Former UN chief Kofi Annan passes away at 80

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Former United Nations chief and Nobel Peace Prize laureate General Kofi Annan passed away at the age of 80, following a short illness. Annan, a Ghanaian national, died in hospital in Bern, Switzerland, in the early hours of Saturday. He is survived by his wife and three children.

Announcing the news of the leaderâ€™s demise, the Kofi Annan Foundation wrote on its Twitter page, â€œIt is with immense sadness that the Annan family and the Kofi AnnanÂ Foundation announce that Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of theÂ United Nations and Nobel Peace Laureate, passed away peacefully onÂ Saturday 18th August after a short illness.â€•

Remembering the late leader, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said in a statement, â€œIn many ways, Kofi Annan was the United Nations. He rose through the ranks to lead the organization into the new millennium with matchless dignity and determination.â€•

Annan was the first black African to assume the office of worldâ€™s top diplomat, serving two terms as secretary-general from January 1, 1997 to December 31, 2006. He later also served as the UN special envoy for conflict-ridden Syria. In 2001, Annan and the UN were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The United Nations flag flies at half staff in honor of former Secretary-General Kofi Annan at UN headquarters, Saturday, Aug. 18, 2018. (AP Photo)

His tenure at United Nations witnessed one of the most turbulent periods since the founding of the world body in 1945. Annan faced criticism for UNâ€™s failure to halt the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990s, during his term as head of UN peacekeeping operations.

As UN chief he was linked to peace efforts to reunite the divided island of Cyprus. In 2007, he helped broker peace in Kenya, where over a thousand were killed in election violence.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Raâ€™ad al-Hussein, remembered Annan as â€œhumanityâ€™s best example, the epitome, of human decency and grace.â€•

Pope John Paul II (R) with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan during a private audience at the Vatican April 15, 1997. (Reuters)

Paying tribute to Annan, French President Emannuel Macron said, "France pays tribute to him. We will never forget his calm and resolute approach to matters, nor the strength of his commitments."

British PM Theresa May condoled the death, saying "A great leader and reformer of the UN, he made a huge contribution to making the world he has left a better place than the one he was born into."

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