

The Kofi Annan Geneva Peace Address
“Peace-Making in a Fractured World” by Martin Griffiths

Ivan Pictet Auditorium, Maison de la Paix, Geneva
Tuesday, 14th October 2025

Madame Fontanet, Nane Annan, dear friends and colleagues,

1. Thank you, Ahmad, for your warm introduction, and to the Kofi Annan Foundation, the Geneva Graduate Institute and Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.
2. I am honoured to be giving the 5th Kofi Annan Peace Address in Geneva - the city that I call home. Geneva symbolizes the universal values that many of us have spent a lifetime trying to put into practice: promoting dialogue and international cooperation for peace; for humanitarian principles; and for action to ensure human dignity and respect for the rule of law.
3. This is also a deeply moving personal occasion as Ruth and I have known Kofi and Nane for many years. Both of us also had the immense privilege of working by his side and saw first-hand the qualities he brought to his direct, personal engagement in conflict resolution efforts.
4. Kofi was a visionary leader. A man with unbreakable principles, expounded with an easy charm. His political instincts and diplomatic skills. His empathy. His deep compassion for humanity. These made him the consummate peacemaker of his time. We miss his wisdom enormously, especially in this deeply divided and dangerous moment.
5. I sometimes wonder what Kofi would make of the state of the world today. I’m sure he would be deeply troubled and frustrated; but also, stubbornly optimistic. This is a hard world, and it’s getting harder. The hopeful promise of the founders of the United Nations - *“to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”* – feels like a very distant dream.
6. We are in an age of long, deadly and, with few exceptions, wholly unnecessary wars, where men have felt free to destroy the lives of ordinary people in the service of their ideologies and ambitions.
7. We also see the laws of war shredded in plain sight. Parties to conflict no longer even pretend to abide by international humanitarian law, or by any set of rules.

Innocents across the world are killed, injured, displaced and violated with impunity. Atrocities are justified, including the deliberate targeting and killing of aid workers, so long as military objectives are achieved.

8. The numbers are chilling: global conflicts have doubled in the last 5 years, with approximately 20'000 deaths each month this year alone. At that rate, 10 more souls will be lost in the time it takes me to give these remarks.
9. Much of the world has turned a cold shoulder to this suffering. The global humanitarian appeal for USD 45 billion this year, to assist 300 million people in need, was only 19% funded as of last month.
10. Long-running conflicts are getting worse, not better. Conflict parties see new opportunities to prolong the killing, rather than incentives to end it. Peace agreements are rare, and mediation and conflict resolution efforts aren't working well enough. Dialogue has been replaced by a more transactional politics, and outcomes are determined by hard power rather than principles.

I would like to share with you a few observations I have come to learn over the years of my experience in conflict mediation.

11. International attention to and commentary on peace-making is at its highest for many years, but that focus can be incredibly narrow.
12. In addition, a great deal of hope is placed on ceasefires as means to deliver humanitarian aid. But this is akin to a doctor tackling the symptoms of disease, rather than the root causes.
13. Without a political settlement in the works, a ceasefire is a fragile thing. I know that from personal experience. Ukraine shows how wide the chasm between ceasefires and long-term political negotiation can be. Let us be clear: we need them both.
14. Right now, all eyes are on Gaza. We see joyous scenes on both sides as prisoners and hostages are freed. But widen the lens, and we are still left with vast acres of rubble across the Strip. A shattered landscape and society. Untamed hatreds. Armed men ready to inflict more suffering.
15. What does the deal struck in recent days tell us? For a start, it is a perfect, stark reminder of the power of leverage in peace-making. There is no doubt that this agreement would not have come about without the personal involvement of President Trump.
16. It's also not wrong to prioritize the release of prisoners and hostages, and a ceasefire to get aid in and save lives. We all welcome it.

17. But this is not yet about peace, no matter how many times that word is thrown around. The deal does not adequately describe, explain or set out the necessary conditions for a sustainable end to the conflict. These include arrangements for an international stabilization force and governance arrangements for Gaza. The ambiguities about IDF withdrawal, and the absence of a plan for the end of occupation and the two-state solution, are very worrying. Without these being done properly, I fear the worst.
18. We welcome these first steps, and we hope for the future. Of course we do. But that's not enough. The essential ingredient for the negotiations now is to make it more inclusive, to consult and establish a proper, accountable dialogue with all those effected. This includes firstly the Palestinian people as well as their political movements. But also, Israeli civil society and actors in the wider region, who have legitimate and important interests.
19. I am not naive. I know how complex and time consuming this can be. I am also aware of the need to maintain momentum. The pace must be kept up and parties focused on delivery of their obligations. This cannot be allowed to drag on in perpetuity. Any transition structures and mandates must be of limited duration, rather than open-ended.
20. Looking elsewhere, it is striking that the only major deal struck between Russia and Ukraine during that conflict remains the Black Sea Grain Initiative – an agreement to support global food security, and a clear example of humanitarian diplomacy. This arrangement was never intended to be temporary. It was meant as an entry point to build trust between the warring parties. Unfortunately, for various reasons, this did not happen. After a summer of much diplomatic activity, we are still in the same intractable situation, with no sign of progress.
21. Sudan is another conflict where mediation has been a slow process. However, recent signals from the Quad are encouraging. Of particular importance is the growing opposition among many Sudanese to the inclusion of the RSF in any peace settlement. How can we best balance pragmatic, practical considerations with demands for accountability? This is a classic and persistent dilemma facing all those involved in peacemaking efforts.
22. Ultimately, peace is more than the mere absence of war. To end fighting for good, we must tick many more boxes.
 - First, any plan must be rooted in respect for human rights and the rule of law. A transitional government which is truly accountable to its people; and constitutional arrangements that protect the equal rights of all its citizens.

- Second, a plan must have regional support and make a positive contribution to neighbouring states.
 - Third, we must prioritize aid and reconstruction as the foundation upon which peace sits, enable fair and equitable economic measures and investments that deliver for people.
 - Fourth, a peace process must be open to challenge by the people in legitimate and peaceful ways. Too many agreements are undermined when international attention recedes.
 - And finally, accountability for crimes committed during conflict, and a process for reconciliation and healing. A sustainable peace cannot rest on unresolved injustices, nor can justice thrive in the absence of stability. The mediator's task is to build solutions that honour both imperatives. Progress lies not in choosing one over the other, but in their harmonious co-existence.
23. These fundamental requirements for peace are both difficult and necessary. Asking the men with guns and their allies to give power to the people and their new rulers is an extraordinary demand and requires great courage from those warring leaders. Difficult but essential.
24. To see success, we need to master a new type of mediation. One that goes beyond the parties. One that consults those with genuine and essential interests and views i.e. the people and political movements on the ground.
25. This is not about some ideological bias. This is about getting it right. No business, for example, operates without asking clients what they want. This is even more critical for peace-making. This is therefore about inclusion and gender of course. But it's also about ensuring that this practice becomes the norm in mediations. (*Kofi's mediation in Kenya is a masterclass in inclusive mediation*).
26. A new style of mediation means including and promoting a new generation of peacemakers, especially from the Global South, and ensuring their active leadership in our peacemaking community.
27. Switzerland must play a central role in this endeavour and invest in the business of peacemaking. Training the new generation of mediators is a vital priority and Geneva is essential as a partner to make this happen. I believe this should focus on practice and the inter-personal skills required, much more than on policy analysis.

28. We have the need and opportunity to globalize peace-making. This should include partnerships with the Middle Powers. Qatar is one obvious example, but there are many others – Uruguay, Egypt, Turkiye, South Africa and Indonesia, to name a few.

Ladies and gentlemen,

29. I cannot end without saying something about the United Nations. It remains the principal source of legitimacy for maintaining international peace and security. It also has unique convening power. But it is fast losing its relevance. It has stepped away from primary peace-making, allowing individual states with their inherent interests, to dominate negotiations.
30. Let us be clear that any failure in multilateralism and peacemaking through the UN is primarily a failure of its Member States. The failure of the Security Council to deliver on its mandate is largely due to the blocking divisions between its 5 Permanent Members.
31. I have seen a lot of bewailing on the health of the UN from States but not yet enough commitment and determination to do something about it. The UN80 reforms, brought about in part because of funding cuts imposed by these very member states, can only go so far. It is national governments that ultimately have the responsibility and obligation to make the international system fit for our purposes today.
32. But the UN must do more. It must recover its most precious resource - its courage. It must not meekly accept irrelevance. It must elbow its way back into the centre of peace processes. It must be awkward, challenge impunity, and speak out when Member States are applying the wrecking ball approach.
33. In these dangerous times, we need the United Nations more than ever. It is still an indispensable institution. As such, its only unforgivable sin is inaction.
34. We need it to be an essential part of peace processes - to infuse peace-making with the norms, values and laws that it has stood for across its 80 years.
35. We need its presence where wars are fought. We need its judgements on how wars are fought.
36. Kofi understood that mission. He lived his life by it. His deeds and his example are why we are all here tonight. And we, as peacemakers, must fight harder to carry his legacy forward in these difficult times. Not for Kofi's sake, but for the millions of people in the world who deserve our help, and the millions more who will come after them.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

We cannot let them down.

Thank you.