



**Address by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to Mark
International Human Rights Day
Questions and Answers with the Audience and the Media**

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Q: Rita Hauser

Good to see you. Ken asked me to ask you a tough question, so I'll try to. We all know that the UN can't really function very well without the support of the US government, that that's essential. And you have had your ups and downs with the government, as I think any Secretary General has had. And there's often a great deal of bashing of the UN by the administration, by members of Congress, particularly, in political campaigns. What advice would you give to Ki-Moon Ban as he comes in as to how he should handle the US relationship?

A: Kofi Annan

I think the US-UN relationship is an important one. But let me start by saying that the US needs the UN and the UN needs the US, and that understanding of the relationship has to be a constant one. They should not as you say, have up and downs, or one should not treat the UN as something a la carte – you pick what you want. You really have to accept the fact as an international community, we all have to tackle certain problems that no one country, however powerful, can tackle alone. I think the new SG will have work to establish a good working relationship, which I had to do at the beginning with all of the US ambassadors: Amb. Holbrooke, Richardson, and others. We had to work with Senator Helms and all that to get that done. So it went reasonably well, but of course in recent years, it has been a difficult and a tough one.

The US has a natural leadership position in the organization, but it also must always remember there are 191 other member states who have their interests, who feel they should be listened to, can play a role. In recent years, it has been a tough position. The US has always been a lead player, but he will have to find a way to work together – if the impression is given that he bends to the US too much, he will lose the others. The SG should reach out to the Hill – go talk to the Senate and the Congress, but he needs to develop good relations with the US but also remember to build good relations with the other 191 member states.

The new SG, any SG, will have to find a way of not only working with the US, but also getting the US and the other nations to work effectively together. If the impression is

given that he is bending over too much to the US, he will lose the others, and in fact in the process, he cannot work with the US anyway – and therefore, he has to maintain his independence to the extent possible, and work with the US and other governments. He should reach out, he should be able to talk to members of Congress on the Hill, and in fact, several US administrations have told me the same – [they've said] don't just talk to us – the administration, go to the Hill, talk to the Senate, talk to the Congress, it makes a difference.

Of course, other member states also have parliaments. The SG has to work through the governments, the parliaments, and others, who have little time. On the other hand, it is an essential way business it is done here. So he needs to develop good relationships, but he must also remember that he also has the other 191 member states, and also get the US to appreciate that and work together.

Q: Maggie Farley, *Los Angeles Times*

Natural follow up from Rita Hauser's question. It's about Iraq. You were attacked by Arab countries for not doing enough to stop the invasion of Iraq. You were attacked by the United States for not doing enough to help rebuild, calling the war illegal. So today, as you're about to leave office, do you feel vindicated? And, what do you see as the UN's future role in Iraq, is it part of, do you think it'll be part of the US exit strategy?

A: Annan

I don't know if I feel vindicated, I think we have a very difficult problem in Iraq, and it is the responsibility of the entire international community to get it right. If we do not get it right, if we are not able to hold Iraq together, then Iraq, the way it will break up - it will have an impact way beyond the region.

If we are worried about oil prices at \$60 or \$70, it will go to \$100 then \$120, and everybody will pay a price, and we have a responsibility to work together to get it solved. I have stated publicly that there should be an effort by the international community, through a conference, to pull this together. If such a conference were to be organized, of course, the UN would be a part, as they have been in previous

conferences - where in the case of Afghanistan or the Balkans. The situation in Iraq is such that I do not see the protagonists suddenly deciding tomorrow to stop shooting at themselves and talk. I think they are going to need help – they will need the help of a third party, an outsider. And that is one of the reasons why I suggested a conference with the key players neighboring countries and with the European countries, the Secretary General, to find a solution.

We talk of Iran and Syria – they have a vested interest in Iraq, it is on their border. Syria has taken in refugees, Iran has taken in refugees, Jordan has taken in refugees. Iran recognizes, and the president admitted that we also need a peaceful Iraq on our border, and I think if we find a way of bringing everybody together to work with the Iraqis, we stand a better chance.

And the UN, as I said will play its role, in some cases, many, the SG will name a special envoy to be brought to have the conflicts resolved, but of course, we will need the cooperation of the Iraqis to get this done.

Q: Farley

Is that your next job?

A: Annan

[Laughs] It interesting you pose that question because when I spoke to the Iraq task force, that question was also asked. I indicated that's an issue for my successor to deal with, who will have to identify someone to do that. And I have plans.

Q: Joel Motley, Lawyer

Would you reflect on the impact, on the momentum of the human rights movement of the US's recent relinquishment of its leadership in human rights. In fact, the abuses are so well known that – how do you see us catching up once we succeed in reversing that?

A: Annan

Yeah, I think it's unfortunate that in the discussions that led to the establishment of the council the US found itself so isolated – on an issue like human rights, where it has a good record and has done so much, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The US decided not to seek a seat on the council, to set it up this year, but they also promised me that they will cooperate with the council. In fact, we discussed a soft “no” and a hard “no”. They would say they would cooperate, so [it was a] soft no, but not a hard “no” and boycott cooperation with the council. In the end, I got a soft “no” and it is in the US interest to work with the other member states to strengthen this council, and next year, [I hope it will] consider a seat.

Q: Dan Trotta, Reuters

[inaudible] I wanted to follow up. In a separate statement today, you said that there's, in regard to Iraq, there's a potential for a wider, regional conflict. What can the international community do to avoid that, considering that the White House has resisted recommendations from the Iraq Study Group with regard to talks with Syria and Iran?

A: Annan

I think the international community can help, if we were to bring them together into constellation, [I have an advantage] – or they may use their own means to encourage dialogue between the US and Iran and Syria. For example, during the Afghan crisis we had what we called six plus two – that is, the neighbors of Afghanistan, plus Germany and the US. And we met regularly [inaudible]. Whenever we met, the US and Iran found a way of talking to each other, going into a corner and really had good possibilities of exchanging views, even though they didn't have diplomatic relations.

And I think that sort of contact is extremely helpful, and when you look back, the Iranians, in a way, honored all commitments they made on Afghanistan. And in fact, the Iranian border has been very quiet. And since, the problems have been on the Pakistani side, and this is why I have, for a long time, encouraged the administration that if one were able to work with them in Afghanistan, why don't you try in Iran where they perhaps have even greater influence than they did in Afghanistan.

And of course, Iran feels itself very powerful as a regional power, and the irony is that now two of the governments have been removed - the Taliban on one side, and Saddam Hussein on the other, and so they are really in a position to stretch their whims.

But I think we should not forget that whatever they say and whatever they do, a peaceful Iraq on their border is in their vested interest. We should not only think we are going to do something to help the US - *they* have an interest to stabilize Iraq.

Q: Justice Richard Goldstone

I'd like to go back to Darfur for a moment. You talked of about the special session, and one knows that the government of Ghana is the only African government that has been supportive of Human Rights Council. What message do you send to African governments, particularly, what actions should they support at the special session next week?

A: Annan

I think the African governments and the African members should become very active in the council. It is our continent that has suffered most of these kinds of abuses. Whether you are seeing the Democratic Republic of Congo where 4 million people have died during the civil war, what happened in Rwanda, we had a serious problem in Somalia – and if the Africans do not step up and take a firm position on Darfur, they are not going to be able to hold it down somewhere else. They should be very firm.

I know we have the European Union here, and I think we have some ambassadors here tend to speak to the presidency. This month, Finland is here – and they should open up dialogue, clear cut conversation, but they should all speak up even if the president is going to speak for them. We need to hear as many voices as possible, and I would hope that the African Union will play their role. That is extremely important for them to do.

Q: Joe Lauria, *Boston Globe*

Did the prohibition of a UN charter against the interference in the internal affairs of a state influence your decision in a way when you were peacekeeping, particularly in Rwanda, and have those decisions weighed on you over the years to make you an advocate for humanitarian intervention?

A: Annan

As you know, the UN is an organization of member states, and the member states are very general of their prerogatives and their rights, and on the question of Rwanda, I don't think they even looked at it in terms of national pride.

Rwanda happened after the UN was pulling out of Somalia after the 18 US troops were killed. When the US left, everybody left. The appetite for peacekeeping changed.

We spoke to the governments in 50, 40 countries to get troops, nobody would help us. Some pretended they did not know that this was going on, and that the peacekeeping department of USG Kofi Annan may have withheld some information from them. There were governments in the council who knew more than we did. They had enough information, but the fact that the climate was such and that ... but let's assume they didn't know. But what do they do when they found out? They sent planes to repatriate their nationals, and allowed the killing to go on.

But I think I must say, Rwanda, and what happened in Srebrenica, they have had an impact on all of us. They had certainly an impact on the determination that we need to take steps to ensure it doesn't happen again.

And that was also part of the [inaudible] speech I gave the general assembly in 1999, that was raising this issue of humanitarian intervention which eventually led to responsibility to protect, and I hope that we will all try to agree to this responsibility.

Q: Kevin Ryan

Thank you. I have 2 questions about the International Court. The first is, if we were back together, 5 years from now, or 10 years from now, what are the specific

differences or improvements you'd like to see happen at that point, and the second is, what role do you see for the United States, and what role do you think they should play.

A: Annan

I hope that 10 years from now, the court will have established its credentials, would have gone through as many cases as possible, and demonstrated to the world that this is a serious court by the world. This is a court that is going to send out a message to the world that impunity will not be allowed stand, and regardless of your status, that if you have committed horrendous crimes you will pay for it. The court has very good procedures, and it does protect governments from religious persecution [screening process] The US didn't want them to get involved, and tried to get exemption for US troops, so that they will not be brought to court.

When the inter council refused to endorse, they went and signed with the Europeans and their governments, some of whom [inaudible]. My own view, is given the exposure of the US in the world, the US in time, is going to need the court, more than any other country. Because it's not every day that you can pick up criminals, terrorists, and deal with them yourself, it's not every day that you will have governments cooperating, but you need to have a court and a mechanism for dealing with security. And I can't think of any other country that's more exposed globally than the US. And if the court proves itself, establishes its credential, the US will attend to it. [audible]

Q: Alice Henkin

Do you think it would be effective to appoint an eminent person, not someone from the UN, but an eminent person, such as Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton to confront Sudan on Darfur? And to keep the pressure, the public pressure up, and to keep the issue of Darfur out there in the public.

A: Annan

Thank you very much. Its something we've been discussing, and in fact, we're still discussing. But that individual alone cannot do it. We need area policies to the

regions The governments that have major commercial interests in Sudan should play a role. We need to get other governments with influence to play a role. We need to get the governments in the region, adjacent to Sudan, to understand it can spread, and it is spreading. So far it's Chad, Central African Republic, Egypt is not far away. I know President Mubarak is getting quite a lot of attention; they should put pressure on the envoy, to make the Sudan government to cooperate. So far, the Sudanese government believes it's getting away with it, and they are resisting.

Q: Adrienne Germain

Thank you very much, Mr. SG. I wanted to ask if you could say a bit more about the concrete action and commitments that UN broadly speaking needs to make to ensure the human rights of women, and therefore, empowerment.

A: Annan

We set up a high level panel recently and they looked at this issue. It was a high level panel on the coherence of the system co-chaired by the prime ministers of Pakistan, Norway, and Mozambique. And they also recognized the need for us to have a world focused structured institution in the UN system that promotes and encourages the empowerment of women. We have several programs, but they are distinct.

The idea would be to bring all that together, with an Undersecretary at the top, to make sure they are sensitive to this. But not just at headquarters, but at all the country headquarters, where we have these activities. And of course, we are looking at the possibility of getting all the UN agencies in a country to come under one leadership and work on these programs to empower women, and get them to continue the political, civil, and social life of their communities, and so, the structures are in place, and I've requested the position of the Undersecretary General. But it will be up to my successor to make the appointment.

Q: Pascaline Servan-Schreiber

Mr. Secretary-General, in light of the recent Lebanese/Israel conflict, would you be willing to endorse the creation of the treaty banning cluster munitions along the lines of what has been done for landmines?

A: Annan

Yes.

Kenneth Roth: When you get the answer you want, you stop.