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'Global is local and local is global,' Secretary-General tells hometown audience



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is embraced by his mother Shin Hyun Soon as he visits his birthplace Eumseong, a small farming village in North Chungcheong

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United Nations [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon went back to his roots today, visiting his hometown of Eumseong county in the Republic of Korea's countryside, where he urged local residents to concern themselves with the world at large.

The Secretary-General was greeted by villagers and officials who arranged a ceremony in his honour. Expressing appreciation for their warm welcome, he stressed that all of their efforts toward him should be invested instead in the United Nations.

He urged participants to think of themselves not just as residents of Eumseong county but citizens of the world. “Global is local and local is global,” he said. “You may live here in Eumseong county but you have access to the world.”

Among those welcoming the Secretary-General was his 92-year old mother, Shin Hyun Soon, who embraced her son as well as other members of his party. The two held hands as they moved among the assembled gathering of friends and neighbours.

The Secretary-General echoed his call for engagement during a visit to his alma mater, Chungju High School. Addressing students, he remembered the principal telling him to keep his head above the clouds and his feet planted firmly on the ground. “Dream big and be realistic,” he told the audience.

The Secretary-General said his principal's words had inspired him to enter an essay contest, which he won, along with the chance to travel to the United States, where he met President John F. Kennedy in what he called “the most inspiring moment in my life.”

Mr. Ban said listening to the President speak prompted him to consider his own future and role. “I thought about how Korea was such a poor and underdeveloped country, I considered what I could do to make Korea a better place. And I decided to become a diplomat.”

This was a distant goal for a poor boy from Eumseong county, he said, and one that demanded a willingness to try and beat the odds.

Pointing out that the students present enjoyed far greater prosperity, security and opportunity than his generation, he asked that they not forget these gains were hard won through sacrifice.

“Now you can go to better universities, you can live comfortably, but you should not be satisfied with that.” He asked the students to engage in helping to address hunger, poverty, climate change and other global threats. “Each and every one of you can be a critical agent of change,” he said.

“You need to have a sense of reality and lofty dreams. This will be your road to success. I have never forgotten this maxim. Please build a bigger vision, be patient and do your best. Do not settle for your current environment. Look beyond your boundaries.”

Mr. Ban specifically called on the students to see past the frontiers of the Republic of Korea. “Still one billion people around the world go to bed hungry. Millions of young people die from malaria. Many, many women die in childbirth. These tragedies are not acceptable and they can be fixed.”

The Secretary-General said he had been deeply moved earlier in the day to visit a reconstructed version of his childhood home located in the nearby mountains. The thatched-roof structure where he grew up in a family of eight had two bedrooms, each accessible through a small doorway and separated by a kitchen which was centrally located so that its wood-burning oven would heat both when used.

Members of his family were there to accompany him as he toured the reconstruction of his old home. The original had been demolished after it became too old to function.

Reminiscing about life as a boy, he said, “It is amazing that they have built almost the same house. It really reminds me of my old days.”

He recalled hearing words of advice from his elders there. “I still remember my grandfather was saying, 'Ki-moon, you study hard. You study hard.' He's been always trying to tell me that.”

The Secretary-General began his day in Eumseong by climbing a winding, paved path up the hill from his old home, past cornfields and rows of red-pepper plants, to his father's burial site. Two straw mats laid out in front of the grave held a low wooden table prepared by his family with offerings of fresh fruit, cookies, meats, wine and incense.

Following the Confucian tradition, the Secretary-General, his wife, and other members of their family took turns bowing solemnly two and a half times each to pay their respects to the deceased, and taking ritual sips of rice wine.

Mr. Ban then walked back down the steep mountain path to an open-air wooden family shrine with a small courtyard at the front. Joined by other relatives, he removed his shoes before entering the building, which featured a row of flat cabinets against the main wall that opened to reveal paintings of his ancestors. There, too, participants bowed in silence, sipped rice wine in turn, and listened reverently as a family elder sang a traditional verse in memory of the deceased.

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