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features

Farewell to Kofi Annan

Nobel peace laureate Annan, who was the world body's first leader from sub-Saharan Africa, died on August 18 after a brief illness. He was 80



People pay their last respects to Kofi Annan, Ghanaian diplomat and former Secretary General of United Nations

AFP | Accra, Ghana

A steady stream of mourners yesterday paid their respects to the former UN secretary general Kofi Annan as he lay in state in the capital of his native Ghana.

The diplomat's body was flown back from Switzerland on Monday ahead of a state funeral and private burial in Accra on Thursday.

Nobel peace laureate Annan, who was the world body's first leader from sub-Saharan Africa, died on August 18 after a brief illness. He was 80.

Draped in Ghana's red, green and gold flag, his coffin was guarded by senior military officers in ceremonial uniform at the Accra International Conference Centre.

There were traditional dances and a choir sang hymns as the public filed past, taking their chance to say a proud farewell to one of the country's most famous sons.

Fritz Kitcher, who spent his career working in human rights for the United Nations in Geneva, said he had watched Annan rise through the ranks.

Now retired and back living in Ghana, he said Annan had taught him "the benefit of humility, the benefit of honesty, the benefit of decisiveness, and diplomacy from the grassroots".

Annan's role as the UN's first black African leader was "an honour for Ghana", Kitcher said.

'He lifted Africa'

"It was marvellous in our eyes, it



A military salutes the coffin of Kofi Annan

was one of these things that we can only dream... he lifted Africa and showed that we are also able to do great things," he told AFP.

Jennifer Asuako, a programme analyst with the UN in Ghana, said Annan was widely respected, humble and an inspiration to his colleagues.

She pledged to "keep the torch burning" on gender equality, an area where he showed great

dedication.

"He made the whole world understand promoting equality between men and women is not an issue of women only, but it's an issue for sustainable development," she said.

"There are a lot of Ghanaians who can take on the mantle and do similar, like he did, but not like him because he is a unique individual."



An artist paints a portrait of Kofi Annan at the entrance of Accra International Conference Centre in Accra



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'Our great father'

Most of those queuing to pay their respects wore black and red mourning clothes, passing under large posters of the late diplomat to the sound of pulsating drums.

Cleaner Akwo Kwame Johnson, from neighbouring Ivory Coast said he wanted to pay his last respects to "our great father".

Whenever he saw Annan in the news, Johnson said he felt like he was watching a family member.

"He was a president to all the world," he added.

Pensioner Joyce Atiase said she was mourning the loss of a "great man". "We all loved him.

He played a major role for our country, he did his best," she said.

Anyekai Oddoye, who works in Ghana's cocoa sector, said he whispered a prayer as he passed his coffin and wished him well.

"Everyone respects him," she said, adding that the state honours were no more than he deserved.

"It shows the extent of how we hold him up here," she added.

Scores of world leaders past and present, as well as royalty, are expected in Accra for Annan's funeral on Thursday.

A private burial service will then be held in the city's military cemetery.