

# Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan laid to rest in Ghana; Guterres hails 'exceptional global leader'

Like few today, former United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, could “bring people together, put them at ease, and unite them towards a common goal”, said the current UN chief, António Guterres on Thursday, speaking at his predecessor’s funeral in Ghana.

“Since the shock of Kofi’s death, I have been reflecting on what made him so special,” Mr. Guterres told those assembled, saying he was “both one-of-a-kind and one of us.”

He opened the doors of the United Nations, bringing the Organization closer to the world’s people –*Secretary-General António Guterres*

The only UN chief to have emerged from the ranks of its staff, passed away after a short illness on 18 August. He was 80.

Speaking of Mr. Annan’s time at the helm of the Organization, Secretary-General Guterres cited “a remarkable record of achievement,” in which he pioneered new ideas and initiatives, including the [Millennium Development Goals](#) – precursor to the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) – and landmark reforms in his report, “In Larger Freedom.”

Mr. Guterres called his predecessor an “exceptional global leader” who saw the UN as “a force for good.”

“He opened the doors of the United Nations, bringing the Organization closer to the world’s people and engaging new partners in protecting the environment, defending human rights and combating HIV/AIDS and other killer diseases,” he spelled out.

“Kofi Annan was the United Nations and the United Nations was him,” Mr. Guterres asserted.

On a personal note, the UN chief called Mr. Annan “my good friend,” saying they “marched through life together in many ways.”

They had come together in supporting the birth of a new nation, Timor-Leste, and then, as the UN Refugee Agency chief, the former Secretary-General had provided him with “unwavering support”, he said.

“Now that I occupy the office Kofi once held, I am continually inspired by his integrity, dynamism and dedication,” Mr. Guterres said.

Noting that to Mr. Annan, “indifference was the world’s worst poison,” the UN chief maintained that even after leaving the Secretariat in New York, “he never stopped battling on the front-lines of diplomacy,” elaborating that he helped to ease post-election tensions in Kenya, gave his all to finding a political solution to the war in Syria, and set out a path for to ensure rights for the Rohingya of Myanmar.

Turning to his Africa roots and identity, Mr. Guterres pointed out that Nelson Mandela’s nickname for Mr. Annan was “my leader.”

“This was no jest. Kofi was our leader, too,” affirmed Mr. Guterres. “When I last saw him not long ago at the UN, his bearing was how I will always remember him: calm yet determined, ready to laugh but always filled with the gravity of the work we do.”

While he will be missed “immensely,” said the UN chief, “let us always be inspired by the legacy of Kofi Annan – and guided by the knowledge that he will continue speaking to us, urging us on towards the goals to which he dedicated his life and truly moved our world.”

His widow Nane Annan spoke eloquently of her husband’s strong connection to Ghana, and about how “excited he always was returning home.”

“On arrival he would draw in the air” and “look so happy and content,” she said, crediting her late husband’s “inner strength...from his deep roots here” and thanking the country for giving the world “such an extraordinary human being.”

She conveyed her husband’s “irresistible aura of radiant warmth” and said, “his legacy will live on in his foundation and in all of us.”

“May you rest in peace and may your wisdom and compassion continue to inspire and guide us,” she concluded.