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Oxford Scholars

12 November 2025

Kofi Annan: a Leader for Peace

Born in Ghana in 1938, Kofi Annan was one of the most prominent leaders of global peace in recent times. Taking up the role of Secretary General of the United Nations from 1997 to 2006, he worked tirelessly to promote peace around the world through equality, human dignity, and collective security, which led to his earning of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001. Annan has influenced world peace most significantly through his works surrounding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

After witnessing the atrocities committed in 1994 during the Rwandan Genocide, where nearly six hundred thousand people of Tutsi origins were slaughtered, Annan set out to bring the world together against global atrocities of such nature. His efforts culminated in the Responsibility to Protect, which was a global compact focused on ridding the world of “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity” (United Nations). The compact planned to complete this goal through the use of group foreign intervention in the case of a nation being unable or unwilling to mitigate its severe dilemmas (United Nations). The Responsibility to Protect was passed unanimously at the United Nations World Summit in 2005, and has significantly changed how the United Nations responds to humanitarian crises in nations worldwide. Several years after its passage, Annan reaffirmed his beliefs in its purpose, emphasizing that “Sovereignty shared is not sovereignty given up. The collective interest in the

new century is also a national interest if we are to find fair, effective and lasting solutions” (Annan).

In addition to his works with R2P, Annan also helped to establish the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, which obligated nations to “combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women” (World Health Organization). The MDGs aimed to correct these issues through the establishment of eight goals which were meant to be completed by 2015. Many of these goals, including halting the spread of HIV and halving the number of people living in extreme poverty were met by the deadline. Additionally, Annan spoke on the bridging of divides in order to fulfill his goals, pronouncing that, “for once, the gulf between rich and poor, between countries often at loggerheads with each other, seemed to be bridged by a genuine partnership among nations and people” (Annan, “How to Achieve Millennium Development Goals”). These significant accomplishments undoubtedly highlight the prolific impact that Kofi Annan has had on the spread of worldwide peace, as he has helped to shape the direction in which the global community moves in regards to their approach on peace and humanitarian dilemmas.

In combination, Kofi Annan’s works with both the Responsibility to Protect and the Millennium Development Goals serve as a remarkable example of strides toward peace in our world. Even though Annan passed away in 2018 at the age of 80, he can still be looked upon as an individual who has had an immeasurable impact on global relations and the progression of peace. Really, his efforts serve as a reminder for how the world can become better together, and that “We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race” (Kofi Annan).

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