

THE PASSING of a GLOBAL STATESMAN

Kofi Annan, born in Kumasi, Ghana, on 8 April 1938, was UN *Secretary General* from January 1997 to December 2006, the only black African to hold this post. He died in Switzerland on 18th August.

Current UN chief Antonio Gutierrez has been leading the tributes to his predecessor, describing Annan as "*a guiding force for good*". *"In many ways, Kofi Annan was the United Nations. He rose through the ranks to lead the organisation into the new millennium with matchless dignity and determination,"*

He joined the UN system in 1962 as an administrative and budget officer with the World Health Organization in Geneva and later served with the Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. Became the first senior staff member of the UN to become its SG. One of his main priorities during this period was a comprehensive programme of reform to revitalize the United Nations and make the international system more effective, which his internal knowledge of the system allowed him to do very well. A few themes stand out in his action over these years: human rights, the rule of law, the Millennium Development Goals and Africa, ties with civil society, the private sector and other partners.

During his years as UN Secretary General, peacekeeping was strengthened in ways that enabled the United Nations to cope with a rapid rise in the number of operations all over the world. He established two new intergovernmental bodies: the Peace building Commission and the Human Rights Council and played a central role in the creation of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, the adoption of the UN's first-ever counter-terrorism strategy, and the acceptance by Member States of the "*responsibility to protect*" people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. One of his initiatives, in 1999, became one of the world's largest efforts to promote corporate social responsibility.

For those of us who worked for the UNITED NATIONS, in the various agencies (dealing with education and science, with children, with refugees, with climate and environment, with sustainable development and agriculture etc), besides the permanent guide from the UN Charter, the leadership of Mr Annan was strongly felt, especially his efforts to strengthen the Organisation's management, coherence and accountability, involved major investments in training and technology.

Kofi ANNAN came to MAURITIUS in early January 2005 to open and lead the second SMALL ISLANDS STATES (SIDS) World Conference in PAILLES. While having at the same time to deal with the international efforts in the aftermath of the TSUNAMI of 26th December. For almost on week, he asked two retired UN staff (Mariam Gopaul and I) to work for him, presenting him 4 times a day with the info from all part of the world and all the world press on the Tsunami's aftermath. His calm and effective responses were remarkable. One immediate positive result of discussions on the Tsunami disaster (many lives could have been saved had there been an early warning system) was the setting up of early warning systems in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

One of his closest collaborator was a Mauritian, whom he trusted with the financial management of the United Nations; indeed on 28th January 1997 he appointed Jean-Pierre

Halbwachs (Mauritius) as Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Financial Controller. J-P also became the highest graded Mauritian at the UN, a post which he occupied till 2004.

Nothing reflects better his personality than some of his key sayings. We have chosen a few below:

“There is no development strategy more beneficial to society as a whole- women and men alike- than the one which involves women as central players

Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.

Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.

Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation, rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.

More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together. And that, my friends, is why we have the United Nations”.

Dr Michael ATCHIA

Secretary general of AFICS-Mauritius (association of past UN staff); Past Programme Director, UNEP

18.8.18