

A Tribute to Mr. Kofi Annan
Former Chancellor, University of Ghana

by
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Soon after I was appointed Vice Chancellor, I received a phone call from Mr. Kofi Annan to congratulate me on my appointment. His gentle voice and calm demeanour came across in a quite remarkable way. He wanted to assure me of his support and his willingness to assist me in whatever way he could. It was very re-assuring that Mr. Annan should make these commitments despite his obviously busy schedule. We had a brief chat about my work at Brookings Institution and how he thought that might benefit Ghana. I felt very humbled by the chat, seeing how interested he was in my succeeding at my new job. He assured me that he would come to Ghana for my induction into office, and indeed he came for it.

My first 'real encounter' as VC with him came when he joined us for Congregation in November 2010. He was surprised that the event went well without any incident. He had had a bad experience with over-active students at a previous Congregation. He remarked after the event about how quiet the campus had become and his hope that it would remain that way permanently. I assured him that we would try our best to keep it that way. It was primarily those bad experiences with poorly behaved students and a couple of other negative experiences that made us change the format for organizing the graduation events, breaking them into smaller groups. Mr. Annan was certainly very pleased when we managed the change against all odds.

In between his annual visits for graduation, the Chairman of the University Council, Professor Justice Samuel Kofi Date-Bah and I worked out an arrangement where we would have a telephone conversation with Mr. Annan from time to time. We changed these gradually to Skype conversations which allowed us to see each other. These were very warm collegial conversations that afforded us an opportunity to apprise him of various developments at the University. We briefed him about major decisions of the University Council, and he asked questions about anything that he had read or heard about Legon. They were very useful ways of keeping him informed, which he appreciated very much. That was how I managed to draw from his wealth of experience in managing people and institutions. His great wisdom always stood out.

Needless to mention, Mr. Kofi Annan had a vast network of people and institutions that appreciated who he was, and were therefore willing to contribute to the success of anything that he was involved with. University of Ghana and I benefited from that. Whenever I was introduced anywhere around the world as the Vice Chancellor of University of Ghana, people were always quick to add "And Kofi Annan is the Chancellor". I was always proud to follow it with "Yes, he is my boss". That opened doors for me. His being my boss enhanced my status among Vice Chancellors and College Presidents all over the world. Many Vice Chancellors thought I was fortunate to have him as my Chancellor, a view that was shared by my mentor, the late Professor Alexander Adum Kwapong, former Vice

Chancellor of University of Ghana. He said to me when I took office, “Ernest, if you have Kofi Annan as your Chancellor and Kofi Date-Bah as your Chairman of Council, you cannot afford to fail as Vice Chancellor”. Yes, I knew I could not afford to fail. That is where I drew my inspiration from.

As we mourn the passing away of Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to him for his kindness towards me and for the words of wisdom that he imparted whenever the opportunity arose. He was committed to University of Ghana and did what he could to support it. He was a warm-hearted person who believed in doing the right things for the institutions he was associated with, simply for the fact that it was the right and honourable thing to do. His death is a big blow to all of us who worked with him and to the entire world.

May Mr. Kofi Annan’s gentle soul Rest in Peace.