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Kofi Annan and United Nations Win the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize

"Today's real borders are not between nations, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated. Today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in another.

*We can love what we are, without hating what—and who—we are not."*¹

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2001 was awarded jointly to the United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. By honoring them as co-winners, the Nobel Committee, based in Oslo, recognized the 50,000 United Nations employees at its New York headquarters and at United Nations missions around the globe for "their work for a better organized and more peaceful world."² "In an organization that can hardly become more than its members permit, he (Kofi Annan) has made clear that sovereignty can not be a shield behind which member states conceal their violations," Committee Chairman, Gunnar Berge stated.³ Kofi Annan was also lauded for his role in reshaping the world's post-Cold War pursuit for peace and in revitalizing the 56 year-old United Nations.⁴

HISTORY OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

The founder of the Nobel Peace Prize was Alfred Bernhard Nobel from Stockholm, Sweden.⁵ The prize, named for Alfred Nobel, a "Swedish philanthropist and inventor of dynamite, carries a prize of \$ 946,200."⁶ The Nobel Committee said the United Na-

¹ Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, Address at the Nobel Peace Prize lecture (December 10, 2001).

² *U.N., Kofi Annan Receive Peace Prize*, at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/nobel.100/peace.story.html>. See also *UN and Kofi Annan wins the Nobel Peace Prize*, (Jan. 2002), at <http://www.norway-un.org/cgi-bin>.

³ Nobel Peace Prize Committee Chairman Gunnar Berge, Announcement of Nobel Peace Prize winner (October 12, 2001).

⁴ Colum Lynch, *Nobel Peace Prize Goes to Annan*, *WASH. POST*, Oct. 13, 2001, at A14.

⁵ *U.N., Kofi Annan wins the Nobel Peace Prize*, *supra* note 2.

⁶ Lynch, *supra* note 4.

tions and Annan would share the prize in equal part.⁷ Mr. Annan said the money would be combined for a single project to benefit the United Nations.⁸ The first Nobel Peace Prize was awarded in 1901 to Jean Henry Dunant, founder of the Swiss Red Cross and Frederic Passy from France, president and founder of the first French Peace society.⁹

HISTORY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations was founded in 1945, during the aftermath of World War II.¹⁰ The United Nations employs 50,000 people around the world.¹¹ Its headquarters are located in New York City with six regional branches worldwide and many field offices around the world.¹² Currently, it has 189 governments listed as members.¹³ United Nations officials and organizations have previously received seven Nobel Peace Prizes.¹⁴ The last award to the United Nations, in 1988, went to United Nations peacekeeping forces, for “reducing tensions” and making “a decisive contribution toward the initiation of actual peace negotiations.”¹⁵

Although the United Nations has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize several times in the past, this year’s award came with greater significance and meaning.¹⁶ The award provided a huge boost for an organization that had been deprived of funding by Washington and criticized by many in the United States Congress for its opposition to the death penalty and advocacy of an international criminal court, and for its harsh criticism of Israel.¹⁷ The United Nations has repeatedly clashed with the Bush administration over American “opposition to a global warming pact, the defeat of the U.S. delegation in the election for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Committee, and the American walkout from the United Nations Racism Conference in Durban, South Af-

⁷ Sarah Lyall, *In Nobel Talk, Annan Sees Each Human Life as the Prize*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 11, 2001 at A3.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ U.N., *Kofi Annan wins the Nobel Peace Prize*, *supra* note 2.

¹⁰ Lyall, *supra* note 7.

¹¹ U.N., *Kofi Annan receive Peace Prize*, *supra* note 2.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ U.N., *Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform*, *supra* note 4.

¹⁴ U.N., *Kofi Annan Receive Peace Prize*, *supra* note 2.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ U.N., *Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform*, *supra* note 4.

¹⁷ *Id.* See also Lyall, *supra* note 7.

rica.”¹⁸ However, despite the friction, the United Nations’ relationship with the United States has steadily improved during Annan’s tenure.¹⁹ In September of 2001, the United States agreed to repay more than \$580 million in back dues to the United Nations, allowing the organization to be on stable financial grounds for the first time in more than five years.²⁰ Much of the improved relationship between the United States and the United Nations is due to the leadership of Kofi Annan. The committee said Annan had brought “new life” to the United Nations and deserves much of the credit for rebuilding the United Nations’ “prestige and authority in recent years.”²¹

BACKGROUND OF KOFI ANNAN

Kofi Annan, 63, was born in Kumasi, Ghana.²² Annan attended the University of Science and Technology in Kumasi and completed his undergraduate work in economics at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota.²³ Annan has also earned his master’s degree in management at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and studied economics in Geneva.²⁴ Annan joined the United Nations thirty-nine years ago in 1962 as a 24-year-old administrative officer at the World Health Organization.²⁵ From there, he rose to the position of Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations before his appointment to Secretary-General in 1997, succeeding the former Egyptian foreign minister Boutros Boutros Ghali.²⁶ Annan began his second five-year term as Secretary-General in January 2002.²⁷ During his tenure, Jeffrey Laurenti, executive director of the United Nations Association of the United States of America, said Annan “has substantially succeeded in revitalizing

¹⁸ *U.N., Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform, supra* note 4.

¹⁹ *U.N., Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform, supra* note 4.

²⁰ Lyall, *supra* note 7. See also, *UN, Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform, supra* note 4.

²¹ *U.N., Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform, supra* note 4.

²² Martin Mbugua, *UN, Annan cheered by Nobel Prize Win*, DAILY NEWS, Oct. 13, 2001.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *UN, Annan get Nobel Peace Prize for Reform, supra* note 4.

²⁷ *U.N., Kofi Annan Receive Peace Prize, supra* note 2.

what had been a very dispirited and bureaucratically paralyzed institution.”²⁸

Kofi Annan has been a courageous, firm, and yet soft-spoken leader. He has guided the United Nations through many difficult challenges such as helping East Timor toward independence and assisting in the post-war administration of Kosovo.²⁹ He has also been lauded for expanding the United Nations’ work into important new areas such as environmental protection and the fight against HIV/AIDS.³⁰ However, despite Annan’s numerous accomplishments and praise from governments around the world, his tenure has not gone without strong criticism.³¹ In particular, he received great criticism from survivors of civil wars in Bosnia and Rwanda after the United Nations’ failure to halt Rwanda’s 1994 genocide, when Annan was head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Organization.³² In addition, he received much criticism for the mass slaughter of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica in 1995.³³ “He has a heavy responsibility in the Rwandan genocide,” said Antoine Mugesera, chairman of a Rwandan association of genocide survivors.³⁴ In an attempt to acknowledge both his and the United Nations shortcomings, Annan commissioned two reports that recognized the United Nations’ failure to respond adequately to those crises.³⁵ This is the second time a United Nations Secretary-General has won the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1961, Dag Hammarskjold was awarded the prize posthumously.³⁶

KOFI ANNAN’S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

Kofi Annan delivered a powerful and timely speech at the Nobel Peace Prize Awards Ceremony in Oslo, Norway, in the wake of the terrorists attacks on September 11, 2001. He used the occasion to spell out his vision of what the United Nations should be in the twenty-first century and where he was planning to take it.³⁷ The

²⁸ Colum Lynch, *Nobel Peace Prize Goes to Annan, U.N.; Work on Human Rights, Poverty, AIDS, and Terrorism Cited*, WASH. POST, Oct. 13, 2001 at A14.

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Lyall, *supra* note 7.

³¹ Lynch, *supra* note 28.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ U.N., *Kofi Annan Receive Peace Prize*, *supra* note 2.

³⁷ Lyall, *supra* note 7.

Secretary-General said his goals for the United Nations in the next century were to eradicate poverty, prevent conflict, and promote democracy.³⁸

Only in a world that is rid of poverty can all men and women make the most of their abilities. Only where individual rights are respected can differences be channeled politically and resolved peacefully. Only in a democratic environment, based on respect for diversity and dialogue, can individual self-expression and self-government be secured, and freedom of association be upheld.³⁹

Annan's words of "democracy" and "democratic" sent a clear and powerful message that the world will only be able to achieve peace when all governments are democratic. These were challenging words from a Secretary-General of a United Nations, a third of whose states are not democratic.⁴⁰ However, many of these states' leaders have spoken of democracy and many undemocratic governments have twisted their own vision to embrace that kind of reference to democracy.⁴¹ But Annan's message erupted when he said that people of different religions and cultures will not be able to live side by side without freedom of religion, expression, assembly, and basic equality under the law.⁴² Annan stated, "Indeed the lesson of the past century has been that where the dignity of the individual has been trampled or threatened—where citizens have not enjoyed the basic right to choose their government, or the right to change it regularly—conflict has too often followed, with innocent civilians paying the price, in lives cut short and communities destroyed."⁴³ Annan continued to criticize these undemocratic nations possibly in an effort to make them the center of attention and indirectly challenge them to change their ways.⁴⁴ Annan further stated, "The obstacles to democracy, have little to do with culture or religion, and much more to do with the desire of those in power to maintain their

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, Address at the Nobel Peace Prize lecture (December 10, 2001).

⁴⁰ *At Oslo, Kofi Annan Challenges the World to Democracy*, (Jan. 2002), at <http://www.europaworld.org/issue61/atoslokofi141201.html>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.*

position at any cost . . . When States undermine the rule of law and violate the rights of individual citizens, they become a menace not only to their own people, but also to their neighbors, and indeed the world. What we need today is better governance—legitimate, democratic governance—that allows each individual to flourish, and each State to thrive.” Annan’s message was unambiguous. Kofi Annan, in the process of accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, told the people of the world that peace and prosperity on both individual and collective levels are best promoted and advanced by legitimate, democratic governance.⁴⁵

Kofi Annan’s speech was more than an opportunity for him to graciously accept his award and lay out the goals of the United Nations in the new century. It gave him the platform and world attention to powerfully respond to the atrocities of September 11, 2001. It took exceptional courage and leadership to boldly tell the undemocratic governments of the world—many of which are members of the United Nations—that democracy is the way to progress forward for all.⁴⁶ Annan seized the opportunity to boldly challenge not only the radical non-democratic states, but clearly also the many respectable but non-democratic governments. His message, from a courtly and soft-spoken leader, was heard throughout the world. Annan perhaps had these beliefs long before he publicly announced them, but the world was possibly not ready to hear and accept their grave truth. However, after the terrible events of September 11, 2001 when the world was shaken to its very foundations, his words’ time had come. Annan put them forward so starkly and so directly and lit a beacon of hope.⁴⁷

OTHER CONTENDERS FOR THE 2001 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

Other contenders for the Nobel Peace Prize this year included: the United Nations war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; the Chinese Falun Gong movement; the European Court of Human Rights; the United States peace broker Richard Holbrooke; Cuban President Fidel Castro; and the game of football.⁴⁸

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⁴⁵ *At Oslo, supra* note 40.

⁴⁶ *At Oslo, supra* note 40.

⁴⁷ *At Oslo, supra* note 40.

⁴⁸ *U.N., Kofi Annan Receive Peace Prize, supra* note 2.