

# U.N. refugee chief resigns, denies sexual harassment accusations

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**UNITED NATIONS** — After months of criticism, Secretary-General Kofi Annan decided that U.N. refugee chief Ruud Lubbers had to go because of the growing controversy over allegations that the former Dutch prime minister had sexually harassed female staffers.

Lubbers didn't go easily. He resigned Sunday but proclaimed his innocence, saying he felt

insulted and accusing Annan of giving in to "media pressure."

At a meeting with Annan on Friday, U.N. diplomats said the secretary-general offered the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees two choices: resign or face suspension and charges of breaking U.N. rules.

Allegations first surfaced last year that he had made unwanted sexual advances toward a female employee, identified in media reports as an American. But it was only on Friday that the British

newspaper *The Independent* published the first detailed description of her allegations and statements from four other women who didn't file official complaints but claimed Lubbers sexually harassed them.

As the United Nations struggles to improve its image in the face of scandals over the U.N. oil-for-food program and sexual abuse by U.N. peacekeepers in Congo, diplomats said Annan decided that Lubbers had become a liability but he was also a fighter.

After defiantly telling reporters that Annan had not asked for his resignation and he intended to complete his five-year term, Lubbers flew home to Geneva on Friday. But after he left U.N. headquarters, Annan's office contradicted the refugee chief, saying the prime topic of the meeting was his future.

U.N. lawyers then started preparing charges against him, U.N. diplomats said on condition of anonymity.

Apparently knowing what was coming, Lubbers, 65, decided to resign on Sunday before being suspended.

In his letter of resignation, Lubbers maintained his innocence, indicating that Annan wanted him to step

down. "For more than four years I gave all my energy to UNHCR," he said. "Now in the middle of a series of problems and with ongoing media pressure you apparently view this differently."

"To be frank, and despite all my loyalty, insult has now been added to injury and therefore I resign as high commissioner," Lubbers said.

On Friday, he insisted the allegations of sexual harassment were "made up" and "slander."

He vehemently denied the female employee's allegation that he put his arms around her waist, pulled her back toward him and pressed his groin into her at the end of a meeting in December 2003.

## ■ CUTS

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spending to about a 1 percent increase the smallest in years. But of the 65 programs he then proposed eliminating to save \$4.9 billion, lawmakers killed four, saving just \$270 million.

In another measure of the staying power of most federal programs, of the 154 programs Bush wants to kill or cut this year, he has targeted 86 in the past including 41 he has tried erasing or trimming every year since becoming president in 2001.

Administration officials say every program on their list has shown little evidence of effectiveness.

"Will we get everything we want? Probably not, but by doing this we help assure overall spending isn't growing so fast" that it hinders Bush's effort to control deficits, said White House budget office spokesman Chad Kolton.

Democrats say Bush's proposed cuts will hurt needed programs. They also complain that the budget's overall \$389 billion for non-security programs is just 15 percent of total federal spending. Eliminate all of them and there still would be a budget shortfall, they argue.

"They end up doing a world of hurt for very little effect on the bottom line," Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C., said of Bush's suggested reductions.

House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle, R-Iowa, and Senate Budget Committee Chairman Judd Gregg, R-N.H., have agreed to try to include Bush's 1 percent cut in non-security spending in the congressional budget they will write in coming weeks.

But underlining the shaky fate of Bush's effort to kill or cut specific items, Gregg said he was not sure he would support one of those proposals to cut a prison construction program, perhaps affecting work on a prison in New Hampshire.

Even many of Washington's staunchest supporters of spending cuts say they doubt Congress will eliminate and cut the programs targeted by Bush. They also doubt Bush's own willingness to fight hard for his proposed cuts.

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