

Congenial collaboration brought tangible results



By Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser -- *Thursday, December 29, 2016*

I have known Mr. Ban Ki-moon for more than a decade. In the next few paragraphs, I will talk about the man that I had the privilege to work with, as our paths crossed together since 2001 while juggling different portfolios within and across the U.N. system.

In 2001, Mr. Ban was the Chief of Cabinet of the President of 56th Session of the U.N. General Assembly and I was the Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations.

In 2006, the State of Qatar, my country, started serving a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the U.N. Security Council. It was the same year Mr. Ban was elected as the eighth U.N. secretary-general. Qatar supported Mr. Ban as an Asian candidate.

In 2011, I was elected President of the 66th Session of the U.N. General Assembly. It was a dynamic and eventful year, as it witnessed the political transformations that took the Arab world by storm. It was also a significant year in our working relationship. Our solid cooperation, which was cemented along the years, was manifested in two historically significant trips that we undertook together.

The first trip was to Libya on Nov. 2, 2011. We were the first high-level officials to visit Tripoli right after the change of the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The joint visit demonstrated the U.N.'s strong support for the Libyans as they embarked in their critical journey of reconciliation, democracy and reconstruction.

The second joint mission was to Somalia on Dec. 9, 2011. It was the first visit by the U.N. secretary-general and a sitting president of the U.N. General Assembly. The devastating situation in Somalia had slightly improved due to increased humanitarian assistance. Three out of six regions were lifted out of famine a month earlier.

A roadmap was adopted in September of that year. That was an opportune moment to reaffirm to the Somali people the support of the international community. I had proposed the visit to Mr. Ban during our monthly luncheons. He agreed with enthusiasm.

We met in Nairobi, as Mr. Ban was arriving from a climate change summit in South Africa. As we were reviewing our plans, the chief of security entered the room to let us know that our itinerary had been leaked. The Boeing 737 that will be transferring us would be an easy target. We were advised to postpone the trip for our own safety. We agreed that postponing our trip would send the wrong signal to a country that sorely needed our support. I suggested to Secretary-General Ban and our security detail that we arrive earlier than anticipated. And this what we did. We safely made our way to the Somali presidential office at Villa Somalia. The visit demonstrated how the U.N. secretary-general and the president of the U.N. General Assembly working together could enhance the visibility and effectiveness of the United Nations.

In a similar way, we continued to work closely together again as of 2013 to date. It was the year I assumed the position of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC). The Alliance is the political initiative of the U.N. secretary-general, co-sponsored by the governments of Spain and Turkey. His efforts have advanced UNAOC causes by upholding our shared values: peace, dialogue, tolerance, respect and diversity. He has regularly participated not only in our annual high-level ministerial meetings and global fora. But he has done more. He has actively engaged in supporting our project activities, participating in UNAOC youth events, summer school, and the Intercultural Innovation Awards. His active engagement has been energizing for all of us, and if I may say so, for him as well.

I have been deeply privileged to work by his side. Together, we have made important gains and I can say that the progress we made in activities, in which we both collaborated closely in the past years, is our shared legacy.

During his decade-long leadership, Mr. Ban has demonstrated his diplomatic skills in a quiet and an unassuming demeanor in a global arena rattled by turmoil. His door has always been open to everyone, including his critics.

I am very proud to have known Mr. Ban not only as a reliable and respected colleague but also as a loyal and devoted friend.

Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser is the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

Copyright © 2016 The Washington Times, LLC. [Click here for reprint permission.](#)