

# UN remembers Kofi Annan: A leader who put people at the centre of the Organization's work

Former United Nations Secretary-General [Kofi Annan](#) was remembered on Wednesday as the embodiment of the global Organization that works to improve the lives of men and women worldwide.

During a wreath-laying ceremony in New York, the current UN chief [Antonio Guterres](#) led staff members in paying respects to the mild-mannered diplomat from Ghana who rose through the UN system to become its seventh leader in January 1997, serving two consecutive five-year terms.

"Kofi Annan's years in office were an exciting time. He put forward new ideas. He brought new people into the United Nations family. He spoke passionately about our mission and role. He created a renewed sense of possibility both inside and outside our organization about what the UN could do and be for the world's people," [said](#) Mr. Guterres.

"His most defining features were his humanity and solidarity with those in need. He put people at the centre of the work of the United Nations, and was able to turn compassion into action across the UN system."

That action included uniting world leaders to agree global targets on poverty and child mortality – linchpins of the landmark Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)) – and to join with civil society and the healthcare industry to save lives from HIV/AIDS.

As his successor noted, Mr. Annan also did not shy away from addressing challenging issues.

"Kofi Annan faced up to the grave errors made by the United Nations in the 1990s – in its response to the [Rwanda genocide](#) and the Srebrenica killings – by shining a light inside the UN," he said.

"The reports he commissioned aimed to make sure such terrible mistakes are never repeated, and set the international community on a new course in its response to mass atrocities."

Kofi Annan died on Saturday following a short illness. He was 80.

As Mr. Guterres stated, his passing was "a personal loss" for many who work in the UN system.

While the UN flag outside Headquarters was flown at half-mast for three days following the announcement of Mr. Annan's death, staff members have been filling a book of condolences with expressions of sympathy to his wife, Nane, and family.

UN personnel also have been sharing their memories of a man who was wise yet humble, courteous and charming.

Jean-Marc Ferré, a photographer with the UN Office at Geneva, recalled Mr. Annan's humanity, but also his sense of humour.

"I remember when we were on mission in Oslo, there was a small work meeting in English and I wanted to be sure that I had understood everything, so I quietly asked Fred Eckhard (Mr Annan's spokesperson) at which point Kofi stopped talking and asked me what was the matter," he told *UN News* on Saturday.

"After apologizing for the interruption, I reminded him that I wasn't very comfortable with English, to which he suggested that Fred could help me afterwards. Then before picking up where he had left off, he looked at me and said, 'You know, it doesn't show in your photos that you don't speak much English.'"