



Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, meets with the Prime Minister, John Howard, the Speaker, Neil Andrew, and Senate President, Margaret Reid, at Parliament House, Canberra.

We need reform

says UN Chief

On 21 February 2000, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, met with the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to discuss its inquiry into Australia's relations with the United Nations. The following is an extract of Kofi Annan's comments. A full copy of this transcript is available on the Committee's web site: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/U_Nations/UNIndex.htm

Let me first of all thank you and the (Committee) members for coming to meet with me this afternoon and also, through you, thank the Australian people for the support they have given to the United Nations more recently in East Timor. I think you have heard my public pronouncements that without that support – without the leadership of Australia – the story of East Timor would have been quite different. I am very happy to hear that you are organising this inquiry to look into the role of the United Nations and Australia's relationship with the world body in the post-Cold War environment. I think it is a very timely study and we at the United Nations are doing a similar thing.

You would recall that last year I issued two important reports: one on the UN operations in Srebrenica, Bosnia, and another one on Rwanda. The purpose of those reports was to learn – to look back and see why we failed or what we could have done better and what we need to change to be more effective in the future. In the course of the year, I will be giving the General Assembly and the Security Council another report on how we can improve these operations and on what will be required of each actor – from the secretariat bureaucracy to the member states, the Security Council and the General Assembly that approves the budget – and perhaps offer some food for thought to see how collectively we can take steps to improve how we mount these operations.

I believe we should always start with the right mandate that is clear and achievable, and the member states must always give us the resources commensurate with the task that they assign us. I think it is important that we get into these operations with the right intelligence and the right political analysis to be able, to the fullest extent possible, to anticipate how things will develop and go into the theatre with the right force structure to be able to deal with all contingencies. The Security Council must be prepared to modify the mandates if required and to add to the resources, if need be, for us to succeed. We should never walk into a situation and say, 'This is what we have come to do,' and stick with it, without adjusting or adapting as the situation demands.

*'bring it in line with
today's realities'*

I think we would all agree that, since the end of the Cold War, peacekeeping operations have become more complex, much more difficult. We have moved from situations of interstate war to intrastate conflicts. In interstate wars, you were often dealing with governments and organised structures who have signed an agreement so that the peacekeepers can go in and rely on their

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cooperation. In today's conflicts, when we go into these internal situations we are often dealing with warlords, as we saw in Somalia, who have no concept of international pressures and the international community. How do you tell a warlord, 'If you don't do this there will be sanctions'? You cannot talk in those terms with them. It doesn't mean anything to them. What sort of pressure points do you need to get them to behave; what steps should we take?

You also talked about human rights. In today's conflicts, the systematic abuse of human rights, the deliberate targeting of civilians and the use of rape as a weapon has become common place. This is one of the reasons why some of the efforts we are making in the area of human rights to bring people to trial when these gross atrocities have taken place are essential.

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I think it is important that we discuss these issues and develop some common consensus that will permit the Security Council to take fairly quick decisions in those situations of gross and systematic abuse of human rights of whole groups of people. Obviously, this is a debate that is now raging. I knew that we were not going to get answers overnight, but what is important is that the Security Council and the General Assembly are discussing it. I have a task force within the secretariat looking at this issue and I have challenged many universities and research centres also to look at it. Hopefully, in the foreseeable future we will come up with enough ideas for us to see how we should react.

The other issue you have referred to is the question of UN reform. We have achieved quite a lot in organisational terms in restructuring the secretariat and getting the leadership to work more cohesively. I meet once a week with all the senior members of the UN: from heads of departments to the heads of UNICEF, the UN Development Program, the UN Population Fund, the UN Environment Program in Nairobi, human rights in Geneva and the High Commissioner for Refugees. The heads of overseas programs participate through teleconferencing, so we are coordinating our efforts both on policy issues and on major managerial issues.

Where we have run into difficulties are in areas outside my direct authority where the member states have to take decisions. For example, the reform of the Security Council has been dragging for quite a long time, even though every member state agrees that the Security Council as it is now is a bit anachronistic as it reflects

the geopolitical realities of 1945 and that it is time for us to reform it and bring it in line with today's realities. Beyond that agreement, there is little that the member states agree on.

On the question of the International Criminal Court, I was in Rome when the statutes were adopted. It was an important achievement because we are introducing the missing link in international criminal law. Once we have that in place we do not have to set up ad hoc tribunals, such as we have done for Rwanda and Bosnia, because often those you put in the dock believe that it is the victor's justice and, if they had won, they would perhaps not be in the dock. Now with the International Criminal Court we should be able to bring people before the court. Of course, we do not have it yet. It will require ratification by member states but I hope we will have enough ratifications to bring the court in by the end of this year. If not, I hope by the end of next year that we should have the court. I think it will be a powerful deterrent and send a message out to everyone that you will be made accountable. It will also remove the anomaly which exists today that a man is more likely to get prosecuted if he kills one person than if he kills 100,000 or 10,000. We have seen it with Cambodia and other places.

On the question of human rights, since I took office I have tried to make it a cross cutting issue. Whatever we do, we try to consider that because, as human beings, that is at the centre of all we do: whether we are trying to improve their political rights, economic wellbeing, education and health, the rights of the individual are essential. Of course, in today's interdependent world and with information technology, people are becoming much more conscious of their rights. I have been encouraged by the response we have had generally from the public and from civil society as a whole. I am not implying that we are in a perfect situation but we are making some progress.

United Nations Inquiry

The Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has already received more than 100 submissions, including reports from government departments, non-government organisations and individuals. It has also held private meetings with:

- Penny Wensley, Australia's permanent representative at the United Nations;
- Catherine Bertini, the Executive Director of the World Food Program; and
- Ian Howie of the United Nations Population Fund.

A series of public hearings will be held in capital cities to provide people with the opportunity to express their views.

Canberra, Monday, 22 May

Brisbane, Tuesday, 4 July

Sydney, Wednesday, 5 July

Melbourne, Thursday, 6 July

Adelaide, Friday, 7 July

For more information on the inquiry contact the Committee secretariat, telephone (02) 6277 2313, email jscfadt@aph.gov.au or visit the Committee's web site: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jfadt/U_Nations/UNIndex.htm