



## UNITED NATIONS GETS NEW LEADERSHIP

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*New leadership at the United Nations could bring new energy to efforts to end the Middle East and Sudan crises.*

South Korea's Ban Ki-moon, who assumed the United Nations' top leadership position in January, is the international organization's eighth secretary-general since it was founded in 1945.

During his swearing-in ceremony on Dec. 14, the 62-year-old former minister of foreign affairs in South Korea laid out an ambitious agenda, including efforts to bring peace and stability to the Middle East and Sudan's Darfur region.

"I will do everything in my power to ensure that our United Nations can live up to its name, and be truly united, so that we can live up to the hopes that so many people around the world place in this institution, which is unique in the annals of human history," he said.

### **The secretary-general**

The secretary-general is the spokesman and leader of the United Nations. He (or she, although there has yet to be a female secretary-general) is a diplomat, advocate, civil servant and chief executive officer.

Kofi Annan, who is stepping down from this position after 10 years, describes it as "the world's most impossible job."

Because the secretary-general is seen as an independent and impartial figure he can have great influence on world events.

According to Article 99 in the U.N. Charter, the secretary-general has the authority "to bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security."

But the secretary-general needs member states to give him the money, manpower and expertise to make change happen.

According to David Grubin, who produced a documentary about Annan, the secretary-general has the "excruciating position of speaking the language of moral obligation without the authority to act."

### **Who is Ban Ki-moon?**

While lacking Annan's high profile, Ban Ki-moon said about himself: "I may look soft from the outside, but I have inner strength when it's really necessary."

He defeated six other candidates for the job and will be first Asian to lead the United Nations in 35 years.

But even before he started, the new secretary-general's effectiveness has come into question in part because of South Korea's slide into diplomatic disorder since he assumed the role of foreign minister in 2004.

"He is competent, clean and careful, and these are all qualities you want as a secretary-general, but he has not done anything to distinguish himself either as foreign minister or before," said Peter Beck, the head of the International Crisis Group's Seoul office.

Yet his supporters see him as a mediator and a world-class administrator, pointing to his ability to get China's support even with its rough political history with South Korea.

### **A tough organization to run**

The current United Nations has 92,000 peacekeepers, a \$5 billion annual budget, and a reputation for being unable to deal with the world's toughest challenges.

According to Stephen Schlesinger, author of "Act of Creation: the Founding of the United Nations," Ban's top priorities include handling the situation in Darfur, the nuclear issue with North Korea and Iran, resolving the crisis of global terrorism and failed states.

Two new programs also require oversight -- the Democracy Fund and the Peacebuilding Commission, which could become powerful tools in the U.N. mission to end genocide and injustice.

In addition, Ban has emphasized his resolve to repair relations between the United Nations' rich and poor member states, who have fought bitterly over parts of an organizational reform program proposed by Annan.

### **Repairing relations with the United States**

Another issue remains -- of repairing relations damaged by President Bush's unsuccessful attempt to get U.N. support for the invasion of Iraq.

Ban has said he will personally work to resolve the differences of opinion between the United States and the world body and ensure constructive U.S. participation in all U.N. activities.

### **Ban Ki-moon: diplomat since high school**

The eldest of six children, Ban first aspired to become a diplomat when, as an 18-year-old student in 1962, he met President Kennedy at the White House while participating in an American Red Cross program.

He later studied international relations at Seoul National University and earned a master's degree in public administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

Ban and his wife have two daughters and one son.

-- *Compiled by Sehrish Shaban for NewsHour Extra*

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