

Remembering Kofi Annan

He was fun to work for as well as inspiring – Fred Eckhard, spokesperson



UN Photo/Milton Grant

Secretary-General Kofi Annan (right) confers with his Fred Eckhard, his spokesperson, en route from Namibia to Angola, 22 March 1997.

Fred Eckhard, spokesperson for the late Secretary-General, recalled meeting Kofi Annan for the first time, long before his rise through the ranks to head the Organization.

With Pérez de Cuéllar at the helm and then-US President Ronald Reagan leading a strong conservative majority in Congress, intent on reducing contributions to the UN, Mr. Eckhard, himself an American, was hired by the UN Information Department. He was called in to brief the Budget Director, meeting Mr. Annan for the first time.

Later, during “an explosion of peacekeeping” missions, Mr. Eckhard became the Spokesman for Namibia, and then for Yugoslavia. “Now I’ve got the new Director of Peacekeeping looking over my shoulder, and that’s Kofi Annan”, he said at that time.

Back at Headquarters, after serving both those missions, journalists asked that Mr. Eckhard give the daily peacekeeping briefings, citing his “firsthand experience.”

With Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in charge, Mr. Eckhard became embedded in Kofi Annan’s department, which led to open access and a “very positive relationship.”

"Boutros then began to see Kofi as a threat, and I was ordered to stop briefing on Peacekeeping," the former Spokesperson said, so Mr. Annan hired him in the Peacekeeping Department as the Liaison with Troop-Contributing Countries.

After a year, Mr. Boutros-Ghali offered him a promotion if he agreed to stay in the Spokesman's Office.

"So, I saw Boutros on one hand, I saw Kofi on the other, and I said, 'I'm going with this guy,'" indicating Mr. Annan.

If Boutros been reelected, Mr. Eckhard said his UN career would have been finished.

"But, as it turned out, no one expected it, Kofi was elected, and he made me his Spokesman," Mr. Eckhard stated, kicking off a long relationship of trust.

He began briefing Mr. Annan each morning as he entered the building, walking together from the basement, taking the elevator up to the 38th floor, down the corridor and into his office, discussing the morning news reports and the day's issues.

And, believe it or not, in eight and half years, he never once told me what to say to the press

"And, believe it or not, in eight and half years, he never once told me what to say to the press," Mr. Eckhard maintained.

And he trusted others as well.

The former spokesperson recalled when Shashi Tharoor, now a politician back home in India, was the UN Communications Director, how he would send cables to the field signing for Kofi Annan, "because Kofi trusted him to make the judgement, and Shashi said he grew so much with this freedom."

"And I think everyone felt that way who worked for him," he continued. "Kieran Prendergast, who was his Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, told me that Kofi trusted people before, or until, they prove themselves unworthy of that trust. Which, in the UN, is unusual. It's usually the other way around."

Mr. Eckhard felt that his former boss endeared himself to many by the way he did business.

"Other Secretaries-General tended to have this little insider circle of people of their own nationality," he said. "Kofi had a broad circle of people he consulted, and he picked people whom he got to know, he thought were interesting – thought brought something to the table, as a part of his staff.

And on a more personal note, the former spokesperson said the Mr. Annan was "secure, confident, serene, comfortable in his skin," and when he talked "he

didn't just talk to you about work. He always asked about your spouse, about your kids, and very often remembered their names".

"He was fun to work for as well as inspiring," Mr. Eckhard concluded.

He possessed a rock star quality – Edward Mortimer, speechwriter



UN Photo/Stephenie Hollyman

Left to right: Secretary-General Kofi Annan goes over a speech on Iraq with Edward Mortimer, Director of Communications and Head of Speechwriting Unit; Salim Lone, Director of the News and Media Division, Department of Public Information; and Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General. March 2003.

Edward Mortimer served as former Secretary-General Kofi Annan's speechwriter and communications director. He described Mr. Annan's leadership style as "not sort of banging tables and shouting or beating your chest, but bringing people together, and saying we are all on this same planet together."

"We sink or swim together," he asserted. "Be it climate change, be it mass epidemics, be it hunger, poverty, or be it very large-scale atrocities and violations of human rights."

"I think that is a lesson that the world still needs to learn, but the fact that people are still mourning Kofi Annan so strongly, indicates that there are many people in the world who realize that that's what's missing, and that that's the kind of leadership that's needed today."

Mr. Mortimer believed that everyone who knew Kofi Annan and worked with him would say that he was an extraordinarily nice person to work for, he was very kind and considerate, and he knew how to get the best out of people.

"I think that this sort of remarkable inner strength and calmness came partly

from the very strong relationship he had with his wife, Nane, who travelled with him on many of his trips around the world,” Mr. Mortimer said, noting that her “smiling, cheerful presence at his side added something important to his leadership.”

The fact that people are still mourning Kofi Annan so strongly, indicates that there are many people in the world who realize that that’s what’s missing, and that that’s the kind of leadership that’s needed today

The former speechwriter, and senior journalist with the Financial Times, recalled that Mr. Annan had been recruited by the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) in 1962, and that up until the 1980s he had worked for different Geneva-based UN agencies, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“That was where he met Nane,” Mr. Mortimer explained. “She was a lawyer, working for UNHCR.”

The former communications director did not find it surprising that at the end of his term as Secretary-General. they wanted to come back and live in Geneva. He also credited the late UN chief with bringing Switzerland into the UN fold.

“I think it’s not a coincidence” that in 2002, during his time as Secretary-General “that the Swiss people voted to join the United Nations,” he argues.

“It’s not something that comes easily to a country like Switzerland, which is very careful about its independence; very distrustful of super-national systems. But I think the fact that the UN was led at that time by Kofi Annan who was somebody who many of them knew and felt a rapport with, I’m sure made a difference,” elaborated Mr. Mortimer.

In his interview with UN News, he shared a charming episode about their life together, after his retirement. “He and Nane were living in Geneva, they’d find it difficult just to go for a walk in the street, because so often he was recognized and people would stop him and want his autograph and whatever,” said Mr. Mortimer.

With a marathon underway in the city, the couple thought it would be a good time to go out for a walk, thinking that nobody would be interested in them, but focused on the race instead.

“One of the runners in the marathon came off the course and came up to him and asked for his autograph,” said Mr. Mortimer. “So perhaps that gives you an idea of that rock star quality that he had.”

Restore hope that peace will come to the Middle East, UN negotiator urges Security Council

Negative humanitarian, security and political developments in Gaza outweigh any positive news concerning the search for peace in the Middle East, the United Nations negotiator for the process has said, urging the international community to help restore hope that a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict can be found.

“The urgency of the situation that we face on the ground is really desperate – Gaza can explode any minute,” underscored UN Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov, briefing the Security Council.

“We have a humanitarian responsibility to react but we must understand that it cannot be solved only on the basis of humanitarian action...It must be solved with a political perspective to resolving Israeli-Palestinian conflict and we have a responsibility to support the parties.”

In his briefing, Mr. Mladenov spoke of Israel’s continued military occupation of Palestinian territory; uncertainties about the future of the peace process and the two-state solution; Hamas’ continuing hold on Gaza and its militant activity, as developments which continue to complicate the situation on the ground.

“No steps have been taken during the reporting period to cease settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem,” he said, reiterating that settlement activities are “a violation of international law and a major obstacle to peace.”

We must overcome the current impasse and refocus our efforts on ultimately returning to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and bring a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – *Nikolay Mladenov*

Violence, acts of provocation and inflammatory rhetoric – both by Hamas and Israel – also continued during the reporting period, he added, noting that on at least three occasions the situation “escalated dramatically” and calm was restored only after Egypt and the UN intervened to de-escalate tensions.

On the humanitarian side, of most concern is the power crisis in Gaza and, with the UN running out of funds for emergency fuel, critical health, water and sanitation facilities are at “immediate risk” of shutting down. Levels of critical medicines are also running dangerously low.

The crisis is being further exacerbated by the serious cash shortfall – due

to the withdrawal of US funding – confronting UNRWA, the Organization’s Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, he said, calling for urgent funding to allow it to continue its vital services.

Concluding his briefing, Mr. Mladenov reminded the Security Council that twenty-five years have passed since the Oslo Accords were signed in the US capital, Washington D.C.

“It was a historic moment that captured the world’s attention and filled Palestinians, Israelis and the region with hope that a genuine peace could be realized. Sadly, that courageous vision of a lasting peace now lies in tatters,” he said.

“We must restore that hope – the alternative is perpetual cycles of violence. We must overcome the current impasse and refocus our efforts on ultimately returning to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and bring a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Ahead of the Security Council meeting, France, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (EU member countries with a seat on the Council); Belgium and Germany (incoming Council members in 2019) and Italy (a Council member until last year) issued a joint statement urging Israeli authorities to reconsider its decision to demolish Khan al-Ahmar, a Palestinian village in the West Bank, as well as highlighting the importance of a negotiated two-State solution.

Adjust UN force in Abyei to current realities, peacekeeping chief urges Security Council

Amidst an increase in criminal activity in the Abyei area, which is contested by Sudan and South Sudan, the United Nations top peacekeeping official on Thursday called for deployment of additional police units, to enhance the UN’s focus on maintaining law and order there, and furthering peace between local communities.

The proposed additional personnel – both formed police units and individual officers – are within the current troop ceiling authorized for the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei ([UNISFA](#)), Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council.

UNISFA was established by the Security Council in 2011, amid deteriorating tensions in the Abyei region – a resource-rich area contested by the two

neighbouring countries – shortly before South Sudan became independent. It is tasked with monitoring the flashpoint border, facilitating delivery of humanitarian aid, and is also authorized to use force to protect civilians and humanitarian workers in the region.

In his briefing to the 15-member Security Council, Mr. Lacroix presented a set of recommendations to adjust UNISFA to the current situation on the ground to allow it to best support the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan in their efforts to reach agreement over the region and its future.

The “modest adjustments” would enable the UN peacekeeping mission to better support border demarcation efforts by the African Union Border Programme, including the “much-needed” sensitization of border communities, said the senior UN official.

The recommendations envisage the establishment of two further sector headquarters and team sites with the “Safe Demilitarised Border Zone” to make the border region safer and more secure.

“Troops would be transferred from the Abyei area to achieve full operating capability for the border monitoring mechanism,” elaborated Mr. Lacroix, noting that such a move would harmonize the “diminishing military threat with the corresponding-reduction in military need” for the region.

Mr. Lacroix also briefed the Council on progress made by the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan towards implementing the benchmarks outlined in resolution [2412](#) (2018).

The benchmarks include freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, an improved joint border verification and monitoring mechanism, the joint political and security mechanism, border crossing corridors, and border demarcation.

[UN chief seeking ‘renewed commitment’ to global rules and values, as world leaders head to New York](#)

[UN chief António Guterres](#) on Thursday called for a “renewed commitment to a rules-based global order” and to the organization he leads, highlighting his key themes for discussion during the High-Level week of the General Assembly, beginning on Monday.

In a [press conference](#) for journalists based at UN Headquarters in New York, the Secretary-General said that with 84 Heads of State and 44 Heads of

Government taking part next week, it showed the UN was still “the world’s indispensable forum for international cooperation”.

One year on from his launch of a system-wide gender parity strategy, Mr. Guterres told journalists that team leaders in the field are now made up of an equal number of men and women, and that there have never been as many female heads and deputy heads of peace operations in UN history, adding:

“Our aim is to shift the long-standing power imbalances that have held the United Nations back, and to elicit the best contributions from all the staff to take the Organization forward. And such a shift will also help to address sexual harassment.”

He said that the UN’s focus was “on prevention, responding rapidly to allegations, supporting victims through their trauma and ensuring accountability for perpetrators.”

Mr. Guterres told journalists that sexual harassment cases will be fast-tracked and investigated by a new, specialized team within the [Office of Internal Oversight Services](#) (five of the six team members are women) and that, since February, a 24-hour hotline has been receiving and responding to calls about sexual harassment and abuses of power, within the UN system.

So far, over 16,000 staff have taken a new mandatory training course on sexual harassment and, in October, the UN will launch a staff survey on this problem, in order to get the best possible understanding of how prevalent it is within the Organization.

The press briefing was also an opportunity for Mr. Guterres to outline three key meetings that he will be convening in the coming days.

The first, on Monday, will be the opportunity for the UN Chief to launch a new strategy called “Youth2030”, as well as an initiative named “Generation Unlimited”, both designed to help young people secure quality education and decent jobs, and contribute to preventing radicalization.

At the second, also on Monday, Mr. Guterres will launch his strategy for financing the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development.

A surge in investment for the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) is needed, as well as a systemic change in the way the world does business, and a clampdown on illicit capital flows such as money laundering and tax evasion.

Finally, the Secretary-General announced his involvement in Tuesday’s meeting of leaders of Member States and regional organizations to strengthen UN Peacekeeping, as part of the Action for Peacekeeping ([A4P](#)) initiative.

The meeting comes at a time of increasing threats against peacekeepers, with peacekeeping fatalities at their highest level in a generation.

Mr. Guterres concluded by sharing his overriding concern that multilateralism is under attack from many directions, precisely when it is most needed.

Globally, youth are the largest poverty-stricken group, says new UN report

Half of all people living in poverty are younger than 18 years old, according to estimates from a new report released on Thursday by the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) and partners.

The new figures in the 2018 global Multidimensional Poverty Index ([MPI](#)) show that in 104 primarily low- and middle-income countries, 662 million children are considered poor according to multiple different indicators. In 35 of these countries, children account for at least 50 per cent of the total.

The 2018 MPI, produced by UNDP and the University of Oxford's Poverty and Human Development Initiative, provides the most comprehensive view of the many ways in which 1.3 billion people worldwide experience poverty in their daily lives.

The MPI looks beyond income to understand how people experience poverty in multiple and simultaneous ways across the three key dimensions of health, education and living standards; taking in factors such as a lack of clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education.

Although the level of poverty – particularly in children – is staggering, so is the progress that can be made in tackling it –
UNDP chief, Achim Steiner

According to the index, those who are deprived in at least one-third of the MPI's components are defined as "multidimensionally poor". The 2018 figures, which are closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)), cover almost three-quarters of the world's population.

Some 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty, which is almost a quarter of the population of the 104 countries used to calculate the 2018 MPI. Of these, 46 per cent are thought to be living in severe poverty.

"The Multidimensional Poverty Index gives insights that are vital for understanding the many ways in which people experience poverty, and it provides a new perspective on the scale and nature of global poverty while reminding us that eliminating it in all its forms is far from impossible," said UNDP chief Achim Steiner.

Progress is possible on poverty, argues UNDP chief

While the latest figures paint a stark picture of just how many are still left behind, they also demonstrate that progress can happen quickly with the right approach.

“Although the level of poverty – particularly in children – is staggering, so is the progress that can be made in tackling it,” he added, pointing out that in India alone some 271 million have escaped multidimensional poverty “in just ten years.”

The poverty rate there has nearly halved, falling from 55 per cent to 28 per cent over the ten-year period.

Although similar comparisons over time have not yet been calculated for other countries, the latest information from UNDP’s Human Development Index, which was released last week, shows significant development progress in all regions, including many Sub-Saharan African countries.

Between 2006 and 2017, the life expectancy increased over seven years in Sub-Saharan Africa and by almost four in South Asia. Moreover, enrollment rates in primary education are up to 100 per cent.

The data shows that in addition to the 1.3 billion classified as poor, another 879 million risk slipping further into multidimensional poverty due to conflict, sickness, drought, unemployment and other setbacks.