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World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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GUEST: Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations

MODERATOR: Ben Malor

“The UN and Africa”

Often absent from the major headlines of the western media, African issues dominate a great deal of the UN's agenda in areas like peacekeeping, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and economic development. Africa's challenges remain daunting, to its governments and to the international community.

Just before the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, in June 2004, World Chronicle invited the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, to talk about the pressing issues facing Africa today.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**

MALOR: Hello, I'm Ben Malor. Welcome to this special edition of **World Chronicle**, focusing on the continent of Africa...its hopes, its conflicts, and its expectations.

Often absent from the major headlines of the western media, Africa and its problems and challenges dominate a sizeable chunk of the agenda of the United Nations in areas like peacekeeping, the fight against HIV/AIDS, and economic development. The challenges remain daunting to Africa's governments and to the international community.

Just before the recent African Union summit in Addis Ababa in June 2004, we spoke with the Secretary-General of the United Nations – Kofi Annan, about the pressing issues facing Africa today.

Stay with us...

(CROSS FADE)

MALOR: We want to begin with Darfur, Sudan. Some people accuse you, the United Nations and its agencies of doing too little too late in this Darfur crisis. What would you say to that?

MR. ANNAN: I think it's not entirely fair. Quite a bit has been done. Maybe one or two of our units had been slow but, first of all, the war went on for much longer than one had expected so the security situation was not conducive to delivery of humanitarian assistance. We have taken some risks and we are doing that but I think the tendency sometimes is to say that the UN is not doing enough, or the Secretary-General has not done enough. What is needed here is a collective action and the political will to act. We should avoid the situations where we allow member states to hide behind the Secretary General, use him as an alibi for their own inaction. I think it is important that we work together and demand action by the Sudanese government and we pool our efforts to make resources available for the humanitarian activity. And it's much better to act than start pointing fingers.

VIDEO ROLL-IN

[UN IN ACTION # 927, TRT: 2'23"]

VIDEO

BURNED OUT VILLAGES

NARRATION

The situation in the war-torn Darfur region in western Sudan is getting worse by the day. Thousands of people have died since fighting broke out between government-backed militias and local insurgent movements a year ago. (13")

FIGHTERS ON CAMELS

The Arab Janjaweed on camels raid local villages leaving them in total ruin and causing untold human suffering. (8")

PEOPLE IN SANDSTORM

More than a million people have fled their homes. A hundred thousand of them have arrived in neighbouring Chad. The others are still in Darfur, many without shelter. Sandstorms and lack of water don't stop people from escaping as fast as they can. Their stories are frightening. (20")

HUSSEIN ON CAMERA

FAIZA ALI HUSSEIN

"For one month we were running on foot, until, thank God, we reached Chad where we were welcomed and given food and water." (8")

BABIKIR ABDALLAH IBRAHIM

IBRAHIM:

"My family is hiding on the mountain and they don't have food or water and the Janjaweed are still attacking them and raping the women. They are taking the children into slavery." (14")

PEOPLE IN DARFUR

NARRATION

Conditions in Darfur are deteriorating

rapidly. The refugees seem totally abandoned, their livestock has died and fear of epidemics is spreading. (10")

HOSPITAL

There is only one small hospital for thousands of people and the growing need is obvious. This boy lost a foot when he stepped on a landmine. Many refugees were injured in fighting in their villages. In some cases, when they finally arrive at the hospital, their limbs are so badly damaged, they have to be amputated. (20")

VIDEO OUT

MALOR: A lot of people look up to you personally and they wonder if you personally could intervene one way or the other; whether there is something you, Mr. Annan, could do to compel the Sudanese government of President El-Bashir and the leadership there to do what exactly you want them to do to protect their own citizens?

MR. ANNAN: Obviously I can talk to the government, and I have been doing that. I have been talking to the government. I've talked to other governments to work with me and the Sudanese government in making this happen. But it is not an issue for the Secretary-General alone. Other capitals, other countries with influence must also weigh in.

MALOR: At the same time that this crisis is raging on in Darfur there is some good news in Sudan in the sense that the rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Movement have reached a peace accord with the Sudanese government in Khartoum. A UN peace mission is expected in Sudan soon. What exactly would be the scale of this mission, its role and its functions, and how soon would it be established?

MR. ANNAN: Let me say that unless we deal with the situation in Darfur – yes, they have initialled a peace agreement between the north and the south, but unless we deal with the situation in Darfur this is going to be a fragile peace. You cannot have a comprehensive peace in Sudan without dealing with the situation in the west. What is being contemplated is that the UN will go into Sudan and work with the parties in implementing the agreement that they are going to sign. And obviously they are working out the details and we will be of assistance and we will be there to help them implement the agreement that they have

signed. And of course I will have a special representative on the ground who would coordinate the UN activities and supervise our own efforts in the implementation of the agreement.

MALOR: If we could move on to peacekeeping in Africa. The talk lately within the UN is about a surge in peacekeeping, particularly in Africa, where 81% of peacekeeping personnel are currently being deployed. Peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Burundi and particularly...

MR. ANNAN: And possibly Sudan.

MALOR: --and possibly Sudan. And then the Democratic Republic of Congo where after many months of what many see as successes, peace coming, transition coming to the DR Congo, over the last few weeks things appear to be unraveling over Bukavu and over the whole of the Congo. The UN is being attacked, vehicles being destroyed by people. How concerned are you? How worried are you that things could completely go back to square one?

MR. ANNAN: As far as the Congo situation is concerned I am not the only one who should be worried. We should all be worried. I believe that we need to work with the government to try and get them – the transitional government to work as a cohesive government, to get the government to jell and for them to focus on the future of the country and the people, the people's needs. Until we do that, there will be a tendency for the various components of the government to still think of themselves as representing this region or that region and not quite certain what the future holds and therefore hedge their bets. But we need to really, really get them to work. We need to reform the army and pull in as many of the soldiers from the three groups into the national army, and of course try and direct others into productive services. But we also need to work with the governments in the region. To some extent that is being done and in fact several of the governments in the region have sent in delegations to talk to that government and to work with my envoy, Swing. But if we are not able to stabilize and the Congo were to revert back into violence or anarchy the whole region will pay a price. And this is why we are focusing so much attention on this issue.

MALOR: But is there more that could be done particularly with the United Nations Mission, which had quite a relatively huge amount of respect before recent events? Could troop numbers be increased? What could we do as the United Nations to restore people's confidence?

MR. ANNAN: I think the issue is not just a military one. This is why I was talking about consolidating the government's efforts and trying to build a national reconciliation and also get the government to become much more cohesive. The military aspect and the presence of the UN troops are helpful. We have 10,800 troops in a country the size of Western

Europe. It's a very small number indeed, but you are not going to be able to put in the number of troops that would be necessary to pacify a country of that size. So the emphasis should not be on the military side. The emphasis, in my judgment, should be on getting the political process going.

MALOR: Overall for peacekeeping, the main contributing nations are developing nations like Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Ghana. The developed, rich nations do not appear willing or keen to contribute to your peacekeeping efforts. Why is this so and what can you do to get them to contribute?

MR. ANNAN: I think they did contribute in the past but after the tragedy in Somalia they pulled back. I think it took us quite a while to get any developed country to participate in a peacekeeping operation in Africa. The Swedes have a unit in Congo. They are participating in the Congo. We have had some units but rather very limited numbers in other operations. In Congo we have some limited numbers. In the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, UNMEE, the peacekeeping operation there, we did have European units, the group that – we call them SHIRBRIG. A group of European countries came together and formed a brigade that can be used in peacekeeping operations. So they were the first to get there and to help establish the mission until they were replaced by other peacekeeping operations. So we have had to rely on other countries rather than the developed countries and that poses a problem for us because in peacekeeping operations one of the key elements you need is effective logistics units, specialized units. Often those are available only in the developed world and even there they are sometimes stretched. And logistics is the glue to peacekeeping operations. When you don't have these specializations it's extremely difficult. We have tried to encourage some of them to fill that niche, to provide those units for our peacekeeping operations. Of course, today, you have competing demands for troops around the world. In Iraq alone there are 160,000 foreign troops. There are troops in Afghanistan and others. So it is essential that – take my own continent, Africa, that they prepare themselves, train their own peacekeepers and play a role on the continent, which most of them are doing.

MALOR: We know about the efforts of the West African regional grouping, ECOWAS, in getting ECOMOG to help resolve conflicts in West Africa. Nigeria bore the brunt of the expenses in that operation but what more could African leaders do themselves as you mentioned in order to have their own rapid response, a peacekeeping programme?

MR. ANNAN: I think they are doing joint regional training. There are quite a few of the countries which are training together. They are trying to upgrade their peacekeeping equipment, which is not easy. They have received help from some of the developed countries in their efforts to strengthen their peacekeeping capabilities. But once again let me say that

what is needed is a political settlement. We need to be able to anticipate and prevent conflicts before they explode and require troops. And here some of the African leaders have been very good.

MALOR: When you cast your eyes across Africa, across the peacekeeping missions you have sent out, what is working and is there anything we could be doing better, the United Nations could be doing better with peacekeeping in Africa?

MR. ANNAN: I think we are doing as best as we can. First of all, in Sierra Leone things have more or less stabilized. We are drawing down in Sierra Leone. We are also trying to pool our efforts in the region. We have three peacekeeping operations in the region – in Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone – and we are getting the commanders and the SRSGs, the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, to work together and share information, monitor what's going on across their borders so that you do not have a situation where the crisis shifts from one country to the other and you are able to anticipate what is likely to happen.

MALOR: If we could move on, Mr. Secretary-General, to the subject of HIV/AIDS. More than two million Africans are estimated to have died of AIDS or AIDS-related diseases last year alone and that forms about two-thirds of the world number. In fighting the pandemic what do you see as the major obstacle or the major obstacles?

MR. ANNAN: I think that it's a question of leadership, the question of education and it should not only be a question of care. There should be the issue of prevention, which you can do through education, and it requires complete mobilization of society from the president or the prime minister down to the village or community level where individuals have to get involved. And in all the countries, including the African countries where the fight has been successful, everyone has been mobilized. This happened in Senegal where I saw a griot – a griot is a traditional storyteller. This woman urging people to protect themselves, urging them to go to hospital, urging them to be tested. In fact my wife, Nane, asked her, "Is it difficult for you to talk about sex, to talk about these sorts of topics as a woman?" She said, "When it comes to AIDS, which means death, nothing should embarrass any of us. We should do it." And yet you have African leaders who would not even want to utter the word condom because they feel it's not correct for them as fathers of the nation. In fact I recall one African leader saying, "To promote the use of condoms as a head of the nation is to promote promiscuity". It took two weeks for his people to convince him to urge the people to protect themselves. And you need organization, you need a structure, you need resources. I think we are getting more resources now than two-three years ago, but the leadership issue is important.

MALOR: To move that leadership in the direction where they can fight HIV/AIDS effectively, what can you do when you meet African leaders?

MR. ANNAN: I press them to intensify their efforts because AIDS is wreaking havoc in Africa. It's not only taking away Africa's present, and people, and men and women in their creative years, but it is also destroying the future in the sense that the capacity is gone. You go to schools today and the teachers are gone, hospitals have no doctors, or nurses and it is extremely difficult to plan ahead and develop a nation when you are caught in that sort of situation. In some African countries life expectancy has dropped by 20 years.

MALOR: The leadership in Uganda is often quoted as an example for--

MR. ANNAN: In fact when I talked about Africans doing well it was Senegal and Uganda. President Museveni led. But you also have President Mogae in Botswana who is exercising energetic and dramatic and really very effective leadership.

MALOR: There seems to be one big or serious argument when we focus on HIV/AIDS, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. People say malaria is killing more people than AIDS every day. Are the UN and UN agencies like WHO, UNAIDS getting their priorities wrong?

MR. ANNAN: I think malaria is a part of one of the diseases that the international community and World Health Organization is focused on. For example, the fund that was set up, the global fund is a global fund to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis and that in a way is also a recognition of the need to fight malaria. And recently there have been further attempts to try and see if one can develop better medication, more vaccines. In fact there is a better malaria pill which came out of China, which WHO is advising governments to switch on to because it's much more effective than the current one that most governments are using. And so, yes, malaria is a disease we should pay attention to and I think we are beginning to, perhaps not as much. And in fact it's only two-three years ago I was at a meeting in Abuja where the whole conference was on the fight against malaria and what needed to be done.

MALOR: Per capita income in Sub-Saharan Africa is now 200 dollars less than it was 30 years ago in 1974 and recently at a meeting, the Economic Forum held in Mozambique, Africa's poor economic performance was described as the worst tragedy in the 20th century. What is your response to this fact?

MR. ANNAN: Africa's economic performance has been deplorable. In some cases there have been external factors but again it's a question of leadership and to some extent we are suffering from the effects of accumulated mismanagement. And of course we also need to look at our own region and in some cases some of the countries are so small

that to develop economies of scale they need to link up with their neighbors. And this is why the sub-regional groupings where ECOWAS, West African Economic Community, is thinking of opening up its market. You have seen the same thing in the SADCC, in the Southern African region. Attempts are being made to revive the East African Common Market, but over and above that is the right governmental policy, having the right macro economic approach, ensuring that you create the kind of environment that investors will come in and invest. But we often forget that it is the same environment that even local investors need because the investor needs to be certain that the situation will be stable enough for him or her to recoup the investment five years down the line. In situations of instability it is not going to happen. We've had all these conflicts – you talked about Congo earlier – you listed all the African countries with conflicts where we have peacekeeping operations. Nobody invests in a bad neighborhood. We need to really get our act together and focus on stopping these conflicts to be able to focus on economic and social development and create an environment that will attract investors to our countries.

MALOR: Is trade or fair trade the answer?

MR. ANNAN: It's extremely important. I mean if we were to have a fair and open trading system it could help the developing countries and the African countries a lot. But that in itself is not enough because you must be able to manufacture or have something to sell to benefit from open markets. And so that will be extremely helpful and in fact opening up trade will give these countries billions more than they would ever get from development assistance. And of course one is also trying to encourage trading between the South: South-South trade. That alone if they were to slash their tariffs against each other by about 50 percent could increase trade or bring in about \$15.5 billion benefits just between them. And of course if you go global it's a huge gain for them. And this is why we keep stressing that trade reform do harm us go ahead [?]. Subsidies in the rich countries must be removed and the goods from the South, the poor countries must be given open access to the markets of the rich. But it's going to take some time. The negotiations have not been easy but trade is one issue, one item that could make a major difference in the lives of the poor.

MALOR: African leaders have failed their people.

MR. ANNAN: --the issue of leadership and the issue of right policies. The Asian economies have diversified. They are no longer dependent only on primary products. They are manufacturing and they have been able to position themselves to take advantage of the global market. And this goes back to the point I made earlier that opening up the markets alone is not enough if you have nothing to sell. And I think governments in Africa have become conscious of this and are beginning to adopt the right approach, beginning first with

governance. You have to have the reform in that area, you have to have the right regulatory system in place for investments. You need to have an educated workforce and healthy workforce and they are beginning to focus on this. NEPAD, the new African initiative, is focusing on this. You have the Peer Review Group, which is going to ensure that African leaders are living up to the promises they have made to improve governance, to respect the rule of law and focus on economic and social development of their people. And in return the richer countries would also come in and work with them and assist.

MALOR: Mr. Annan, you mentioned NEPAD... it looks like many people in Africa expect you, Mr. Secretary-General, and the United Nations to be doing more. Whatever the UN is doing a lot of people don't seem to feel or think that the UN is doing a lot for Africa. How much are you aware of this?

MR. ANNAN: First of all, let me say that the development of any country is first and foremost the responsibility of the leaders and the people. It would be wrong for any country to sit back and wait for an outside institution or outside body to come and develop the country for them. They can assist, they can help and the UN can help, can assist, can offer advice. We don't have billions of money to put into these countries. Of course, we have our sister institutions like the World Bank and IMF and others and the donor community that plays a role but the responsibility is first and foremost those of the leaders of the countries concerned. So I would much rather see them focus on what they need to do rather than sit back and say, "What are the outside institutions doing for us?"

MALOR: Does it bother you the perception that the UN is doing nothing for Africa or too little for Africa?

MR. ANNAN: Well, I'm not sure that it's entirely correct that almost every African country says UN is not doing enough for them. And if they do then I think they may be in the minority. When you look at the situation – first look at the famine situation in Southern Africa, who was there to feed the people and to help? The peacekeeping operations you've referred to, isn't it the UN? And the health issues, the vaccinations, the fight against polio, it is the UN. What more would they want the UN to do - to develop each and every African country? What would the leaders do then?

MALOR: Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, thank you very much for talking to UNTV and UN Radio. It's been an honor talking to you.

MR. ANNAN: Thank you very much.

MALOR: Thank you.

ANNOUNCER: Electronic transcripts of this programme may be obtained free of charge by contacting **World Chronicle** at the address on your screen:

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