

## THE TIMES OF INDIA

### If leaders fail, people will lead: Kofi Annan

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When leaders fail to lead, people take charge and leaders then have to follow, says **Kofi Annan**, former UN Secretary General and Nobel laureate. In an exclusive interview to TOI, Annan expresses optimism that slowly and steadily, the world is gearing up to the challenges of climate change and global warming. He hopes peace and stability are restored in Afghanistan soon and is optimistic about an emerging Africa.

The Elders, a group of political leaders first convened by Nelson Mandela - including Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu and Mary Robinson - used the World Economic Forum in Davos to call for renewed efforts to conclude a global climate pact by the end of 2015 and work toward a "carbon-neutral" planet by 2050.

#### **How far do you think this will be successful given the reluctance of the developed nations to cut down on emission?**

Let me tell you about the Elders, convened by Nelson Mandela to use our voices to help protect the poor. We all have been very active given our own independent positions. We were not part of any government. Most of us were independently employed. But we decided to engage in discussing global issues and offer advise which governments may or may not be taken.

On climate change, we often don't fully appreciate that it is a problem. We think it is a problem waiting to happen. We see the floods, we see the droughts. This is a threat to our drinking water, our food, and possibility of having scarce resource. This is where we need to come up with sustainable model of development. There is an end to resources. We have to ensure that carbon emission should be contained. Governments, societies and people have to take tough decisions. We need to make sure that polluters pay. We need to make sure that those who use fossil-fuel pay the cost. We should remove the subsidy from the fossil-fuel because it creates pollution and focus on research and innovations for a renewable source of energy.

The discussions on global emissions have not been successful yet. So we are going to try next year and the year after. I think we have to accept that we are all responsible for the earth, but the richer and developed countries have a greater responsibility because their historic accumulation for which they are responsible. But that doesn't mean others are not responsible either. They may have to take bigger steps, but India, my country Ghana, China will have take steps to mitigate the climate change.

#### **Given the outcome of the Warsaw conference and the debate on Loss and Damage mechanism, do you think the road to Paris will be easier?**

I don't think Paris will be easier. You also have to understand we are just coming out of a financial crisis.

When economic conditions are difficult, people tend to be less generous and protect themselves, the question of solidarity doesn't mean much to them at that time. We need to really press very hard because we can't afford to give our children and grand-children a planet that is unlivable.

**Developing countries do not have enough resources to completely switch to renewable energy from fossil-fuel based economy. How is a country like India, where 54% of energy comes from coal, expected to be a change-maker?**

It involves cost. If we can come up with innovations and train young people to take on new jobs and if we can switch to clean energy, I think we have the capacity to build this world not dependent on fossil-fuel. I think it will happen and it won't destroy economy.

There are others who believe that any attempt to switch to green energy will create problem, but there are others who will tell you that this is great for economy. And I tend to be on the optimistic side.

**Adaptation efforts need to be scaled up. The world's poorest are the hardest hit, but they have done the least to cause it.**

The poor have done the least to cause global warming and yet they pay the highest price. That's why setting up a fund to help the poorer countries is a fantastic idea, but where is the money coming from? Promises have been made, but we have not seen the money. Climate justice endorses that polluters must pay. We must have a system that those who use SUVs, not the one who use bicycles, pay.

Countries like India and developed nations, where you have science can play a big role by sharing innovations and the new techniques to the poor.

**Climate change is likely to have impact on water supplies and sustainable living, ultimately impact economies and give rise to poverty. Shortages are likely to threaten food production, reduce sanitation and hinder economic development and damage ecosystems. What should the world leaders keep in mind while framing policies?**

We are going to need more food, people are really going to reach out for water, we are going to get health problems associated with the climate change. I think it is important that not just governments but societies and individuals push governments and leaders when we are making policies. To focus on sustainability, we tend to focus on inflation and GDP. I think very few governments focus on the issues that the population is growing, there is a growing middle class and a growing demand for food supply.

**Across the world people from different communities and grassroots are coming up to voice their plea for action from governments. Powershifts are happening across the world. Is this a new writing on the wall for a new climate revolution?**

I have always believed that on important issues, the leaders must lead. Where the leaders fail to lead and people are really concerned about it, the people will take the lead and make the leaders follow.

On the issue of climate change, it can lead to greater mobilisation where people get involved and push the environmental agenda higher up in the political decision making and get political leaders to act. I really

believe in some situation where leaders have failed to lead the people have stepped up. Often the leaders have taken action. You have seen it here in our country and we have seen it in other parts of the world. People want responsible leadership. On big issues, they are not going to sit on their homes. They will act and press for action. I would urge leaders to engage with the people more because it is a long-term issue of how our children and grand-children will live in the world.

**How did your upbringing in Ghana during the 50s—the decade it gained Independence from Britain—shape your outlook?**

I grew up at a time when the struggle for Independence was going on. Luckily it wasn't too violent. There were discussions and debates. After years of struggle, Ghana got Independence in 1957. I was in my teens then. It was an exciting period. Everybody was pushing for Independence and one day we got it. And you see suddenly the changes around you - the police commissioner was no longer an Englishman, the head of the army was from Ghana, so were the judges. So as a young man, you saw changes are possible, even dramatic changes are possible. When I grew up and started my career and went through the international system, I was able to challenge the existing system. The biggest impediments to reforms are the civil servants who say this is not the way we work, this is not the way it has never been before. So I would say, test it, and changes can be done. I learnt it in my youth.

**What is your opinion on Nato troops pulling out of Afghanistan? Do you see escalation of violence in the country?**

What happens depends very much on the arrangements that have been discussed between all stakeholders, not only between Nato and Afghans, but also between Afghanistan and Pakistan and other neighbours in the region. This is a country which is at war for decades - first the Russians, now the Americans and the West. They need peace and stability. And I hope they themselves get tired and would not go into continue with war whether there are foreign troops or not. I hope all the stakeholders would involve in serious talks and come to the conclusion that the only way they can develop the country is to end the war and focus on economic and social development. They also need to have meaningful and deeper relations with their neighbours. I am hopeful it is possible to pacify Afghanistan. It is not going to happen tomorrow, but there should be an end to war and restoration of peace and stability.

**What is your view on emerging Africa?**

Africa is doing well economically now. According to IMF, six fastest growing economies are from Africa. Foreign investments are relatively high in Africa. In addition to the traditional partners like the US, China, Brazil, India, Malaysia are very active in Africa. Governments are doing better on macro-economic policies. There are bright young men and women who want to make a difference, some of them are trained in the continent and some are in Europe and America and they are going back to their respective countries. Governments are sorting out the hindrances before development of infrastructure and energy. There has been also an increase in intra-Africa trade. Also, there is a growing middle class.