



Au Revoir Secretary-General

In a series of major policy speeches in the past few weeks, Secretary-General Kofi Annan reflected on his experience during the past decade at the helm of the United Nations.

His speech at the Truman Library in Missouri on December 11 was branded "the farewell speech" by the world media. Mr. Annan underlined that the choice of that venue for such a major speech was particularly fitting: "If Franklin D. Roosevelt was the architect of the United Nations, President Truman was the master-builder...Truman's name will

for ever be associated with the memory of far-sighted American leadership in a great global endeavor."

"You Americans did so much, in the last century, to build an effective multilateral system, with the United Nations at its heart. Do you need it less today, and does it need you less, than 60 years ago? Surely not. More than ever today Americans, like the rest of humanity, need a functioning global system through which the world's peoples can face global challenges together."

In this speech the Secretary-General summed up five principles that he believes are essen-

tial for the future conduct of international relations: Collective responsibility, global solidarity, the rule of law, mutual accountability, and multilateralism.

"We can only do all these things by working together through a multilateral system, and by making the best possible use of the unique instrument bequeathed to us by Harry Truman and his contemporaries, namely the United Nations" he said.

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Five Lessons

By Kofi Annan - 11 December 2006

Nearly 50 years ago, when I arrived in Minnesota as a student fresh from Africa, I had much to learn – starting with the fact that there is nothing sissy about wearing earmuffs when the temperature is 15 below. All my life since has been a learning experience. Now I want to pass on five lessons I have learnt during ten years as UN Secretary-General - lessons which I believe the community of nations needs to learn, as it confronts the challenges of the 21st century.

First, in today's world we are all responsible for each other's security. Against such threats as nuclear proliferation, climate change, global pandemics, or terrorists operating from safe havens in failed states, no nation can make itself secure by seeking supremacy over all others. Only by working to make each other secure can we hope to achieve lasting security for ourselves.

This responsibility includes our shared responsibility to protect people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. That was accepted by all nations at last year's UN summit. But when we look at the murder, rape and starvation still being inflicted on the people of Darfur, we realize that such doctrines remain pure rhetoric unless those with the power to intervene effectively – by exerting political, economic or, in the last resort, military muscle – are prepared to take the lead. It also includes a responsibility to future generations – to preserve resources that belong to them as well as to us. Every day that we do nothing, or too little, to prevent climate change imposes higher costs on our children.

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Quote of the Month

"My name is Ban, but not James Ban. I take office in (2)007. I may not be shaken but I am a little stirred."

Ban Ki-moon at the UN Correspondents' dinner and ball – 8 December 2006

Ban Ki-moon the 8th Secretary-General of the United Nations

"The good name of the United Nations is one of its most venerable assets, but also one of it's most vulnerable"



mony, the 192-member General-Assembly approved a resolution by acclamation lauding outgoing Secretary-General Kofi Annan's "many bold initiatives" to reduce poverty, promote peace, protect the environment and launch the U.N. reform process. The assembly then gave him a standing ovation.

On Thursday December 14, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon took the oath of office as the new Secretary-General of the Organization. The eighth Secretary-General who begins his term on January 1 will be the first Asian to lead the UN in 35 years.

Before the swearing-in cere-

In a brief speech, Mr. Annan noted that despite many difficulties and some setbacks in the past decade "we have achieved much that I am proud of," citing UN reforms in particular. The Organization "became more transparent, accountable and responsive," he said. "It began to better address the needs of individuals worldwide. It faced emerging threats, as well as familiar ones, head-on.

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Interview with Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre

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A basis for a constructive debate

GreenFacts seeks to provide clear and unbiased scientific information on health and the environment in a language for non specialists.

What is GreenFacts?

GreenFacts is an international non profit organization based in Belgium that publishes clear and unbiased summaries of scientific consensus documents on health and the environment. Jacques de Selliers, the General Manager of GreenFacts explained to UNRIC Magazine's Arni Snaevarr, that the aim was to write summaries, in a language for non-specialists, make them freely available online: "Our goal is to provide a basis for constructive debates and informed decisions," Mr. de Selliers said.

What exactly do you publish?

Each publication is a faithful chapter-to-chapter summary of a scientific consensus document. The publications are presented on www.greenfacts.org as a series of questions and answers in several languages. The answers are available in different levels of detail, and allowing readers to quickly find the information they are looking for.

What do you mean by different levels of detail?

In order to meet the needs of non-specialist readers, GreenFacts has developed its unique Three-Level-Structure containing a summary (Level One), a detailed summary (Level Two), and the source document (Level Three), which served as the basis for the first two levels. Level One summarises the topic in a series of short questions and answers, avoiding the use of technical language. If readers are looking for more information, they are one click away from the Level Two, which elaborates each answer of Level One in a few paragraphs. Should the readers want to verify the source of the summary, they can click and find the section of the source document in Level Three.

How do you ensure that your publications are not biased?

In order to ensure the credibility and impartiality of our publications, GreenFacts has a strict publication procedure:

The subjects for our publications are chosen by our Board of Directors, which has a balanced composition of members from four different backgrounds: academia, environmental or health NGOs, industry, and others.

The source document for each summary is selected by our Scientific Board, composed of independent experts. It is carefully chosen among the recent scientific consensus publications issued by authoritative international organizations such as Scientific Committees of the European Commission, WHO and other United Nations agencies such as FAO.

Our summaries are written by a specialist on the subject in collaboration with our editorial team. To ensure that they are faithful to the source document, the summaries are peer-reviewed by at least three independent experts appointed by our Scientific Board. After implementation of the corrections, the final publication of the Study is subject to approval by the President of the Scientific Board.

What topics do you cover?

In the field of health and the environment, our topics range from climate change and the state of ecosystems to the health effects of chemical substances or lifestyle choices. Recent publications include Forests, AIDS, Arctic Climate Change, Desertification, Psychoactive Drugs, and PCBs.

How is your content different from what is found in the media?

GreenFacts presents the current scientific consensus in a clear language, avoiding the use of scientific jargon. Published by international organisations and written by large panels of experts, scientific consensus documents reflect the current state of knowledge on a given subject. The media, on the other hand, usually focus on what is controversial, and tend to put a lot of emphasis on the striking results of a single study, even when they are contrary to the scientific consensus.

This may confuse the public, who is not in a position to judge the validity of latest findings.

Can you illustrate this difference with an example?

In the debate on climate change, about half of what is found in the media questions the reality of human-induced climate change. Yet, the vast majority of the scientists agree with the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (summarised by GreenFacts), i.e. that the earth is warming, that this warming is at least partly due to human emissions, and that the more greenhouse gas we will emit, the more the earth will warm, resulting in an increase of negative effects and risks of catastrophic impacts.

Aspartame, an artificial sweetener, is another example of confusing media coverage. Although scientists agree that aspartame is not carcinogenic, the public was confused due to media focus on a study that challenged this conclusion. The revised conclusions by the European Food Safety Authority confirming the harmlessness of the sweetener were however hardly reported on, leaving the public with a distorted image of the scientific reality.

To conclude, what is GreenFacts' added value?

Bringing the scientific consensus to the reach of non-specialists is vital to properly informing the public. When communicating latest research, reference should always be made to the current scientific consensus in order to provide non-specialists with a sound perspective. Also, the scientific consensus is essential for constructive debates and informed decisions. And this is where GreenFacts plays an important role as the provider of reliable and accessible information on the current scientific consensus.

Jacques de Selliers, General Manager
GreenFacts