

Instrument of Peace
The new U.N. secretary-general, Kofi Annan, has a monumental task:
to usher the United Nations into the 21st century.

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On Dec. 17, 1996, the United Nations elected a new secretary-general. Replacing Boutros Boutros-Ghali is Kofi Annan, a native of Ghana. His term of office will run from Jan. 1, 1997, to Dec. 31, 2001.

Fluent in English, French and several African languages, Mr. Annan has spent most of the past two decades working at the United Nations, most recently as under-secretary-general for Peace-Keeping Operations. In this position, he was responsible for negotiating the repatriation of more than 900 international staff and the release of Western hostages in Iraq following that country's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. He also initiated discussions on the "oil for food" formula to ease the crisis in Iraq and oversaw the transition from the U.N. Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia to the multinational Implementation Force led by NATO, following the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement. Mr. Annan has also served in the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization.

Thus far in his career as an international civil servant, Mr. Annan has been seen as extremely effective and reliable — Djibouti Ambassador Roble Olhaye calls him a man of "moderation and good management style as a consensus builder." Concerning his future work at the United Nations, Mr. Annan has said: "A new understanding of peace and security must emerge. The world is beginning to recognize the many roots of conflict, the economic base of stability, and the grim truth that intolerance, injustice and oppression — and their consequences — respect no national frontiers."

The task before him now is to usher the United Nations into the 21st century. Many have criticized the United Nations recently for its need to reform. Many have criticized the United Nations for not being effective enough in various arenas throughout the world. But no one can dispute the importance of the United Nations in the future. Mr. Annan is acutely aware of all of this.

In a speech to the General Assembly on the day of his appointment, Mr. Annan said: "The United Nations is your instrument of peace and justice.... It can be no wiser, no more competent and no more efficient than those member states that now comprise and guide it.... Alone, I can do nothing. Together, we can irreversibly advance the frontiers of peace, dignity and justice for all humankind."

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