBC interview to say the war was "illegal".

**Kofi Annan:** No.

**BBC:** Why didn't you stand up in the UN Security Council and say in 2003: "This war is illegal without a Security Council resolution"?

**Kofi Annan:** I think, if you go back to the records, you will discover that before the war I said that for the US and its allies to go to war without Security Council approval would not be in conformity with the Charter.

**BBC:** Which is a very sort of UN bureaucratic thing, rather than saying "it's illegal" which would have much more impact. And your aides say to me: "This was Kofi Annan, the cautious man, not wanting to confront."

**Kofi Annan:** It's easy to - what do the Americans call it? - "Saturday morning quarter-backing", or "armchair critic". I mean, it was one of those situations where even before a shot had been fired, you had millions in the street and it didn't make a difference.

**BBC:** But for you, in that position, a very difficult, devastating time. Your aides say that you lost your voice.

**Kofi Annan:** Yeah, it was very difficult, very painful, because I really, really felt we should have tried harder to avoid it and I was very worried about the consequences and the results.

**BBC:** Another big challenge for you: the situation in Darfur. Many say that Darfur has proven that the United Nations cannot stop genocide.

**Kofi Annan:** Who and what is the United Nations? The United Nations are the member states.

**BBC:** The Security Council.

**Kofi Annan:** Your government and mine.

**BBC:** It's been going on for three years, more than 200,000 people have died, two to three million have been displaced.

**Kofi Annan:** I'm not disputing the gravity of the situation. We've been pushing very hard to get peacekeepers in.

**BBC:** One of the big successes of UN reform was this Responsibility to Protect. But you're not protecting - it's been three years.

I myself have made that point, that member states made a solemn pledge to protect.

Sudan has made it quite clear to the whole world that it will not accept UN peacekeepers. The resolution says we should deploy the troops with the cooperation and consent of the Sudanese.

If the Sudanese do not give their consent, no government, not yours or mine, is going to give troops for a peacekeeping operation in Darfur.

**BBC:** So, people said after Rwanda, after Srebrenica, "never again". But it's happening again.

**Kofi Annan:** It is deeply, deeply disappointing and it's tragic but we do not have the resources or the will to confront the situation - as in, If you did it, would you make the situation worse, or would it be better?

I mean, I have gone out and indicated to the Sudanese that if they cannot protect their people, and they are refusing to let the international community come in and assist, they will be held individually and collectively responsible for what is happening and what happens.

**BBC:** We're told that you're going to make this one of your priorities to the day that you leave, on 31 December.

**Kofi Annan:** You mean Darfur? I've told you, it's very tragic and painful, not only [to me] as secretary general but as a human being and as an African, and I hope all of us feel that way. I'm going to work on it - Darfur and one or two other issues which I'm working on - up until the last day.

**BBC:** Another policy approach identified with you was zero tolerance when it came to sexual abuses carried out by blue helmets - UN peacekeepers. In 2004 there was a scandal involving peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and yet again, in the last few days, there have been reports of abuse. What happened to zero tolerance?

**Kofi Annan:** We take zero tolerance very seriously and we have tightened up and we have groups that work in these peacekeeping operations.

Over the last 18 months to two years we've looked at over 300 cases and disciplined well over half of them - some have been dismissed, some have been sent home and others have been disciplined and, in fact, on Monday we are going to have a high-level group meeting - this had been arranged a long time ago, before this piece came up - a high-level discussion on sexual exploitation, warning people - and it's not just for the UN, it's for the UN, the agencies, NGOs and a whole group of other people to share experiences and discuss this and do something about it - even go further than we have.

**BBC:** But your assistant secretary general for peacekeeping operations told the BBC that: "My operating presumption is that this is either a problem or a potential problem in every single one of our missions."

**Kofi Annan:** I think by that she means that we recruit these people from the wider world - we don't have troops, we borrow them from governments. And by that she's implying it's a problem in society that we have to recognise and deal with, and we need to be realistic that some of these incidents may happen and therefore set up systems and be vigilant to make sure that it does not happen in our operations, particularly when we are there to protect the most vulnerable.

**BBC:** But it has happened - again and again.

**Kofi Annan:** I don't think she was defending it.

**BBC:** But it has happened again and again, since it first broke as a scandal in 2004. So zero tolerance doesn't seem to be having an impact.

**Kofi Annan:** I beg to differ. I think you have an absolute position on everything, the moment you declare zero tolerance, everything vanishes. And as I said...

**BBC:** But what would help [so you can] expect it to get better?

**Kofi Annan:** We have been very active and we've been challenging some of these governments about their troops, the civilians have been disciplined and some of them have been fired, and we are going to remain vigilant.

**BBC:** As you get ready to leave, is there something that particularly worries you? For example, you went to Iran recently and the Iranians made it clear to you they're not going to back down on their nuclear programme, they're prepared for the worst. Is that something you think could happen again, a military confrontation?

**Kofi Annan:** I hope not. As I indicated, I have a great concern for the whole Middle Eastern region and I don't think the Middle East can take another crisis. It's in a very precarious and delicate state at this moment and I have indicated quite clearly that on the Iranian issue we need to do whatever we can to get a negotiated solution and that, in my mind, is the only one.

**BBC:** Do you think that there are others, though, perhaps other countries who may be thinking about a military solution since the diplomacy's not working?

**Kofi Annan:** It would be extremely unwise for that country and for the world and everything should be done to stop it.

**BBC:** Your biggest regret?


**Kofi Annan:** My biggest regret - well, it's also linked to Iraq. It was 23 wonderful colleagues and friends I sent to Iraq who got blown away. They went to Iraq to try and help clean up in the aftermath of a war I genuinely did not believe in, and these people, who were wonderful professionals, wonderful friends, were blown up overnight. And of course when that happens, you ask questions, you know: Would they be here if there hadn't been this situation? Would they be here if I hadn't asked them to go?

**BBC:** Any advice for your successor?

**Kofi Annan:** He should do it his way. I did it my way, my predecessors did it their way and he should do it his way.

**BBC:** And the Kofi Annan way - a man who said he doesn't like confrontation, who's cautious by nature - that was the best way, in retrospect?

**Kofi Annan:** I said he should do it his way.

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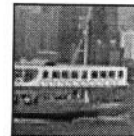


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