

Homage to Ban Ki-moon, His Empathy and Willingness to Help Others

Anote Tong
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Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate Anote Tong

Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, Dr. Il-sik Hong, chairman of the Sunhak Peace Prize, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and of course, our recipient of the award this morning, whose achievements we are celebrating, His Excellency former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

Let me begin by expressing how deeply honored and grateful I am to be able to be given this opportunity to make a few remarks. I don't want to go through the process of expounding on all of the achievements of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. They are all listed in the book that is in front of you. But I

can tell you there are many, many, many more which are not listed here. I can tell you that from my own experience in interacting with Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon over the years when he was secretary-general, and when I was in office. I remember the times when I was talking about climate change, and I was always trying to pester Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to hear me because I felt nobody else was listening to me. And I remember the time, Mr. Secretary-General, when you invited me to join twenty-six leaders, mostly from the developed world at a dinner before a meeting at Copenhagen. And I think Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon did that very deliberately because I had been saying a lot of things about climate change. And he wanted to see what I would do in the midst of the president of the United States, the president of China, all of these big people from big countries.

And I recall Mr. Ban Ki Moon looking at me while all of the discussion was going on. And in a sense inviting me to comment. Eventually, I built up the courage to say a few words, and I scribbled a note "Can I make a few remarks?" and I did.

Seeing is believing

Ever since that time, I think Mr. Ban Ki Moon listens to the voice of and the messages coming from those in small countries. The people who attend the United Nations without really being seen, without really being heard. And I say this with a great deal of emotion because Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was the first one to listen to what I was saying, even to the point of being convinced to visit my country in 2011. I remember that very, very distinctly. I remember Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon going on a tour to visit all the places that are flooded very frequently. To visit the people who suffer every time there is flooding, a bit of a storm. And I remember the Secretary-General coming back in the evening as we met before the reception, and I asked him, So what have you seen? And I can never forget what he said. He said, "Mr. President, I have been listening to you year after year at the United Nations General Assembly. And I must admit that I never truly understood, but now not only do I understand, but I feel it, and I promise you I will do everything in my power to do as much as I can.

And ladies and gentlemen, he has done that. He delivered his promise. He has succeeded in putting what is regarded as the greatest challenge to humanity, he succeeded in putting climate change at the top of the

UN agenda. Secretary-General Ban did not elaborate on all of the good things that he did. He did not make reference to the establishment of the Green Climate Plan, which is also a product of his time as secretary-general. Here in Korea, we have the Global Green Growth Institute. In 2016, following a meeting in the Pacific, we, the Pacific region, our small islands, dots, in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. What do we have? Islands. Small Islands. But huge ocean states. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon succeeded in putting oceans, recognizing not only the relevance but the critical importance of oceans, not only to the changing climate but to humanity. With the result that now the ocean is an integral part, a key part, a critical part of the international agenda.



Sunhak Founders' Award recipient Ban Ki-Moon

A man of the people

In all of these interactions that I had with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, there are two things that I observed. Unlike many people, he is comfortable interacting with the biggest leaders, leaders from the biggest countries, and also very sympathetic to interact with leaders from small countries. Not only that, but I can see as we have all seen from what he has done -- the sustainable development agenda, the focus on the women's issues, now climate change -- but my perspective on Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon is that he is one of the greatest humanitarian people that I know, perhaps in the world. He cared about the small people. He was

willing to step forward and take the burden of the small people.

Ladies and gentlemen, many people asked me, Where is your prepared speech? And I said I don't want to read a speech. I want to speak from my heart. As a former secretary-general, he is a man with the courage to step forward and do things that many others would shy away from. The engagement of civil society, the engagement of the private sector, the engagement of people outside of the government in international discussions, these are some things that as secretary-general brought in during his term in office. To tackle climate change, this was absolutely vital.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I am very proud to take this opportunity to offer my congratulations -- the congratulations, I am sure, of all of us here -- but also the congratulations of our people, the vulnerable people, the people that have benefited and will benefit from the work of Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. He unreservedly deserves the honor that has been bestowed on him. Congratulations once again, and may you live forever. Thank you.