

Tribute to Kofi Annan

By

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It sounds like a dream that our cherished idol and role model is now no more.

Some eleven years ago in 2007, when the first elected Chancellor, Oyeeman Wereko Ampem was long gone Legon was challenged to produce a successor. I was the Vice-Chancellor at the time, assisted by Professor Kwesi Yankah as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Registrar Teddy Konu. The following year 2008, was also going to be the 60th anniversary of the university's founding and we could not celebrate it without a chancellor in place.

After weeks of careful deliberations, the lot fell on that cool affable gentleman of international repute, who had just retired from his duties as Secretary General of UN. The plan was to have Mr. Kofi Annan's good friend, Mrs. Chinery-Hesse, a member of Council, to introduce him to us at an arranged dinner. Whereas at the time we were expecting to encounter an imposing presence, we were pleasantly surprised to meet that evening, an extremely humble personality, dressed in simple slacks, and a patterned short-sleeved shirt, with absolutely no airs about him.

On Monday, 11th August, 2008 Kofi Annan was invested as Chancellor of this University in this very Great Hall at a colourful ceremony, and sworn in by H E John Agyekum Kufuor, the then President of the Republic.

Knowing Mr Annan's heavy schedule and his unavailability for a greater part of each year, we would all congregate at his residence at the airport residential area whenever he returned home, and briefed him about events that had transpired in his absence. He would in turn take us through some of his experiences around the world, in his now vintage clear articulation of the Queen's English. On one such occasion early 2009, we were in the process of appointing a director of finance at a time all university councils had been dissolved, leaving us in a fix. After listening, he simply waved acceptance, "Go ahead and hire Phil Mandy."

Soon Uncle Kofi as we called him, took upon himself the matter of fund raising for a University in dire need of funds, to support our budget. When he then asked me of specific areas he could be of help, I pointed to certain areas within the Report of International Visitation Panel, which had been instituted to review the University's standards in academia, and infrastructure, and make relevant recommendations. The Chancellor took a copy of the Report along with him to Geneva, and subsequently asked me to speak with the President of Carnegie Corporation of New York, Vartan Gregorian, which I promptly did. The outcomes of it all:

- Carnegie sent Claudia Fritelli to discuss details and eventually accepted a proposal to fund a review of the course/credit system and the structure of the undergraduate curriculum at a cost of US\$200,000.00.
- Carnegie also later funded the Balme Library, including the establishment and equipping of the Research Commons for postgraduate training costing US\$2 million.
- Also the Next Generation of Academics project managed by Professor Yaa Ntiamoah-Baidu started with a Carnegie grant of US\$1.8 million.

His name also brought the University to the attention of George Soros' Open Society Foundations, which subsequently funded a climate change project with US\$1.6 million.

As Chairman of the Board of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), Mr. Annan visited WACCI before his appointment as Chancellor. AGRA had provided the funds for establishment of WACCI in 2007. His visit gave further visibility to the Centre which easily won a phase 2 grant of US\$5.2 million from AGRA.

Kofi was an affable personality, and full of humour. During one of our conversations, he narrated an incident at the reception of the AU office in Addis. An Army General, heavily laden with medals, arrived majestically at the entrance. Kofi whispered in the ears of another diplomat. "Look at him, they think they are the only patriots; we diplomats also die for our countries. While they die for their countries by fighting, we diplomats die for our countries through our livers," in apparent reference to the drinking bouts at the numerous receptions and cocktails in the course of their official duties.

But I also recall his love for music and dancing. At a reception held for him at the forecourt of the Great Hall, on one of his visits, he originally appeared in suit, but as the music got the better of him, Kofi said, 'must I be in this?' pointing to the tie and jacket. The answer was obvious. Swiftly the two items were removed and flung over the back of a chair. Kofi Annan was soon on the floor with his dear wife Nane, shuffling feet and twisting to the good old school music by Sam Cooke in 'Twisting the Night away.'

Kofi Annan's chancellorship lent the University great visibility whose benefits the University richly harvested.

Those of us who worked with him in his early years as Chancellor, (2008-2010), feel most honoured to have seen the best of a great diplomat at the University.

We will forever miss the global icon, Kofi Annan.

May he have eternal rest in the bosom of the Lord.

Amen.