



**AUSTRALIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
OF FORMER  
INTERNATIONAL  
CIVIL SERVANTS  
(AAFICS)**



**VOL. XXXVI, No. II**

**NEWSLETTER**

**JULY 2023**

*AAFICS represents retired officials from the United Nations and its agencies and funds. Former officials of other international organizations are also welcome to become members. We offer a link to UN retirees through occasional social events, as well as contacts for information and advice about retirement in Australia. We are affiliated to FAFICS in Geneva, the Federation of 63 Associations similar to ours and an essential source of advice on pension-related issues and on after-service-health insurance schemes. This newsletter has been prepared and circulated on a voluntary basis by the AAFICS membership.*



The wisdom of the old adage 'the first casualty of War is Truth' continues to ring clear as we witness misinformation, disinformation and propaganda pouring out of conflict situations in Ukraine, Russia, Sudan, Syria and elsewhere. It goes without saying that every side in every war seeks to influence public opinion and to shape a positive view of its interests and political viewpoints. Often, ensconced in our comfortable homes here in Australia while consuming radio/television/on-line news, we are inclined to forget that brave journalists are gathering the information we need to make our own judgements on what is actually happening in the world. Reporters don't always get it right, but they provide us, often at their own peril, with first-hand accounts of what is afoot in conflict zones. Moreover, their reportage can expose potential war crimes, thus highlighting issues to be investigated by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The UN Secretary-General has described journalists in war zones as essential workers for a 'durable peace'. Too often, reporters, both locally-based and international, are killed or injured while carrying out their essential roles. Many have already died during the war in Ukraine. It's important to remember their sacrifice. **Editor**

---

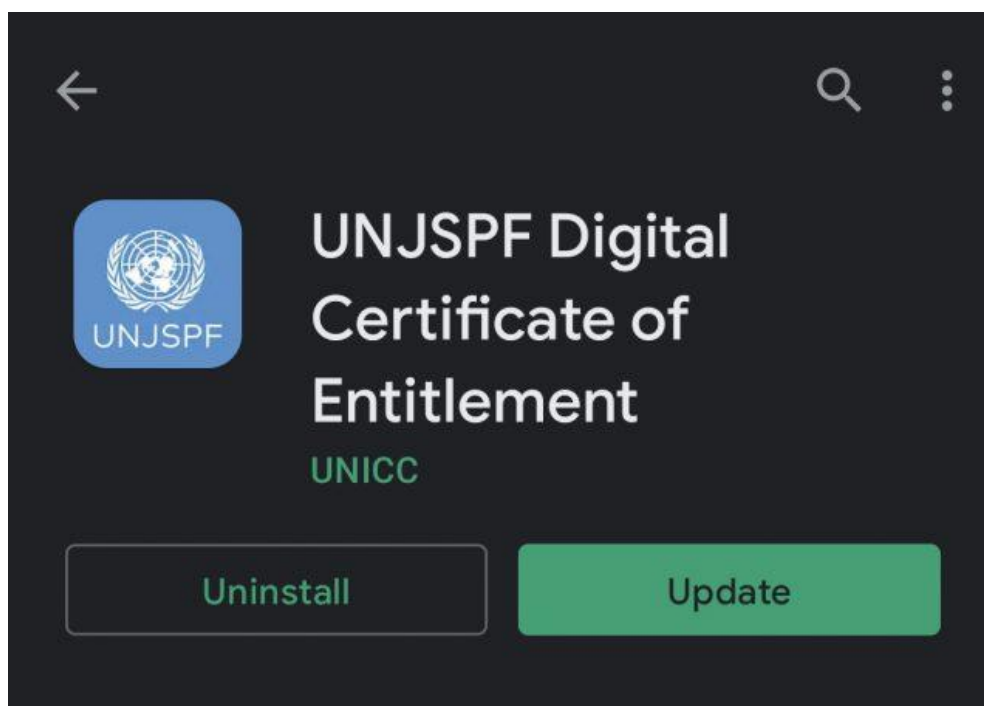
## PRESIDENT'S REPORT: JENNIFER ASHTON

---

It has been a very social few months, as Melbourne, Brisbane, Hobart and Sydney have arranged lunches. Peter and Ivy Steele, the new Victorian Coordinators, arranged a wonderful gathering, the first since COVID struck! Unfortunately, COVID struck yet again and Mike Patto, the retiring coordinator and his wife Lorraine, were unable to participate. Fortunately, this gives us all an excuse to have another lunch when we can thank them for their valuable contribution over the years.

We also welcome Sharon Vanbuerle as the new WA Coordinator (effective April this year) and thank Monina Magallanes for her long service to AAFICS. A number of you have already sent messages to Monina in appreciation of her hard and dedicated work.

We have just completed our annual exercise to track down pension beneficiaries who have not returned their CE. Failure to do so can result in suspension of pension payment. We were successful, thanks to the diligence of our State Coordinators, in managing to track down 9 of 14 missing beneficiaries. As usual, there were a few who just plain overlooked the form, but the majority had reached that time of life where they were increasingly incapacitated and moved to intensive aged care facilities with no-one around who understood the importance of a CE. Another group are those who are the foreign spouses or children of deceased Australian beneficiaries who have trouble understanding the paperwork that they must deal with. In two cases, Coordinators have worked with the most computer-literate kids in the family to help them set up the systems that will prevent a recurrence.

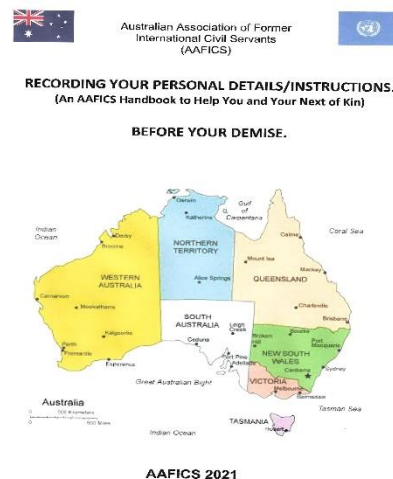


During this exercise, AAFICS learnt two important lessons, that I pass on to you. The first is that UNJSPF does not recognise the full parameters of the Australian Power of Attorney which we commonly use to help manage the affairs of our more infirm beneficiaries. While we can continue to manage the daily affairs of a loved one, UNJSPF will not recognise the right of a trustee to sign a CE on the beneficiary's behalf. In the past several years, we only had one case where the husband who was in a retirement home and whose wife was in a dementia

ward submitted all his trustee documents to UNJSPF and signed the CE on behalf of his wife. When this was rejected, he could not bear the impact on her of fingerprinting for the CE so he went to court to get a court recognised guardianship (which cost him the better part of \$2000). This year, we encountered four beneficiaries who are no longer able to sign the CE and, in one case, a Trustee Company appointed to manage her affairs had their signature rejected. While I can understand the caution of UNJSPF in this matter, given that they have beneficiaries in countries from Afghanistan to Zambia, I feel that AAFICS should investigate recognition of Power of Attorney further, given that both the UK and Canada have had their system accepted. Are there any lawyers among our membership who would like to take on a pet project for the benefit of our members?

The second lesson relates to making sure that clear instructions are left for any family members who will be managing your pension affairs. We had one case where the pension beneficiary had died some 2 years before UNSPF contacted AAFICS to try and locate him. During that time, I presume that his full pension had been paid. I have tried to clarify with UNSPF what the procedures are in this sort of case, but am yet to find out. One hopes the elderly widow will not be penalised. The clear message though is to be prepared. Some years ago, the Victorian Branch put together a very useful booklet on preparing for your demise, which includes how to do this as well as other practical tips. Our editor will make sure there is a link to this publication.

Incidentally, he (the beneficiary, not the editor) sounds rather a character, as I learnt from his eulogy. He was raised in a pub by his widowed mother, left school early to work variously as a jackeroo and deckhand, before working a passage to Hong Kong, where he wanted to become a war correspondent. When this failed, he tried to stow away on a boat returning to Australia and spent 6 weeks in prison for his efforts. Somehow, he worked his way to the USA after being accepted into university there, emerged some years later with a doctorate in agriculture and a firm commitment to helping the poor farmers. Where else could he go but to the UN.



I do not have anything major to report about the Pension Fund, except to note that no news is good news. The ruckus of last year over possible external management of our funds has abated, as UNSPF has now recruited the skilled personnel it needed to do so itself. The UNSPF website and newsletter are very clear and you can find out about our investments, our rate of return and the sustainability model that has been adopted. I will attend the FAFICS (our umbrella organisation for country based AFICS) meeting remotely. It will be held in Vienna in July.

I hope that you will all stay warm and snug during the winter months. I am busy making sure that the garden is well mulched in case the dreaded El Nino returns!

**Jennifer Ashton, AAFICS President**

---

*[Editor's note: As the excellent 'Recording Your Personal Details/Information Handbook' mentioned by Jennifer is over 26 pages in length, we are asking all State Coordinators to attach a copy when they send this July Newsletter to AAFICS members. If, for any reason, you do not receive it as an attachment, please contact me for a copy.]*

---

**COOEE!**

**REPORTS FROM BRANCHES**

---



---

**QUEENSLAND**

Our AAFICS Queensland routine has been to get together for lunch twice a year, alternating between much-appreciated, long-used venues in Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast hinterland. Alas, all good things come to an end. Barbara and Klaus, who had hosted us at their German-themed restaurant for over a decade in Maleny, took a well-earned retirement just after our Spring 2021 event. This led to three consecutive lunches in Brisbane including our recent May get together attended by 22 members.

I can now advise that we have found a new venue for our next lunch which has been fixed for Wednesday 25 October – Queenslanders please note that date on your calendars; holidaying out-of-state AAFICS members would also be most welcome to attend. The venue is Birches Restaurant at Mount Mee, which is 66km north-west of Brisbane, and a similar distance from the Sunshine Coast. It's a casual, relaxed venue with a good menu, friendly staff and great views from its 500m elevation.



*Mid-year Queensland AAFICS lunch over, but there is always much more to discuss (l to r) Tim Henry (UNMIK/UNRWA), Mike and Eileen Sackett (FAO/WFP/UNDP), Mary Petr (FAO) and Cheryl Williams (ITU).*

Some of you will already know that Australia's arguably most eminent international civil servant ever, Jim Ingram, died on 15 February this year in Canberra, aged 94. Jim served two terms as the World Food Programme's Executive Director from 1982 to 1992, after a lengthy period in the Australian diplomatic service. In the 1980s WFP was a large, successful UN programme handling food assistance, but with a bizarre organisational arrangement giving ultimate authority to FAO in Rome and UNDP in the field. Ingram's legacy was an effectively independent WFP with its own Board and operational structures, and which today is said to be the largest humanitarian agency in the world. Jim's life will be celebrated at ANU, Canberra on the evening of Wednesday 9 August.

I mention Jim Ingram because he was my ultimate boss when I joined WFP, having transferred from FAO in February 1984. I had been assigned to Bangladesh as 'WFP Adviser' in Dhaka. I reported to the 'WFP Director of Operations' who in turn reported the 'WFP Representative' aka the UN Resident Representative, usually a very busy individual with little understanding of the complexities of food assistance. This was part of the nonsense which Ingram managed to sort out.

I recall meeting Jim to get my marching instructions for Dhaka. Apparently, our office had been selected to receive two desk-top computers to determine if they could conceivably be useful in an office dealing with mountains of data related to labour-intensive food-for-work schemes. Jim was sceptical of anything related to computers, having previously had his fingers burned by some unsuccessful word-processing system using the WFP mainframe computer. Within three years, WFP had hundreds of desk top computers in operation around the world.

In 2007 James Ingram produced a book “Bread and Stones” sub-titled Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the UN World Food Programme – a great read if you’re into that kind of thing.

**Mike Sackett, Queensland State Coordinator**

---

## TASMANIA

The Tasmanian AAFICS group enjoyed a visit from Jennifer Ashton in May. It was reassuring to hear first-hand that the Pension Fund is in strong financial health.



*AAFICS President Jennifer Ashton and Tasmanian member, Janet Cummins, chat in Hobart.*

Jennifer’s visit also coincided with a very large and vigorous anti-Stadium demonstration, chaired by author Richard Flanagan. Attended by more than six thousand people, State politicians, plus Jacquie Lambie and Andrew Wilkie, there is no doubt of the strong public feeling against a stadium at Macquarie Point.

Besides the demonstration, we had an interesting few days meeting and reminiscing with membership in Hobart. Their careers encapsulate the range and variety of experience we can have in our positions in the UN.

Belai (ex-UNHCR) describes himself as a field person. He never wanted to work in a capital city; he always wanted to be in deep field where he could be hands on and directly help people of concern. He told us of his stint at the Dolo Odo Ethiopia-Somalia border, where thousands of refugees were crossing, long before UN field staff accommodation standards were introduced. At the end of a long, hard and hot day, the Staff Association representative who was there on mission to show solidarity with field staff, asked plaintively when they would go back to their accommodation. Belai informed him that they would sleep, as usual, on the roof rack of their vehicle or in the verandah of the small village Admin Office.

This was not the end of hardship. He was later posted to a remote field office in Angola, where he and Jennifer met on a cross-border mission to share information for repatriation planning. The province suffered the worst of vicious, prolonged warfare (it was a UNITA stronghold) and no infrastructure, no nothing, remained. It was a day-long trip on appalling roads from the Zambian border, but during that long drive no petty trader was seen by the side of the road. The Zambian group was instructed to bring in all the food that would be needed for the meeting. Belai reports that in his field office, food shortages were worse. He survived on 'bush meat' and fish from the river. Colleagues would send commodities from rice to vegetables for him if a returnee convoy was traveling from Zambia. He was there for 18 months. No internet of course, let alone electricity or running water and one military flight a week to the capital, Luanda. The road and bridges to there had been destroyed. Belai has now developed a passion for lawn bowls; very fitting as the first bowls game in Australia was played in Sandy Bay, Hobart.



*(l to r) Belai Ghebreegzabiher (formerly UNHCR), Jane Wilson (Tasmania State Coordinator) and Jennifer Ashton (AAFICS President) share experiences at lunch.*

Janet worked a world away in UN HQ New York and in Geneva. In 1961, JFK, the brand spanking new, young US President, gave his first landmark address to the UN. He paid tribute to Dag Hammarskjold, the UN Secretary-General who had died in an air-crash the week before. Importantly, he also called for a global disarmament plan, urging there be a peace race rather than an arms race. The bright young recruit, Janet, summoning up all her courage, begged her boss to allow her to go downstairs to greet him at the entrance. Her boss was a frosty Russian, but he melted. She joined hundreds of other staff to applaud JFK as he came in. Hopes were high for a bright international future. Two years later she was in the UN building when the tragic news of JFK's assassination reached them. The building was unnaturally quiet. Janet headed for the exit, wanting to be alone with her shock and grief. There was no one in the hallways, offices were deserted. In the streets around the UN, Janet saw many of her colleagues, each huddled in their own grief.

Janet returned to Hobart for the education of her daughters, but later moved to Geneva where she worked for a number of agencies. The UN Palais was captivating with its lawns rolling down to the lake, and patrolled by colourful peacocks. Its basements were full of old UN meeting records. With a few years in Disarmament culminating in the Chemical Weapons Convention, the opportunity came to join ICFY, the peace talks jointly chaired by Lord Owen (EU) and Thorvald Stoltenberg (UN) in 1993. During these 3 years of negotiations at UNOG, she also travelled to Albania and FYROM (Macedonia) with Ambassador Gert Ahrens experiencing an overview of the troubles in the Balkans. Upon the peace talks moving to Dayton Ohio, her next experience was working for the Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights at Palais Wilson in Geneva and at the International Conference Against Racism in Durban. Finally, UNOG offered her another insight into the workings of the International Law Commission at its twice-yearly sessions.

Janet has been witness to history and we hope she will share more of her memories.

AAFICS Tasmania has grown since I retired in 2011. We're pleased to have two new members this year and look forward to getting to know them.

### **Jane Wilson, Tasmania State Coordinator**

---

## **VICTORIA**

An AAFICS Victoria AGM/Social Meeting was held on Friday 31 March 2023 at the Kathleen Syme Centre, Carlton, Melbourne.\* The Minutes of the meeting are as follows:

### *Summary*

*Covid-19 may have disrupted a regular annual meeting of AAFICS/Victoria people during the past four years, but this did not detract from the pleasure of the people meeting/talking/socializing at the meeting held 31 March 2023. Ideal facilities provided the basis for a meeting that was twice as long as planned.*

*The President AAFICS presided with the new Victorian State Coordinator(s) in support. An agenda had earlier been distributed that was in two parts: 1. International networks – UNJSPF, FAFICS, etc. and: 2. Domestic AAFICS issues – publications, pensions, communications, links to other domestic pro-UN groups, health, etc.*

*Findings remain optimistic for improved networking within the country and with international networks courtesy of AAFICS national representatives. Suggestions were made to re-visit appropriate tax options for ex-UN pensions, for closer links with the UNAA and for holding another social meeting before the end of the year. The importance of the twice-annual AAFICS newsletter was highlighted with AAFICS/Victoria people encouraged to support the newsletter.*



### 1. Officiating & Attending

Jennifer Ashton President AAFICS officiated with Peter & Ivy Steele in attendance as incoming AAFICS/Victoria Coordinators. Last minute apologies were received from Mike Patto out-going AAFICS/Victoria Coordinator (and Lorraine Patto) both of whom had contracted Covid-19 infection. A report covering the lead-up to the meeting prepared by Mike Patto was read out by Peter Steele. It helped bridge the period from the AAFICS/Victoria meeting five years earlier and the initial impact of the Covid-19 infection/lockdown.

### 2. AAFICS/Victoria people

There are >60 AAFICS members registered in Victoria. Invitations and follow-up reminders were distributed prior to the meeting with 23 people responding of which 15 attended as shown in the tables. Apologies are also listed.

### 3. Meeting *modus operandi*

We had booked the meeting room for two hours 10.30-12.30. Formal presentations/discussion/Q&As covered a period of 90 minutes followed by *ad hoc* social discussions that spilled over into the Common Room next door for more than an hour. The coffee/tea-making facilities, the enthusiasm of attendees and, not least, Jennifer Ashton's attendance encouraged people to move around, to join the different groups and to generally enjoy meeting up after such a long absence ... and talking.

### 4. People coming and going

Courtesy of the report provided by Mike Patto, we were able to welcome Soe Nyunt U and his spouse Mawawa into AAFICS/Victoria.

### 5. Presentations, Questions/Answers & Findings

Arising from an agenda circulated prior to the meeting, the presentation of Jennifer Ashton and the report of Mike Patto the outgoing AAFICS/Victoria Coordinator.

#### 5.1 AAFICS Publications

Two documents drafted by AAFICS/Victoria remain pending: 1. '*Essential checklist for ex-UN retirees returning to Australia*', and 2. '*Before your demise – personal information for families*'. These were developed post-2018 and subsequently despatched to the President AAFICS for action - whether to re-review and/or redraft and/or to use in draft form. In practice, they have already been distributed on an *ad hoc* basis – for those who seek this kind of information. It is important to make them available before they may be needed ('*Demise*') and/or to use them as an AAFICS recruiting tool ('*Essential Checklist*').

Any subsequent feedback from use of the documents can be used for re-drafting when/if required. In particular, the '*Essential Checklist*' document has legal implications for the advice offered. It may require to be cleared/checked/re-drafted following an appropriate legal review before widespread distribution.

---

\*<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/hubs-bookable-spaces/kathleen-syme-library-and-community-centre/Pages/kathleen-syme-library.aspx>

Sadly, we also registered people who had died and those with whom we have simply lost contact (some of whom may have subsequently died). Deaths noted: Jacob Frim (2020), Kaye Dudley Thomman (2020) and Vivien Clements (2021); John Clements subsequently moved to QLD. Further deaths: Brian Scoular (2021), Andrew Smith (2022) and Liliana Siani (2022). Contact was lost with Meta Smith after the death of her spouse Keith. It was the same with Arnold Schwatschko following the death of his spouse Nina.

Then there is the challenge of introducing AAFICS to returning Australians prior to them leaving their UN station/agency/work. How, for example, to inform them of the 'Essential Checklist'?

Distribution requires confidence in the status of the two documents as-they-stand and/or for the need to revisit/redraft/re-consider them prior to distribution.

Findings: That the two documents be made available for use by current and future AAFICS people as-may-be-required.

One suggestion was to send copies to everyone within the Australian AAFICS network. A second was to list the documents on the FAFICS webpages (under 'Australia/publications'). A third option was to place both documents in an appropriate Google Docs account (and inform everyone). Two people offered to establish this account.

Action will be required of the Office of the President AAFICS with the choices available.



*AAFICS Victoria members at the AGM. Standing (l to r): Alistair Hicks, Tony Marjoram, Peter Steele, Constance Hicks, Pushpa Jayakody, Sylvia Murphy, Madhavi Ashok, Greg Jones, Jennifer Ashton, Anne Wilkinson, Marie Scoullar, John Langmore. Seated (l to r): Ivy Steele, Michael Coughlan, Alan Wilkinson. Photo by Tara Strong.*

## 5.2 Communications

The importance of increased regular communication within/by/for AAFICS/Victoria members was highlighted and, particularly, with use of social media. WhatsApp and/or LinkedIn networks were suggested.

There was consensus for a second AAFICS/Victoria meeting for later in the year. Covid-19 has had a debilitating impact on the cohesion of the group. Further, with Mike & Lorraine Patto absent from the current meeting, the group would like to take the opportunity to formally thank them for keeping the group buoyant for >10 years.

The importance of the twice-annual national AAFICS newsletter was emphasized. The first six-monthly AAFICS newsletter of 2023 is due for publication in July. The editor had recently requested submission of suitable material from AAFICS/Victoria people.

The AAFICS brochure requires updating with photos of the incoming AAFICS/Victoria Coordinators.

It was suggested that a core group be established to share/develop the work required of AAFICS/Victoria coordination, publications, etc. Did this group exist earlier? What would be the ToR? Would the group survive in practice?

Findings: Two offers were received from experienced WhatsApp users for the establishment of a WhatsApp network. This will be further explored within the group.

### 5.3 UNJSPF – ‘Fund’

The annual 2023 letter from the Fund – covering 2022 and the first months of 2023 – has just been distributed.\* It provides an overview of the performance of the Fund, which remains buoyant/secure. Notwithstanding increasing life expectancy, incoming funds from new people continue to be more than sufficient to balance outgoing payments to recipients.

The letter also contains reference to a ‘*Cost of Living Adjustment*’ (COLA) for those on the US dollar track. For those of us in Australia the COLA, presumably, remains in the pipeline.

Findings: Experience of the heavily promoted on-line digital Certificate of Entitlement (CoE) within the group remains mixed – the main issue being facial recognition. Delegates expressed a sense of frustration that the Fund had presented such an apparently unworkable/unfriendly system to pension recipients. The feeling was that a majority of recipients have remained with the paper/postal option.

### 5.4 Federation of Associations of Former International Civil Servants (FAFICS)

AAFICS is one 62 national/member organizations that make up the international network of ex-UN people – FAFICS; membership includes >80,000 retirees. We are represented by Jennifer Ashton the AAFICS President. Explore the FAFICS webpages; watch the five minutes presentation from Jerry Barton the FAFICS President, download/read/sign-up for the different newsletters (including those from AAFICS) and generally keep abreast of developments that may interest you.

### 5.5 United Nations/Specialized Agencies/Programs/People

Raising an understanding of the purpose/role/work of the UN within the country is a perennial challenge. Apart from the critical role of the UN Security Council, the majority of local people are likely to have limited knowledge of the extent of Australian nationals within the UN agencies/programs that make up the UN network. Closer ties with other domestic pro-UN groups were suggested.

Findings. To include boosting ties/links with the UNAA (UN Association of Australia) courtesy of AAFICS people (in Victoria and elsewhere) who may be familiar with the UNAA.

### 5.6 Ex-UN/AAFICS people and the Australian Tax Office

UN pensions paid in Australia continue to be taxed unfairly – representing ‘*investment*’ earnings (according to the ATO). The reality, however, is that they represent normal contracted annual payments into a long-term pension fund. Further, the original UN salary will have already been subjected to a ‘*Staff Assessment*’ deduction that had been paid annually to the Australian government by each of the UN agencies/programs employing them (i.e. the equivalent to an ‘*income tax*’ payment).

---

\*Further information is available at your Fund MSS account under the ‘*Documents*’ tab at: <https://www.unjspf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Annual-Letter-2023.pdf>

There is continuing frustration that the AAFICS challenge to the ATO >10 years ago – to tax UN pensions more equitably – was unsuccessful at the time. Is it practical to mount another challenge to this earlier ruling? The discussion was mixed – the effort/costs involved would be exorbitant. What grounds exist for a new challenge? The estimated 600 AAFICS people may be seen unfairly as a rich minority – fortunate with their inflation-linked pensions.

Findings. The country has a new government that has shifted priorities into socio-economic-development sectors that had previously been side-lined. A ‘*political approach*’ was suggested

(in preference to a legal challenge) in cooperation with AAFICS people/contacts/links within, for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT).

#### 5.7 Health, provision of medical service, private medical insurance & Medicare levies

Discussions were wide-ranging with little in the way of structured outcome. There was reference to the Medicare levy\* based upon 2% annual taxable income (and potential for reduction/exemption); to the ATO that does not recognise AAFICS people who continue to pay UN/ASHI (After Service Health Insurance) contributions; and to similar experience from other places with a national health system – France was mentioned.

Findings. Little of structural value resulted. There was a recommendation to seek advice from the ASHI Committee. How many AAFICS people have retained their original ASHI? Survey?

\*There is also a Medicare Levy Surcharge (MLS). This is payable by Australian taxpayers who have an income above MLS thresholds, and who do *not* maintain sufficient level of private hospital cover.

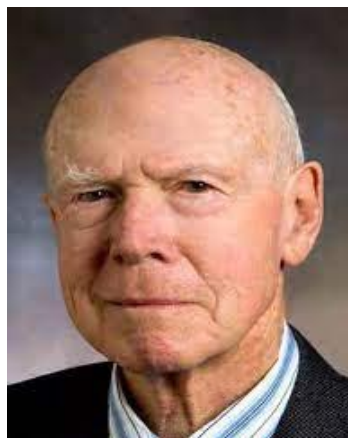
**Peter & Ivy Steele, Victoria State Coordinators**

---

### **VALE JAMES CHARLES INGRAM AO FAIA**

---

The former World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Director, James Ingram, passed away in Canberra at the age of 94 on the 15th February, 2023.



WFP remembers him for leading the organization in its shift from development to humanitarian work.

James Charles Ingram served for two terms as WFP's Executive Director — from April 1982 to his retirement in April 1992 — and is widely recognized for leading WFP in shifting its focus from development to life-saving humanitarian work.

Catherine Bertini, Ingram's successor as WFP Executive Director from 1992 to 2002, said:

"Today's WFP would be a small shadow of itself — or maybe a division of UNHCR — if Jim Ingram had not taken on governance reform. While he was running WFP, he managed a campaign with governments to convince them that WFP should be a Programme outside of FAO with its own operations and authorities. He succeeded.

“The change took place effective December 31, 1991. My term started April 5, 1992. He gave us the gift of building our own HR, finance, IT, admin systems and of making decisions based on Board direction, but not FAO directives in Rome nor UNDP in the field,” Bertini added. “And from then on, together we built the WFP of today on the back of his determination, commitment and success. Here’s to Jim Ingram and the billions of people better served because of his foresight.”

A citizen of Australia, Ingram studied economics and political science at Melbourne University and began his career in the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs in 1945. Ingram’s postings included Brussels, where he opened Australia’s Mission to the European Economic Community, Indonesia, and the United Nations.

He was the first Australian to head a United Nations body and, at the time of his appointment as WFP Executive Director, Ingram received Australia’s highest civil honour for his services to his country.



He received the Alan Shawn Feinstein World Hunger Award for his work at WFP and served on the governing body of the International Food Policy Research Institute. On his retirement, he was director of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and wrote on arrangements to provide international humanitarian assistance and Australian policy toward the UN at the Australian National University in Canberra.

While he headed WFP, it supported an emergency response during the Lebanon civil war; responded to widespread drought in sub-Saharan Africa, including the delivery of two million metric tons of food during the Ethiopia famine in 1984; launched Operation Lifeline Sudan in 1989, in which 1.5 million tons of food were air-dropped into what is now South Sudan; and implemented agricultural projects in China at a crucial stage of its development.

On the UN’s 40th anniversary in 1985, Ingram said:

“The UN system continues to embody the hopes of people everywhere for international peace among nations and for a better future...the strength of the United Nations derives from the combined strength of its parts...

“The 40th anniversary, coming as it does at a time of crisis for many of the world’s people, should represent a time for reflection and commitment to even greater achievements in the future.

“In meeting the challenges of today as well as those to come, the World Food Programme, conscious of its role within the United Nations system, will strive to make its contribution to fulfilling the mandate of the United Nations charter to ‘promote higher standards of living, full employment and conditions of economic and social progress and development’ for the common good of mankind.”

Ingram’s book *Bread and Stones: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme* is available in the WFP Library. He is survived by three adult children, a son and two daughters. A memorial service was held at WFP Headquarters to celebrate his life of public service.

*[Editor’s note: This tribute was contributed by former WFP staff members. There is an additional, extensive obituary to James Ingram on the website Pearls and Irritations by former Australian diplomat John Menadue. [Vale James Charles Ingram AO FAIIA - Pearls and Irritations \(johnmenadue.com\)](#) Thanks to Jennifer Ashton and Mike Sackett for these links.]*

---

## . A POEM FOR AAFICS

---

The Australian Association of Former International Civil Servants,  
A group of dedicated professionals,  
Who have served their country and the world,  
With distinction and honour.

You have worked in many different countries,  
In many different roles,  
But you have always shared a common goal,  
To make the world a better place.

You have helped to resolve conflicts,  
Promote peace and understanding,  
And protect human rights.  
You have made a difference,  
And you will be remembered for your service.

We are proud to be a part of your association,  
And we are grateful for your dedication,  
To making the world a better place.

Thank you for your service.

*[Editor’s note: This poem was composed entirely by Artificial Intelligence using Google’s ‘Bard’ Chatbot program. ‘Bard’ describes itself as “your creative and helpful collaborator, here to supercharge your imagination, boost your productivity, and bring your ideas to life.” We inserted the request ‘A poem for the Australian Association of Former International Civil*

*Servants' into the Chatbot and this was the result. The AI system wrote this in less than two seconds. Try it yourself! There are several other similar programs such as ChatGPT. AAFICS Newsletter readers can be assured that the Editor of their publication is, when last he checked, a real person.]*

---

## THE RELEVANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS TODAY

---

Recently, I watched the start of a Zoom meeting on 'saving humanity'. The keynote speaker was an eminent international lawyer whose first substantial words were that the world lacks a strong impediment to violence. He asserted that the UN is irrelevant except for issuing rhetoric from time to time. He, like some others, was blaming the UN because it couldn't stop the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

This judgement was superficial. It is possible that there was too little UN diplomatic vitality when the Russian forces were gathering on the Ukraine border. But we can't know for sure, because dialogue or preventative diplomacy efforts, if attempted, are often behind closed doors and are rarely reported on in the media. Other factors were influential. Putin's ambitions to restore the Russian empire are obsessive and are likely to dominate Russian policy until he is replaced. And the US, NATO and Ukraine didn't demonstrate much willingness to compromise.

It is true that further institutional reform of the UN would be valuable, so let's think about that for a moment. There have in fact been many reforms of organisational structure, procedures and policies during the UN's seventy-eight year history. Is there a possibility for further reform now?

### 1. Security Council Reform

Multi-national interest in Security Council reform, for example, is currently growing. The United Nations Charter, which every Member State has accepted, gives the Security Council 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security'. This awesome global task is extraordinarily complex and difficult.

The Charter also gives the Council formidable powers, one of which is to make decisions that are legally binding on all UN Member States. This revolutionary innovation resulted from failures of the League of Nations and the consequent catastrophe of World War II.

This means that when nine SC members agree, and there is no dissent by any of the veto-wielding permanent five members, there are few limits to what the Council can do. **There has been no other body in history with such potential power. When peaceful means have failed, Chapter VII of the Charter gives the Council the capacity to authorise coercive measures including sanctions and the use of force to enforce its decisions.**

The principal difficulty at present is that the five countries which are permanent Security Council members, and which therefore hold a veto, have greater power than the rest. The whole world chose to avoid a world war when Russia flagrantly violated international law by invading Ukraine, just as the rest of the world chose not to violently reprimand the United States, Britain, and Australia when they illegally invaded Iraq in 2003.

There are many impediments to Security Council reform, but some can be overcome. The number of Security Council elected members could be increased, so widening national representation, and the length of elected members terms expanded from two years to three. This would strengthen the democratically elected membership, broaden the debate, and reduce the relative power of the permanent five.

Australia could contribute by discussing and identifying organisational changes which would increase the Council's effectiveness, and which we could then advocate. This would be an appropriate task while we prepare for Security Council elections for the 2029-30 period.

## 2. The United Nations

Now a **second theme**, for these remarks relate to the breadth of the UN organization itself. Critics of the UN generally forget the extraordinary range of global services the Organisation delivers. As well as the forums for political debate and decision, and the Secretariat which serves the Security Council and the General Assembly, there are forty or so funds, programmes and agencies.

You all must know many, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and ILO but could you name 40? I taught graduate students about the UN for fifteen years, and in the final year one of them wrote her final essay on one of which I had not been aware – the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. It administers recovery processes and funds for emergency relief. There must have been great calls for its support during the last year.

The world is facing a confluence of climate, debt, energy, and security crises, and in fact the UN is active on all of them. Because the UN hasn't been able to wave a magic wand over Ukraine and prevent or end the war is not a reason for abandoning common sense let alone hope.

Astonishingly at the beginning of March the UN demonstrated its political and legal value yet again, this time through the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity in areas beyond national borders which has just successfully agreed on a comprehensive treaty.

The principal problems of multilateralism are not with the structure of the UN: they are with the failures of most countries to implement commitments which the Charter requires of Member States, and policies which they have contributed to making.

## 3. Australia

For example, Australia's commitment to the UN and implementation of agreed UN policies has been severely eroded by the cuts to DFAT's share of Commonwealth funding. **The share of Australian Government expenditure on diplomacy has been halved since the Howard Government was elected in 1995-96.**

In 1995-96, diplomacy received minute funding - 0.38 per cent of Commonwealth spending. By last year, diplomacy was receiving only 0.21 per cent of total spending. The forward estimates in the last Morrison budget were to reduce the allocation for diplomacy to 0.18 percent in 2025-26. **Australian governments normally neglect the role which diplomats can play in generating dialogue and other forms of preventative diplomacy and constructive approaches to addressing conflict.**

Aid – which is often vital in reducing conflict - was also reduced from 1.7 per cent of total outlays a quarter century ago to 0.6 percent now. **Australian governments have been destructively undermining capacity for generating good neighbourly foreign policy.**

Australian foreign policy has also been securitised. When Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard set up a task force in 2011 to write the White Paper on *Australia in the Asian Century*, the Chair, Ken Henry, wrote to DFAT asking for a background paper on the East Asian current and future geopolitics. DFAT replied that that was the task of the Defence Department! Australian foreign affairs had been militarized to the extent that DFAT could no longer produce a major geopolitical analysis.

This decimation of DFAT's capacity to offer well thought-out policy advice is the result of both slashed funding and Coalition disregard for diplomacy. But Labor didn't begin to correct the



situation under Rudd or Gillard either. Senator Wong however is reported to have said during her address to the whole department that in future she wanted all foreign policy issues to pass through DFAT.

The stagnation of diplomatic spending severely constrains international representation and empathy in understanding other countries. The cuts to aid reduce what Australia can do to relieve poverty, malnutrition, and disease elsewhere or contribute to enabling other countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and improve their productivity, average incomes, and wellbeing. It is vital that Albanese's promise to increase funding for diplomacy be steadily implemented to facilitate revitalising diplomacy.

#### **4. Australia and the UN**

This is the background to Australia's relations with the UN. The effectiveness of the UN depends principally on the willingness of Member States to implement organisational decisions. UN structure and rules sometimes retard action, but Member State failure to implement agreed positions is more commonly the principal problem.

The Secretary-General and the Secretariat have significant scope for proposing strategies and policies to the various decision-making bodies, but Member States have the power to decide what to do and then whether to implement their own agreements.

The actions of every Member State matter. The central question is: how can Member State engagement be strengthened? That depends most centrally on the degree of Member State commitment. Let's quickly review a few major aspects of Australia's highly uneven multilateral engagement.

The foundational question is what is the aim of foreign policy? Most Australians would agree that the aim of foreign policy should be to achieve national interests such as peace, physical and economic security, and environmental sustainability. Those goals are expressions of what Minister Wong calls 'constructive internationalism'. These goals are consistent with those of the UN.

On one membership requirement, Australia has an unblemished record: all Commonwealth Governments, as distinct from America and Russia, have always paid their annual dues in full and on time. However, it is not nearly as generous as many other countries which voluntarily contribute substantial funds for work on issues they regard as important.

For example, when I was Director of the UN's Secretariat Division for Social Policy and Development, Mexico used to donate several millions of dollars each year for work supporting policies for people with disabilities. Norway is the most widely generous country, not only allocating a total of over one percent of national income to aid, but providing substantial support for peacebuilding, for example.

According to DFAT, Australia works with multilateral organisations because it brings clear benefits including influence with other countries, going beyond bilateral contacts and advantages of reach and scale in places where Australia does not have sufficient presence. Other advantages include access to the expertise of specialist organisations, better coordinated multi-country programs and the leveraging of technical support and financing for the Australian region.

DFAT also acknowledges the significance of multilateral efforts for global standard setting, the value of the international rules-based order, of encouragement to sustainable development and emergency humanitarian assistance.

However, Australian neglect of diplomacy means that little funding is available for imaginative or creative international peacebuilding, social justice policies, or developmental or other multilateral humanitarian spending.

**In practice the central fact about Australia's international relations is that foreign engagement has principally focused on bilateralism.** Political rhetoric has supported multilateralism but funding for UN agencies during the last decade has declined. Australia has treated its multilateral relations as principally a self-serving tool for work on a narrow set of its own national interests, rather than to being a good international citizen – to quote Gareth Evans' attractive term.

For example, the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly were an amazing diplomatic achievement. They identified 17 goals and 169 targets adopted as guidelines by all UN Member States. They are a valuable guide to countries as they decide which of these goals and targets to prioritise as they prepare a national multiyear plan or an annual budget.

Australian governments have endorsed the SDGs and reported on progress as required, but their degree of commitment is questionable: for while the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet had early responsibility for introducing the SDGs, DFAT was given the task of overseeing implementation, management, evaluating and reporting on progress. Since the SDGs were adopted, Australian governments have given little attention to ranking priorities for implementation. **Yet the SDGs are goals for all countries, not just the impoverished.** Coalition governments rejected them as guides to domestic policy. Will Labor be better?

Australia has been slow to adopt a strong, comprehensive strategy for counteracting climate change. Before the election we were clearly rightly perceived internationally as recalcitrant in refusing to adopt carbon emission targets. The Albanese Government has acted quickly to establish these and to adopt implementing policies, but the lost decade of inaction leaves huge and difficult requirements for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Australia also has an appalling record of destroying biodiversity. We have driven more mammals into extinction than any other country. The UN does vital work in publicising this and will be a valuable agency assisting Tanya Plibersek in policy development and sustaining motivation for effective action.

In relation to asylum seekers. deterrence, including indefinite detention regimes, has been at the centre of an asylum policy which rests on laws from which reference to the 1951 UN Convention on the Status of Refugees has been deleted. Intake of refugees through resettlement programs has decreased and the settlement programs for regular arrivals have been cut back.

Australia is one of the few wealthy countries which has failed to adopt a charter of human rights, as all UN Member States are encouraged to do. The UN led the way with the drafting and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Australia is in breach of good governance because of its failure to set clear and humane human rights and to enact and enforce them in many areas. A clear example is the continuing record of imprisonment of First Nation peoples and the continuing number of First Nation deaths in prison.

If Australia wants to be a good international citizen it must apply the SDGs to itself; continue with the process of toughening climate change policies, apply humanitarian criteria to migration issues and other human rights.

## **5. Revitalisation of the UN**

If Australia is serious, we will also participate actively in multilateral revitalisation. There are immeasurable needs. Pandemics, historically high refugee and displacement numbers, resurging conflict tensions, widening wealth disparities, climate change, loss of biodiversity,

degraded oceans and an increasingly poorly regulated and threatening cyberspace are amongst those needing attention.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made it the mission of his second term to spearhead efforts to revitalise multilateral cooperation under the UN umbrella. What is needed, he has said, is 'multilateralism with teeth'.

During the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN on 28 September 2020, the Member States unanimously agreed in the General Assembly to ask Guterres to develop recommendations to advance UN strategy and respond to current and future challenges. He undertook widespread consultations which resulted in sweeping proposals in an uncharacteristically hard-hitting report entitled *Our Common Agenda*. This reflects a significant body of international thinking framed in uncharacteristically direct language and was adopted by consensus in the UN General Assembly in November 2021.

The *Agenda* persuasively argues that:

States have at their disposal an organisation whose very purpose is to solve international problems through cooperation. The United Nations presence is global, its membership is universal, and its activities span the breadth of human need. Its fundamental values are ... found in every culture and religion around the world: peace, justice, human dignity, equity, tolerance and, of course, solidarity (p18).

These values alone inspire a serious examination of the policies proposed. The outstanding report rests on a recognition of the absolute criticality, now, of improving the way countries cooperate to manage the world's common resources (oceans, land masses and space) and public goods like global health and peaceful security to safeguard the planet and its resources for future generations. *Our Common Agenda* aims to spur a renewed multilateral system built on a 'UN 2.0' able to offer 'system-wide solutions to 21st century challenges'.

It is vital that the Australian Government systematically review how to implement the Global Agenda strategy and share in that implementation. Much that Minister Wong aims to do as described in her splendid national statement at the start of the General Assembly session in September fits well with the global *Common Agenda*. However, adoption of AUKUS cuts across parts of the multilateral *Agenda*.

## **6. AUKUS**

The *Common Agenda* is quite direct about national steps to achieving peace sustainably. It requires working 'with Member States to update our vision for disarmament to guarantee human, national, and collective security'. This includes ratifying the Treaty Prohibiting Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), effective control of conventional weapons, and regulation of new technological weapons. Prime Minister Albanese said several times before the election that a government he led would ratify the nuclear treaty. Making that ratification would reassure UN Member States and clarify that it does not plan to use nuclear powered submarines to carry nuclear weapons.

The *Common Agenda* also requires contributing to UN peacekeeping. Yet the most recent figures show that Australia was contributing only 27 personnel to peacekeeping, which placed us 85<sup>th</sup> on the table of listing national participation. Fulfilling this obligation would demonstrate support for multilateral peacekeeping.

Without such initiatives the Albanese Government risks being classified as distorting and divisive because of adopting hastily and uncritically a tactic which is based on existential threats to Australian, regional, and even global survival.

AUKUS is misguided and dangerous for too many reasons to be adequately discussed tonight, but just to mention a few illustrates the depth of reasons for review. One of the most serious is that AUKUS dramatically intensifies the arms race in East Asia; and intensifying arms races increases the risk of violent conflict.

The assumption underlying AUKUS, that Chinese assertiveness will automatically lead to military aggression, is shallow. Many of the most professionally accomplished of Chinese scholars reject this simplification. It depends in part on whether a serious attempt will be made to restrain a regional arms race. The media narrative is shaped with established security actors, not experts on China in the region.

A central question for Australia should be what military strategy should we adopt? Many wise military planners support national protection rather than forward assertiveness. There is no doubt at all that purchase of the submarines as announced two weeks ago will put Australian defence under American control. Many people who seek peace regard this abandonment of sovereignty as misguided because it increases the risks of being drawn into an unwanted war.

Many critics question whether the fiscal consequences of the proposed package through the innumerable cuts and constraints to human services could possibly be justified. Is Australian wellbeing improved more by owning nuclear powered submarines or by housing the homeless and contributing to peaceful development of the Australian population and of other countries in the region?

In any case it is absurd to make plans for thirty years ahead. Will the technology of Virginia-class submarines still be credible by the fifties? Technology for locating nuclear submarines will certainly have dramatically improved by then. These questions are only a selection of those which are important. AUKUS requires rigorous review.

The wellbeing of all Australians will be permanently strengthened if we recognise that our national interests must focus on peace, justice, economic and strategic security, and committed cooperation with the countries in our region and with the global community through the United Nations.

Australia would participate in UN renewal by adopting and implementing the new global strategy *Our Common Agenda*. We could also contribute by engaging with the preparation of the *Agenda for Peace* which is currently underway.

This would suggest many ways in which Australia could strengthen its contribution to addressing major global issues such as preventing nuclear war, controlling climate change, reducing disease, and increasing equitable human and environmental wellbeing in all their dimensions.

Yet "... diplomacy and mediation at the UN are chronically under-funded, with 20 per cent of the UN's Department of Political Affairs budget, including all of its Mediation Support Unit's funds, acquired through voluntary contributions." (Bellamy) That is one reason why DFAT's funding must be substantially increased, so that as well as strengthening its own peacebuilding capacity it can support peacebuilding at the UN.

This would also allow DFAT to financially support an Australian NGO like the Initiative for Peacebuilding at the University of Melbourne, which mobilises additional intellectual and empathetic peacebuilding capacity to complement and support DFAT. The Initiative does research on conflict and peace processes, engages in seeking conflict transitions, and plans to teach about peace.

War is not inevitable. It is a human creation; wars happen because people want them to happen. So does peace. If we want to flourish, we must seek positive peace. Alex Bellamy writes in his splendid book *World Peace* that "the ideas and social forces that give rise to war

now seem to be in the ascendancy. Unless they are met with countervailing activism for peace, our future may become more violent than our immediate past.” (p22)

A central question for the Government is therefore will it take seriously its responsibility to share with the other UN Member States in implementing the *Common Agenda*? The Australian government and all of us must continue to work for, and advocate, renewal of foreign policy by placing peacebuilding amongst our central goals and processes. How can we nudge Australian culture towards that transformation?

*This article is an address delivered by Professor John Langmore AM, Professorial Fellow and Chair, Initiative for Peacebuilding Board, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Melbourne to a meeting of the UNAA in the ACT Legislative Assembly on Monday 27 March, 2023.*

**John Langmore AM, formerly UN NY**

*[Editor’s note: Many thanks, John, for another fascinating and thought-provoking piece.]*

---

## **VALE PAUL JAMES MCCOSKER**

---



Dr Paul James McCosker passed away at home in Yeppoon surrounded by family on 7 October 2022 at the age of 90 after a long battle with dementia and an incredible life of adventure. Daughter Sarah said he was still studying the world around him and still enjoying companionship.

Paul was born in Emerald, Central Queensland and spent his early life on the family property ‘Codewarra’ where his lifelong curiosity for animals and their health first developed. It was here he first encountered tick infestations on Codewarra stock. His aim was always to return to Codewarra with skills to help and so he decided to study veterinary medicine. At St Brendan’s College, Yeppoon, he was told this was impossible as he had failed Latin and was colour blind. He ignored the advice, retook his final year at school, passed Latin and in 1950 went to study veterinary medicine at the University of Queensland and shone. He published his early undergraduate research which established topical/pour on pesticides as the best methodology to control pests in the prestigious journal *Nature*.

In 1957 he was awarded a Junior Wellcome Foundation Fellowship and went on to Cambridge University, UK, to gain his PhD on ‘copper metabolism in domestic ruminants’. For this he studied a phenomenon noticed at Codewarra whereby when you approached a flock of

sheep they would all collapse as if dead. Paul established this was caused by diet options in times of drought when the sheep would eat the leaves of trees and suffer copper poisoning due to the tannic acid content of the leaves. He continued to teach at the University of Cambridge School of Veterinary Medicine for two years after gaining his PhD in 1960.

In 1969 he joined the FAO Animal Health Project in the Departamento de Ganaderia in Bolivia, based in Santa Cruz. While dealing with disease outbreaks nationwide, his research activities concentrated on tick borne diseases: piroplasmosis and anaplasmosis and babesiosis, writing manuals for their treatment, ensuring frozen vaccines for the latter two diseases and establishing a policy of routine immunization of cattle imported into Bolivia. He then moved with FAO to Montevideo, Uruguay where he continued his work with disease outbreaks throughout the country and his research.

In 1976, enroute to Nepal for his next posting, Paul was asked to go to Rome to FAO headquarters instead as Animal Health Officer responsible for ticks and tickborne diseases globally which he continued to do until his retirement in 1993 as Senior Officer for Infectious and Parasitic Diseases. He was proud to be involved in the eradication of Rinderpest globally, notably only the second disease eradicated on this planet (the other is smallpox). Rinderpest was a viral disease of ungulates which in vulnerable domestic and wild herds resulted in 100 per cent deaths. In Rome, his work became increasingly administrative, lobbying member nation governments for funding for projects, setting up projects, finding the right staff, visiting projects and writing reports on progress.

In 1989, in Canberra, Paul's contributions to the advancement of global veterinary science were recognized by the Australian Veterinary Association when he was awarded the Kesteven Medal for an Australian veterinarian's considerable contribution to a better world. Through his scientific research, Paul made a positive impact on the lives of animals, wild and domestic, globally and helped preserve the livelihood of many a farmer.

*[Editor's note: reprinted from CQ Today 13/12/2022. Thanks to Mike Sackett for alerting us to this obituary.]*

---

## **KEEPING THE BALANCE**

---

I haven't been to the Palais des Nations in Geneva for over a decade. I know I won't be going back. As a former International Civil Service Officer, I've been living on a continent far from Europe for a few years now. From my life in Switzerland, I have fond memories that are both bitter and sweet, and of course, funny. I can't help but share one of these amusing memories with you.

The United Nations in Geneva: Back in the day, when you entered through the main gate (number 6), you would discover something quite peculiar in the hall. Three telephone booths with telephone directories stood side by side. A thought-provoking notice caught everyone's attention: "Don't disturb the peacocks"!?!

Apparently, the peacocks must have roamed around the large park surrounding the building, under the watchful eye of the security guards on their rounds. And it turns out, peacocks can actually disturb people. One of the guards, while on his night patrol, confessed that he

experienced the fright of his life. In the darkness, he felt a heavy and voluminous object rush past his right ear, causing a gust of wind. The mysterious object crashed into one of the park's ancient oak trees with a loud thud. Overcoming his fear with curiosity, he pointed his flashlight to discover it was not a UFO, but a peacock!



Since then, many changes and renovations have taken place at the Palais des Nations. However, it's quite possible that the peacock trio still proudly flaunt their iridescent turquoise feathers in a magnificent display. They continue to roam among the majestic Lebanese cedars, sipping water from the Celestial Sphere Woodrow Wilson, their cries as horrendous as their plumage is splendid.

Back in the main entrance hall, we appreciated that the Swiss Post had provided three counters for staff and visitors. Equally welcoming was the presence of a bookstore, *Naville*, where, along with daily newspapers in several UN working languages, you could find *Oggi*, an Italian publication. Among other office necessities, you could also find greeting cards for thank yous and condolences. Quite convenient, considering the nearby bulletin board displayed recent obituaries. Sooner or later, you would experience a shock upon seeing the name of a colleague or a well-known person.

The nearby delegate's bar became the go-to place to recover from the emotional blow by downing a cordial or a coffee. On the bar counter, there was a row of hard-boiled eggs. One day, a prankster had the brilliant idea of substituting a hard-boiled egg with a fresh one. Always fitting, don't you think? Not far away, there was a notice board displaying available vacant positions (in addition to the official announcements published in major weekly publications). Furthermore, there was a *Hotelpian* travel agency for private trips and even a branch of the Lloyds Bank of London, complete with three counters for all banking operations (though our salaries were paid by the SBS located a little further away). The distribution of documents extended along the first floor, while a small inter-organizational package delivery room was set up on the ground floor. The cafeteria was also located further down the line.

The personnel working in these arcades, though not 'true' UN employees, were considered part of our community. We regarded them as our own, and they earned our gratitude. They even became our confidants on gloomy days, keeping us informed of the latest happenings extra-muros.

Some UN perks were extended to these 'semi-UNers': access to the SAFI (a purchasing shop for civil servants, located in the basement near gate 1 or 2?); there you could buy luxury watches, alarm clocks, Neuchâtel clocks, high-end beauty products and perfumes, and even some branded clothing and handbags, all of them at preferential prices and tax-free. These 'semi-UNers' could also enjoy a reasonably priced stay at the hotel chalet (and its restaurant) in the Haut-Valais, property of our staff committee (or rather, our union). Reservations had to

be made through the 'union' secretary, and it was open to other international personnel, including those from CERN. Unfortunately, this charming chalet hotel had to be sold.

A little innocent mishap brought me closer to June, who worked at Lloyds Bank. It happened by chance that we found ourselves at the chalet during the same vacation period, with the same alpine ski instructor, aiming to improve our 'carvings' and 'stems'. On the first day, we ended up lying flat on our stomachs, head to toe, noses planted in the snow due to a poorly executed turn. It was more hilarious than frustrating and marked the beginning of an unexpected friendship.

Once a week, we would meet at the cafeteria to share a coffee and croissant during our allotted break time (a quarter of an hour to 20 minutes). It was during these moments that I had the opportunity to meet Brian, her husband, who would join us, when possible, after his parcel deliveries at the inter-organization package reception. Brian's career path was quite different from June's one, and fascinating.

Brian had arrived in the French-speaking part of Switzerland after accepting an offer to operate a very peculiar machine. Construction work was about to begin in neighboring France—it was



the construction of an 11,611 metre road in a tunnel under Mont Blanc, dubbed the roof of Western Europe. The Mont Blanc massif includes the French, Italian, and Swiss Alps, with the highest point of Mont Blanc reaching an altitude of 4,807 metres. Brian was going to operate a monstrous rock-crushing machine (possibly disposing of the waste?) to create the entrance and to dig the tunnel halfway as determined by the engineers, with the other half connecting to the Aosta Valley, under the competence of the Italians. This project not only aimed to improve the flow of the ever-busy traffic, but also to promote mountain tourism in the

region.

It was no easy feat. As the workers dug, they encountered both warm and cold watercourses, underground springs hidden beneath the ice cap that needed to be redirected, and the consolidation of retaining walls. The junction of the two tunnel segments was somewhat delayed and led to a tragic incident as an Italian engineer involved in the project took his own life, believing he had made a mistake in his calculations. A tragedy that could have been prevented had he waited just one more day.

Brian later found a position as clerk and part-time delivery driver with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). When living in Geneva, one tends to follow the customs and traditions. The average Swiss naturally enjoys a glass of white wine after work. Bryan adhered to this habit, toasting with pleasure, sometimes opting for a glass of whisky with a less aristocratic beer mug, and on other occasions, a white wine like *Perlan* from Geneva or a *Fendant* from Valais.

During one of his outings to the bistro, Brian, as he recounted to us, agreed to participate in a frog hunting expedition in the Dombes region of neighbouring France on the upcoming weekend. For a British person, it's a *tour de force*...

The night before his departure, Brian's sleep was disturbed by strange dreams. They were



premonitions.

First, there was a joyful yet demanding dream where he had to practice tap dancing with Ginger (already!) Rogers and Fred Astaire. Then, he was disappointed to be denied entry to the Irish Tap-Dance show, the precursor to tap dancing. This was followed by a nightmare where Herod, with a fierce look, ordered him to go on a mass killing spree, deeply unsettling him.

The Dombes is a marshy region in France, known as the 'land of a thousand ponds'.

Twelve hundred ponds dedicated to fish farming are the economic lifeline of this region. Individual fishing is allowed, and it is also the largest reserve of frogs in France and beyond (in Europe). The ponds are teeming with these little amphibians that enchant our rural nights with their incessant croaking (thank goodness for earplugs!).



Equipped with waders, a helmet with a headlamp, a satchel, and a fishing net, Brian reluctantly follows his colleague through the shallow marsh, capturing the unsuspecting frogs along the way.

Not everything in the frog is eaten, only its two meaty paws, renowned as the most delicate part. Sautéed in butter, garlic, and parsley, they grace the tables of the region.

The abomination is that the prey must be 'processed' on-site using a specially brought slicer. Only the edible part, the paws, is taken, while the rest is discarded into the marsh, becoming a feast for voracious carps.

Brian remains traumatized, imagining the agony of the frogs. He suddenly realizes that he has committed a homicide - going from a mere accomplice to a criminal to a serial killer capable of leaving tadpoles prematurely orphaned.

Remorse drives him to gulp down one, or maybe two, bottles of whisky to soothe his melancholy. Any other bottle of alcohol, even the infamous 'gut-rot', would have sufficed. In such circumstances, he can be exempted from any 'breach of trust' with the bottle. After the eventful weekend, on Monday, despite a persistent migraine, Brian faithfully showed

up for work. Around 5 o'clock, he received an urgent phone call from his boss, who asked him to pick him up from the airport. Surprisingly, his boss had managed to catch an earlier flight than expected.

In that very moment, an alarming realization hit Brian: he had completely forgotten about a sacred duty he had to fulfill - taking care of his boss's cat, Safran (Saffron), while he was away on business trips. Safran was a reddish, semi-Angora feline with a questionable pedigree. It would have been fitting to call her Ginger, but that name had already been bestowed upon Fergie, the Duchess of York.

Unfortunately, for the past three days, Safran hadn't received the attention and care she needed. Brian realized there was no time to waste, and a surge of determination came over him. He immediately called June, pleaded for her help, explaining the dire situation. June agreed to step in and rushed to the boss's house, where she would find a spare key in the top drawer of his office.

To save time and avoid the notorious traffic jam that plagued the Mont-Blanc Bridge, which would have required 45 minutes of waiting to cross from the left bank to the right bank of Geneva, they decided to take an alternate route using another bridge over the Rhône River (le Pont de la Machine). This would prove to be a less problematic option. Their goal was clear: within a maximum of 30 minutes, they needed to change Safran's litter box, change the water, refill her bowl with her favorite kibble, and, of course, give her a gentle cuddle between the ears, as sweet as a loukoum (*the Turkish delight*).

With the mission nearly accomplished, June called Brian to report a surprising turn of events. As she cautiously opened the boss's apartment door, she was taken aback to see a large, yellowish paw approaching her. It was not a lion's roar or a growl she heard, but rather plaintive vocalizations and hoarse cries that seemed unimaginable coming from a domestic cat. Astonishingly, it could only be Safran. The question remained: How was this even possible? June eventually entered the apartment and discovered an exhausted cat, too weak to even swipe a claw at the belated rescuer. A backup plan was urgently needed: finding a veterinarian to take care of the ailing feline.

First and foremost, she needed to get the cat into a carrier, which was nowhere to be found. Should she ask the neighbour if they had one? Unthinkable! The neighbour would immediately report to the police that a madwoman had illicitly entered a neighbouring apartment to steal a cat.

June then pleaded to Saint Rita, the patron saint of desperate causes. Her plea was heard: a travel bag should be at the bottom of a cupboard, or alternatively, the laundry basket in the bathroom would do.

Finally, Safran could be transported, "And off we go, Simone." This French expression doesn't mean anything specific, other than expressing the blissful satisfaction of pulling off a stunt. But who is Simone? I have no idea!

And now, what was next? June remained vigilant. She remembered Murphy's law "if anything bad can possibly happen, it will, and at the most inopportune time".

As soon as they were in the car, she anticipated reading the headline in the newspaper: 'Collision between two cars: one of the drivers hospitalized. A laundry basket with an injured cat was found on the back seat in one of the cars.'

A second SOS is sent to Saint Rita, who understands that it's time to put an end to this circus.

The final act: the smartphone plays the concluding score and locates the veterinarian who will restore the swollen/patéed paw of the feline to its normal state, ensuring all four legs are back in business.

Saint Rita finally ensured that no further mishaps interfere with the wild rescue of an adventurous cat and a forgetful driver. Brian was fit for a series of professional challenges - but that is a story for another time.



Cursed be the *bise noire* that sometimes blows over Lake Geneva, causing a temporary halt to the iconic water jet on the lake. It was surely this bad wind that slammed the terrace door onto the Meow's paw as it went in and out.

It's doubtful that Miss Safran will lounge there in the future!

**Regine Digiovanni, formerly UN Geneva/MINURSO**

*[Editor's note: thank you Regine for another intriguing tale of your time with the UN. Wonderfully evocative images of Geneva and the hunt for frogs for the dining table!]*

---

## WHO RUNS THE UN AND HOW DID THEY GET THERE?

---



*UN Secretary-General António Guterres at a press conference in the headquarters' Visitors Plaza, in front of the "Knotted Gun" sculpture. Photo John Penney/PassBlue*

One of the most powerful positions in the United Nations is the head of its peacekeeping wing. The post of Under Secretary-General oversees 100,000 peacekeepers and administers an annual budget of \$6.5 billion, nearly double what the UN Secretary-General works with. You'd think that basic questions like how the peacekeeping boss is chosen and when the person's

term of office ends would be simple to know. It turns out that it is not, at least under Secretary-General António Guterres, who makes these decisions.

Despite proclamations of progress and initiatives to support transparency and merit-based appointments, the UN Secretariat still asserts that basic information, like the start and end dates of high-level posts or upcoming renewals of such posts, is, to quote a recent letter sent to us by Guterres's spokesperson "confidential." Previous Secretaries-General, and even the current one on some occasions, have made this information public. There is no justification for keeping a top-level appointee's term a secret.

"A United Nations leader is expected not just to preach United Nations principles and norms to others, but to live them," the UN Leadership Framework tells us. A UN chief, it adds, "rewards merit and operates with integrity, transparency and fairness." In reality, top UN jobs are often given out based on politics and not on merit — a contradiction so obvious it is hiding in plain sight. This does not imply that those who are rewarded high posts are not qualified, but it suggests that the process of appointing the people is murky.

Everyone knows that you must be American to get the job of running the prestigious Political and Peacebuilding Affairs office; that you need to be Chinese to get the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, British to get the Humanitarian Affairs office and Russian to get the Office of Counter-Terrorism. For peacekeeping, you should be French. The Secretary-General ring-fences these roles for the powerful — often for powerful men — even though the General Assembly states that a national of a member state should not succeed a national of that same state.

These monopolies by the permanent members of the Security Council play out in the UN and across the wider multilateral system. Take the election for the president of the World Bank underway: an incredibly complex system that on 13 previous occasions has gone to an American man to run and is about to do so once again. Lofty goals for gender and geographic diversity evaporate on contact with money and politics. And in light of Russia's full invasion of Ukraine, which has been condemned by 141 UN member states, Guterres will be closely watched this June to see if he will reappoint a Russian national, Vladimir Voronkov, to head the counterterrorism office.

The upshot is a deeply uneven distribution of leadership positions and lack of due process that can sometimes lead to questionable results: a UN official appointed to a new post while being under internal investigation, officials accused of abuse, appointees so bad they have entered into folklore like "Potato Jack" Hutson — and perhaps the most notorious vetting oversight: appointing a Secretary-General who was later found to be a former Nazi credibly accused of war crimes. The UN's credibility and effectiveness suffer and the people the UN serves, everyone across the world, pay the cost.

Highly politicized or opaque recruitment practices not only mean that the most efficient candidates can be overlooked but also that the appointee, no matter how qualified, is denied the legitimacy conferred by a robust vetting process. It leaves the UN vulnerable to charges of unfairness and conflicts of interest.

To quote the first woman to rise to the rank of Under Secretary-General, Dame Margaret Anstee, a Briton, "People — the best possible people, in the right place — are a surer recipe for success than the most elaborate organogram." Such change is achievable, and civil society can make that difference.

We want to discourage further politicization of top appointments: UN officials should be independent civil servants, not subject to political pressure from member states. That much is enshrined in the UN Charter. However, the current lack of public scrutiny around the UN's

top appointments does not mean the absence of political pressure; it just means that this pressure goes unchecked and hidden, so that the public never knows why or how an appointee got a job. Where countries jockey for the soft-power spoils of top jobs and put the Secretary-General in an impossible stance, it is not only justified, but vital that this conduct be called out.

Healthy interrogation of these practices can help senior-level UN leaders to stand up to countries and assert their independence while doing their jobs, defending the UN Charter and adhering to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Blue Smoke is applying this approach across the UN's senior leadership cadre via a website and a newsletter that places senior leadership appointments under the spotlight.

*[Editor's note: This article reprinted from PassBlue on-line written by Maiara Folly, Enyseh Teimory, Fred Carver and Ben Donaldson. Thank you AAFICS member Peter Steele for submitting this link.]*

---

## EVOLUTION CONTINUES

---



© 1986 FarWorks, Inc. All rights reserved.

**“It’s Bob, all right ... but look at those vacuous eyes, that stupid grin on his face—he’s been domesticated, I tell you.”**

---

## WE HAVE A WINNER!

---

AAFICS Newsletter readers might recall a request in the December, 2022 edition from our colleagues at AFICS in Argentina. They were seeking entries for a competition regarding art works in a variety of genres and styles.



One of our AAFICS members not only entered the competition with two entries, he won third prize! Congratulations John Clements AM, formerly WHO, on such a splendid achievement. Readers will also know that John, now based in Queensland, has recently published a book (details in the December AAFICS Newsletter) so it seems that his talents have no end. Well done, John. What a wonderful way to spend a fulfilling retirement.

AAFICS President Jennifer was excited when she received this message from Buenos Aires to be passed to John:

### AFICS ARGENTINA 2022 23 ARTISTIC CONTEST, RESULTS

Dear John (Giovanni),

We are very pleased to send you here attached a report on the results of the AFICS Argentina 2022 23 Artistic Contest, and the images of the works presented there. We also add, for your information, the Jury's report on your works, one of these obtained a third prize: Painting on black card.

All the works will be exhibited for one year on our website (<https://www.aficsargentina.net.ar/>), and we are inviting FAFICS and all FAFICS member Associations (including yours), to show these beautiful participating works on their websites.

We would like to express our gratitude for your participation, which has contributed to enhancing this Contest.

With kind regards,

Isabel N. Kantor, Caty Iannello

Contest Coordinators

John's winning work is illustrated here:



**Third prize: PAINTING ON BLACK CARD** Autor:  
Author: John Clements (Giovanni), AAFICS  
Australia

### **Jury Comments**

Its aesthetics stand out, the contrast of those colors and movement, on a dark background

The black background, in turn, which highlights the delicacy of the flowers, also asks for something more so as not to be merely decorative (which is nothing wrong if that is the intention)

Reminiscence towards the Asian, the Japanese. The use of full colors is very attractive and how they stand out on the black background. The work proposes an aesthetic and ornamental vision of nature.

And John's other entry?

### **FLOWERS ON MY BEDSPREAD (Diseño sobre mi colcha)**

Autor: John Clements (Giovanni), AAFICS Australia

Technique: Acrylic; 26 x 37 cm



### **Jury Comments**

#### **Flowers on my bedspread**

A delicate and harmonious work, perhaps bordering on illustration a bit.

Work of great subtlety, which blends drawing and watercolor painting in a harmonious way. The line of the drawing defines each shape, the watercolor gives the color with a beautiful palette in which the blues and violets predominate, on which the yellows and oranges shine in contrast.

We invited John to let us know more about his artistic efforts and how he came to submit works for the prize. He wrote:

*I first saw an advert for a painting prize in the AAFICS newsletter. A small group of members in Argentina were organizing a global competition. I am new to painting as a hobby, taking it up during lockdown in Victoria. I had tried pen and ink sketching with a light watercolour wash and found it suited my style. But then I bought a new duvet cover to match my “Zen” house. It had a black background and a Chinese-style floral pattern to match the black in the house. Inspiration! I bought a piece of matt black card and painted a part of the duvet pattern. It was my first foray into acrylics, and I rather liked the effect. Never easily daunted, I rather arrogantly submitted the painting to the competition, not expecting to be even noticed. Just to add a bit of a Renaissance flavour, I signed it “Giovanni” (“John” in Italian!). My cheeky entry came third, but I don’t know how many entered – it may have been third out of three! There is no prize, no cup and no money, but it has been well worth it for bragging rights!*

While John is displaying his usual modesty, it should be pointed out that the judges were of considerable calibre and many entries were received. Check the AFICS Argentina website. Well done, John, for ensuring that the AAFICS Australia flag flew high.

---

## VALE (MARGARET) RUTH PFANNER

---



(Margaret) Ruth Pfanner (nee Harris) was born in Sydney in 1931 of British parents. She graduated from Sydney University with a B Economics and then went onto Cornell University where she did an MA followed by a PhD (Economics, International Economics and South East Asian studies).

She worked briefly with the NSW Public Service and became assistant to the Economist at AMP insurance company.



She met David Pfanner at Cornell. He was her cherished companion and life partner and fellow music lover who also worked in international development as an Anthropologist. He wrote 'A Semi-subsistence Village Economy in Lower Burma'. He died in 2021 aged ninety-two. <https://tributes.canberratimes.com.au/obituaries/397487/david-eugene-pfanner/?r=https://tributes.canberratimes.com.au/obituaries/canberratimes-au/>

She was then recruited directly to the UN Secretariat, where she worked from 1964-1971 in the Centre for Industrial Development. Her role as an economic researcher in the Economic Development Department included producing publications and training economic planners in member countries. She was also part of the group that organized the first international conference to establish UNIDO.

She apparently also worked for the World Bank in Washington DC but I can't find a definitive record of that.

From 1971-1980 she worked for ESCAP in Bangkok, again in the Economic Development Department, continuing research for publication and for annual regional meetings, as well as training experts from the region. She also prepared and executed a Women in Development project focussed on income raising for women in nine Asian countries and the Pacific.

Having completed sixteen years in the UN, she moved to Canberra in 1980 and joined AIDAB (later AusAID) as its first Women's Advisor, working across the agency to help staff to specifically address the needs of women. Ruth was no strident 'bra-burner' and I doubt if she would have been accepted in the heavily male dominated bastions of AIDAB if she had been. Instead, she wisely beavered away more quietly, helping to set the scene for future developments in this arena.

In 1985, she helped to found the International Women's Development Agency, along with Wendy Rose and Wendy Poussard. Her crucial role is well described in the following: <https://iwda.org.au/vale-dr-ruth-pfanner/>

She died in Canberra on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, like David, aged ninety-two. The death notice remarked that she was a talented musician (a pianist), a pioneer in promoting gender equality, a strong advocate for women and a benefactor of many causes, large and small.

I remember Ruth coming across as having been an understated person, calm, warm, wise and diplomatic, with an underlying strength which clearly demonstrated her extensive experience in dealing with bureaucracies and over-coming cultural constraints to improving the condition of women's lives around the world. These attributes were underlaid by a strong sense of practicality as shown by her farewell gift to the women of the Burmese village where she and David had lived - the only present that she could think of that would be really appreciated was one potato peeler per woman to replace the dangerous large knives they used! (With thanks to Helen Ware for that contribution).

Vale Ruth - a wonderful example of an 'Aussie Woman in the UN'.

**This eulogy prepared by Margaret O'Callaghan who worked with Ruth in AIDAB and later knew her as a highly respected former UN colleague.**

---

---

## DISTINGUISHED GENTLEMEN (AND GENTLEWOMEN) ON BIKES

---

The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride is already an institution in Australia, not only on these shores but worldwide. The website states: "The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride unites classic and vintage styled motorcycle riders from all over the world to raise funds and awareness for prostate cancer research and men's mental health. The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride was founded in Sydney, Australia, by Mark Hawwa. It was inspired by a photo of TV Show *Mad Men's* Don Draper astride a classic bike and wearing his finest suit. Mark decided a themed ride would be a great way of connecting niche motorcycle enthusiasts and communities while raising funds to support the men in our lives."



*A British classic – Triumph.*



*Bella Italia - the modern version.*

This fantastic initiative has raised over US\$37.5 million since 2012 with some 340,000 riders taking part in rides in 121 countries in the world.

Taking part in Cairns on Sunday 21 May we had an awesome day starting the day at one of the major sponsors (the local Triumph dealer) with over 75 bikes in attendance adorned by some dapper looking gentlemen. Our ride took us out to Ellis Beach Bar & Grill via the Esplanade in Cairns and ended up at Macalister's Brewery in Smithfield to join their highly popular bike show. As per the organisers, this year was by far the best one yet with 100 riders registered (more joined along the way) and over \$21,000 raised in Cairns alone.



*An Italian favourite, Ducati Desmo. What a beautiful machine, but temperamental. An Italian Diva.*

With our trusted BMW GSA adventure bike still in self-imposed 'hibernation' in Brissie, we saddled up our Japanese steed and took the *Kwaka* (Kawasaki Versys 1000 SE) on the DGR.

Mind you, she does not really fall into any of the suggested DGR categories of vintage or classic bikes, but then again, the old Z1000 4-in-line engine must definitely rate as one of the greatest 'classic' engines ever built. Who could argue with that?



*Norton Commando, beautifully restored and still running like a dream.*

The Cairns DGR saw an impressive diversity of makes and models, from classic European bikes to the usual American brands, of course all sorts of Japanese variations of the Big Four of Nippon. Four-strokes dominated, but there were a few interesting two-strokes doing their bit to contribute to CO2 emissions (as they do....) BMWs were present, too, mainly a couple of well-travelled R 100 GS, but beautifully maintained and looked after by their fastidious owners. And a few odd ones, too - brands long forgotten.

We are lucky in Cairns, the May weather is just perfect for riding. Nice, dry and warm, not having to worry about carrying rain or cold weather gear makes a big difference.

Despite the awesome options of riding up and down the ranges, the DGR ride is mainly meant to raise public awareness, so we straddled the Esplanade mid-morning where people had their breakfast (or brunch?) and enjoying the Far North Queensland atmosphere.

Riding up the iconic Captain Cook Highway to Ellis Beach is always a pleasure, a few twisties to warm up and get the five (or six?) senses going. Ellis Beach claims to be QLD's cleanest beach. Is it? We did not check the beachside but focused on the Bar & Grill which is a fantastic venue, it really seems the new proprietors are truly investing into making this a prime stopover for local weekenders and tourists alike.



*A legendary BMW GS veteran, winner of the Paris-Dakar race in the 80s.*

Heading back into town via the Northern Beaches with their own attractions and beautiful beachside resorts, we aimed for Macalister's Brewery in Smithfield, for their Sunday arvo live music session. They put on a great bike and car show, live entertainment and an interesting variety of craft beers. Unusual for us we stuck to lemon, lime & bitter (bitterly so...) but got rewarded with best-dressed couple (the motorcycle shop voucher will go towards an intercom upgrade!). Some say, that was an easy win with the others dressed in rags, but we consider that fake news. Mightier people than us have used that argument in their defence, some more successful than others (who shall all remain unnamed).



*We never won the Dakar ourselves but at least 1st prize for "best-dressed couple".  
Hmmm, where were the fashion police that day?*

Motorbike riders are spoilt for choice in Far North Queensland. And not only motorcyclists, motorists in general have some great roads and vistas to choose from.

From one of Cairns' northern suburbs, Smithfield, the Kennedy Highway to Kuranda (don't miss the Barron Falls lookout!) takes one to Mareeba, where a stop at the Heritage Museum, chocolate factory and tropical 'wineries' is in order. Follow the Great Divide south to Atherton in the Tablelands, visit the Crystal Caves, and take the Gillies Hwy down to the coastal plain. Yungaburra, a National Trust listed town, is well worth a stop (chance of spotting a platypus!), not to mention the Curtain Fig Tree and the numerous waterfalls, best just after the rainy

season when they are in full flow. The Gillies Hwy down to Gordonvale is a biker's delight but equally enjoyable in a nimble sports car. But watch the road after rain, it can become slippery from leaf litter. The Bruce Highway from Gordonvale back to Cairns is definitely not a highlight.

Back in Atherton on top of the Tablelands take a detour over to Herberton and visit the old historic village, a great place to spend a morning or afternoon.

Alternatively track south from Atherton towards Millaa Millaa Falls (there are actually three spectacular waterfalls only a few kilometres apart), then continue on the picturesque drive via the Palmerston Hwy to Innisfail on the coast - back again on the underwhelming Bruce Hwy...

Otherwise one can head north from Atherton and backtrack to Mareeba, then onwards further north via Mt. Molloy to Mossman Gorge (bring your hiking shoes!), then one has a choice: Either onwards to the Daintree National Park and Cape Tribulation (all bitumen now) or eastbound towards Port Douglas. 'Port', as the locals call it, is known as the playground for the rich and notorious (naturally unsuitable for us poor UN retirees...!). But do stop at Port Douglas and soak in the atmosphere, great restaurants and resort-style accommodation. Back to Cairns via the Captain Cook Highway, the vistas never stop, breathtaking scenery for most of the way. Pop into Hartleys Creek Crocodile Farm for a close look at the kind of reptiles which would be only too keen to make your acquaintance in some of the creeks and rivers of FNQ. As the Highway approaches Cairns, drop into the various resort beaches along the Northern Beaches, Palm Cove or Trinity Beach, all great places to spend a day or two (or more), relax and soak up the FNQ lifestyle. There are safe swimming enclosures all along the beaches, but do check with the local surf life savers before taking a plunge.

Cairns is a great place to live and the 'winter' months are arguably the best time to visit, i.e. from April/May till September/October. But even the wet season from October/November till March/April is a good time because most of the tourists are gone and things are quieter. The rains are not a bother, just come prepared. Of course, a trip up to the Cape is probably not a bright idea but interestingly many other sites are fairly easily accessible during the rainy season.

### **Klaus and Kerry Zillner, formerly DFS/DPKO/UNV**

*[Editor's note: Many thanks, Klaus and Kerry! Your motorcycling exploits continue to impress us all. Coming to a town near you soon. Safe travels.]*



---

## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

---

Sincere thanks to all contributors for articles, story ideas and other material for this *AAFICS Newsletter*. It is all highly appreciated. As readers would understand, the input for each edition



starts arriving months before we go to press. For example, the first items for this July publication reached my e-mail box in January. Of course, as Editor, this is very encouraging. However, as the address is also my personal e-mail box, AAFICS items are mixed with my own incoming messages and, to be honest, when the editing process begins every five months, I sometimes lose track of AAFICS material. With this in mind, I have decided to introduce a **new e-mail address specifically for AAFICS Newsletter contributions**. Makes sense? Hope so! I have tried to make the new address as

simple as possible. It is **aafigsnewsletter@yahoo.com** Please add this address to your list. Of course, I will continue to monitor the current mhtravelling@yahoo.com for contributions and personal e-mail well into the future. However, if you could use the new e-mail address, I would be most appreciative as I would then have all incoming articles, stories and ideas in one place. Thank you for your understanding. **Editor**

---

## MILK FOR BEGINNERS

---

*This story originates from time spent working from the FAO regional office in Cairo in Egypt – regional in the sense that the team covered 20 countries from Morocco in NW Africa to Iran in the Middle East. Everyone a technical specialist with responsibilities to service the many development projects underway in support of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Behind the two-dozen people in Cairo, however, there were the technical resources of the 1,200 people at headquarters in Rome. Mine was an agriculture/agro-industries portfolio...which is where the story arises. It describes some unexpected novel developments that enabled me to earn my 15 minutes of fame.*

*Target kids (kids everywhere) with those messages about the wholesomeness of milk and it will go over their head as they reach for that next can of Coke; but catch them at school or even earlier and you can establish dietary habits that will last a lifetime. This is more difficult to do in the middle-income countries, however, where the pressure of the entertainment food industries is relentless. Promoting kids having fun is a reasonable approach and one that dominated 'World Milk Day' in Egypt that year.*

*Milk comes from the supermarket.*

Explore the literature on World Milk Day and the shortened version 'WMD' continues to leap from the text (*with all those unfortunate military connotations left over from the invasion of Iraq and the aftermath that remains*) but nothing could be further from reality. More than 80 countries currently celebrate this most basic of foods with images of sunlight, squeaky clean

people (*both adults and kids*), cows that have been manicured since birth (*all of them Friesians*), grass that you can only find in New Zealand, and stainless-steel factories the size of a city block that have never seen a dust storm.

This is the commercial success of global companies celebrating technologies in genetics, livestock feed, milk production and processing, and then matching them to markets. Each morning they place just about the most wholesome food imaginable on your breakfast table. The reality for the traditional domestic small-scale milk producer in most low-income countries may be different, but the parallel industrial producer is well-supported by Messrs '*International Agro-Business*'. The formal milk industry in Egypt flourishes and services about 30% of the population.

And why not? With estimated 70% of Egyptians living in towns and cities there is simply no way to reach them with traditional systems of production and delivery and, in any case, the messages from the Ministry of Health on Milk Day were all about the delivery of high-quality safe foods, and you certainly do not get that from shipping raw/loose/untreated milk around. Small-scale milk producers are essentially stool and bucket people, with limited feel for the rudimentary basics of a clean approach to their animals, those doing the milking, those shipping and trading and those selling milk door to door or at street markets.



We got invited to participate in national Milk Day that year. Horror stories were delivered to those of us in the audience by the man from the Ministry of Agriculture for the adulteration of milk with water (*as an extender - and that presupposes a friendly source of water*), but then he moved on to chalk powder (*to bulk up the solids*) and finished with sodium hydroxide or formaldehyde (*for preservation*). There were no issues that the sanitized packs of milk available – most of it UHT – were a better choice, but these were 3-4 times the cost of the loose milk alternatives. Many local people compromise and buy ‘safe’ milk, which is sold in plastic bags at about half the cost of UHT milk.



#### *World Milk Day.*

It was a good year for World Milk Day in Egypt that year - it was a *first time* for this special day in the country and this, notwithstanding, that it owes its international status for the first day of June to decision-making by the group that I represented at that time. Now there’s a clever little programme that did not need a multi-million-dollar investment in strategic planning (*but some pragmatic, dedicated, cash-strapped and hardworking commodities people from earlier years including my colleague in Rome – who was tech/backstopping us with our local initiative in support of WMD in Egypt*). The Egyptian day went well too because ... we were invited on to national television.

Funnily enough, none of us in the Cairo Office had known about WMD before, and it was only the invitation from the national organisers (*led by a really well-known Swedish packaging company that needs no introduction*) to open the celebrations that got us all excited. A chance to meet the dairy industrial cognoscenti, to enjoy a fine lunch and to talk to people beats strategic planning back in the office any day. No such good fortune for our Senior Manager with those pressing deadlines but, it’s an ill wind, and one short presentation and five television interviews later makes you a celebrity for a day.





*(Take a moment out to reflect on this one ... Arabic television ... my Egyptian colleague standing out-of-sight behind the presenter and shifting my English into Arabic; and then, later that same day ... there's you, the talking head in the studio and on the screen with voice over saying all the right things about milk and Milk Day. 'Quirky' comes to mind. And there's estimated 100M people in the country from which to make up that television audience.)*



The waiters in the hotel restaurant at breakfast the next morning were grinning because they had seen me on television. That thing about everyone having their 15 minutes of fame. But that said, no one approached me on the Metro on the way to the office – except to offer me a seat (*which people did every day without fail*). You say 'La shukran' (*No thank you*) or 'Ana ayiz aa-gaff' (*I want to stand*) or 'Ana ayiz arua Dokki/Attaba' (*I want to get off at ...*). A cinch. No issue that people enjoy listening to you struggling with their language.

*Just desserts.*

In fact, the Milk Day lunch finished with a milk dessert topped with fresh cherries and it was delicious. We tossed around some ideas between the handful of people sitting at the table and earlier milling around during the mid-morning '*milk break*' and came up with an initiative that could fly – to provide technical support to the domestic buffalo milk industry for, while the milch cow dominates industrial milk production in Egypt, a significant minority of rural people milk their buffalo (which is typically a traction animal) and prefer the taste and texture of its higher

solids content. All buffalo milk is consumed raw with the issues therein of hygiene and human health.

More to the point, buffalo milk producers cannot access town markets easily. Italy has the most developed buffalo milk products industries in the world. Scope for partnerships? Probably, but it would need further work. Fortuitously, we already had a small technical exploratory initiative underway and that was before it cropped up in discussion on World Milk Day that year.



*And those kids.*

Egypt had a popular milk song that year too – really catchy and a great melody. To the sound and film of a group of kids singing – middle class all – the famous Egyptian soccer player Mahmoud El Kalib came on stage for the finale with a line of 10-year- old kids from his soccer academy - all dressed in red and ready to play each carrying a soccer ball. Cameras flashed, the audience clapped and the kids looked bashful and self-conscious. When asked by the big man, one of the kids said he never drank milk – the audience laughed – it was a fitting end to the celebrations as-it-were. Clearly, the kids had not been set up – which is typical of people in the country - open, friendly, generous to a fault and completely honest.

*(Well, taxi drivers excepted – but that's not entirely fair; it is more one of a try-on when they ask outlandish prices of foreigners. Beat them back to a reasonable price for the journey and it's all grins, jokes and not a little respect – but it's hard work. I can still remember some of my bargaining phrases and sums).*

*Photograph captions.*

1. Ice cream comes from milk. World Milk Day - surely one of the nicest of 'world days' - images of nutrition, health, freshness and little kids that combine to encourage the consumption of a food that can benefit just about everyone; especially those kids – kids love ice cream the world over.

2. Animal traction - buffaloes. More than 60% of local milk comes from buffaloes – and all of it is loose and part of the informal milk industries. People like the taste and higher fat content of buffalo milk – which is twice that of the typical milch cow; and buffalo milk attracts a higher price (*which doesn't prevent adulteration from one to the other*). Calf mortality can be high too (*with the milk sold off for cash*).

3. Donkey cart. Draught animals remain important for local transport in towns and villages across the country.

4. Desert country. Of the order 90% of the country is desert – but this was not always the case. Pyramid field south of Cairo where the ruins of the ancient capital Memphis can be found. The agricultural production of >1,000 years ago has long gone. The country has estimated 120 pyramids.

5. Urban sheep. Urban sheep can be found in many parts of the main cities – typically where there is open space, common lands and/or food supplements. This is in Alexandria.

**Peter Steele, formerly FAO**

*[Editor's note: Thanks again for another interesting article, Peter. And for all the other suggestions submitted for this Newsletter.]*

---

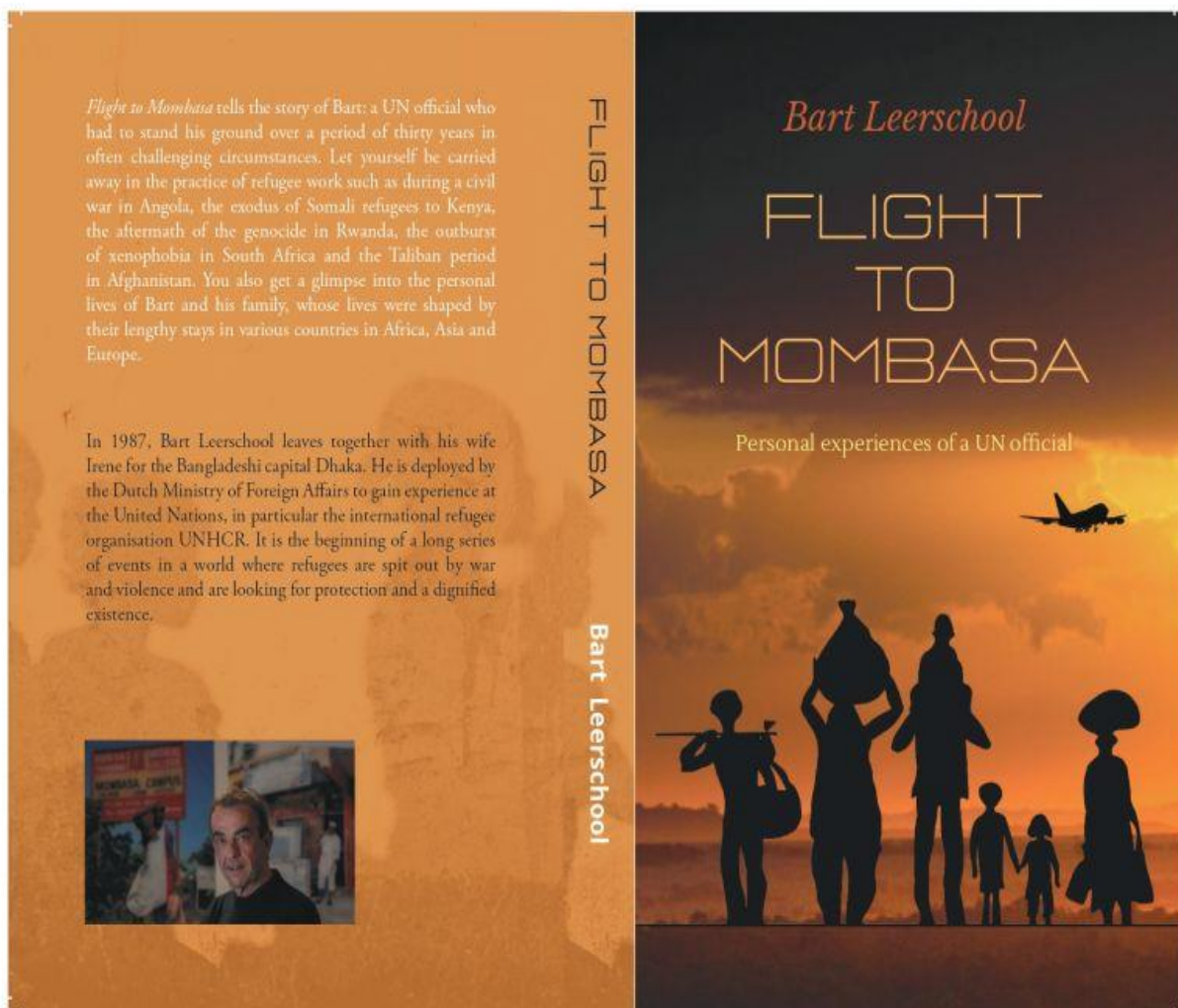
**UNHCR REMINISCENCES**

---

My name is Bart Leerschool. I have recently written a book about my personal experiences at the United Nations, in particular the world refugee agency, the UNHCR, over a period of 30 years.

The book, 'Flight to Mombasa', contains anecdotes about life and work in the different places of employment, against the background of the specific political context and refugee situation in the countries concerned.

After my law studies, I was deployed in 1987 by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to gain experience at the United Nations, initially at the UNDP. Subsequently, during my work at the UNHCR, I experienced a rather eventful period in war zones and refugee receiving countries such as Angola, Thailand, Kenya, Rwanda, Congo, Germany, Greece, South Africa, Zambia, Afghanistan and at the UNHCR HQ in Geneva. My personal story also includes the account of living with my partner and children in sometimes challenging circumstances.



I wrote the book in the Dutch language but also translated it into English, with the title 'Flight to Mombasa'. In the Netherlands it is available at all online bookshops and abroad on Amazon websites.

([https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bart-leerschool-8b23467\\_refugees-migration-un-activity-7034595604336930816-a-5F?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bart-leerschool-8b23467_refugees-migration-un-activity-7034595604336930816-a-5F?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop))

For further information about my profile and professional background, I may refer to the LinkedIn website, under the name Bart Leerschool.

I would be grateful if you could inform the members of your Association of the existence of my book which could be of their interest. I have attached a copy of the cover of the book.

*[Editor's note: Bart Leerschool was a former UNHCR colleague of Jennifer, our AAFICS President. There are probably many other former UNHCR folks in Australia who might also know Bart and would be interested in his book. 'Flight to Mombasa' is available totally free of charge from his LinkedIn page.]*

---

## UKRAINE AND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

---



*The city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine has been fought over since the summer, with still no decisive win by the Ukrainians or Russians. The photo is by the 93rd mechanized brigade of Ukraine Armed Forces, Feb. 27, 2023. In this essay, Ban Ki-moon, a former UN Secretary-General, endorses the establishment of a special tribunal to prosecute the crime of aggression in Ukraine, saying that Russia's Putin and others in the country's leadership "must be held accountable for their crimes."*

A year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the search for a credible path towards peace, based on the United Nations Charter, is ever more urgent. At the same time, mounting evidence of war crimes and atrocities committed by Russian troops against civilians in liberated Ukrainian territory reminds us that there can be no lasting peace without justice.

On Feb. 23, 2023, the UN General Assembly voted 141 to 7 for a "peace resolution" that reaffirmed global unity on the core principles at stake: a just and sustainable peace based on sovereignty, territorial integrity and accountability.

Turning these words into concrete actions is our collective responsibility. This is why the world needs to establish a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression in Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin and others in Russia's leadership must be held accountable for their crimes, as the leaders of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were tried at Nuremberg and Tokyo after World War II.

Such a move is a vital complement to the recent indictment of President Putin by the International Criminal Court for war crimes.

In May and June 2010, as UN Secretary-General, I attended the Kampala Review Conference of the Rome Statute, where the historic agreement was reached among states from all regions of the world on the definition of the crime of aggression.

More than a decade later, an act of aggression has been committed by a permanent member of the UN Security Council. It demands a unified, robust international response, demonstrating to the Russian leadership and autocrats everywhere that the fight against impunity supersedes geopolitical divides.

The International Criminal Court cannot prosecute the crime of aggression in Ukraine because Russia has not ratified the court's founding agreement, the Rome Statute, and the UN Security Council will not make a referral to the ICC, given Russia's veto power.

A special international tribunal can close this jurisdictional gap, focusing on the crime of aggression as the supreme international crime that encompasses all the acts and atrocities that flow from it.

Momentum for such a tribunal is building, with more states joining the core group that is working on accountability for Russia's aggression, support from the European Union and the establishment of a new centre for evidence on the crime of aggression in The Hague.

There is an active debate underway on the tribunal model that should be adopted. In my view, it will be most effective and legitimate if it can demonstrate broad international support, including from Asia, Africa and Latin America, through a UN General Assembly resolution recommending its establishment.

Some states, including those that publicly champion and defend the rules-based international order, may have reservations about the General Assembly playing this kind of leadership role on accountability. Others may be concerned that the pursuit of justice could make peace less likely. But I have long believed that "peace versus justice" is a false choice, and that we must pursue both with equal vigour, in tandem.



I believe the best way to hold the top Russian leadership accountable is through the establishment of an international tribunal, based on international law and the Kampala definition of aggression as a leadership crime.

The main alternative being put forward — a hybrid Ukrainian/internationalized model based on Ukrainian law — risks being unable to overcome immunities and could place undue pressure on the Ukrainian government. UN member states around the world should unite behind its efforts to work towards the General Assembly-recommended international model.

At the G20 summit hosted by Indonesia in Bali in November 2022, leaders agreed in the final

communiqué that “it is essential to uphold international law and the multilateral system that safeguards peace and stability. This includes defending all the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.”

President Putin, his ministers and generals have all shown their contempt for these values by their actions over the past year. The crime of aggression is, by definition, a leadership crime. This must be the focus of the international community. The individual responsibility of a political leader should not, however, induce the collective responsibility of a whole nation and affect international sporting or cultural exchanges.

An international tribunal would deliver on the shared responsibility of all UN member states to tackle impunity and defend the essence of the UN Charter. When this issue is put to the General Assembly, as I believe it must be, I hope political leaders across the world, from Asia and Africa to Europe and the Americas, will rise to the moment. Endorsing this approach will be a decisive step towards a just and lasting peace in Ukraine and a victory in the battle against impunity.

**This essay by former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon originally appeared in the *Jakarta Post*, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023. It is reprinted from the on-line *PassBlue*.**

---

## PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF SUDAN

---

One of the saddest chapters in recent international history is currently being written in Sudan. Australian media pay little attention to the on-going vicious, bloody civil war which erupted in mid-April 2023 in what was, until the break-away of South Sudan, the largest country in Sub-Saharan Africa.

January 1979 saw the Sackett family make their first landfall in Africa in the Sudanese capital Khartoum, *en route* to an FAO posting in Dar es Salaam, via that well-known staging post Mogadishu, Somalia. I don't suppose Alitalia runs that route today!

Fast forward to a 1993-98 World Food Programme posting to Nairobi with responsibility for operations in Kenya and “rebel-held” southern regions of Sudan. WFP ran an air-base in Lokichogio in Turkana district of Kenya, some 30km from the border of what is today South Sudan. This represented a whole new ball game in terms of food aid delivery, with thousands of tonnes of sorghum and other commodities being air-dropped into largely road-less war-torn areas. I still vividly recall my first trip into Waat, Jonglei State where the subsistence farmers literally killed the fatted calf on our arrival, and sang and danced for the rest of the evening. A less happy memory was the long road trip in 1997 from Arua in north-west Uganda to Yei in Southern Equatoria State of Sudan. We had stopped to stretch our legs for a few minutes. A few metres from the land-cruiser our boots were crunching over a midden of human bones – remnants of a not too-distant massacre.

And so to 2002. Back to Khartoum, Sudan where improbably the writer had been appointed as UN Resident Coordinator arriving on the evening of Saturday 6 July. Never easy starting a new assignment in a new country. What one needs is a quiet initial couple of weeks to get to know the new staff, the key figures in Government and some of the intricacies of the

programme activities. What one doesn't need is, on Day 4, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, arriving. His 40 hour visit to Khartoum ranks among the most miserable, frustrating time in my UN career. Effectively I knew nothing and knew nobody and could contribute nothing. My diary for Thursday 11 July reads succinctly "Lunch: Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail; Dinner President Omar Al Bashir". I recall the dinner was held *al fresco* in the grounds of the Old Republican Palace. Scheduled to start at 8.30pm, the key figures didn't show up until around 10pm. Coinciding with their arrival, one of Khartoum's notorious *haboobs* or sand-storms rolled through coating everything with dust and confusion.



*UN photograph of Khartoum during the relocation/evacuation of UN staff and families in the current civil conflict.*

Everything plain sailing after a tricky introduction in Khartoum? Not a bit of it! After about six weeks in limbo waiting to formally present my credentials as UN Representative in Sudan, a message came through from New York that the Government of Sudan would *never* accept Sackett's credentials. The next day, I was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bracing myself for a roasting, I was astonished to be met by a meek request for UNDP technical assistance for an e-commerce project. Obviously it wasn't common knowledge in MFA Khartoum that Sackett was unacceptable.

Despite high level lobbying in New York, there was no change to the government position. So finally, after 88 days in Sudan, we left for Home Leave and an uncertain future. Ironically we reflect on our time in Khartoum with some affection. We certainly made more local friends there in three months than we managed in other postings in three years.

**Mike Sackett, formerly FAO/WFP/UNDP**

**Editorial note: History repeats. Mike Sackett was denied UN appointment status in Sudan in 2002. Last month, June 2023, the military regime in Khartoum declared the current UN envoy *persona non grata* and he was denied re-entry to the country after visiting New York to brief the Secretary-General and the General Assembly on the current humanitarian situation.**



---

## DISEASE IS MY MIDDLE NAME

---

My involvement with the United Nations stemmed from 'disease'. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is very interested in diseases - especially those that limit agricultural production or have a 'pandemic' potential.

I really love 'diseases'.

Diseases put you out of 'ease' They can be anything that impairs your normal function. There are many ways to categorise diseases. Broadly they are either infectious, due to deficiency, hereditary, or physiological. Being run over by a bus could also pose as a diseased state. Cancer is clearly a disease.

The most interesting diseases, to my mind, are the infectious diseases.

So in 2023, do we - you and I and science - understand diseases? In recent years, we have probably heard more about one particular disease than we have heard about all diseases throughout our entire lives. During the past couple of years many disease experts were born across the coffee tables of the globe. We think we know. So how did we come to this?



*A village meeting to discuss Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia control in The Gambia - October 2012. This severe disease of cattle was eradicated from Australia in the 20th century but persists in many areas of the world. In The Gambia's case, civil unrest in nearby countries led to animals being moved and the disease being introduced. A surveillance and vaccination programme addressed the problem but not before these herders suffered terrible losses.*

Our hunter gatherer ancestors lived difficult and short lives, filled with the challenges of getting enough food to fuel their bodies. They lived in small groups and, although they practiced no

real hygiene, their environments were relatively clean. Infectious diseases were not really able to establish in them.

This all changed with the agricultural revolution, emerging from the Middle East and spreading rapidly around the Mediterranean creating great wealth and empire but changing the infectious disease playing field. People started to have much less variation in their diets due to the monocultures they farmed. The populations grew and gathered around fertile areas. Trade increased and, with trade, people moved over long distances and took their animals with them. This paved the way for infectious diseases to emerge from livestock and establish in crowded human population centres, spreading along trade routes.

The diseases that were recognised were poorly understood and thought to be pestilences thrown down by gods or witches.



*Foot and Mouth Disease Checkpoint - Mongolia 2010*

*This highly contagious viral disease of cloven-hoofed animals enters Mongolia regularly but tends not to sustain. Mongolian authorities act swiftly and firmly to eliminate these incursions.*

With the theft by Prometheus of that wonderfully useful tool, fire, Zeus was understandably upset. Zeus found vengeance by presenting Pandora to Prometheus' brother, Epimethius. Pandora was also charged with the care of a box that contained all of the ills that could exist with strict instructions "not to open the box". Of course, in accord with all sexist mythologies, the woman was just too curious and ... you guessed it ... released all of the world's sicknesses, diseases, and unspecified evils to plague mankind forever. Quick to slam the lid shut, Pandora only managed to retain one item - "hope" - inside the box. A pretty depressing story all round.

Many of the advances in medicine have come from empirical observation - looking at things that are not understood and proposing explanations or hypotheses. With time, thinkers made the connection between disease and swamps and bad water. Not bad guesses as cholera and malaria were popular at the time and were in fact associated with water.

But the explanations were poor. Malaria takes its name from the Italian “mala-aria” or bad air. It was thought that the gases (the miasma) coming from the swamps was the disease source rather than the mosquitoes that infested those swamps.

In fact, modern day Italians will mostly try to convince you that sickness comes from blasts of cold air to your head and throat. The cause is termed “colpo d’aria” or blast of air. Scarves are not just a fashion item in Italy but a prophylaxis.

There is an element of truth even in these folk tales. Cold viruses that find their way into your nasal passages are activated by cold dry air that is inhaled, breaking down the normal protective barriers of the mucous membranes.

With the Black Death (Plague) spreading throughout the known world in the 15th century, Venice correctly saw itself as vulnerable and established quarantine centres. They put plague sufferers on the island of Lazzaretto Vecchio (old Lazzaretto) and later ensured that ships coming from plague affected places were quarantined on Lazzaretto Nuovo (new Lazzaretto).



*Near empty poultry farm due to “bird ‘flu” - avian influenza - Sumatra 2004  
Bird ‘flu has been of great concern since a virus group capable of infecting both birds and humans emerged in Asia. In addition to devastating poultry production, this has been the main focus of “pandemic preparedness” in recent years.*

Why the word “quarantine”? Even earlier than this in Dubrovnik, then a Venetian-ruled part of what is now Croatia, the idea of quarantine was first sparked. For some reason a forty day isolation was chosen as the ideal and the Italian term was “quaranta giorni” meaning forty days.

Over time, the notion of living organisms causing disease was starting to take on but it was not until Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, a Dutch microscopist of the 1670s actually saw microbes for the first time that they became known. This gave rise to a particularly endearing poem about his discovery:

“Big bugs have little bugs, on their backs to bite ‘em.  
Little bugs have littler bugs, and so *ad infinitum*.”

These bugs or microbes were thought to come out of nowhere - to spontaneously generate. After all, people knew by then that fermentation involved microbes in the vats and no-one introduced them (knowingly).

Enter Louis Pasteur who thought up a simple experiment. Why not boil up the same broth but put half in a glass container that is sealed and half into one that is not. Voila! Bugs are apparent only in the unsealed one. In fact, if the opening is beneath the spout so that dust etc. cannot settle in the glass, then spoilage is also avoided. Also, the very fact that spoilage can be avoided by heating would suggest that something has been alive and killed by the heat - the bugs did not spontaneously generate. This work took place in the years prior to 1862, in the greater scheme of things not so very long ago.

Modern infection prevention pre-dates Pasteur. In 1847 the Hungarian physician and scientist Ignaz Semmelweis applied his observation skills to great effect. At that time, many mothers were dying from puerperal fever in his hospital. They were suffering from severe uterine infections in the immediate period following their confinements. Semmelweis reckoned that this might have had something to do with his doctors going straight from performing autopsies to delivering babies. He changed the processes and all but solved the problem.

As part of folk medicine, healers had used moulds to treat wounds and must have found that this worked. Who knows how they explained their results. Dateline 1928, and the Scot Alexander Fleming goes an experiment growing bacteria in his lab in London. A contamination with mould is obvious and caused by the lid being accidentally left off the cultures. What is not so obvious but Alex picked up on was that the bacteria were not growing near the mould. He had discovered penicillin.

Fast forward ten years and the Australian Howard Florey with his mates at Oxford, work on the mould and purify, assay and develop production systems for it. By 1942, in time for some of the Second World War, penicillin becomes available as the world’s first intentional antibiotic.

But so recently in our history, our ignorance is again on display. Penicillin was used so widely and so poorly that the unanticipated resistance to it by disease-causing organisms quickly arose. Dose with too little, for too short a time, too frivolously and - bang! - some of the millions of bugs that are exposed to penicillin are, for whatever reason, immune to its effects and it is these bugs that survive and propagate.

Even in 2023 we still do not seem to understand. We have made many antimicrobials but almost all have spawned resistance in the microbes we want to destroy. Antimicrobial resistance is very real, a very serious threat to our future well-being. It is not a fun day when a patient is told that “yes, they have septicaemia” but “no, the normal antibiotics will not save you” and “we have only one possibility in our kit that might work”.

Do we now, in the days of wonderfully complex understanding of our universe, fully understand diseases? I think not. We are positioned much better than we were two hundred years ago, but we have a long way to go.



*Monument in Rome to celebrate the global eradication of Rinderpest - October 2011  
Two major accomplishments have been the effective eradication of Smallpox and Rinderpest globally.  
The viruses remain under secure conditions in some laboratories but no longer circulate naturally.*

Do we need to focus on diseases? I think so. Is it dangerous? Possibly, but it is even more dangerous to ignore them.

There are some diseases that even penicillin will not cure.

**Ian Douglas, formerly FAO**

*[Editor's note: Many thanks, Ian. Always fascinating, educational and easy to understand stories flow from your pen. Appreciated.]*

---

## THE LAST WORD:

### *THE FLYING MUFFIN*

---

Been embarrassed recently? Easy. Oh yes! For instance, at the AAFICS lunch in Brisbane in May, I managed to avoid paying for the meal. I realised my mistake on my way home halfway down the Bruce Highway! I suspect the older I get (not you, of course) the more frequent events such as this will be.\*

I had a particularly belittling experience on a recent Qantas flight. I was flying from Canberra to Sydney on a small Dash-8 plane – not much room in the seating. With only 20 minutes to serve a three-course meal, the cabin staff provided me, instead, with a very full hot cup of tea and a muffin. This was the beginning of the problem. The muffin came in a cellophane packet that was sealed down one edge. To access the muffin, I needed to pull at both sides of the seal to liberate it. Pull as I might, it would not open. After several moments of applying maximum shearing force on the packaging, it suddenly popped open. The muffin, now released, shot into the air to a considerable height.

I was now faced with a dilemma – to catch or not to catch. In the microseconds the muffin was in flight, I decided that the confines of the seating and the perilously perched hot tea made a goalie's lunge a dangerous option. In its descent, the muffin, being moist and spongy, landed on my tray table and bounced into orbit I know not where. I did not see the item again.



*A muffin. Origin, flavour and texture unknown. Probably not the muffin lost on the Qantas flight, but potentially a close relative. Photo courtesy of the author.*

Upset at losing the only food on offer, I summoned the lady cabin crew. “I had difficulty opening the cellophane,” I said. “I’ve lost my muffin.” She gave me a long look that I last remember receiving when I was seven and had broken the lead in my pencil. A look generally reserved for kindergarten teachers.

“I will bring you another,” she said, with barely concealed annoyance. True to her word, she disappeared to the back of the plane and re-emerged moments later. If I thought the next bit was going to be easy, I was wrong. She definitely regarded me as kindergarten material as she delivered the final insult: “I have opened this one for you already,” she said as she carefully placed the new muffin on the tray table, thereby avoiding another pathetic performance by her small pupil. I may have to fly Virgin next time.

*\*Editorial note: John is, of course, a man of honour and did eventually pay for his lunch.*

**John Clements AM, formerly WHO**

---

---

## ABOUT US

---

The *AAFICS Newsletter* is an informal communications tool designed to keep former UN staff



members residing in Australia in touch with each other and their Association's activities. Editorial responsibility for articles is held by the individual contributor. The Editor appreciates any stories or articles of interest and thanks all who have contributed to this edition. Photographs are either supplied or taken from public Internet sources such as Wikipedia, Cartoonstock.com or the UN and its agencies for non-commercial, private use. Please send any articles to the office of the President, to the Editor or through your local State/Territory Coordinator. The next *Newsletter* will be released in December 2023.

### AAFICS OFFICE HOLDERS

**President:** Jennifer Ashton OAM. [jenniferlashton@gmail.com](mailto:jenniferlashton@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:** Tom Joel. [tomjoyjoel171@gmail.com](mailto:tomjoyjoel171@gmail.com)

**ACT Coordinators:** Lorraine Corner. [lorraine@helkorn.com](mailto:lorraine@helkorn.com); and Margaret O'Callaghan. [Margaret@ocallaghan.id.au](mailto:Margaret@ocallaghan.id.au)

**NSW Coordinator:** Maurice Critchley. [mauricecritchley@yahoo.com](mailto:mauricecritchley@yahoo.com)

**QLD Coordinator:** Mike Sackett. [msktt@yahoo.com](mailto:msktt@yahoo.com)

**SA Coordinator:** Christine Elstob. [christineelstob@hotmail.com](mailto:christineelstob@hotmail.com)

**TAS Coordinator:** Jane Wilson. [wilsojane@gmail.com](mailto:wilsojane@gmail.com)

**VIC Coordinator:** Peter and Ivy Steele.

**WA Coordinator:** Sharon Vanbuerle. [harryanne2@msn.com](mailto:harryanne2@msn.com)

**Newsletter Editor:** Martin Hadlow. [aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com](mailto:aaficsnewsletter@yahoo.com)  
(or [mhtravelling@yahoo.com](mailto:mhtravelling@yahoo.com))

