

## **A Personal Remembrance of and a Tribute to Kofi Annan on the Occasion of the 2018 AGRF**

When Kofi Annan passed away just last month, I issued a statement on behalf of the World Food Prize that said:

“Kofi Annan’s vision in creating the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to ensure global food security for all in the 21st century, will ultimately be seen as his greatest contribution.”

To that should be added that Kofi Annan’s leadership role with AGRA will be as consequential as his initiatives while Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Indeed, as the world gathers in Rwanda and the 2018 AGRF is launched, the spirit of AGRA’s first Chairman, the man who personally galvanized the leaders of Africa to focus their attention and their energy on the continent’s most pressing issue- -achieving a Green Revolution- -clearly pervades the Kigali Convention Center. It was so apparent when AGRA President Agnes Kalibata called for a moment of silence to honor him.

Looking back almost two decades earlier, the sense of momentum that Annan’s creation of the MDGs generated was palpable. Dr. Norman E. Borlaug the founder of the World Food Prize reflected that renewed energy in his remarks at our Laureate Recognition Ceremony that we held in New York City in October, 2000 to support Annan’s U.N. Millennium Summit.

Norm was so happy that global attention was, thanks to Kofi Annan, at last now turning to Africa. It was at that ceremony that we introduced our first female Laureate- - Dr. Evangelina Villegas of Mexico, honored most appropriately for her work in developing Quality Protein Maize in Ghana.

One of the next steps Secretary General Annan took in this endeavor, was to appoint two World Food Prize Laureates as the co-chairs of the United Nations Hunger Task Force- -Dr. M.S. Swaminathan of India and Dr. Pedro Sanchez, a native of Cuba. It was, therefore, a special privilege to be in Norway in 2001 as Kofi Annan received the Nobel Peace Prize for his dynamic leadership..

It was the 100th anniversary of Alfred Nobel’s founding of the award, and I attended with Dr. Borlaug the 1970 Laureate for Peace. The award ceremony in Oslo City Hall, with HRH The King of Norway presiding, was as visually impactful as Annan’s words in his Laureate Address were inspiring. He began his address with a reference to a young girl living in poverty in Afghanistan, powerfully capturing the direction in which he was taking the global community.

When my longtime colleague, U.S. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke beckoned me over to congratulate the Secretary-General at the conclusion of the formal Peace Laureate Dinner, I had the chance to see up

close the huge smile on Kofi Annan's face and observe his light step as he did a few celebratory dance moves. It was a bit of a departure for the usually very formal international diplomat, but one that made him appear to be literally walking on air at what had to be the apogee of his professional career.

That recognition seemed to propel Annan forward at an increased pace; just as he had also sharpened our focus on the U.N. and Africa. In 2003, our second woman Laureate was Catherine Bertini head of the U.N. World Food Programme. One year later in 2004, Dr. Monty Jones became our first African World Food Prize Laureate. That was the same year that in Addis Ababa, Kofi Annan surfaced the idea for creating AGRA. The rest as they say is AGRA history, thanks to the critical support of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Reflecting his dual global leadership in food security, it was my privilege to present to Kofi Annan the World Food Prize Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Medallion at the 2010 Africa Green Revolution Forum in his home country of Ghana. We were honoring him for being the catalyst in putting in place the structure that would allow African political leaders, scientists, business executives and donor organizations to come together and identify strategies and focus their efforts, both at the U.N. and AGRA.

As I said in my remarks, I was sure that Norman Borlaug was looking down from Green Revolution Heaven on Kofi Annan and the AGRF within a broad smile on his face. That same year, we welcomed Kofi Annan to the Borlaug Dialogue International Symposium in Des Moines where he delivered the keynote address on the symposium theme of Norman Borlaug's last words- -"Take it to the Farmer."

My earliest memory of interacting with Kofi Annan, however, goes back to the early 1990s when I was an American diplomat and we worked together to deploy a UN peacekeeping force to Cambodia. It came at our meeting in New York during which arrangements were put in place for the U.S. Air Force to provide the airlift capability to transport Peacekeeping troops from almost a dozen countries to Phnom Penh.

The logistical coordination issues were extraordinarily complex both physically and politically, but under Annan's leadership and direction, the U.N. Transitional Authority for Cambodia, or UNTAC, was a total success in delivering a peaceful, democratic election to the people of Cambodia, one judged free and fair by every observer.

That the Cambodians themselves were unable to maintain this genuinely representative government and returned to conflict and violence, in no way detracts from the masterful role that Kofi Annan and his U.N. staff did in planning and executing an exceedingly complex political-military strategy, especially as it came in the wake of the wretched policies of the Pol Pot Khmer Rouge regime- -the worst genocidal, mass-murdering, terrorist organization of the second half of the 20th century.



Kofi Annan and the United Nations had given the five million Cambodian survivors of genocide a second chance at a peaceful life.

That experience in Cambodia revealed some lessons about U.N. peacekeeping missions, which seem relevant as AGRF 2018 takes place in Rwanda, where Annan himself publicly lamented that the United Nations did not rise to the challenge that the extreme violence presented in 1994.

The UNTAC Mission in Cambodia, in contrast, was highly successful because it had the full support of all five of the Permanent Members of the U.N. Security Council. Indeed, as deputy head of the U.S. delegation during the four year long negotiation process, I saw first hand the commitment each country had to the U.N. / Cambodian peace process. That unified political support was essential to the success of UNTAC, as it would be for any peacekeeping endeavor.

A second lesson is that no matter how much support there is for a Peacekeeping operation among the U.N. Members, if the local parties themselves decide to return to conflict (as was the case in Cambodia), there is little that can be done, except the critical importance of providing essential protection to innocent civilians.

Indeed, it was his command over all of these myriad Peacekeeping details, as well as his smoothly effective diplomatic style that made Kofi Annan such an exceptional United Nations civil servant and the logical choice to become the next Secretary-General - the first individual ever to emerge from the United Nations' professional staff and ascend to that highest office.

One of my favorite stories about Kofi Annan involves my home state of Iowa. It came from Dr. Rajiv Shah then the Administrator of USAID, when he began his luncheon address at the World Food Prize by saying "I just bumped into Kofi Annan at the airport in Des Moines."

One of our local guests told me that he laughed when he heard it, because nothing seemed less likely to him than Annan, the impeccably tailored, diplomatically oriented statesman, being found outside the halls of the U.N. in New York and in a rural place like Iowa.

But, I told that person that the truth is that Kofi Annan was actually one of us. The son of Ghana, scion of Africa and consummate international diplomat was in fact also a "midwesterner" equally at home in the American heartland, because of his undergraduate college degree from Macalester College in Minnesota.

The U.N. Charter begins "We the peoples..." of the world. Kofi Annan was truly a man for all "peoples," just as his leadership demonstrated that the United Nations is an organization of and for all peoples.