

A 'charismatic leader' dedicated to peace: UN officials bid farewell to former Secretary-General Kofi Annan

The flag at United Nations Headquarters in New York is flying at half-mast this Saturday as the Organization marks the death of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Officials from across the UN system have been paying tribute to the man who led the global body for a decade, starting in January 1997. He was Secretary-General during what has been described as one of the darkest days in the organization's history: the [19 August 2003](#) bombing of the UN premises in Baghdad, Iraq.

For Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, the outgoing UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Annan is simply ["irreplaceable"](#).

"Kofi was humanity's best example, the epitome, of human decency and grace. In a world now filled with leaders who are anything but that, our loss, the world's loss becomes even more painful," said in a statement.

Mr. Annan was the seventh of nine men appointed Secretary-General since the UN was established in 1945. He was the first to emerge from the ranks of UN staff and the second to come from the African continent.

Before taking the reins of the organization, he held [various senior level positions](#) at Headquarters and in the field. At one point he was Zeid's immediate boss.

The UN rights chief recalled a man who was ever courageous and though direct in speech, never discourteous.

"Later, when I was an ambassador at the UN he inspired us, by being a dynamic and charismatic leader in his capacity as Secretary-General," Zeid continued.

"And most of all, he was a friend and counsel – to me and to so many others. Whenever – as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I felt isolated and alone politically (which, in the last four years, was often) I would go for long walks with him around Geneva – and listen."

Mr. Annan and the UN were jointly awarded the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

Miroslav Lajčák, President of the [UN General Assembly](#), remembered the Nobel laureate as "a strong believer in dialogue" and staunch defender of peace, development and human rights.

"He dedicated his life to making the world a better, more peaceful, and just place for all people. And in many ways, he is a symbol for the shared values

of the United Nations” he said.

The UN’s Economic and Social Council ([ECOSOC](#)) brings the global community together to promote action to achieve a more sustainable planet. Inga Rhonda King, the newly appointed Council President, offered her condolences to his family, and to all those who had worked with or known the former leader.

“His contribution to the world was immense. His leadership was compassionate and his legacy consequential,” she stated.

Kofi Annan was committed to, in his words, “bringing the United Nations closer to the people”; forging partnerships with civil society, the business sector and others.

UN agencies and their chiefs are using technology to further this goal, taking to social media to express their sadness over his death.

In a post on Twitter, William Lacy Swing, Director General of the [International Organization for Migration \(IOM\)](#) lamented the loss of “one of the greatest leaders of our times.”

He described Mr. Annan as a dear friend and “champion of justice and peace who, even at the moment of death, was engaged in the search for solutions to conflicts in many parts of the world.”

Also on Twitter, David Beasley, head of the UN [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#) said Mr. Annan had [strongly supported](#) the agency’s mission and was an ally in the fight against hunger. “We all must keep his legacy alive, working to break the cycle of hunger and conflict so people can live in peace,” he said.