ARE WE ALL BECOMING ORANGE?

GENDER ADVANCEMENT

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The time is now

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On 8 March, the world celebrates International Women’s Day. This edition of *UN Special* is dedicated to the ongoing struggle to achieve true global gender equality. In these pages you will find an overview of the women’s liberation movement over the course of the twentieth century, beginning with the struggle for the rights of women to vote, up until the ‘Orange the World Campaign’ from UN Women. You may read about the achievements of government and society on these fronts, and about the grave failures and the challenges that remain. Among other issues, experts discuss the inclusion of women and girls in STEM, as well as sexual violence, harassment, the pay-gap struggle, and the #meToo campaign. You may turn to the centrefold for an overview of the gender gap in humanitarian action and its broad implications, not just for women but for the world.

In this edition, you will also find an interview with the CEO of the Geneva Airport, an important organisation serving the Genève Internationale. In another interview, the Lebanese ambassador speaks to us about his nation, and issues a passionate call to the international community to step up to the broad-ranging demands of the refugee crisis. You will also read about the upcoming International Film Festival and Forum on Human Rights (FIFDH). You will find several articles relevant to UN staff, including an exploration of the toxic effects of badmouthing and psychological harassment in the workplace, as well as some practical tips for what to do when faced with potential dismissal for underperformance. In addition, you will find an overview of coaching on the workplace, a must for all UN agencies that is sometimes ignored. Finally, this edition concludes with a portrait of travels in the beautiful nation of Myanmar. We hope you will enjoy it!
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Gender Advancement? Or Gender Complacency?

Are we really advancing gender equality? It has been several decades since this was declared a top priority for everyone, but the crude reality is that much remains to be done.

ALEX MEJIA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

We are privileged at the UN to be able to see the world holistically. We have a vantage point that give us unparalleled access to top-level discussions, to global decision makers, and to state-of-the-art resources on the most important topics for humanity. Of those topics, one seems to have advanced steadily: gender equality. But, has it really advanced? You will find mixed answers depending on who you ask. Most women today can do all things a man can do: they can work as equals, drive and travel freely, vote, marry whoever they want, and even fight on the frontline of wars. However, well into the second decade of the 21st century, there are still many countries in which such actions as this, remain a dream for women and girls. Everyone agrees that gender equality is essential for us to achieve peace, foster economic growth, defend rights, and ensure the well-being of all members of our societies. Everyone, except some governments where gender equality is still seen as a secondary matter. And if you are thinking of some developing nations, you may be wrong. To put things in perspective, let’s remember where we are coming from.

The right to vote and the Suffragettes

A wave of enfranchisement started in 1893 in New Zealand, swept across the globe and found its end in 2015 in Saudi Arabia. Country by country, it granted women the right to vote and deemed them as intelligent and trustworthy as men (!) and, with that, it brought about a sea of change. While this was neither the beginning of the struggle for equality nor its end, 2015 saw the culmination of a prolonged and sometimes dangerous campaign to secure women’s suffrage.

This year we celebrate a noteworthy anniversary of this movement: exactly 100 years ago, the Suffragettes movement culminated successfully and British women, for the first time, went to the voting cabinets. It
sounds difficult to believe today, but at first the terms to do so were strict: while all men from the age of 21 could vote, women had to be 31 and be householders, wives of householders, occupiers of property, graduates of British universities, or similarly qualified. These strict terms were finally abandoned one decade later. While historians don’t agree how big a part the Suffragette movement had in the achievement of this historic milestone, without these brave women British democracy would clearly look different today. More than that, the work of the Suffragettes was as much practical as it was symbolic. Winning the right to vote meant the inclusion of women into public life and political debate.

The National Society for Women’s Suffrage or Suffragettes, with their slogan “deeds not words”, sought to disrupt society for the better. They organized protests, marches, rallies and held public speeches for their cause. This peaceful campaign had started in 1867 and continued for many years during which hardly any progress was being made at the state level. So deplorable the Suffragettes saw the conditions of women in society that, ultimately, militant action was seen as an acceptable means. The year 1905 marks the beginning of this militant movement, when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney got arrested and imprisoned for heckling a Liberal politician at a meeting in London. The so-called criminal acts that followed as part of the campaign, mostly smashing of windows and small-scale arson, stood in no comparison to the immediate response of an already aggressive and discriminative state. Suffragettes were imprisoned under harsh conditions, brutally force-fed in response to hunger strikes and even injured and sexually abused by the police.

Anniversaries bring with them an opportunity to look back and reflect. And so, the centenary of the women’s vote in Britain has pushed the issue of the Suffragettes once again on the political table. While today the movement is perceived as something clearly necessary that was met with an appalling response by society and the state at the time, there has never been an official apology or posthumous pardon to convicted suffragettes. This was now suggested by the leader of the British Labour party, Jeremy Corbyn. “As a country we must recognise and honour the enormous contribution and sacrifice made by women who campaigned for the right to vote.” Corbyn said in a speech on 6 February 2018. A decision on posthumous pardon remains in the court of the ruling Tory Government that, albeit not generally against a pardon, has deemed it impractical. It was a shock to hear Home Secretary Amber Rudd say that giving pardons for women who were jailed while fighting for the right to vote would be “complicated”. Maybe we need another 100 years for the pardon to happen.

The UN and women
Let’s take a step back from Britain and look at the global landscape of the fight for gender equality. Major United Nations (UN) agreements seek to end the systematic discrimination of women that still plague all our societies. In 1979, the General Assembly adopted a convention that is often referred to as the “international bill of rights for women”: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and defines measures on the state level to end it. As of today, 189 governments have ratified or acceded to the treaty. As a second major achievement of the UN, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action paints a picture of a world where every woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choice and realize all their rights. It was conceived by 185 member states after two weeks of heated political debate in 1995. Dubbed the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women’s rights, it remains an influential source of guidance and stimulus to this day.

Despite progress being made, the United Nations still faces challenges in its fight against the systematic discrimination of women. Insufficient funding and a fragmented approach have long hindered much-needed improvement. To accelerate progress, in 2010 the General Assembly unanimously adopted the resolution that created UN Women. As the “champion for gender equality”, the agency brings together previously separate efforts of the United Nations and builds upon their results. While having a separate entity should enhance the work of other UN agencies and sharpen their focus, it does not relief them from their own duties to promote gender equality. Since its inception, UN Women has spearheaded several impactful initiatives. Its “HeForShe Campaign” aims to bring more men to the table by encouraging them to become agents of change.
UN Women’s “HeforShe Campaign” stands exemplary for a noteworthy shift of perception that has begun in the last years and is critical if we are to reach true gender equality. Previously perceived as a “struggle of women for women”, we now slowly come to realize that gender equality is something that affects all people and critically influences social, political and economic spheres. After all, we are speaking about fifty percent of the world’s population – 3,760,869,278 people and counting – that are systematically forgotten, excluded, hindered and degraded, especially in the developing world. Imagine what we can achieve if we can finally seize the immense potential behind this number.

In 2015, the countries of this earth pledged to make our world a better place by 2030 by adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 5 is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” and calls, inter alia, to end all forms of violence against women, to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work and to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources. While achieving Goal 5 and all of its targets will positively affect the lives of billions of people, more than that, success of all the other goals hinges on it. The fight for gender equality and with it the social, political and economic inclusion of half of the world’s population in the struggle for a better world, is key to achieving the Agenda 2030.

**Still far ahead: equal pay**

Awareness-raising campaigns regarding gender equality are now focused on how the wage gap between men and women has prevailed. It seems that the private sector is oblivious to the facts and that legislative efforts continue to be insufficient in combating this type of discrimination. As of today, it is estimated that: a) the gender gap is at 10% or more; b) women around the world earn 77 cents for every dollar men earn; c) women will achieve wage parity with men only within 217 years, should the current trend continue. Different reasons may explain -if not justify- this gap. For instance, much of the economic gap stems from the prevalence of women occupying low-paid, temporary, precarious, informal, and irregular positions, mostly at the industrial, agricultural and service sectors (in many cases, as domestic workers). Frequently, they also tend to work less hours because they are the ones assuming unpaid domestic and care responsibilities, namely being wives and mothers. In addition, women often start their careers with lower wages than men, and this gap tends to widen over the years. Maternity also plays a decisive role in the hiring of women and in the gender pay gap. For every child a woman has, the gap is greater, especially in developing countries. Illegitimate and unjustifiable.

We need to remember the passion of the Suffragettes and remain committed to fight for gender equality. But this is not a fight for women only. I can assure you that if more men would really take this to heart, the world would indeed change. I personally have a strong motivation to do just that: my three daughters. Voilà!

Learn more about the #OrangeTheWorld campaign: [http://unwoman.org](http://unwoman.org)

International Women’s Day 2018

The theme for International Women’s Day, 8 March, is “The Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women’s lives.”

UN WOMEN

This year, International Women’s Day comes on the heels of unprecedented global movement for women’s rights, equality and justice. Sexual harassment, violence and discrimination against women has captured headlines and public discourse, propelled by a rising determination for change.

People around the world are mobilizing for a future that is more equal. This has taken the form of global marches and campaigns, including #MeToo in the United States of America and its counterparts in other countries, protesting against sexual harassment and violence, such as #YoTambien in Mexico, Spain, South America and beyond, #QuellaVoltaChe in Italy, #BalanceTonPorc in France and #Ana_kaman in the Arab States; “Ni Una Menos” (‘not one less’), a campaign against femicide that originated in Argentina; and many others, on issues ranging from equal pay to women’s political representation.

International Women’s Day 2018 is an opportunity to transform this momentum into action, to empower women in all settings, rural and urban, and celebrate the activists who are working relentlessly to claim women’s rights and realize their full potential.

Echoing the priority theme of the upcoming 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, International Women’s Day will also draw attention to the rights and activism of rural women, who make up over a quarter of the world population and majority of the 43 per cent of women in the global agricultural labour force.

They till the lands and plant seeds to feed nations, ensure food security for their communities and build climate resilience. Yet, on almost every measure of development, because of deep seated gender inequalities and discrimination, rural women fare worse than rural men or urban women. For instance, less than 20 per cent of landholders worldwide are women, and while the global pay gap between men and women stand at 23 per cent, in rural areas, it can be as high as 40 per cent. They lack infrastructure and services, decent work and social protection, and are left more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Making the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality, to leave no one behind, needs urgent action in rural areas to ensure an adequate standard of living, a life free of violence and harmful practices for rural women, as well as their access to land and productive assets, food security and nutrition, decent work, education and health, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Rural women and their organizations represent an enormous potential, and they are on the move to claim their rights and improve their livelihoods and well-being. They are using innovative agricultural methods, setting up successful businesses and acquiring new skills, pursuing their legal entitlements and running for office. Recently, as hundreds of courageous women from the film, theatre and art industry in the USA started speaking against sexual harassment and assault by powerful men in the industry, they found a powerful ally in Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, the national farmworker women’s organization, no stranger to the abuse of power. On 8 March, join activists around the world and UN Women to seize the moment, celebrate, take action and transform women’s lives everywhere.

1 Figures are based on data available on: http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/media-and-resources/evaw-facts-and-figures
Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls

- Up to 70 per cent of women face physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, according to available country data. Most violence takes place in intimate relationships.
- Worldwide, up to 50 per cent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 15.
- More than 64 million girls worldwide are child brides, with 46 per cent of women aged 20–24 in South Asia and 41 per cent in West and Central Africa reporting that they married before the age of 18. Child marriage resulting in early and unwanted pregnancies poses life-threatening risks for adolescent girls; worldwide, pregnancy-related complications are the leading cause of death for 15-to-19-year-old girls.
- Approximately 140 million girls and women in the world have suffered female genital mutilation/cutting.
- Trafficking ensnares millions of women and girls in modern-day slavery. Women and girls represent 55 per cent of the estimated 20.9 million victims of forced labour worldwide, and 98 per cent of the estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation.
- Rape has been a rampant tactic in modern wars. Conservative estimates suggest that 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.
- Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work.
- In the United States, 83 per cent of girls aged 12 to 16 have experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.

Extra vulnerabilities

Women in urban areas are twice as likely as men to experience violence, particularly in developing countries. Women are already two to four times more likely than men to become infected with HIV during intercourse. Forced sex or rape increases this risk by limiting condom use and causing physical injuries.

In the United States, 11.8 per cent of new HIV infections among women more than 20 years old during the previous year were attributed to intimate partner violence.

The high cost of violence

Annual costs of intimate partner violence have been calculated at USD 5.8 billion in the United States in 2003 and GBP 22.9 billion in England and Wales in 2004. A 2009 study in Australia estimated the cost of violence against women and children at AUD 13.8 billion per year.
Sustaining economic growth (SDG8) and achieving higher productivity through technological upgrading and innovation implies that we need more women in STEM. The figures are very clear: McKinsey Global Institute (2015) has found that if women were to participate in the economy equally to men (full-potential scenario), it would add an extra 28 trillion USD (26%) to annual global GDP in 2025 in comparison to the business as usual scenario.

A quick brainstorm of eminent and acclaimed scientists may throw up names such as Galileo, Einstein, Newton, Darwin and Stephen Hawking. The common denominator? They are all men. Would you immediately think of Marie Curie and her research on radioactivity, Rosalind Franklin and her contribution to the discovery of DNA, Esther Lederberg who laid the groundwork for future discoveries on genetic inheritance, or Lise Meitner whose work led to the discovery of nuclear-fission? The hidden faces, voices and stories of women in science is something that has come to the forefront of our thinking as we push towards gender equality across our societies. With SDG5 dedicated to gender equality and Target 5.5 committed to achieving gender equality in leadership and decision-making fora, the time has come to

Sunday 11 February 2018 marked the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. The empowerment of women and girls through increased participation in science is crucial to reaching the world we want by 2030.

NIKHIL SETH, UN ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL

The spread of Information and Communication Technologies, and scientific and technological innovation, has put the achievement of all the ambitious sustainable development goals (SDGs) within our grasp – poverty eradication, sustainable agriculture, health/medicine, energy for all, water, sustainable infrastructure and sustainable cities, are all science and technology driven. However, if the benefits of these science and technology breakthroughs are to be reaped, then we must ensure all hands are on deck. The human capacity gap must be addressed. This gap will not go away without the fuller engagement of women in science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM).

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address the imbalance. Even on key information sites, like Wikipedia, the gender knowledge gap is well-documented. In a 2011 survey, the Wikimedia Foundation found that less than 10% of its contributors were women and Wikipedia has fewer and less extensive articles about women or on topics important to women. With this in mind, Wikimedia is now running a campaign, hand in hand with UN Women and the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, to actively source and boost the number of images and information articles available about women, particularly in STEM fields. Highlighting the stories of the lives of successful women in science is essential to encouraging more women to take up positions in STEM. This year at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, the six presidents of the Forum were women, including Dr. Fabiola Gianotti, the Director of the prestigious European Organization for Nuclear Research, CERN.

Worryingly, we are even facing a backward slide in the number of women in science-based roles, at a time when STEM jobs are being created at an unprecedented rate. UN Women provides no shortage of examples to illustrate the STEM gender gap and the resulting gender biases in research, innovation and engineering feats, shaping tomorrow’s world and our future.

What can be done to encourage women to enter STEM fields? Firstly, initiatives to encourage girls and women to take up STEM subjects, need to be multiplied. Whilst getting women into STEM fields is important, keeping them in these fields is arguably even more crucial. Many women drop out of these careers, the reasons for which are multiple and complex. Some exit surveys highlight “masculine” work cultures or rhythms, or lack of gender sensitivity in the work place, including with respect to parental leave or work-life balance policies, gender bias in promotion scales or simply stereotypical gendered attitudes. The cumulative effect of which forms the so-called “glass ceiling”.

Companies must take responsibility to ensure equal work opportunities for their employees irrespective of gender, and must go the extra mile in supporting women to continue both their professional career alongside family, or other roles outside the workplace. Closing the gender gap in pay scales is also a must.

Combatting gender stereotypes is essential to overcoming gender inequalities in STEM fields, this includes the way our children are educated and gender bias in the classroom, for example assuming that boys are naturally better at maths and physics whilst girls are more suited to social sciences. We must break down these stereotypes, and have more female role models in science, encouraging girls to aspire to the top of STEM sectors. The media has a huge role to play in this regard.

Early childhood learning and pre-school will also play a crucial role in removing the prejudice and biases against women and girls in STEM. I was recently in a school in the State of Kerala, India. All the students there are from poor backgrounds and study on full scholarships. During my interactions with children in the higher grades I was pleasantly surprised that all the girls (about half of the class) wanted to pursue careers in STEM – neurophysics, astrophysics, medicine and engineering – while most of the boys wanted to become accountants or MBAs. The trajectory of girls in STEM in the developing world seems very different to that in more prosperous parts of the world.

Gender equality is a topic close to my heart and UNITAR has been actively participating in the promotion of gender equality and parity programmes both externally and internally. In 2015, I joined the International Gender Champions Network in Geneva, pledging in my personal and professional capacities to strive towards gender parity and the dissolution of gender barriers.

In 2015, UNITAR also launched its Women’s Leadership Programme, promoting the participation of women in political leadership positions worldwide. Noticing the gender gap that exists in Parliaments, Governments and on UN delegations, including the UN Security Council and General Assembly, UNITAR’s Women’s Leadership Programme is working across the UN System to promote the participation of women in decision making fora.

UNITAR’s Women’s Leadership Programme has so far reached over 400 participants worldwide, with a focus on promoting women’s participation in science and technology policy bodies, including delegations to the World Meteorological Congress, the International Telecommunications Union and World Intellectual Property Organization.

I strongly believe that gender parity is an essential requisite to achieving the Future We Want by 2030. Gender equality cuts across the entire 2030 Agenda and is necessary for the achievement of each of the Goals. It will only be achieved if we act together, on multiple fronts, through multiple channels, with multiple tools and with multiple means. Building awareness about gender equality and women’s empowerment principles, and their relationship to human development, is crucial. UNITAR looks forward to working together with partners and with the entire UN System to ensure that our work reaches and impacts the lives of women and girls around the world.
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As over seventy heads of state and countless world-leading chief executives, academics, technical pioneers and social entrepreneurs gathered in the snowy mountains of Davos, the ‘summit of summits’, to address the political, economic and social fractures we face, the Financial Times chose to run a different story on their front page. It was also one of politicians, philanthropists, business leaders and celebrities gathering for a noble cause. But there was significant difference.

At a men-only black-tie dinner run by the ‘Presidents Club’ in London, women were paid to hostess in skimpy outfits at ‘the most un-PC event of the year’. Within days, evidence of sexual harassment by powerful and wealthy men towards young women gained public attention for the first time in the annual dinner’s 33-year history.

#Timesup on the Presidents club, and the event has joined many cases in the #metoo campaign that have opened up a debate about appropriate sexual behaviour online and offline, in office corridors, in meetings, and in homes, in countries all around the world. Does this social movement represent a watershed in history for women’s rights where norms truly shift?

And at a time when we are seeing increasing inequality and insecurity across the world, a crisis of trust across government, business, NGOs and the media, and the liberal international system, what can we learn?

The point at which new norms are created is when socially acceptable behaviour becomes unacceptable, or, more positively, what was thought impossible becomes possible. It takes laws and policies, and hearts and minds. When traditions are embedded in institutional norms, and perpetuated through political and economic power and privilege, change is harder. Take for example slavery, a tradition; and colonialism, a norm. Inappropriate dinners might become unacceptable, but rid-
ding society of misogyny, exploitation and abuse towards all sexes will take longer, and will be met with overt and subtle resistance. #MeToo has started a conversation, but there is a long way to go until we reach equality.

For organisations, grievance procedures alone do not provide the answer. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission found in 2015, that of 90,000 discrimination complaints made, 45% included a charge of retaliation, which suggests that the original report was met with ridicule, demotion or worse. The power of the perpetrator can silence victims, particularly in a hierarchy.

Whether the #meToo movement really marks a watershed moment, will depend on whether we can turn a culture of fear into one of trust. A space has opened to communicate new values and influence perceptions, thoughts and beliefs, but to get to a new normal we will need a significant mindset shift.

Firstly, we need to see the problems.

Just because you are not experiencing something yourself, does not mean that it isn’t happening. A recent survey within a UN agency found the perceptions of sexual harassment by men and women differed significantly: more women than men perceive a problem. As highlighted by Michael Kimmel, ‘privilege is invisible to those who have it’, and furthermore, voices have been silenced. To see the problems, we need to create more spaces for those who are experiencing challenges to be heard, and adopt more inclusive behaviours in decision-making so that they are able to influence policy to meet their needs.

Secondly, we need the courage to act.

How many of us are complicit in turning a blind eye to behaviour that we can see happening, but which we do nothing about? Margaret Heffernan explains how wilful blindness has stopped us from confronting uncomfortable facts, from the financial bubble and crash of 2008, to sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation. It is damaging in individuals, dangerous in collectives, and corrupting if embedded in institutional culture. Fear of change and conflict can keep us away from standing up to harmful norms, but a few courageous people can inspire others, and create an expectation that those with integrity will act.

Thirdly, we need to design change and be creative.
When discriminatory behaviour and bias is systemic and embedded in institutional culture and norms, Professor Iris Bohnet suggests that we need to better understand how it operates and design change. Just like grievance procedures, diversity and inclusion programs are not universally successful, and can even activate rather than eliminate stereotypes, and induce defensive reactions when people feel accused or threatened, so evidence of what works is key.

In a trial conducted by the Behavioural Insights Team to see if perspective taking could reduce discrimination towards pregnant women, line managers in a large police force participated in an on-line exercise. The results were surprising: male and female managers were actually rated by their female staff worse than those who had not received the intervention.

To really shift mindsets, improve empathy and communication, and decrease prejudice, behavioural science points to the need to truly understand another person’s perspective – how they think and feel. We need to build trust and bond with people presenting different social identities to ourselves. This requires dialogue, engagement, creativity, and time.

**What are the implications of the #metoo movement for equality, peace and security?**

#MeToo has put human dignity and respect back on centre stage. It offers a lens through which to better understand how power and privilege operate, and why different perspectives matter. In a fractured world, where technology and global trade have disconnected us from the consequences of our actions, it tells us to reconnect, see the problems, confront them, and be inspired to act.

At Davos, Jack Ma spoke of the need for EQ for success, IQ not to lose quickly, and LQ for respect – the IQ of love. The final panel was given to artists from around the world. Photographer Platon told the story of Sandra raped in a war driven by the extraction of precious metals to fuel modern technology, to tell the world her message: ‘My body is not a weapon’. A shared future really will require us all to feel, understand and love.

As for a new normal? Movements and networks bring with them new power that might just help us to turn social evolution into transformation. Beatrice Finn, the leader of the coalition of NGOs that campaigned for the Nuclear Ban Treaty, ICAN, believes a nuclear free world is possible despite increasing state rivalry, polarisation and the highest threat level since the Cold War. If we are to avoid a zero-sum game and restore trust and integrity to our world, it is time to start imagining the seemingly impossible to be possible.

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1 Fleur Heyworth leads the Gender and Inclusive Security Cluster at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. She works with the GCSP-CCL Leadership Alliance to equip leaders with the ‘mindsets, skillsets and toolsets’ to lead in complex and turbulent times. The GCSP offers ‘Inspiring Women Leaders’ courses and workshops, and a new course ‘Leading Inclusive Teams’ from 16–18 April, which is specifically aimed at Managers, who play a critical role in creating organisational culture and developing talent. On June 14, the GCSP will be collaborating with partners including the World YWCA, to bring ‘Seven the Play’ to Geneva to help us develop Safe Spaces for all.

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From the UN human rights archives

Thank you, United Nations, for protecting the rights of women

There is still a long way to go to uphold the rights of women worldwide, and UN Women, a department of the Secretariat, is now carrying the torch in this struggle.

DR. BERTRAND RAMCHARAN

It builds on the efforts of the United Nations (UN) human rights programme going back to the earliest days of the organization. When the UN was established, injustices against women were pervasive. The Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, and its Sub-Commission put down protection building blocks, one after another. Mrs. Molly Bruce of the UN Division of Human Rights was one of the pioneers. Eleanor Roosevelt led the entire human rights cause. The UN studied issues such as discrimination affecting the nationality of women, their political rights, consent to marriage, minimum age for marriage, registration of marriage, suppression of trafficking in persons, the abolition of slavery, the slave trade, and practices similar to slavery. The UN established international norms on these and other topics. These were foundations the world had never witnessed before. The world had changed. In 1974-75, Mrs. Helvi Sipila of Finland, Secretary-General of the first World Conference on the rights of women, held in Mexico City, ignited the world with her campaign to promote the rights of women and to highlight the importance of the conference. She was a true hero of the human rights cause. Afterwards, subsequent world conferences, the last in Beijing, further built on the edifice to uphold women’s rights. Women’s rights, Hilary Clinton memorably declared at the Beijing Conference, are human rights. In 1979, the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which now has an optional protocol providing for the consideration of petitions about violations of women’s rights. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has delivered notable decisions on cases involving domestic violence resulting in the deaths of the victims (Goekee v. Austria and Yildrin v. Austria). It has also considered issues such as inadequate care during pregnancy, resulting in death (Teixiera v. Brazil). The process of considering petitions and handing down decisions upholding the rights of women was pioneered in the Human Rights Committee, which operates under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). The Committee has delivered landmark decisions upholding the rights of women. The path blazed by the Human Rights Committee is of crucial significance. In a world of political, legal, cultural, religious and philosophical diversity, now undergoing numerous challenges and convulsions, it is the jurisprudence of bodies such as the Human Rights Committee that defines what is just in our world. Global society cannot survive without justice. In fact, Plato cautioned, no society can.

In the 1970s, a foreign woman who married a Mauritian man had the right by law to live with her husband in Mauritius. A foreign man marrying a Mauritian woman did not have that right and had to apply for a residence permit that could be granted or refused. The law did not permit redress to the courts in case of refusal. This could obviously put the enjoyment of family rights at risk. Mauritian women joined together to bring a case before the Human Rights Committee, complaining that Mauritian immigration laws discriminated against Mauritian women, as alien wives were guaranteed automatic residence rights in Mauritius by law, whereas alien husbands were not. The Human Rights Committee held that the legislation was discriminatory and that Mauritian women had the right to equal treatment: “The protection of a family cannot vary with the sex of the one or the other spouse” (Ameeruddy-Cziffra and others v. Mauritius).
This was the first time that the Committee recommended a change in domestic law to make it consistent with the Covenant. Mauritius complied and removed the discriminatory aspects of the law. This was a breakthrough decision for women worldwide. In the 1970s, native Indian women in Canada who married outside their tribe lost their right to live with their kin on tribal land. The Canadian Government was ready to change the law, which dated back to the nineteenth century, but the male elders of Indian tribes opposed this. After a divorce, Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet Indian, wanted to return to her family and kin on their tribal land, but was refused. After going unsuccessfully to the Canadian Supreme Court, she brought her case to the Human Rights Committee and won. The Committee held that she had a right to continue living with her tribe and to share in its culture. This was a milestone for women in Canada. The Government of Canada used the decision to go ahead and change the legislation.

In the 1980s, women in the Netherlands who contributed to the social security system on par with men, could, unlike men, only receive benefits if they could show that they were breadwinners. A man was not required to meet this condition. Mrs. Zwan de Vries and Mrs. S.W.M. Broeks, brought cases before the Human Rights Committee, which held that they had been victims of discrimination. These decisions helped provide justice for the women of the Netherlands.

In the 1980s, in Peru, the civil code provided that when a woman was married, only her husband was entitled to represent matrimonial property before the courts. The Committee found this discriminatory (Ato del Avellanal v. Peru). Four decisions, touching four continents and making global law. Judge Jakob Moller of Iceland, Chief of the Petitions Branch of the UN human rights secretariat for twenty-five years, who led the team that assisted the Human Rights Committee in its consideration of these and other cases, considers these decisions building blocks for gender equality and global justice. Together with a colleague, Alfred de Zayas, he has published a book on the decisions of the Human Rights Committee.

When the Human Rights Committee first began considering cases, the Cold War was in full swing. Members of the Committee from Eastern Europe took a very narrow view of the role of the Human Rights Committee, in considering national reports as well as in considering petitions. It took great skill and wisdom to pilot decisions such as these.

Judge Rosalind Higgins of the UK, later President of the International Court of Justice, Judge Christine Chatelain of France, Judge Elizabeth Evatt of Australia, Professors Gisele Cote-Harper of Canada, Cecilia Medina of Chile and Pilar Gaitan de Pombo of Colombia, were among the members of the Committee who helped steer its decisions. In the midst of it all, Judge Jakob Moller provided wisdom, tact and inventiveness. He and his team prepared the draft decisions considered by the Committee.

The decisions of the Human Rights Committee and CEDAW will stand the test of time. They are among the most important contributions of the United Nations to upholding human rights generally, and the rights of women in particular. They are the core of global law on human rights. They are signposts for determining what is just in particular countries and in the world at large. Plato would be pleased!

Thank you, United Nations.
Interview with Charles Aznavour

An extraordinary evening at Victoria Hall

It wasn’t an ordinary evening at the Victoria Hall in Geneva. There were warm words from the Swiss officials and the Director-General of UNOG, all to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Armenia becoming a United Nations member and establishing diplomatic relations with Switzerland.

But all eyes were on one man – a singer, songwriter, star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, diplomat and who they say is the most famous Armenian of his time. The Ambassador of Armenia to the United Nations in Geneva and to Switzerland is no ordinary person; he is a living legend; he is Charles Aznavour. UN Special had a rare opportunity to sit down...
with Ambassador Aznavour and learn more about his path to diplomacy and the role and relationship of Armenia with the United Nations and Switzerland.

Thank you for agreeing to give us this interview, Ambassador. You are a recognised global celebrity, but not many people know about you also being the Ambassador of Armenia to the United Nations in Geneva and to Switzerland. How did that come about?

I was born in Paris, but both my parents were survivors of the genocide. My father, Misha, was an Armenian from Georgia; my mother, Knar, from a family of Armenian traders from Turkey. France quickly became my country. At home we spoke both Armenian and French, and we felt both 100% French and 100% Armenian. Many Armenians in France believe that I played a certain role in the term “Armenian” being included in the French national narrative, and then, after the song “They Fell,” which I wrote in 1975, they regarded me as someone who, finally, represented them.

However, my commitment to Armenia is relatively recent. Before its independence, I went there once, in 1964, just for a concert. It was the devastating earthquake of 1988 that alerted my consciousness. In twenty-four hours, I decided to launch an association: “Aznavour for Armenia”, which for many Armenians in Armenia in those difficult times, embodied hope for the future.

The newly independent Republic of Armenia trusted me with a function that would strengthen and formalise my commitment. First, I was appointed as Armenia’s Ambassador to UNESCO, and then, in 2009, President Sargsyan, who granted me the Armenian nationality, proposed that I represent Armenia in Switzerland and the United Nations in Geneva. At first I hesitated, thinking it would not be easy. Then I thought what is important for Armenia must be important for all of us.

Armenia is a country with ancient history and culture, but its independence is recent. What has the contribution of Armenia to the United Nations family been since its independence?

For Armenians, with a history of millennia, the last quarter of the century was particularly critical. Last year, Armenia celebrated the 25th anniversary of its membership of the United Nations. Over the past years, despite a number of challenges, Armenia has become a fully-fledged and responsible member of the international community. On becoming a member of the United Nations, Armenia committed to making its own contribution to the efforts of the international community aimed at building a peaceful future based on universal values, including respect for the principles of equal rights and the self-determination of peoples.

It is important to emphasize the participation of Armenia in a number of United Nations peacekeeping missions: from Afghanistan to Iraq, from Kosovo to Lebanon and Mali, through which Armenia contributes to the establishment of international peace and security.

Armenia is committed to contributing to the joint efforts of the international community aimed at combating terrorism and responding to the refugee crisis. Armenia is the third country in Europe in terms of hosting the largest number of refugees per capita. Twenty-two thousand refugees from Syria have found shelter in Armenia.

Since it became a member of the United Nations, Armenia has been actively engaged in the activities of the Organization and its bodies in various areas. This, in particular, relates to our commitment to the United Nations prevention agenda. In this regard, the efforts of Armenia directed towards the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide are essential. As a nation which has survived the horror of a genocide, we feel moral responsibility to voice the importance of the prevention
of genocide and crimes against humanity and to take action in this domain.

An international day of commemoration and dignity for the victims of the crime of genocide and the prevention of this crime has been officially and unanimously established by the United Nations General Assembly. At the origin of this initiative was the Human Rights Council in Geneva, through a resolution presented by Armenia. As a descendant of genocide survivors, and, moreover, as a public figure, I have a particular responsibility. I carry the weight of their infinite suffering. It is our task to stand for their respect and dignity, and to make sure that oblivion and denial do not kill them a second time. Those who were annihilated in 1915, 1941 and 1994, were the Armenians, the Jews, the Tutsis... not for what they had done, but for who they were. It was me, but it was you too. Because at Der Zor, Auschwitz, and Kigali their target was humanity. The barbarism that has not been eradicated resurfaces under another mask. It can be observed in the fate of the minorities in the Middle East nowadays. Impunity has set the wrong pattern.

The year 2017 also marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Switzerland. How would you assess Armenian-Swiss relations and what have been the main achievements during these 25 years?

Armenian-Swiss diplomatic relations were established only a quarter of a century ago, however, the friendship between the two peoples is not new.

The political dialogue between the two countries intensified after the opening of diplomatic missions in Switzerland and Armenia, with many reciprocal high-level visits, as well as due to the close collaboration in the framework of such international organizations as the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the International Organization of Francophonie.

I am also very happy that Switzerland hosted two recent summits of the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the framework of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. I believe that settlement of this issue will contribute greatly to the overall security and stability in the region. Since 1990s the peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan have been mediated by the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (France, Russia, USA), the only internationally mandated body to mediate in the settlement of this conflict.

The mediation hinges upon a package of proposals, which are based on such principles of international law as the non-use of force, self-determination and territorial integrity.

The trilateral (Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan, Armenia) cease-fire agreements signed in 1994 and consolidated in 1995 shall be fully respected. In this regard, it’s important to have in place the investigative mechanism on the Nagorno-Karabakh contact line with Azerbaijan, which has repeatedly been called for by the Co-Chair countries. I hope the neighbouring country will agree and will not hinder this mechanism. This will save the lives of 18-year-old boys and civilians. The co-chairs have also been calling for the authorities to prepare their people for peace, not war. I hope their voices will be heard. Thirty years after Sumgait, the international community, including the United Nations, should be more vigilant and attentive in pushing for peaceful resolution, to which there is no alternative, for the sake of the people living in the region.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Yes, I was glad to know that this year, in October, the heads of states of La Francophonie decided to hold its summit in Yerevan. This will be the largest event not only in the history of independent Armenia, but also of the Organization in the region. As a member of La Francophonie, Armenia shares its values of peace, solidarity, dialogue, the equality of peoples, human rights and cultural diversity, and will prioritize them during its presidency.

The summit slogan – “Living together” reflects these humanitarian values, which, I am sure, can strengthen the cohesion of our societies and bring peace and prosperity to the francophone space.

Thank you very much. I also want to particularly thank your son, Nicolas, for taking our picture and saving us from the unexpected malfunction of my camera! 1

1 Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Armenia to the United Nations
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New perception of the United Nations in Lebanon

Charles H. Malik, who was a signer of the Charter and also went on to serve as president of the General Assembly in 1958 and 1959. Ambassador Malik, a man of multiple talents, diplomat, philosopher, and writer contributed to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Let me also mention that one of the UN’s oldest peacekeeping missions, UNIFIL, is based in Lebanon, and the Lebanese government entertains excellent relations with these UN troops.

As such, we have devised a political system peculiar to Lebanon, based on democracy and power sharing between different communities. The idea is that tolerance – merely accepting the existence of the other – albeit important is not sufficient. In Lebanon, all recognized communities have the right to be part of the fabric of the nation and to contribute to the charting of its future. Legal and political arrangements have been devised in order to enshrine this principle in the Parliament, the government, in the public service, in the army, and in all relevant sectors of public life. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the different components of the system are all the time happy. Like all political system ours has its flaws and its blind spots, but it nevertheless assures certain inclusivity and the feeling for all parties and communities that no one is completely left behind.

I do not wish to idealize the situation too much. Of course, frictions do exist. It’s natural for human beings of certain groups sometimes to resent identities and ways of life of the others, felt as threats to their own. But the idea, that diversity, if properly harnessed, means richness is widely shared in my country. Therefore we often incline to make efforts to listen to and understand each other. Indeed, in Lebanon, mixed marriages are commonplace, Christians and Muslims interact in all areas of life. We should never seek a utopia where everyone becomes the same. If humanity has evolved and flourished in such a spectacular way, it’s largely because of its diversity.

Can you speak about the Lebanese diaspora? Is there a government policy towards this diaspora, and how does the diaspora give back to Lebanon? The Lebanese Diaspora is huge compared to the population of Lebanon itself that is around 4 million: it comprises more than 10 million people all over the world. The oldest waves of the diaspora took place under Ottoman rule starting the last decades of the 19th century. In those days, many young Lebanese fled Ottoman rule and dire living conditions, and boarded ships without even knowing where they were headed. Some of these Lebanese ended up in Latin America others in Africa. Even after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the accession of Lebanon to statehood, the 20th century witnessed further waves of Lebanese migration, this time to Europe, North America and Australia. The civil war contributed to this exodus as well as difficult economic conditions. The Lebanese Diaspora is therefore not monolithic. But here again, the diversity of the Diaspora itself is a chance for Lebanon, since it contributes to making our country attuned to what is happening in other parts of the world.

Lebanon is not a rich country in terms of GDP; however our Diaspora is considered one of our most valuable assets.

Alex Mejia, Editor-in-Chief
Can you tell us a bit about how the UN is seen in Lebanon?

For small developing countries like Lebanon, the UN is seen as a guarantor of international law and a multi-polar system. For small nations, such a guarantor is very important: it enables them to make their voice heard. If the UN didn’t exist there would be nothing to counterbalance the proclivity of the big and powerful players to tilt the balance in their own favour through the use of force and wealth advantages. The UN offers a space for multilateral diplomacy, treaties negotiations, democratic debates, sharing of experience etc. that is conducive to a spirit of cooperation and contributes to a certain extent to counterbalance the big challenges that beset the international system rendered more instable by globalization and power politics.

I would also like to mention that Lebanon was one of the founding nations of the UN. Lebanon’s chief delegate to the conference that drafted the UN Charter was Ambassador Salim Baddoura.
Almost all Lebanese families have relatives living and working abroad. For Lebanon itself, this reality translates not only into remittances very useful to our balance of payments, but also into tourism, when Lebanese abroad come back every year or other year to visit their families and to spend time in their country of origin. In addition, Lebanese emigrants and their descendants serve as de facto ambassadors for our nation. They make Lebanese culture known and vibrant all over the world – in politics, business, arts and other fields of life. They are part of our mouthpiece as a nation.

The Lebanese government strive relentlessly to strengthen connections with the Diaspora. Indeed, our Ministry for instance is called the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants”. The name itself is testimony that one of the core jobs of all Lebanese diplomats is to take care of the diaspora communities. We have programs that facilitate regaining citizenship for descendants of Lebanese emigrants, and, with effect this year; our electoral law has been modified to allow Lebanese citizens abroad to vote in embassies.

In addition, we have a huge event organized regularly by the Ministry called Lebanese Diaspora Energy (LDE). It’s a yearly conference that provides a space for successful and promising members of the Diaspora to come back to Lebanon and to connect with the country and with each other and to make the country benefit from their experience, talents and networks. It is at once a celebration of the diaspora’s success stories and an exploration of new opportunities. Emboldened by the success of the conference in Lebanon, the Ministry have started holding abroad regional conferences specifically designed for emigrants of specific regions or continents. The LDE is an original and creative endeavour that helps our country in maintaining a tangible and fruitful connection with Lebanese emigrants and their descendants worldwide.

**Can you tell us about how your country is helping refugees?**

**What would you call your country’s contribution to the international community on this subject?**

Civil wars have cascading effects that often cannot be contained within the epicentre of the crisis exclusively. The Syrian crisis is a tragic case in point. Not only it has resulted in immense suffering and destruction in Syria, but also it has opened the floodgates to many scourges in the region and beyond, terrorism, proxy wars, refugee problem, polarization of the international community etc. The consequences of this dismal state of affairs are becoming deeper, more widespread, more painful, and more difficult to tackle with time passing without finding a solution.

The ongoing war in Syria has thrown into exile millions of refugees. Lebanon a small developing country of only 4 million people has found itself taking a huge share of those refugees, a situation for which he was not well prepared. The number of refugees is estimated at around 1.5 million. Our economy was doing rather well before this crisis; it was gaining strength after few years of stagnation. Needless to say, that the consequences of the huge influx of refugees on our territory have been devastating, not only on the economy but on all other aspects of life as well. Despite our modest means, we have done what we can. It is important to note that Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not in camps, but enjoy freedom of movement. We also afford Syrian children in Lebanon the right to a free education in our public schools. In the same vein Syrians are afforded medical access to Lebanese public hospitals and many have managed to find small temporary jobs to work in, in order to earn some money.

However, as a result of this massive influx, our entire infrastructure is overwhelmed – schools, hospitals, housing, prisons, water, power supply and many Lebanese are starting to fear for the future of their country. The suffering of refugees should be well acknowledged, and rightfully so. But it is equally important to underscore the suffering of the host communities. In the case of Lebanon, these communities were often hardly making ends meet, even before 1.5 million more desperate people arrived overnight.

The international community is helping but the support is far from being sufficient. We often feel that we are left alone. The only durable solution to this crisis is to work for curbing the level of violence durably in order to start the repatriation of the refugees. But until that return becomes possible, Lebanon needs to be properly supported; its economy has to be boosted in order to survive this protracted crisis. We do not need empty promises anymore. It’s the message I keep conveying here in Geneva to all those who are active in this field, colleague diplomats, NGOs, International Agencies staff alike. The international community pretend to adhere to the principle of burden sharing when it comes to refugees; the challenge is to translate this principle into real and tangible efforts on part of everybody.
Closing the Gender Gap in Humanitarian Action

Today we face a global humanitarian challenge.

From Syria’s ongoing conflict to Nepal’s post-earthquake recovery and West Africa’s Ebola epidemic, human suffering has reached alarming levels, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. Yet, when it comes to humanitarian assistance, gender equality is not prioritized.

200.5 million
people were affected by natural disasters or displaced by conflict and violence in 2014.

50 per cent
of refugees are women and girls.

Only 4 per cent
of projects in UN inter-agency appeals were targeted at women and girls in 2014.

Just 0.4 per cent
of all funding to fragile states—most impacted by disasters—went to women’s groups or women’s ministries from 2012 to 2013.

Women are leaders and agents of change.

These include increased levels of gender-based violence, exclusion from life-saving services and decision-making processes due to discriminatory social norms, such as food hierarchies, and limited mobility to get help due to physical insecurity.

Catalyzing action to achieve gender equality.

Together we must take bold steps to enable women and girls to realize their human rights and full potential and end discrimination in crises. When women are meaningfully engaged, and their needs are directly addressed, humanitarian action is more efficient and effective, the transition to recovery accelerated, and community-wide resilience is enhanced.

Commitment 1
Empower women and girls as change agents and leaders, including by increasing support for local women-led groups to participate meaningfully in humanitarian action.

Commitment 2
Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome documents of their review conferences for all women and adolescent girls in crisis settings.

Commitment 3
Implement a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in crisis contexts, including through the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies.

Commitment 4
Ensure that humanitarian programming is gender-responsive.

Commitment 5
Fully comply with humanitarian policies, frameworks and legally binding documents related to gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights.

Syrian Refugees, Jordan

Ebola Epidemic, West Africa

Earthquake, Nepal
When crises strike, gender inequalities are often exacerbated.

These include: increased levels of gender-based violence, exclusion from life-saving services and decision-making processes due to discriminatory social norms, such as food hierarchies, and limited mobility to get help due to physical insecurity.

Health

60 per cent of preventable maternal deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement and natural disasters.

Gender-based violence

1 in 5 refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings are estimated to have experienced sexual violence—likely an underestimation given the barriers associated with disclosure.

Livelihoods

Up to 30 per cent of internally displaced households in Yemen are female headed, compared to approximately 9 per cent before the current crisis.

Education

Girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries than their counterparts in conflict-free countries.
Interview with Mr. Schneider

GVA Airport, new challenges

The next 10 years will be crucial for Geneva Airport and United Nations staff. How is the airport anticipating the challenges ahead?

ALEX MEJIA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In 2016, after an eclectic career path throughout the world, André Schneider became the CEO of Geneva Airport. His optimism and interest in sustainable development will be crucial to overcome the challenges awaiting the airport over the next ten years. UN Special Editor-in-chief Alex Mejia sat down with Mr. Schneider to discuss these challenges and his commitment towards the achievement of Agenda 2030.

Mr. Schneider, part of your target audience at the airport is the international community and United Nations (UN) staff: how do you see the international community vis-à-vis the airport?

This is very important for us. You have to understand: GVA is one of the oldest airports in the world. We have grown since the 1920s together with the role of International Geneva, and have probably been part of the reason why it has been able to grow. We are also very proud of offering an excellent service to our international community. For us, it is very important because we also see ourselves as the facilitators of the development of Geneva, and Geneva would not be Geneva without its international community.

Can you tell us what the vision of the airport is in the next five to ten years down the road?

We are actually in the middle of the process of determining that with the Federal Government. As you might know, in Switzerland, airports and airlines are under federal jurisdiction. In this context, we have to define a plan up to 2030 to understand what the development of the airport will be. What we foresee is that we will keep playing a critical role in the economy of the region within our catchment area of 6.5 billion people. One of the big challenges of the years to come will be to finish our terminal for intercontinental traffic with the opening of our East Wing in 2020. We will also rebuild the main terminal, which was built in the 1960s and needs to be replaced to allow the foreseen growth of the next 50 years and enable us to provide an improved level of services. We will also work on the development of connectivity. Today, we have outstanding connectivity towards European destinations: we can reach over 50% of all European economic centres in less than a day. We will thus focus on the development of intercontinental direct lanes to Africa, Asia, North and Latin America.

What is the current number of passengers and what is the forecast in 10 years?

Last year, we reached 17.3 million passengers, that is to say a growth of 4.95% compared to the previous year. Our average growth over the last 17 years has been 4.5%. According to today’s forecasts, we will reach 25 million passengers in 2030. It is clear that we have reached a stage where we really have to do something about the main terminal and many other facilities.

How many operations are there per day (take-off and landing)?

Annually, we have a little more than 190,000 operations, so even if there are seasonal variations, the average is around 500 movements per day. Interestingly, what we have seen over the past few years is that we have had quite a constant growth of passengers but a very low growth of movements (less than 0.5% last year). We see fuller and bigger planes, which increases the positive results for the airlines and has a positive impact on the airport environment because the movements are responsible for noise. As a city airport actually surrounded by the city, our preoccupation is also to find the right balance between offering a good service and having a low impact on our neighbours. The development of bigger planes is thus for us naturally quite favourable.

You mention noise pollution, so let me go on to the environmental impact of the airport. Planes are becoming more environmentally friendly, but is there something else your airport is doing to reduce its carbon footprint?

We have actually just been certified as an airport with zero CO2 emissions for our own operations. Naturally, we do that through compensations, but we are among the sixty airports in the world which are at this level. We have many operations to reduce our impact. For example, every new building today is built with a positive energy concept. It means that it will produce more energy – through solar panels, geothermal energy, heat pumps, etc. – than it consumes. By 2025, our heating and cooling system will come from the use of water from the lake and thermal water pumps, to stop using fossil energy. We have also just signed an agreement with a local energy provider to equip all of our roofs with solar panels, which will add another 55,000 m² of solar panels. We have set a target to have 40% of all the vehicles on the tarmac being either electric or hybrid. We have many other initiatives like these.

On the flight operations, we have increased noise taxes by over 120% to encourage airlines to use more recent planes that make less noise and...
consume less fuel. Today, no plane can leave after 10 p.m., but in order to extend our intercontinental flights, we will need to allow planes to leave after that time. All of these planes will have to belong to the best noise classes. There is also considerable development in electric planes for journeys of up to 700 miles [1,126 km]. Moreover, when planes are stationed here and in order to reduce our environmental impact, we also provide electricity, heat and cooling directly through our system instead of letting the airlines use their reactors as is usually the case. So we are working on many fronts to reduce our own environmental impact and to encourage the airlines to do the same.

Let me go to another side of sustainability: we also know that you create a lot of jobs. Is it also a priority of the airport to create “green jobs”? GVA has 1,000 employees and there are approximately 11,000 on the platform. Given that we have more and more work to do on solar panels as well as on thermal pumps, we also have more and more people in our ranks who specialise in renewable energies. Since 2000, we have invested 44 million to soundproof buildings around the airport, and we will invest another 19 million over the next 10 years. The staff increase that we see is mainly in two areas: sustainability and digitalisation. We collaborate with more than 200 companies, and we can see that the digital evolution will help us more and more to exchange data more quickly and make our operations more efficient. For example, a plane will not start its reactors any longer unless it has obtained all clearances to take off, fly to the destination, land there and have a gate ready: planes will thus no longer turn around in the air with their reactors running. We can say that the staff taking part in the digitalisation is also part of the “green jobs” because it helps us to be more efficient – environmentally and also in term of the quality of the services we provide.

Last question on sustainability: At the UN we believe in capacity-building, as well as in sharing expertise and best-practices. Do you share your knowledge about sustainable development?

Yes, and you should know that airports are among the most organized amongst themselves. We actually have working groups on almost everything, where airport staff get together, exchange, come to visit other airports, etc. We are also in different associations where airports come to exchange on current practices. This is a very important part of our work. We are also engaged in an Airports Council International (ACI) world programme, which enables us to go to developing countries to help local airports develop skills on security, airport management, etc. This is a philanthropic contribution: we are not paid for it, but we believe it is very important to help everyone in the world develop good airports.

It is always important for us to hear from leaders and agents of change: what is your view of the UN, and what do you think the UN should focus on in the future?

The UN is a multilateral platform that defines international rules. It is also a place of exchange in a globalised world. One of the main challenges for the UN is that we see more and more that national-oriented government might not be very helpful in solving big challenges like climate change or migration, and multilateralism and common decision-making are thus under a lot of pressure. The UN should thus be ready to say things that might not please everyone, in order for all to realise that focusing on national interests is not sustainable, and that we need to collaborate. You are also a diplomatic organization, so if the UN does not do it, who will do it in the end?

I also see that governments and international organizations are no longer the only actors on the international stage: businesses play a growing role, and the UN needs to find the right way to reflect these changes.

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March wouldn’t be March without the FIFDH. Now in its 16th year, the Festival is an auto-proclaimed “barometer” on the state of Human Rights in the world. Simultaneously, the Human Rights Council (HRC) will be in session.

The two events complement each other in furthering the Human Rights dialogue so that it leads to concrete actions. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

A lot has been accomplished in 70 years, but a lot still needs to be done. In the words of Secretary-General António Guterres in his New Year address “Narrow the gaps. Bridge the divides. Rebuild trust by bringing people together around common goals.” These are surely the objectives of both the HRC and the FIFDH.

And March wouldn’t be March without some reflection on women in particular and gender in general. Anne-Claire Adet and James Berclaz-Lewis of the FIFDH team told me about some of the events planned in relation to this theme.

The Weinstein scandal only surfaced in October 2017. Social media added the hash tag to Me Too, a movement originally founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke and, since then, the momentum has not ceased to gather worldwide. In France and the French-speaking world, #balancetonporc is the equivalent. Right now we are right in the middle of a male backlash – where will it take us? Hostility between men and women is good for no one. Within this context, Atiya Khan and Lawrence Jackman’s début film “A Better Man” couldn’t be more timely. In it, a woman abused in her late teens meets up with the same man again twenty-three years after their break-up to discuss the violence he subjected her to and how it has influenced both their lives. A powerful film on the theme of domestic violence in which the aggressor is, in Anne-Claire Adet’s words, “neither a beast nor a poor guy”. The film will be followed by a debate in which Caroline de Haas, a prominent French activist and politician, will participate alongside the film makers and other panellists. (Sunday 11 March)

At the United Nations, thanks to training initiatives, the acronym LGBTI should no longer elude readers (but if it does, it stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Intersex). The FIFDH will host a thematic evening on the little-known and even less understood “I” of this acronym – Intersex – entitled “Anatomy of the Genders”. Two films will be projected “The Son I Never Had” by Pidgeon Pagonis and “N’être ni fille ni garçon” by Barbara Lohr. A debate will follow and discuss such questions as the fight not to be attributed a sex – male or female – without consent at birth, and what it actually means to be intersex. The panel will include Hanne Gaby Odiele, a
One of the key moments of this year’s FIDFH will be the event organized around the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a feminist champion famous the world over not only for her bestselling novels such as “Americanah” or “Half of a Yellow Sun”, but for her essay and TED talk “We Should All Be Feminists”. You may be familiar with the Christian Dior T-shirts inspired by this message. Fifteen women of all ages and origins will read aloud in their native language passages from her latest publication “Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions”, in which she gives advice to a friend on how to raise her baby daughter as a feminist. In her publication “We Should All Be Feminists”, Adichie wrote “Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn’t have the weight of gender expectations.” In the current #MeToo climate, this promises to be an inspiring evening! (Saturday 17 March)

The documentary film “Mr. Gay Syria” returns to the “G” of our LGBTI acronym and adds to it the theme of the dangers of being a gay refugee in the Muslim world today. The protagonists of this film are two gay Syrian refugees, Husein and Mahmoud, who have fled to Istanbul, Turkey. In the words of the film maker, Ayse Toprak: “With this film, I wanted to share their fight for freedom, acceptance and visibility. This is… a story of what staying alive means… and what dignity is about. There is something very courageous about my characters, which is admirable.” A debate on how Geneva welcomes LGBTI refugees will follow the projection. (Sunday 11 March)

As always, the FIDFH will take us out of our comfort zone, encourage us to think of those less fortunate than ourselves and hopefully to act in whatever way we can to further the cause of Human Rights in the world.

Further details: www.fidfh.org
Coaching in the workplace helping UN staff
Identifying what you want from your future, why you want it and how to achieve it

Often when we think of a coach, what comes to mind is an athletics, tennis, basketball or football coach developing young athletes to perform to their full potential in winning teams. But a new type of coaching is entering the workplace with many similarities, but some key differences too.

VERONICA RIEMER, WHO
This kind of coaching is all about developing individuals in their personal and professional lives, working with people to identify, target, and plan for performance improvement throughout their careers.

Coaching in the workplace is delivered by external coaches, internal coaches or managers who have integrated coaching skills in their leadership style. An organization is said to have a “coaching culture” when everyone uses it as a way to communicate and learn.

Saba Imru-Mathieu is an Executive Leadership Coach and Senior Trainer and is a Founding Partner of Leaders Today. Formerly leading the Human Resources & Administration Unit at the Standards Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), she trained at the Institut de Coaching in Geneva and subsequently became a teacher at the school. As an ex-international civil servant, she is well-known in the UN system and the wider Geneva community. Her knowledge of the work environment and understanding of its challenges places her well to give training in coaching to UN staff and her many presentations, seminars and workshops have been well received.

During the last quarter of 2017, Saba was invited by the WHO Human Resources Department (Global Talent Management team) to conduct a series of workshops to provide staff with a better understanding of coaching concepts, with a view to adopting such a posture in their professional environment. It was part of the overall objective of introducing a coaching culture in WHO, where more open communication and trusting relationships are formed among staff with the ultimate goal of generating a more empowered and motivated attitude in staff members. The mini workshops offered by Saba were complementary to a series of half day sessions on coaching skills for managers and for staff, which were offered from September to December.

“I am absolutely passionate about seeing people develop their full potential and supporting them to engage with each other in a constructive dialogue” she explained. “It is essential to create an enabling environment for this to happen, so to me personal, leadership and organizational development go together.”

Working mostly in global organizations, her work focuses on three main areas:
- developing international leaders
- fostering collaboration in multicultural workplaces
- training manager coaches and professional coaches in advanced coaching skills.

She recognises that coaching in the workplace can be a difficult skill for managers to master as most managers are used to directing work rather than achieving it through employee development. She sees coaching as a conversation driven by strategic inquiry that stimulates novel thinking. “Conversing is something that anyone can do. By asking questions, we stimulate reflection and by asking good questions we cause entirely new avenues of thought to open up” she explained. The role of the coaching manager is to enable the supervisee to find solutions for themselves, so that they become more effective, more accountable and more satisfied. The goal is to help employees recognise opportunities for improvement by asking probing, and often tough, questions, challenging the person to think about their goals as well as how to achieve them. When managers discover that a consequence of coaching is empowering their staff, they free their time from micro-managing to focus on strategic thinking instead”.

What Coaching in the workplace is NOT
Saba explained that there are a number of misconceptions about coaching, and the three most common myths are described below:

Myth #1 – Coaching is for people who do not perform well and coaches are brought in to fix problem behaviour. – In reality, executive coaching is usually offered to top performers to help them excel and achieve even more. So having
a coach should be a source of pride and not embarrassment!

Myth #2 – Coaching is simply a dynamic and practical way of teaching. Some managers might be convinced they already coach, so why learn something they already know?
– In reality becoming a manager or leader who coaches requires learning specific skills that must be practiced extensively until they become a natural part of their behaviour as leaders. Some of these skills are counter-intuitive at first, such as asking questions rather than jumping in to give advice.

Myth #3 – Coaching is a fad
– Far from it, in fact it’s here to stay! Coaching is a recent profession with multidisciplinary roots which has now built its own research-based body of knowledge. It is recognized in academia and in business world as having a high positive impact on work life, and on personal well-being.

Saba often hears that “command and control” is out, it no longer works. “Today, employees expect to be respected and to experience work satisfaction. But few know what to do instead of commanding! Is it just about being nice? Some people are afraid of becoming “too nice”. How can you be a democratic leader and still keep control? I believe that learning coaching skills is the answer because the methodology itself unravels the complexities around motivating employees, creating accountability, helping them develop”.

Coaching can also play a positive role in conflict management in the workplace. Firstly, it can decrease the level of fear and stress experienced by parties in conflict thus helping them to develop a strategy for resolution. By giving each party concrete communication tools to approach the sensitive situation, it provides a pathway to understanding and awareness which leads to more tolerant interactions in the future. Strategic coaching questions will help the person understand what triggers conflict, what is really at stake, and what they really want as an outcome.

Saba recently worked with a manager who had taken on a team of people who were all at least 15 years his senior and had worked for the company for many years. The young manager was a graduate of a prestigious university and had made a quick, stellar career progression. His arrival had been greeted with much scepticism by his team and after a bumpy start where he unwittingly offended many people, he was keen to correct the course and establish good relations with everyone.

For several months he worked on increasing his self-awareness, understanding how he might affect others, practising new ways of writing emails, talking with his staff and leading meetings. He also experimented with tools that helped him build the team strategy in a participatory manner. The results he produced were outstanding in terms of his own confidence and relaxed approach and at the same time he was able to build a strong team spirit where staff felt respected and much more satisfied at work. “Most of the time it’s about people changing perspective” said Saba “seeing themselves or others in a different way, and on this basis, undertaking new behaviours”.

Put simply, coaching is a process that aims to improve performance and focuses on the “here and now” rather than on the distant past or future. The coach is there to help the individual improve their own performance: in other words, helping them to learn. Good coaches believe that the individual always has the answer to their own problems but understands that they may need help to find the answer.
... and if we stopped badmouthing colleagues?

Can you feel the change? People speak out against sexual abuse in churches, in the film industry, at the United Nations, and more and more about psychological harassment as well.

EVELYN KORTUM, WHO AND GLENN ROLFSEN, OSLO GESTALT THERAPY (OGT)

Now at WHO we have started talking about respect, what it is and what we can do to have more of it, and about the negative effects of badmouthing. If this is something that sounds familiar to you and you would like to know how you can stop this negative habit in your workplace, then this article is for you.

Badmouthing is when we speak negatively about a third person (or several) that is not present, it may make us look more interesting because we know something about a person the other may not know, while at the same time it always belittles the person we talk about. But do we really need to do that? And what would happen if we just stopped doing it? Would it make a positive difference? These are the questions we wanted to ask ourselves at WHO.

We invited a keynote speaker for our Respectful Workplace Day on 7 December 2017, who started the thinking process and showed us one evidence-based path to behavioural change. Glenn is a Norwegian psychotherapist and an educator in gestalt therapy. We invited him, because he is particularly concerned with the psychosocial work environment in enterprises. And the first question he asked was “Imagine you received some negative information about me before this talk, such as that I am incompetent, brag a lot, am a liar and/or wear women’s underwear. How much do you think this would affect your image of me here and now?”

You know the answer. In that sense, we received a demonstration of the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates’ attitude towards badmouthing and we can learn from his triple filter test (TGU).

It so happened that Socrates met an acquaintance in the street, and the dialogue goes:

ACQUAINTANCE: “Socrates, do you know what I just heard about your friend?”

SOCRATES: “Before telling me anything, I’d like you to pass the Triple Filter Test (TGU Test).”

ACQUAINTANCE: “Ahm, very well.”

SOCRATES: “Have you made sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”

ACQUAINTANCE: “No. Actually I just heard about it and…”

SOCRATES: “So you don’t really know if it’s true or not, but is it at least something good?”

ACQUAINTANCE: “Oh no, on the contrary…”

If we all committed to not badmouthing our colleagues, or if we all spoke up if someone did it, what would happen? This is the blueprint which has worked many times and it is safe to say in at least 250 different companies. The result was that absenteeism declined, and so did staff turnover. For us this would save precious funds from our Member States.
Try this:

**The Concept – Gossip 2018**

1. Gather the group to which you will present the idea. You will need a flipchart and commitment.
2. Ask the group **Question 1**: Do you believe that badmouthing takes place here?
3. Define badmouthing, and explain the Triple Filter Test.
4. Ask **Question 2**: Do you work in place without badmouthing?
5. Use the flipchart – Capitalize Gossip 2018
6. Ask the group members to commit not to badmouth colleagues for the next 6 months and ask them to sign the flipchart sheet
7. Frame the page and hang it where all employees can see it (meeting room, canteen, corridors,...)
8. Follow up with the group members in 6 months and ask them how they are doing with the project Gossip 2018.

The success of the project is entirely dependent on how the staff members lead by example and how the project is followed-up on. It is important to talk about the negative effects on people badmouthing others in fora that deal with the psychosocial working environment and change of organizational culture. If this is not going to be a single event, but a major cultural change in WHO or any other organization for that matter, then all members of the organization must take responsibility for their own behaviour during their working hours.

What are the effects of badmouthing? Take a clean and lean sheet of paper. Crumple it up between your hands and then try to straighten it again. Is that fully possible? No, of course not. Something will always stick with a person and taint the reputation.

Given the evidence-based success, one could expand it to the family or to schools and talk about how to prevent bullying among children and young people in schools and social media, which is a prevalent societal problem around the globe.

We, as adults have a responsibility to set a good example. And when we talk negatively about (badmouth) absent family members, friends, neighbours or colleagues around the dinner table at home, then we should make sure we are not a bad example for our children, family, friends or colleagues. We should walk the talk.

So, let’s be good role models, at work and at home. It will yield positive outcomes for all of us, our achievements at work, and it may stimulate talking directly to those who annoy us. This is completely in line with our ethical guidelines at WHO. Although it may seem that this is a bit naive, a little too simple, it nevertheless works.

We believe that this is a good tool, it is cost-effective and psychosocially beneficial for all employees of all cultures, in all countries.

This is where the world is going according to social movements and we should ride this opportunity wave.

*You can also view Glenn’s talk here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYLb7WU3Y8d=2s*
There are many ways for staff members who face these setbacks and their supervisors to maintain a meaningful dialogue. Both sides must communicate clearly, listen to each other, and follow internal organizational procedure in order to ensure fairness and due process.

Preventing underperformance while avoiding disagreement and conflict

An organization must clearly inform its staff of expectations and requirements from the start. It must be known how the organization defines success and what measures can be taken to achieve it according to organizational criteria. This will prevent discrepancies between expectations of the organization and performance of the staff members.

When a supervisor raises concerns that a staff member is not performing up to expectations, it may cause conflict, exacerbating the situation and hindering the chance of improvement. Avoid conflict by adhering to formal procedure, listening to each other, engaging thoroughly in conversations about improvement, and being clear with any concerns or comments. If this process is viewed as a collaboration, rather than a threat, the staff member will be more likely to respond positively and improve.

Role of the staff member

If you are the staff member in question, be vigilant that your supervisor complies with organizational standards and Tribunal jurisprudence. A warning that your performance is unsatisfactory must be in written form, not verbal, and be provided “in a timely manner… in specific terms… identifying the areas where performance is lacking… stating the specific steps taken to remedy the situation.” If you are on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), the length of time should be specified, as well as the required procedure going forward.

At every point in this process, concrete evidence and examples must be provided by the supervisor to justify any claims of underperformance. This will give you a fair chance to step back and reflect on how you can remedy the situation, as well as demonstrate your willingness to improve. If you have assessed yourself and know that you truly have made your best efforts but still are alleged as underperforming, there are avenues for you to explain and advocate for yourself in the evaluation process. For example, in the initial and subsequent meetings with your supervisor, while you should listen attentively to the criticisms, you can also offer any relevant explanation.

When faced with dismissal due to a perceived underperformance, staff members may not understand their rights, responsibilities, and participation in the performance evaluation procedure. This is a disadvantage that can lead to termination of appointment without a chance for improvement.

What to do when you face potential dismissal due to perceived underperformance

When faced with dismissal due to a perceived underperformance, staff members may not understand their rights, responsibilities, and participation in the performance evaluation procedure. This is a disadvantage that can lead to termination of appointment without a chance for improvement.

GEMMA VESTAL, WHO, CAROLINE SOUTHARD

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as to why it appears that you have not met the organization’s standards.

With your supervisor, you should collaborate on a plan with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-limited (SMART) objectives that includes guidance and coaching to improve your performance. Take advantage of this opportunity to improve the skills necessary to meet the outlined objectives.

The performance evaluation process is open for your input, and the final report must include your comments. Use this as a chance to explain the context of your alleged shortcomings, if there are any salient explanations. Make sure that the progress notes give justice to your efforts. Understand that any statement or claim against your performance that is prejudiced is neither allowed nor valid. Criticism of your performance should be based on organizational expectations and requisites, not any external factors. If you sense any traces of prejudice, you are allowed to call attention to it.

Dismissal will occur if improvement is not exhibited before the designated probation or PIP time frame elapses. This time period is typically substantive, so it provides adequate time to get back on track. In the case that you are dismissed from your position, your performance appraisal can only be released to future employers with your consent.

**Role of the supervisor**

To follow the “best practices” of performance management, supervisors must act according to the “rules and policies in place that adhere to the jurisprudence of the Tribunals which uphold the basic principles of procedural fairness, respect of due process, timely warning of unsatisfactory performance with an adequate opportunity to improve through a performance improvement mechanism.”

Consideration 15 (CTBT0) of ILOAT Judgment No. 2529 states: “an organization owes it to its employees, especially probationers, to guide them in the performance of their duties and to warn them in specific terms” if they are not producing satisfactory work and are at risk of dismissal. If a staff member under your supervision fails to meet organizational standards, you must immediately inform this staff member with a written warning, clearly identifying the “aspects which need improvement and the time within which such improvement ought to be demonstrated.”

Additionally, beginning a dialogue about what has led to the situation and how to move forward can be invaluable. You must respectfully consider any comments or questions made by the staff member in order to maintain a fair and unbiased dialogue. This will help to understand any explanations and bridge discrepancies between your expectations and their actions.

To assess the progress made within the evaluation period, the supervisor must write the report based on the goals set forth and agreed upon in the work plan and to what extent these goals were met. Then, the supervisor must evaluate the performance improvement of the staff member, based on the organization’s internal laws, standards and rating scale. Finally, the supervisor needs to “assess the work on the basis of previously established rules,” not any that were amended during the time period. Objectivity is required at every point in this process. An allegation of underperformance that conveys any prejudice or intent of stigmatization is inadequate grounds on which to claim dissatisfaction. Evaluation procedure steps may depend on sets of organizational internal laws, but the fundamentals of due process and objectivity remain constant. However, note that feasibly, there could be simultaneous ongoing PIPs if the staff member has several areas needing improvement manifesting at different times.

**Conclusion and recommendation**

It is a given that staff members in the U.N. Common System must perform in order for their respective organizations to fulfill their mandates. However, when staff members face possible dismissal due to perceived underperformance, this golden learning opportunity allows them to look inward and to do some internal assessment. Additionally, the situation provides a chance for staff members to demonstrate their willingness and ability to improve. On the track towards improvement, they should also thoroughly understand the internal administrative processes of their organizations so that they can proactively and strategically stem the tide of their possible dismissal and turn it around for the better. Likewise, for supervisors dealing with underperforming staff members who challenge their evaluation, it is a golden learning opportunity to see how they can improve and better understand internal administrative processes in order to resolve conflicts with supervisees and maximize outputs. For the organization, there must be a continuous learning and coaching culture that provides a safe and confidential environment for all staff to seek guidance and coaching on these issues.

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1. This article relied heavily on previous works, “Probation, Performance Appraisal And Staff Reports” by Renuka Dhinakaran, Dhinakaran International Law Consultancy.
2. As well as “Performance Management Systems Dismissals Linked to Underperformance: Guideline for Staff Representatives” by Maria Dwegalah
3. WHO staff member who is currently released to serve as FICSA’s General Secretary.
4. Boston College student currently serving as a FICSA intern.
Non à la destruction des Feuillantines au profit d’une Cité de la musique

Patrimoine architectural ou musique, il faut choisir

LEÏLA EL-WAKIL

La musique adoucit les mœurs, dit-on! Sauf si, pour déployer son commerce, elle le fait au détriment d’un autre art infiniment estimable, celui de l’architecture. Et a fortiori si cette architecture appartient à la famille très restreinte des exceptionnelles maisons de maître et constitue un irremplaçable jalon du patrimoine genevois. En effet une remarquable maison ancienne, sa loge et ses portails sont parvenus intacts jusqu’à nous par on ne sait quel miracle ! Leur environnement aussi, soit un parc, doté d’une végétation répertoriée pour sa valeur, et d’une luxuriante bambouseraie, qui dévale jusqu’à la place des Nations. Les riverains du quartier « international » qui se densifie se promènent à l’ombre des frondaisons centenaires et plébiscitent l’inégalable havre de verdure public.

Il a fallu attendre l’issue du concours international lancé par la Fondation pour la Cité de la Musique de Genève, créée en 2014 et présidée par Bruno Mégevand, pour que les citoyens genevois apprennent, un peu éberlués, qu’une Cité de la Musique allait prendre place sur la parcelle des Feuillantines. Le dossier avait jusque-là, comme trop souvent, fait son chemin entre les méandres de l’Administration et ceux du lobby des architectes accolonnés à un puissant mecénat. Personne alors pour se soucier d’intégrer la demeure au nom de cet illustre « patrimoine de demain », dont se gargarise une clique qui allie l’arrogance à l’inculture. Le tout légitimé par un concours international qui met cruellement en évidence l’étendue du provincialisme genevois!

Mise en œuvre par la famille Duval, faisant pendant à la Villa Blanche construite en contrehaut pour Etienne Duval et actuellement occupée par la Mission permanente de la Fédération de Russie, la maison qui deviendra Les Feuillantines fut construite vers 1880, probablement sur des dessins de Jean Franel (1824-1885), bien qu’il subsiste encore une part d’ombre sur la genèse de l’ouvrage. Avec l’Ariana, musée hors du commun conçu par Gustave Revilliod dont on va célébrer les 150 ans de la création à l’automne 2018, ce périmètre du Petit-Saconnex s’ornait là d’un ensemble architectural classicisant de très haute qualité, que des interventions contemporaines ont malheureusement peu à peu gâté sans doigté.

Le domaine passe ensuite entre les mains de la famille d’Auguste de Morsier-Claparède (1864-1923), de retour d’un séjour parisien au début du XXe siècle. Il est alors baptisé Les Feuillantines, en souvenir de Victor Hugo qui vécut dans l’impasse éponyme à Paris entre 1809 et 1813. La famille Morsier cède sa propriété à l’ONU en 1937. Elle abrite dès lors divers directeurs et hauts fonctionnaires des organisations internationales, dont le prix Nobel d’économie suédois Gunnar Myrdal, qui y réside en

Une bombe aux Feuillantines

– Victor Hugo–

L’homme […] S’était assis pensif au coin d’une masure. Ses yeux cherchaient dans l’ombre un rêve qui brilla; Il songeait; il avait, tout petit, joué là; Le passé devant lui, plein de voix enfantines, Apparaissait; c’est là qu’étaient les Feuillantines; Ton tonnerre idiot foudroie un paradis. Oh! que c’était charmant! comme on riait jadis!

(L’Année terrible, 1871)
Traduire à l’ONU (4e partie)

« Le renouveau a toujours été d’abord un retour aux sources »

Romain Gary

M. ALLEK, N. JÉRÔME,
A. REIGNIER-CHAPPAZ, ONUG1

Entre sueur et labeur

Le Groupe des références a été créé en 1965 à la suite d’une idée simple: comment faire pour que la traduction des documents de l’ONU soit irréprochable, réponde au mieux aux attentes des États membres et facilite le travail du traducteur? La réponse fut une révélation: appuyer la traduction en amont du processus. S’en est suivi un système de dispositif architectural et paysager des Feuillantines a été conservé à ce jour, ce qui est exceptionnel. Des bureaux, installés sans dommages dans les espaces existants, abritent les activités culturelles des épouses des fonctionnaires de l’ONU. Dans la douce convivialité que favorise une distribution ancienne, on y apprend les langues, on s’y adonne à des activités manuelles et artistiques, porté par le génie du lieu. La distribution ancienne, les salons et la salle à manger du rez-de-chaussée avec cheminée à chambranle de marbre et dresse soirs anciens, lambris, frises et parquets d’origine, tout a été conservé, grâce au manque de moyens. Le majestueux escalier tournant à garde-corps de ferromerie, relayé par un escalier qui dessert le 2e étage, est une véritable démonstration de l’art de balancer les escaliers dans ce que l’architecture Beaux-Arts a de meilleur.

En tant que domaine et résidence, Les Feuillantines constituent un îlot d’exception architecturale et paysagère qui doit absolument être conservé pour témoigner aux générations futures de la qualité artistique de la fin du XIXe siècle et du foisonnement vivant d’un parc centenaire, rendu précieux par les circonstances de l’actuelle pression urbaine effrénée. Afin qu’il ne faille pas tristement conclure comme dans la poésie de Victor Hugo, intitulée « une bombe aux Feuillantines».

Quand bien même mélomane, le Genevois de souche ou d’adoption se souhaite un avenir meilleur que celui que lui concoctent dans son dos des groupes d’influence qui interfèrent avec le libre exercice de la démocratie suisse.

1 Historienne de l’architecture et architecte

1 Groupe des références, ONUG
Deaf (WFD) in 1951, which brought together national Deaf Associations and communities from different cultures and backgrounds.

Also, attempts have been made to develop Standardized Sign for the main languages such as English, French or Arabic. However, these attempts have been rejected and have therefore failed mainly due to the fact that, like hearing people, deaf people are very protective of their linguistic diversity and cultural identity. So much so, that an American signer cannot understand a British signer nor can a Honduran signer understand the Sign of a Columbian.

International Sign is a means of communication, national sign is an expression of cultural diversity and national identity.

CHIRINE EL DALATI-CHAKRA, UNOG
Senior Management at DCM has taken the lead, particularly through the CRPD Secretariat and the Interpretation Service, to give effect to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities in terms of inclusiveness and accessibility by providing, inter alia, Sign language interpretation.

There are different types of Sign Language:
- National Sign languages that have naturally developed over centuries in deaf communities and that are specific to each country, region and sometimes, local community.
- International Sign Language is a form of lingua franca that developed with the advent of large gatherings, namely the establishment of the World Federation for the Deaf (WFD) in 1951, which brought together national Deaf Associations and communities from different cultures and backgrounds.

Sign Interpreters must strictly comply with UN on-line recruitment procedures that are cumbersome and require high-speed Internet access. Also, UN qualification requirements are such that very few candidates can meet them in some countries.

The challenge the UN faces today is to respond to the legitimate demand for recognition of national identity and preservation of cultural heritage and to remain sensitive to the specific circumstances of developing countries while at the same time adapting to current realities of budgetary cuts and dwindling resources.

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities whose 10th anniversary the UN celebrated in 2016, was a milestone in the history of the deaf people’s struggle to be heard. The deaf community represents a population of approximately 70 million people of which 80% live in developing countries and only 1%-2% have access to education in Sign language. In fact, it is only recently that sign language received legal recognition in some countries that previously forced deaf children to learn to speak and lip-read in school.

“Sign language is at the core of Deaf people’s lives; sign language makes accessibility for Deaf people possible; without accessibility Deaf people will be isolated; the full enjoyment of human rights for Deaf people is based on the recognition and respect for Deaf culture and diversity.”

In 2018, the CRPD will be examining country reports including some developing country reports. Haitian French Sign interpreters, for example, were needed for Haiti’s country report but none were available.

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EVELINA RIIOUKHINA, UNOG

For years and millennia, from ancient times to modern history, striking love stories, be they of Kings and Emperors, of Tsars and Presidents, or of regular men and women, capture our attention and nourish our imagination. And from ancient times to nowadays, writers and poets, musicians and film-makers alike make us a part of those stories. They bring us in, letting us navigate through their complexities together with their main characters. We share joy of the latter’s good fortune, and we shed a tear saddened by their tragedies. In any case, however, we follow these tales with bated breath.

Since ancient times it is well known that a man can make miracles for a woman he loves – he can conquer cities, reach the highest peaks, or discover a star and name it after the loved one. There are many ways in which a man expresses his feelings. A painter puts his heart on canvas, thus paying the ultimate tribute to his muse. A musician composes a symphony. These acts mean more than words. They tell the fuller story. They are profoundly honest, thus making a man exposed and vulnerable. By reflecting his soul in his creation, he opens his heart and invites others to explore the “secret garden” of his love to a woman to whom he dedicates his chef d’œuvre, be it a painting, a symphony, or a… Palace.

It is no coincidence that one testimony to love, the Taj Mahal Palace, has recently been selected one of the new Wonders of the World. It impresses some, and leaves others totally overwhelmed. Not only is it spectacular, magnificent and splendid. Not only is it a pure “eulogy to love”. There is more. But, what exactly is it that makes Taj Mahal so magnificent, so splendid. Not only is it lit, but it is always bright. It sparkles at night and shines during the day. It is not lit, but it is always bright. It sparkles at night and shines during the day. It breathes, it feels, it lives. And then it struck me – this is the secret – the Palace is LIVING, it is ALIVE! Alive as is the eternal love that it embodies.

I am very grateful to Rajiv Trehan and Ajay Kumar Vats for giving me a chance not only to see this World’s most precious Wonder in its full splendour at dawn, sunset and night, but also for making it possible for me to discover the secret of the Taj Mahal. Thanks to them, I am sharing it today with UN Special readers. 

Eulogy for the love of a woman

SHAH JAHAN, Emperor of India from 1628 to 1658, built this Palace in honour of his much beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Born as Prince Khurram, he was the favourite son of the Emperor Jahangir of India, who gave him the title of “Shah Jahan,” or “King of the World”. After the death of his father, Shah Jahan crowned himself Emperor at Agra. He shared this moment with Mumtaz Mahal, or “the Chosen One of the Palace.” who had been at his side since 1612 when the two had married. Among the three queens, she was his favourite. Unfortunately, Mumtaz died at childbirth in 1631. According to the legend before drawing her last breath, she asked her husband to build in her honour the world’s most beautiful mausoleum. He pledged not to disappoint her.

Soon after the queen’s death, the deeply grieving emperor ordered construction to begin. For twenty-two years, 20,000 workers from India, Persia, the Ottoman Empire and Europe worked to construct the Taj Mahal. The palace located near the capital Agra, on the southwest bank of the Jamuna River, spreads over an area of 42 acres (17-hectares). At its centre, surrounded by delicate screens filtering light, lies the cenotaph, or a coffin, containing the remains of the Shah’s beloved queen. The origin of the name of the Palace is not clear. In court stories from Shah Jahan’s reign, the place is referred to as the rauza (tomb) of Mumtaz Mahal. The currently used “Taj Mahal”, which translates as “the Crown of the Palace”, is believed to be an abbreviated version of the queen’s name.

Visiting the Taj Mahal is a lifetime experience. If you have not been there yet, I encourage you to go! Whether you take it as an architectural masterpiece, or as a monument of love (it is worth mentioning that nowadays the sarcophagi of both, the emperor and the queen are placed in the same tomb chamber, just 5 inches apart), you will without a doubt sense the magnifying charm of this place. Perhaps, it comes from its majestic form, breathtaking details, and perfect proportions. Perhaps. But it might also be that it is the force of pure love that reigns there.

It is not a place to visit in a hurry. Offer it your time and it will reward you. Embrace the omnipresent beauty, and allow the palace to reveal its secrets to you. At every moment in time, you will see it differently, as the Palace is constantly changing. It interacts with its surroundings, with you, and with the sky. Made of the precious stones inlaid with white marble, it reflects different hues of light –snow at dawn, all shades of ivory during the day, glowing pink at sunset, and pearls in the moonlight.

I am very grateful to Rajiv Trehan and Ajay Kumar Vats for giving me a chance not only to see this World’s most precious Wonder in its full splendour at dawn, sunset and night, but also for making it possible for me to discover the secret of the Taj Mahal.

1 New7Wonders of the World was a campaign launched by Bernard Weber through his Foundation based in Switzerland, with the main aim of preserving the global heritage of today. Millions’ popular poll selected seven of them that were announced in Lisbon, in 2007, without ranking. Taj Mahal is lately considered as the most visited.
À ce jour, il y en a vingt. Parmi elles, des peintres, scientifiques, politiciennes, comédiennes, médecins, philosophes, écrivaines. Elles sont toutes fortes, rebelles, elles ont changé le monde, ont voyagé, elles ont l'esprit libre, quelques unes plus que d'autres. Ces guerrières ont quelque chose en commun : leur photo décore les toilettes des femmes de la THF, The hamburger fondation, (Rue Philippe-Plantamour 37 à Genève). Les clientes réagissent selon leur état d’âme d’après Yann Popper, un des trois associés de la chaîne qui veut « sauver les hamburgers de la malbouffe ». Une femme d’Etat a ainsi fini dans les toilettes, une actrice américaine a été volée à de nombreuses reprises, et une autre déchirée. À vous de deviner lesquelles…

Berthe Morisot, Tina Fey, Rita Levi-Montalcini, Isabelle Eberhardt, Rosa Parks, Cindy Sherman, Ruth Dreifuss, Susan Sontag, Lucille Ball, Ayn Rand, Amelia Earhart, Florence Arthaud, Velma Scantlebury, Lena Dunham, George Sand, Indira Ghandi, Angela Merkel, Beyoncé…

Comment ces photos ont-elles atterri sur les murs du lady’s room de la THF, et pourquoi pas dans les murs des « gentlemen » ? Yann raconte qu’au début il y avait aussi des photos dans les toilettes des hommes, des inventeurs, des entrepreneurs, des Rockfellers et autres spécimens similaires qui ne le satisfaisaient pas vraiment, et qu’il les a enlevés. Néanmoins il envisage de décorer les murs des toilettes des « gentlemen » avec des modèles qui aillent au-delà du modèle mascu- lin-viril, quelque chose de plus gender neutral : des hommes qui ont réussi par la musique ou l’art, et pas forcément par la force. Yann voudrait montrer aux jeunes garçons que la sensibilité c’est très bien aussi… « Avec la décoration on a la possibilité de faire une connexion avec les émotions des gens » dit-il.

On prend un café en terrasse, je découvre cet entrepreneur aux idées féministes.

Ca fait plaisir de l’entendre : « Ce que j’aime chez les hommes ou les femmes c’est qu’ils ou elles se réalisent, et je pense que toutes ces femmes se sont réalisées. Elles n’ont pas été définies par leurs maris ou par des choses extérieures mais par leurs propres vies » Et puis, « Si on arrive à mettre une belle idée dans la tête de quelqu’un c’est encore mieux. Les petites filles en ont assez des modèles de femmes qui utilisent leur féminité et leur sexualité pour se mettre en avant, mais elles reçoivent très peu de messages des femmes qui ont utilisé leur cerveau, leur humour, pour exister, et je me suis dit si une petite fille va aux toilettes ici et qu’elle est curieuse elle va découvrir qu’une de ces femmes a eu un prix Nobel, ou que celle-là a fait le tour du monde toute seule en bateau, et peut être que cela va lui servir d’inspiration pour faire autre chose que mettre une jupe pour se sentir belle ».

Yann dit avoir grandi avec une mère de fort caractère et pas patriarcal, il pense qu’on n’est plus vraiment dans une époque où priment les modèles duels et que c’est peut-être dû à la fragmentation des médias traditionnels. « Aujourd’hui, les gens reçoivent les contenus par divers médias et ils réalisent qu’il y a plusieurs identités. Au travers des réseaux sociaux un jeune qui grandit à la campagne en Suisse, dans un milieu très traditionnel, a accès grâce à Internet à des histoires de vies originales qui peuvent l’inspirer au-delà de son portable ».

Heureusement il nous reste aussi les rues et les murs… des lieux d’expression où les idées bouillonnent selon les époques…

« On m’a dit que je devrais ajouter le portrait d’Oprah Winfrey » dit Yann. Avant qu’il ait le temps de finir son café j’ajoute : « tu devrais mettre aussi Mary Shelley… »
**Et la récompense revient à...**

*Le saviez-vous?*  
*La collection des œuvres d’art des Nations Unies à Genève vient de recevoir un prix international prestigieux.*

**CLARA GOUY, CRISTINA GIORDANO**


Longtemps méconnue, la collection de l’Office des Nations Unies à Genève a dû attendre le début du XXIe siècle avant de faire l’objet d’une étude approfondie, qui a été menée sous l’égide de la Bibliothèque. En 2013, la Bibliothèque a aussi établi un inventaire systématique des œuvres qui la composent et depuis 2017, elle gère la collection à l’aide d’une base de données muséale. L’importance de la collection a alors pris une nouvelle dimension. De nombreux artistes contemporains y sont représentés: le norvégien Sørensen, les espagnols Sert et Barceló, l’américain Rauschenberg, le suisse Erni, les italiens Rotella et Pistoletto, la française Charlotte Perrrand, pour n’en nommer que quelques-uns.


L’ONUG a été primée sous les deux volets, grâce au rôle que joue son Programme d’activités culturelles dans la promotion de l’art comme lien entre les cultures, de la compréhension et du dialogue entre les civilisations.

Les participants des «Institutional Art Awards 2017» incluaient, entre autres, la Banque d’Italie, le Ministère des Affaires étrangères d’Italie, la Banque européenne d’investissement, le Parlement européen, la FAO et la Banque centrale d’Argentine.

Les gagnants ont été désignés à Rome le 22 novembre dernier durant une cérémonie et une conférence tenues au Ministère de la culture et du tourisme, en présence du Ministre Dario Franceschini.

M. Francesco Pisano, qui s’est rendu à Rome pour recevoir le prix, dit: «Cette récompense est très importante car elle souligne la valeur et l’originalité de la collection de l’ONUG, qui est étroitement liée à l’histoire de l’organisation internationale. Elle renforce notre détermination à travailler pour préserver ce patrimoine unique et à le faire connaître au grand public et aux spécialistes. C’est à la fois un honneur et une responsabilité.»

M’Clara Gouy, qui gère la collection au quotidien, remarque: «Des historiens, qui veulent étudier des objets d’art se trouvant au Palais, nous contactent souvent. Ils se rendent compte que des œuvres marquantes font partie de nos fonds».

Alors, quand vous vous rendez dans des salles pour des réunions ou passez dans les couloirs, n’oubliez pas de regarder autour de vous. Vous y découvrirez peut-être un pan d’histoire de l’art du XXe siècle. Si quelques œuvres vous interpellent, n’hésitez pas à contacter la Bibliothèque, qui pourra apporter des réponses à vos questions. Un voyage intellectuel fascinant s’ouvre devant vous, sans même que vous ayez à quitter votre lieu de travail. Profitez-en! 

1 Bibliothèque des Nations Unies à Genève

Contact: Section de la diplomatie culturelle et de la sensibilisation du public de la Bibliothèque, email: clara.gouy@un.org
A beginner’s experience of Aikido

A Japanese martial art leads to a harmonious body and mind.

NESRIN EVERETT

I stand at the entrance to the dojo. In front of me; a room covered in soft mats, with a photo of O Sensei (Great Teacher), Moreihi Usheibia, against the far wall. A line of students, dressed in white *dogis* warms up. Our instructor wears a black *hakama* skirt, showing black belt status, over his dogi. I remove my shoes, step onto the mat, bow and walk inside.

This is our space, where we practice Aikido, a peaceful Japanese martial art. Ai: harmony, Ki: energy/spirit, Do: the way. Aikido: *The way of harmony.*

Once warmed up our instructor moves to the far side of the room. He faces away from us and kneels towards the photo of Usheibia, the founder of Aikido. Kneeling in a line behind him, after a short meditation, once centred and calm, we all bow in unison to Usheiba. Our instructor turns to face us and we bow once more, this time to each other. We are now ready to begin our practice. For the hour and a half that follows, we will work together to practise different movements, taking turns to be the attacker (*uke*) and the defender (*tori*).

Aikido was very much a conscious choice for me. While working in the busy and stressful financial world, I spent many years practising yoga, which helped me feel calm, healthy and centred. As time passed (and my career changed) I realised that I wanted to evolve my practise. Yoga had helped me focus on myself. Now I wanted apply what I had learned to the world around me. I needed a practice that allowed me to connect more directly with others while still continuing to have a spiritual dimension.

Another reason I chose to study Aikido, was to be able to live a more peaceful and harmonious life. I have seen a great deal of conflict in my life, and the destruction it can cause. Frequently in the middle of conflicts between others, my greatest desire was for resolution, but my efforts to create peace had often not had the desired result. As a result I found conflict situations extremely draining and upsetting and would do my utmost to avoid them. Aikido interested me because it offers another solution. We neither avoid nor retreat from conflict; we always enter into the situation in order to transform the conflict into peace. Aikido respects and cares for all of life and brings peace to any situation. I wanted to experience the Aikido way of conflict resolution.

It was during a hiking leadership course in the mountains, when asked about my goals for the week, I realized that I needed to better manage my energy. Whilst I have plenty of energy I am often wasting it, misdirecting it or not using it to its full potential. This applies
Aikido is one of the most intense physical and mental trainings I have ever done. For the first three months I would come home elated, but also completely exhausted. I felt as if I had been in a fight (even though Aikido is about peace rather than war!). I was falling incorrectly, hitting the ground like a sack of potatoes, rather than lightly rolling, which made all my internal organs feel like tennis balls in a tumble dryer. Every time I performed a technique, I was using far too much energy to get my opponent to move. Once home, I just needed to quickly eat something filling, before collapsing into bed. Falling asleep was not so easy, as my body was so charged with energy! I never thought that an hour and a half of moving around a mat could be so intense.

At the beginning, I found the techniques very complicated. During the demonstrations I would catch half the move, or only what the hands were doing but not the feet. My brain simply could not keep up with what it was seeing. Often I would just feel stupid “How can I not get this? What’s wrong with me?” As time passed, I noticed that my right side was more flexible and fluid than the left. I became more aware of any negative self-talk and started being more compassionate and patient with myself. Sometimes the moves would flow right through and in trying to replicate others I would get stuck in the middle or hesitate.

But six months later, my concentration levels improved and the flexibility on both sides of my body and brain had increased. I was energised rather than exhausted at the end of each session. My body has changed as well – I am stronger, harder, yet also supple. When I practice aikido I feel steadier, more centred and stable.

Aikido is about feeling. In a world where rational thinking often take precedence, Aikido shows me the need to feel. I had wanted a practice that made me need to exercise my feelings and intuition. Using the body is such a wonderful way to do this. With Aikido I get to see my blocks rather than just talk about them. If I overthink, I hesitate. I get lost in getting the moment “right”, rather than feeling the energy spiraling between me and the other person. In order to connect I have to do more than think, I have to feel. Because my school works with “ki” or “energy”, I have to feel my energy and the energy of the other in order to create peaceful transformation. As time progresses I have become more aware of my own energy (and that of my opponent). I see and feel directly where I am losing energy or where it is being misdirected or wasted.

Aikido is about harmony. Harmony with yourself and harmony with the world. Aikido is about creating versus destroying. It is about aligning yourself with universal energy and projecting it outwards. It is about reciprocity and being at one with all that is.

As result it is logical that there is no competition in Aikido. Aikido unifies. When we are all on the mat, we are all the same. Age and gender do not matter, we are all as one. ■

For more information visit: aikidowashikai.ch

L’Île de la Paix (du 21 au 23 mars)
Une création du Club théâtre de l’ONUG

Un palais au bord d’un lac, une île...
Le Roi, la Reine et leurs clans respectifs s’affrontent, le peuple gronde et la popularité est en berne. Les sentiments et la politique s’entremêlent dans ce jeu de l’amour et des pouvoirs. Une comédie originale imaginée et présentée par le Club de Théâtre de l’ONUG, mise en scène par Sébastien Deront.

Trois représentations, les 21, 22 et 23 mars, à 19 heures
Hall XIV du Palais des Nations (derrière la salle des Assemblées, en venant de la salle des Pas perdus)
Pour les personnes sans badge d’accès au Palais, l’enregistrement est obligatoire, à l’adresse suivante: theatreaupalais@gmail.com
Entrée libre – «chapeau» à la fin du spectacle

Célébration de la Journée de la langue française

• Jeux sur le thème des régionalismes
• Mini-représentation du Club théâtre de l’ONUG
• Remise d’un prix de rédaction par le Centres de langues de l’ONUG
• Buffet de spécialités

Le Département de la Gestion des conférences de l’ONUG célèbre pour la première fois la Journée de la langue française, en collaboration avec le Centre de formation et de multilinguisme et l’Organisation internationale de la francophonie.

Tous les amis de la langue française sont les bienvenus, le 20 mars de 12h 30 à 14 heures, dans le Hall XIV du Palais des Nations (derrière la salle des Assemblées, en venant de la salle des Pas perdus)
Myanmar est probablement l’une des dernières destinations mythiques d’Asie (voir le UN Special de décembre-janvier). De par son long isolement, elle possède encore de vastes régions inexplorées qui abritent une faune et une flore à la fois diversifiées et peu connues.

Les vastes étendues planes du lac Inle ont fait place à des paysages montagneux couverts d’une végétation luxuriante. Nous sommes à Kyaing Tong dans l’est de Myanmar, à trois heures d’avion de Heho, après avoir fait escale à Mandalay puis à Tachilek. La frontière avec la Thaïlande et le Laos est toute proche. Cette région est au cœur du Triangle d’or, l’une des principales zones mondiales de production d’opium depuis les années 1920. Myanmar en est le second producteur au monde après l’Afghanistan. L’Office des Nations Unies contre la Drogue et le Crime (ONUDC) dont le Siège est à Vienne en Autriche a constaté que malgré les efforts d’éradication, les rendements plus élevés associés à une augmentation de la culture du pavot en Birmanie ont entraîné un accroissement de la production mondiale d’opium ces dernières années. Les enquêtes menées par l’ONUDC auprès des agriculteurs exploitant le pavot ont montré que l’argent en découlant était essentiel pour les villageois menacés par l’insécurité alimentaire et la pauvreté. Et tant qu’il n’y aura pas d’alternatives économiques durables, ils continueront, en désespoir de cause, à développer l’opium.
comme une culture de subsistance. Mais les autorités birmanes ont fixé à 2019 la date pour éliminer la production de drogues dans leur pays… À suivre donc!

**Véritable mosaïque ethnique**

Aux alentours de Kyaing Tong, de nombreux sentiers traversant vallées et collines offrent de multiples possibilités de randonnées pour partir à la découverte des minorités ethniques. Ici, les touristes sont encore rares et l’accueil dans les villages en est pour autant merveilleux.

Afin de nous donner de l’énergie avant d’arpenter la montagne, rien de tel qu’un verre de saké. Sur la route, notre guide Soesoe a l’excellente idée de nous faire découvrir, dissimulée au beau milieu de la forêt, une distillerie clandestine qui fabrique cet alcool de riz. Interdite mais tolérée, cette production est destinée au marché birman, mais aussi chinois et thaïlandais. À consommer avec modération il va de soi ! Fin prêts, nous pouvons y aller. Après avoir sillonné les rizières qui donnent ici trois récoltes par année, notre chemin s’élève au milieu des plantations de thé. Habité par l’ethnie akha, le village de Hokyin est en vue.

Myanmar est une véritable mosaïque ethnique. Les Birmans «de souche» ne représentent que 60% de la population, le restant étant composé de 135 ethnies différentes. Les Akhas font partie des Tibéto-birmans, provenant d’Asie et installés en Birmanie vers le milieu du premier millénaire de notre ère après être passé par le Tibet. Vêtues de leurs habits traditionnels, les femmes vaquent à leurs occupations devant leur hutte sur pilotis ou dans les champs. Elles portent la jupe ainsi que des jambières décorées, affichent leurs plus belles parures, de nombreux colliers bariolés et de gros médaillons gravés. Leurs têtes sont recouvertes d’une coiffe haute et colorée en fer blanc agrémentée de dizaines de pièces en argent.

**Mandalay et ses environs**

Alors qu’un festival haut en couleur regroupant des ethnies locales venues faire la fête anime la place centrale de Kyaing Tong, notre chemin nous amène au village de Pin Tauk habité par les Lahus. D’origine sino-tibétaine, cette ethnie vit de la culture, de l’élevage mais également de la chasse. Nous continuons la marche jusqu’à un village de la minorité ann. Ce peuple est animiste, il croit aux esprits. Les Ann’s vivent comme leurs ancêtres et ne semblent pas vouloir changer. Au retour, après avoir traversé des rizières verdoyantes aménagées en terrasses où broutent paisiblement quelques buffles, changement d’ambiance en arrivant dans un village palaung. L’endroit semble beaucoup plus structuré et développé. L’ethnie palaung fait partie des Môns, peuple qui domine la basse Birmanie durant de longs siècles. Le tissage occupe ici beaucoup de femmes qui sont joliment vêtues d’un longyi souvent dans les tons rouges et d’une courte veste de couleur vive. Elles portent une large ceinture brodée ou faite de métal et certaines chiquent du bétel. Mélanges de feuille de bétel, de noix d’arbre et de chaux, ce coupe-faim très consommé en Birmanie colore les levres et les dents d’un rouge-orangé très prononcé.

Nous ne quitterons pas la région sans avoir visité une fabrique d’objets en laque. En Birmanie, ils font partie de l’histoire du pays. La technique de la laque pourrait remonter à la période Pyu, au VIIe siècle après JC. On reconnaît une laque de qualité à la souplesse de l’objet. Le procédé exige des mois de travail. Jusqu’à sept fines couches successives de laque (résine issue de la sève de l’arbre *Melanorrhoea usitata*) sont appliquées à la main, à l’intérieur puis à l’extérieur d’une structure réalisée, soit en bambou tressé, soit en bois sculpté. Le résultat est tout à fait magnifique…

Deuxième plus grande ville de Birmanie, Mandalay fut sa dernière capitale royale entre 1860 et 1885. On la surnommait alors la « cité des joyaux » pour son jade réputé. Et c’est justement sur la route qui nous conduit en ville depuis l’aéroport que trône une étonnante pagode, unique en son genre, construite entièrement en jade. La ville grouille, s’agite, la circulation y est intense et bruyante et l’on se prend à regretter la sérénité vécue ces jours passés en montagne parmi les ethnies. Nous la retrouverons quelques instants sur le fleuve Irrawaddy, épine dorsale de Myanmar. Notre bateau nous achemine vers Mingun,
lieu choisi par le roi Bodawpaya pour y faire construire la pagode Pahtodawgyi, grandiose mais inachevée et sérieusement mise à mal par différents séismes. A deux pas, près de la pagode blanche Mya Thein Tan édifiée en l’honneur de la princesse Sinbyumae, se dresse un pavillon qui renferme une cloche d’un poids de 90 tonnes, la plus grosse en état de sonner du monde.

Retour dans la périphérie de Mandalay, au sud plus précisément, près d’Amarapura qui fut la capitale du troisième empire birman jusqu’en 1823, puis de 1841 à 1860. Avant d’aller admirer le coucher du soleil derrière le très poétique pont d’U Bein construit en teck qui, avec ses 1200 mètres est le plus long du monde, une pause «silence» est programmée à la pagode Mahamuni. C’est l’un des trois sanctuaires les plus sacrés du pays. Elle abrite une grande statue du Bouddha recouverte de 12 tonnes d’or, composées essentiellement des millions des minces feuilles d’or que les fidèles appliquent quotidiennement.

Depuis la pagode Su Taung Pyi édifiée sur la colline de Mandalay nous jetterons un dernier regard sur la ville avec au cœur le Palais royal entouré de remparts de 8 km de long. Enfin, avant de prendre la route pour Pyin Oo Lwin en direction de la frontière chinoise, une visite de l’extraordinaire monastère Shwenandaw s’impose. Construit entièrement en bois, il a été une résidence du roi Mindon. La découverte de la pagode Kuthodaw n’est également à manquer sous aucun prétexte. C’est la plus importante bibliothèque bouddhiste au monde. Insrite au Registre Mémoire du Monde par l’Unesco, elle abrite une collection constituée de 729 tablettes en pierre sur lesquelles sont inscrits les textes sacrés bouddhistes.

Pyin Oo Lwin, station climatique édifiée à près de 1200 mètres d’altitude nous donnera l’occasion de retrouver un peu de fraîcheur. Son jardin botanique fondé en 1915 par le botaniste anglais Alex Rogers n’a pas d’égal dans le pays.

Demain c’est par le train que nous continuerons notre périple plus au nord de Myanmar.

(Suite de l’aventure à découvrir dans le prochain numéro du UN Special)
Vous aimeriez partager votre opinion sur le magazine et son contenu ?

N'hésitez plus et écrivez-nous !

Nous serions heureux de recevoir votre avis. Les plus pertinents, les plus intéressants, les plus originaux seront publiés dans le magazine.

Si vous souhaitez proposer un article, n'hésitez pas à me contacter à tout moment.

Et maintenant, à vos plumes !

Adressez vos commentaires à :
Alex Mejia, rédacteur en chef – UN Special
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Genève 10, Suisse
Par courrier électronique: alex.mejia@unitar.org

Would you like to share your opinion about UN Special and its contents ?

Write to us!

We will be glad to hear from you. The most interesting, relevant, or even ingenious responses will be published in the magazine.

Should you wish to submit an article, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Now, put pen to paper!

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