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Ban hails refugee champion Fridtjof Nansen as bearer of world's conscience



Portrait of Fridtjof Nansen, New York, 1929

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today hailed the renowned Norwegian explorer and refugee champion Fridtjof Nansen, on the 150th anniversary of his birth, as the very embodiment of the world's collective conscience that brings succour to the downtrodden, the afflicted and the oppressed.

“The greatest barriers in life are not walls around buildings, but walls around hearts,” he [told](#) a ceremony in Oslo, Norway’s capital, commemorating the “great global citizen” who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, served as the League of Nations’ first High Commissioner for Refugees, and has given his name to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees’ ([UNHCR](#)) annual [Nansen Refugee Award](#) for outstanding work on behalf of refugees.

“Gaze on the face of Fridtjof Nansen. It is the very embodiment of strength and human fortitude,” Mr. Ban said, stressing that the collective conscience springs from a basic human instinct for solidarity – the recognition that we are one human family on this one planet Earth.

“The man was a hero, to be sure. He climbed high mountains and traversed the Arctic vastness.

For those of us at the United Nations, however, he is a hero for the larger and enduring example he set. Like few others, he helped give birth to our modern collective conscience. Amid the revolutions and conflict of the last century, he was there – the first High Commissioner for Refugees at the League of Nations.

“When Jews and other stateless refugees fled the Nazi persecution, the Nansen Pass was a ticket to survival. Today, the United Nations feeds and shelters a new generation of the homeless and unwanted. We do so in the name and spirit of Fridtjof Nansen. We do so in the name of our collective conscience.”

Mr. Ban, who was in Oslo to attend an energy conference aimed at mobilizing private capital and public resources to bring sustainable energy to three billion people that still lack it, also paid tribute to the dozens of people who died on 22 July as a result of that day’s bomb attack in Oslo and gun assault on a nearby holiday island.

“Norway responded to devastation with democracy, to intolerance with inclusion,” he said at the site. “Norway is grieving – but Norway is giving. I am confident you will continue reaching out to the world and lifting up humanity. There is no more fitting memorial than that.”

During the day Mr. Ban held bilateral meetings with Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and other top officials, discussing Libya and the Middle East, next year’s Rio+20 Conference on sustainable Development, and strengthening the UN to meet today’s complex challenges.

He praised the Government’s commitment to multilateralism, and later addressed the Norwegian Parliament’s committees on foreign affairs and constitutional affairs.

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