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Yale-UN Oral History Project

Kofi Annan

May 10, 2000

New York, New York



UNITED NATIONS

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Interviewer: This is an interview of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the United Nations on May 10, 2000. The winter of 1998 you made a trip to Baghdad to try to reach a solution of the crisis that had been building around the inspections of the Presidential Palaces. What kind of meetings had been taking place in New York prior to your going, on your trip?



Kofi Annan: The Security Council itself met several times on this issue. The inspectors themselves also met to have discussions, and the Chairman of the Inspection Team Butler [Richard Butler], met with me several times on it. And there were also contacts with the Iraqi Mission here. I also had a series of meetings with the Five Permanent Members to discuss the crisis and what would constitute an acceptable solution, in preparation for my trip to Baghdad. And so by the time I left I had had intensive consultations, particularly with the Permanent Five and the Council, to have a clear understanding of what would be acceptable if I could get the Iraqi authorities to agree.

INT: Why did you decide to go yourself, in person?

KA: I decided to go myself because the stakes were extremely high, and the issue had also been festering for a while. We were dealing with the issue of peace, the issue of weapons of mass destruction, which the Council had given us a mandate to disarm. We had inspectors on the ground, and I felt that we should do everything to keep the program in place. And I was worried that if the bombing went ahead without this effort it could mean the end of the inspections, and it could also have impact – negative impact – on the humanitarian efforts that we were doing for the Iraqi people.

INT: So you were sort of a “last card”?

KA: That’s correct. Yeah, that’s correct.



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INT: How willing was Saddam [President Saddam Hussein of Iraq] to have the Secretary-General come and visit him?

KA: Well, before I went – as I indicated – I was having a series of meetings here in the UN, but I was also in touch with leaders in the region, talking to leaders in the region – the Turks, the Jordanians, the Egyptians, and all those governments that had influence or could help push things in the right direction, including the French President and other leaders. And I was also in touch with the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, because I wanted to make sure that they knew how serious the situation was and that they would be ready to engage seriously if I went to discuss this issue. And when I got the

signal that they realized the seriousness and their preparedness to engage, then I was ready to go.

INT: When it comes to Saddam himself -- Saddam Hussein -- did he surprise you in any way during your meetings?

KA: Well, I had always seen him in pictures in his military uniform, so it was interesting to walk into the Palace and see him in a suit and a tie. And up 'til the moment when they came to tell me a meeting had been set, I didn't know where the meeting was going to take place. I knew we would meet, but I didn't know when and where. So when his officials came to tell me -- with a car -- that he's ready and we have the car out, I went with two people from my side, Hans Corell [UN Legal Counsel] and Ralf Knussen and we took off and went. I had there about three hours of meetings with him, the hour with his advisors and mine and the next couple of hours -- several hours -- alone with him negotiating. And I was -- contrary to the impression one had generally-- that he didn't know the issues and was not well informed -- he seemed to have been well-briefed and even had the Security Council Resolutions, and the document that I had been working on. He had studied with his staff very thoroughly and was asking very pertinent questions.

INT: Because I've heard that he studies everything very carefully, and he reads, apparently, a lot.

KA: That's the impression that I got in my encounter with him.

INT: What kinds of guarantees did you need from the members of the Security Council before you would agree to go?

KA: I don't know if I would call them guarantees, but I wanted to have a clear understanding of what it is that they were looking for, that we were looking for.

Otherwise I was not asking for rigid instructions or marching orders. I think it was important -- when you are going to have a discussion with President Saddam Hussein and come back with the proposals that the Council can work with, can accept and move forward -- that you had a rough idea or some idea as to what the Council is looking for and what they would accept as a solution to the conflict. So after a series of meetings with them I had that understanding, and I knew that if I can get President Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi authorities to agree to those things that the Council will accept it.

INT: Did you have any special talks with Madeleine Albright [United States Secretary of State] before going to Baghdad? What did she say at the time?

KA: Yes, Mrs. Albright and I met before I left, and of course she indicated that they were not enthusiastic, but they had decided to join the consensus since others felt the trip would be useful, but they had "red lines" that one should be aware of -- "red lines" meaning issues of importance to them that one should not compromise on. And that we discussed, that sort of issues like free and unfettered access to all areas that they would want to inspect, including the Palaces, and the cooperation of the Iraqi authorities to

allow the inspectors to get their work done and nothing that should be done to dilute the resolutions which had already been approved. And of course I had no intention of doing that, so the American “red lines” posed no problems for me.

INT: Did any other of the Permanent Five have any “red lines,” so to say?

KA: Not really, in the sense that they all put together – in their own discussions the “red lines” came up, and so in the end there was a group position.

INT: Okay, they all agreed on one thing. How were you received once you arrived in Iraq?



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KA: I arrived on a private plane. President Chirac [Jacques Chirac] of France loaned me his Presidential plane. So we arrived on a private plane, and to my surprise there was a huge press corps at the airport. In fact, there were about 700 of them that visit – 700 pressmen and women. So, I was quite surprised by their presence, of which I had not anticipated because Iraq had been fairly closed until that point. And so I talked to them briefly but couldn't tell them much until I had started my negotiations. The Iraqis were pleased to have the chance to engage there with the Secretary-General, explain their positions and to talk to him. And of course, they were very accessible for their discussions and particularly wanted to continue immediately upon my arrival, but I told them that I needed a night's sleep –

INT: I understand that.

KA: -- And that we should start the next day.

INT: So the press and media, they were from Iraq? They were local?

KA: No, no, international press had flown in. They were all given visas to go. International press had flown in, and so in fact, at the press conference I gave before I left, the room was packed and full, and I hadn't seen that many press concentrated in any one room until that morning.



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INT: That's impressive.

KA: Yeah.

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INT: Whom did you meet with – we've touched a little bit, you said Hans Corell as one of them – but whom did you meet with there, and did Saddam Hussein meet with you right away.

KA: No, I started my discussions the next morning. In fact, I was met by the Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. We had the preliminary discussion, and I went to sleep. And the next morning I met with Tariq Aziz and his team, which included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Oil, the Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, and

others. I, on my side, had Hans Corell, Sashe Peru, and I believe Fred Eckhard [Spokesman for the Secretary General of the UN], but as we got into this, pretty soon Tariq and I got into one-on-one, tete-a-tete on most of the issues, with our teams waiting outside. And we consulted them as need be. And so although the teams were involved for quite a lot of the discussions, it was between the two of us. And then Hans Corell and the Iraqi lawyer, a man called Rioudad Casey got together to do the legal draft of the things that we had agreed on.

INT: Yes, because Hans Corell is the legal advisor, so –

KA: He's the legal advisor. And of course these discussions went on for about a day and a half, and by the end of that period we had hammered out a sort of a broad outline of an agreement. And there were quite a few issues that we had agreed to, but there were some critical issues that Tariq Aziz and his team could not agree, and they felt it's only President Saddam Hussein who could decide. So each item we could not agree on, I said: "Leave it aside," because I had expected to be able to take it up very directly with President Saddam Hussein and try and resolve it at his level. And that's what happened.

INT: Which were the critical issues – or from their point of view – that they didn't want to agree on without consulting Saddam Hussein?

KA: I think one of them, one of the critical issues I think that really bothered them -- you know the crisis has centered around the Palaces. They maintain that this dignity and

sovereignty of Iraq had to be respected and that the Palaces are places where they also work in. And they cannot have inspectors coming and disrupting their work, demeaning their authority and their leadership, and that they could not allow inspections, and that they may allow just one visit, once and for all, but we needed to have the authority to go back as and when needed and not be limited to only just one inspection. That is one kind of issue – and whether one should use the word “visit” or “inspect.” And we are inspectors, and we were going there to inspect? They were saying: “Okay, you can say you can come and visit.” And I said: “‘Visit’ is too loose. People might think you are inviting us for tea or something, you know?”



INT: Even though I don't know if I would like to go and have a tea party there –

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KA: Have a tea –

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INT: -- But, yes. What were the dynamics of the discussions? Were the Iraqis cooperative, or were they hostile?

KA: In the end they were cooperative, but they began in a rather -- as we can expect -- a hostile attitude towards a Resolution and organization that in their mind has tried to dismantle – let's say, not dismantle -- has tried to humiliate them, trample on their sovereignty and dignity, and prevented them from developing their country. And it's a Resolution of the 687, which they felt very strongly about, and so I had come to tell them: “You have to accept this Resolution. If you want to see light at the end of the

tunnel, you have to implement the disarmament provision, the disarmament agreement, and then you will see light at the end of the tunnel, our sanctions being suspended or lifted, because the Resolution was clear: disarm and the sanctions will be lifted. So, in effect, it was in their court, but they didn't see it that way. They felt that whatever they did was not enough and that they had disarmed, had destroyed quite a lot of weapons, but that judgment belonged to the inspectors and not to them.

INT: So you mean that they didn't really believe that the sanctions would be lifted, that you ever would agree on, "this is okay, and now we can give it up?"



KA: This is really part of the association, and this is also the argument we are having with them, even on the new Resolution with a new body, UNMOVIC [UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission], which is headed by [Hans] Blix, because they feel that the Resolutions are so complicated. The demands are so many that those who do not want to lift the sanctions will always find an excuse to say they have not here complied. I mean, we must admit that we've achieved a lot. I think the first inspector, Ekéus [Rolf Ekéus, first Executive Chairman of UNSCOM], did a remarkable job, and I think – for the record – they destroyed more weapons under his inspection teams than all the bombings of the Gulf War did. And so, yeah, so they did achieve quite a lot, but they also felt that they had not completed their work, and there were weapons still to be destroyed and to be checked in Iraq, which also showed the amount of weapons they had in that country.

INT: Were there any surprises at the meeting, something that you didn't predict?

KA: Yes, there were some surprises. About one hour into the meeting President Saddam Hussein excused himself and said he had to go and pray. And so he left and went and prayed and came back, and that was the first time I've been in a meeting where someone has left me to go and pray and then come back, and so that was unusual.

INT: But he did come back, that's a good thing.

KA: He did come back in to continue the discussions, and then as things calmed down and as the talks continued and they began to be more relaxed – a bit more relaxed – he offered me a cigar. He took one. So we continued our discussions in a very direct and professional manner.

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INT: Like a peace pipe.

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KA: A peace pipe, yes.

INT: How did you eventually achieve an agreement?

KA: Well, since we had agreed on quite a lot of the other issues, I focused mainly on the outstanding issues which I told him that we had discussed, but his ministers felt he was the only one who could take the decision, and also told him quite frankly that if we

do not get an agreement for them -- open up the Palaces -- the bombing will go ahead. And even though they rebuilt Iraq since the War, it will be destroyed again and that the destruction can be quite massive, and he should take a decision in the interest of his people and allow the inspectors to come in to undertake the task for which they have been mandated by the Security Council and that there could be subsequent visits to the Palace to do that. Then he felt that: "Well look, some of these inspectors do not always respect our culture and our dignity and the various officials and all that." And they had suggested, before I went from New York, that if they opened it up they would want some observers to make sure that things are done properly by the inspectors. So in the end it was agreed the inspectors would do their work, but there would be some diplomats around observing to make sure that things were done properly, but he did agree to the unimpeded and unfettered access to allow the inspectors to do their work -- which was also crucial -- and reaffirmed the acceptance of all relevant Security Council Resolutions.

INT: But did he actually understand the threat was serious with the bombings?

KA: I think he did. I think he did, and I think his ministers did too.

INT: Okay. Did Tariq Aziz give you a written message at the airport when you left? If so, what was the meaning of the message?

KA: Tariq Aziz gave me a written document at the airport -- this is after we had concluded the agreement -- and it dealt with the professional handling of some of the

work being done by the inspectors. And I told him that that I will have to take to New York and give it to the inspectors and have them deal with it. So when we came back the first thing Hans Corell did was to give it to Butler and Butler's legal advisor. And the response was done to the Iraqis telling them that it wasn't acceptable.

INT: Were you satisfied with the result of the agreement?

KA: I think the agreement was fine, but often the proof of the pudding is the emendation and how the agreements are implemented by all concerned, but I think the agreement itself reaffirmed the Security Council Resolution of free and unfettered access to the areas where the inspection is to take place and opening up the Palaces over which we were going to go to war. And therefore, allowing us to continue with inspection, even though there were difficulties, was a positive development. Of course, eventually Iraq was bombed. So for over 18 months we have not had inspectors there. So what I tried to avoid in February '98 happened in December '98. So we gained some time, but in the end it happened.

INT: Well, coming to the Security Council, were they satisfied with the agreement? What did they say about it? Were there any problems?

KA: Now when I arrived, the staff and the people were generally pleased that the Secretary-General has been able to go to Iraq and avoid a military confrontation. So they were very pleased.

INT: And maybe even happier that you came back, right?

KA: Yeah, it's possible. When I went into the Council, of course, there were discussions. The Council unanimously endorsed the agreement. So they may have their own views on it, but at the end, after full discussion, the entire Council unanimously endorsed the agreement because they like it.

INT: That's good. What do you think were the major achievements of your trip – of course the agreements, but were there any others?

KA: I hope the other message that the trip put out is that it ought to be possible to find political and diplomatic solutions to some of these here conflicts and that it may not necessarily be solved through a military conflict. As I said, in the end the bombing went ahead in December, but we are now back at the same position, in fact, perhaps in a much more difficult situation, because at that time we had the inspectors in. We were continuing our inspection. We were putting pressure on Iraq to cooperate with them. Right now they are armed, and we are trying to negotiate with the Iraqis to get them back in again. So Mr. Hans Blix has been appointed. He's worked out his work plan, so Geine Graham is recruiting inspectors, and we will be waiting to see if the Iraqis will accept them. So now after 18 months we are at the point where we don't know whether they will say yes or no.

INT: How has the development gone? I mean, they've been very negative about letting them come in, entering their country, because they see it as if they would let them come in, they would see it as they agree on –

KA: Exactly, because they have not accepted the Resolution 1284 [UN Security Council Resolution 1284], and 1284 has several parts. It has the disarmament portion and then the improvements in the humanitarian project. In fact, they have refused to meet Mr. Blix. I saw the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq in Havana in April, and I tried to encourage them to meet with him somewhere outside of Iraq or wherever. And they felt: "If we meet him, then it implies we accept the Resolution." And so at this point their position is rather hard-line. So they wouldn't meet him, much less accept the inspector, let the inspectors go into Iraq now. Mr. Blix is working on the detail of all his work plans, his staff, and their approach, and I suspect once that is completed and the Iraqis have a better sense of how he's going to approach the work, they may be receptive, but I cannot be sure that their attitude will change.

INT: So they're still very negative –

KA: They're still very negative.

INT: -- Until the plan's finished.

KA: Until the plan's finished, but even when the plans are finished we have no –

INT: Idea.

KA: Idea or guarantee that they will say “yes.” And of course, if they don’t say “yes,” what do you do? And this is when the Council and all of us will have to take some critical decisions.

INT: Do you feel that UNSCOM has done the job that it was created to do? What has been its overall achievement? What more needs to be done?

KA: I think UNSCOM, as I indicated earlier, has destroyed quite a lot of weapons, particularly under its first leader Rolf Ekeus. We did have a problem during the tenure of Richard Butler, but I think in some areas they felt they had made quite a lot of progress. It wasn’t just UNSCOM that was doing the inspections. You also had the International Atomic Agency [International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)] in Vienna, which was then headed by Blix. On the atomic side, I think they made quite a lot of progress.

INT: And they had a very close cooperation there, too.

KA: Cooperation, yes, and that’s why I’m surprised they are not cooperating with him now, because this is somebody they know. He’s very serious. He’s very professional, and they could work with him as they had worked with him in the past, but in any case, be as it may, they’ve decided not to cooperate with him. So on the atomic side quite a lot

of progress was made, and I think also on the ballistic missile side they've made some progress. Where we had major difficulty is at the chemicals area, where progress had been made. They really had completed the weapon work, the most difficult area was the biological area, where they felt that more considerable work needed to be done. And of course, the Iraqis take the line that we have really destroyed everything: their weaponry, their dignity. We have –

INT: But it's so easy to hide them, too, and to produce.

KA: Yeah, exactly.



INT: In your opinion, did economic sanctions help or hinder the work of UNSCOM?

KA: I think the economic sanctions probably initially helped, but I don't think anyone expected the sanctions to last for so long. And so it is possible that initially the Iraqis cooperated in the expectation that in six months or a year the sanctions would be lifted, but then it's dragged on now for almost ten years. And this is why they are very – according to them, their position is that they are very hesitant -- now that the inspectors are out -- to enter another process which will be as complicated as the previous one, and they may never see sanctions lifted.

INT: What do you mean "a new process?"

KA: They are talking about Resolution 1284 –

INT: Okay, the new Resolution.

KA: And with a new inspection crew, UNMOVIC, because they tend to argue that they don't see any difference between UNMOVIC and UNSCOM. And in some cases they consider the UNMOVIC Resolution more complicated on the inspection side. On the humanitarian side I have personally tried to tell them that they are getting lots of improvements and that they should work with us to improve the humanitarian program to be able to assist the Iraqi people.



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INT: Do you think that the UN could ever create something like UNSCOM in the future if needed? I mean, UNMOVIC is created, but it's not the same.

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KA: It's an interesting question. I'm not sure if the International Community will ever be able to try something like this again, because there has been too much controversy and too much divisions in the Council surrounding UNSCOM and efforts in Iraq that another resolution of that kind may be difficult to get through the Council.

INT: What changes would you like to see in the work and organization of UNMOVIC, comparing it to UNSCOM?

KA: I think Mr. Blix has already introduced some of the changes which I think will be helpful and effective. He wants all those working with UNMOVIC to be full UN staff-members. That was not the case with UNSCOM. With UNSCOM we borrowed them from governments, with the result that some of them undertook other activities beside what they were supposed to do for UNSCOM. Remember they were accused of spying –

INT: At the same time.

KA: Yeah, they were accused of spying; collecting material for their governments, whereas they were supposed to be focused on disarming Iraq, and I think that also undermined UNSCOM in the end, and the UN. And as I had said in the past, that could also have an impact on future disarmament regimes, because if you have a disarmament regime and you tell a government that you are coming in to inspect its nuclear facilities or weapons of mass destruction, you should focus on that. If they think you are there for other things they become more difficult in opening their doors to you.

INT: Are these actually active discussions about a disarmament regime?

KA: You mean, that today –

INT: Yes.

KA: As of now we have a Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT] going on, and the conference is going on here. It has another week or so to go, and there are other disarmament conventions and the inspection mechanisms of them, like weapons, chemical weapons, and the nuclear. And so there are regimes where inspectors do go around and work also on these items, yeah.

INT: But do they have enough the knowledge – UNSCOM were able to really hand pick the people and specialists and everything that they needed -- we're going to be able to have this same knowledge?



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KA: For UNMOVIC?

INT: Yes, exactly, if the people are UN?

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KA: But they will be recruited specifically for that. So they will be experts who'll be brought in from our side to join –

INT: In the name of UN.

KA: In the name of the UN. They will be brought in, and they will join the UN and do this work, just as the Atomic Agency and the Chemical Weapons Organization in the Hague [Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)] does, because they recruit people from outside to do this technical work, and they are paid by the UN,

not by their governments, in the hope that their allegiance will be to the UN and not to a government that is paying them to sit on the UN.

INT: Were there any areas that the Security Council wanted UNSCOM to act differently in from what they did?

KA: I think the Security Council was very rarely unanimous towards the last few days on UNSCOM, particularly between '96 and '98, end of '98. There were major divisions in the Council, and therefore on almost any one issue certain members of the Council expected certain behavior from UNSCOM which others didn't or when others supported the position UNSCOM has taken. And so it was not easy to say that the Council, per se, did not support UNSCOM. I think, generally, a majority of the council members supported UNSCOM or felt that they should stand by UNSCOM, but you had two key members – mainly the Russians and the Chinese – who often had problems with the approach and recommendations of UNSCOM. And as time went on the French also had their difficulties with them.

INT: How much influence did the Security Council have on UNSCOM? Will the influence be the same on UNMOVIC? Would the UN have liked to have more influence on UNSCOM than they actually were able to have?

KA: Some member states felt that they probably gave UNSCOM too much latitude and did not ask enough pertinent questions and accepted UNSCOM reports rather

uncritically. And I think there will be greater – there's been an attempt for the Council and the Members to become much more involved in UNMOVIC with particular requirements of report and approval of work programs and other things. And so I suspect that they follow it much more closely and probably ask the critical questions which some believe they did not ask in the case of UNSCOM.

INT: Will UNMOVIC send or report as often to you as UNSCOM did?

KA: Yeah, actually both UNSCOM and UNMOVIC will be reporting at the Council, through me, and I think the Council will probably require a regular report.

INT: Like twice a year for UNMOVIC, as for UNSCOM or ...?

KA: I think on the bigger issues they would, yeah, although they may periodically want to have interim reports also.

INT: What makes the UN able to go into a country as it did in the Iraqi case? Would it not be to violate the country's sovereignty, or does it not make a violation?

KA: I think, under normal circumstances, the UN would not be able to do what it did in Iraq in any country, but Iraq is not an "any country." This program came into being after Iraq had attacked Kuwait and had been pushed out of there by the International Community. And as part of the cease-fire agreement and the settlement Iraq was

required to accept this kind of regime, and the Resolution was passed, which it accepted. And so once it has accepted and agreed to cooperate and was cooperating, it's not the question of violation of sovereignty. There's not a right. It was being done with its acceptance – if not full acceptance, at least acquiescence.

INT: “Acquiescence?”

KA: “Acquiescence” means “agreeing,” “agree,” that they agree that the inspectors and others can come in and do the work they did.

INT: So if they didn't agree on it, it would have been completely other issue.



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KA: Yeah, if the history was not what it was – that they had not gone to war and lost and as part as the cease-fire agreement -- going into any country and doing this would have been violation.

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INT: Just two more questions.

KA: Sure.

INT: Saddam made a promise (like many other countries) not to have biological weapons, chemical weapons, and so on, but yet he did. Was his punishment hard enough,

comparing it to the punishment Germany got after the war? Looking back on how he has not kept his promises, should one have been harder on him?

KA: I think it depends on whom you talk to, and it depends also on which German war you're talking about.

INT: Yeah, true. That's true. Sorry.

KA: I think most people would argue that the Versailles Treaty following the First World War was very harsh on Germany. And in fact some would even argue that the seeds of World War II were sewn in Versailles and that the Germans felt so humiliated and angry that it created an atmosphere where a Hitler would find his way to the top, become its chancellor –

INT: Because of it?

KA: -- Because it was an angry nation, a nation that felt humiliated. And after World War II that lesson had been learned, and we set up the Marshall Plan for Germany – to assist Germany and all other things. And so the question that comes up is: “For how long does enmity between states last?” If Europe, for example, had not found a way of resolving its difference, creating the European Union, Europe would not be what it is today. In fact even after World War II nobody would have imagined Germany and France would have the relationship that they have now. I think on the Iraqi situation the

International Community, they had to be firm. They had to be firm on the aggression. They had to be firm to indicate that we cannot sit back and allow one nation to swallow up its neighbor, without doing anything about it. And so I think the International action was correct. We have achieved some disarmament results. We've not achieved everything that we would want to do in the disarmament area. The sanctions there continue. Between President Saddam's behavior and the sanctions, the Iraqi people are going through a difficult period, and they are suffering. In fact, in a way they are twice punished. They are punished by their leaders, and they are punished by the sanctions the International Community has imposed on them. And of course now there is a debate going on: "For how long can this go on?" Often the question is raised: "Who is responsible? Is it Saddam or is it the UN?" Regardless of who is responsible, it is clear that the people are suffering, and this is why we are trying to use a humanitarian program – the "Oil for Food" – to do as much for them as possible, but that program will not satisfy all their needs. And I hope in the course of this year we can convince the Iraqis to cooperate and cooperate fully with us to get the inspections out of the way so that they can see light at the end of the tunnel. If we are not able to get them to cooperate, the linkage between the inspection and lifting of the sanction is not there, and the leadership doesn't seem to be bothered by the suffering of the people, then what do you do, you know? And for the UN – I said it in the Security Council that this poses a real moral dilemma for the United Nations, because the United Nations has always been on the side of the poor, the weak, and the vulnerable. And we have always sought to alleviate their suffering. But in this situation the public are beginning to accuse us of being responsible or partially responsible for the suffering of an entire nation, and –

INT: “The public” meaning the world’s opinion, or you’re talking about the Iraqi people?

KA: I think that you have the Iraqi people and some of the Middle East’s public opinion -- the opinion in the West: there are discussions going on. And don’t forget I lost two directors of the humanitarian program who resigned –

INT: And the “Oil for Food”?

KA: – Complaining that they cannot, in good conscience, be associated with a program that they felt was depriving a whole generation of Iraqi children of education and health. And our own peer programs there – UNICEF and other UN agencies – Red Cross had reported on malnutrition, which may not be 100 percent our fault, but it does exist.

INT: Yes it does, but on the other hand Saddam can, if he’s willing to give up – but he’s apparently not willing to – but if he is willing to give it up, the sanctions will be lifted.

KA: He could do something, and this is why I told them when I was over there: “It’s in your hands. If you cooperate and if you destroy your weapons you will see light at the end of the tunnel,” but obviously he hasn’t done that. And if Iraq had been a democracy and the people had a say and could vote, probably Saddam would have been long gone,

but now we find ourselves in a situation where it is not a democracy. The people cannot remove him. He's not taking the steps that may help their condition, and if he doesn't take the steps that can help their condition, we cannot do anything about the sanctions. And we want to get new weapons of mass destruction. So, let the cycle continue.

INT: I don't even dare thinking about what his sons are like.

KA: I haven't met them.

INT: No? I just read about them, and I leave it at that.

KA: Yeah, I haven't met them.

INT: Why hasn't Saddam already been convicted for his violations towards human rights? Should he be?

KA: We don't have a mechanism for convicting individuals like that. In the cases of Bosnia and Rwanda we set up a special tribunal to be able to indict leaders that we think have committed crimes against humanity, and we have acted against them. We are now talking of the possible tribunal for Cambodia for the Khmer Rouge killers. And I think until we have the International Criminal Court [ICC] – the statutes of which were approved in Rome – until it is signed and ratified by enough governments and we can set up a permanent criminal court, we don't have any mechanism – End of Tape

Yale-UN Oral History Project

Kofi Annan

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