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ÉDITORIAL / EDITOR’S NOTE

On 10 December of this year, the Declaration of Human Rights turned 70. This issue of UN Special highlights this truly remarkable achievement. You will read about the perspective of UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights on why this Declaration is still relevant today, and about the rising tide of alarm that Human Rights are under threat. We are glad to offer you an article on Michelle Bachelet, the new UN High Commissioner as well. Additionally, in an interview with Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, you will read about interfaith and intercultural understanding. As this edition concludes the year 2018, we invite you to turn to this month’s centerfold for a summary of the most important events that took place under the umbrella of our organization, hoping you reflect on this truly busy year.

Since its advent in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has reshaped how our organization works. In this edition we invite you to read the first part of a rare first-hand account from UN Assistant Secretary-General Nikhil Seth on how this unique Agenda came to be. We also invite you to read how sustainable development is implemented in Oman in the words of its Ambassador, Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi.

Other topics include an interview with WHO Deputy Director-General for Programmes, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, the ILO centenary, and a remarkable account of female peacekeepers on the field. Finally, we hope you will enjoy this edition’s Art & Culture section. We have prepared for you, among others, pieces on the Geneva Black Movie Festival, the Comédie de Genève, and the Théâtre de Carouge. With this, UN Special wishes you an excellent end of the year and looks forward to 2019!


Depuis son avènement en 2015, l’Agenda 2030 pour le développement durable a remodelé le fonctionnement de notre organisation. Dans cette édition, nous vous invitons à lire la première partie du témoignage du Sous-Secrétaire général de l’ONU, Nikhil Seth, sur la genèse de ce programme unique. Également, vous pourrez lire sur comment le développement durable est adopté en Oman, dans un entretien avec M. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi.

Parmi les autres sujets abordés figurent un entretien avec la Directrice générale adjointe pour les programmes auprès de l’OMS, Mme Soumya Swaminathan, le centenaire de l’ILO, et un compte rendu sur les femmes soldats de la paix. Enfin, nous espérons que vous apprécierez la section Art & Culture avec entre autres, des articles sur le Festival International de Films Indépendants «Black Movie» de Genève, la Comédie de Genève et le Théâtre de Carouge. UN Special vous souhaite une excellente fin d’année et se réjouit de vous retrouver en 2019!

La revue officielle des fonctionnaires internationaux des Nations Unies à Genève et de l’Organisation Mondiale de la Santé

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From 9 December, the network will be enhanced thanks to the Léman Express rail service. Travel for international organisations will be improved and new services made available.

- A new service to the Nations district. Connecting passengers to Colovrex via Nation Cornavin instead of lines V and Z. This new service to the Nations district complements that of line 8 and F and ends at Place de Neuve.

- A new service to Petit-Saconnex and part of international organisations (including the ILO and WHO).

Note that on line 22 there will be a diversion for one year between Bouchet and Maison des Parlements via Balexert-Pailly and Chemin des Coudriers due to work in the area.

- Buses will be more frequent, with one every 15 minutes in rush hour. Line 28 buses will connect passengers to Leman Express trains to/from Coppet at Geneva-Sécheron train station.

- Buses will be more frequent mainly during the week in rush hour (with one bus every 10 minutes) and off-peak hours (with one bus every 15 minutes).

More information on tpg.ch
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The TPG network and Léman Express introduce better services. More information on tpg.ch.
Just as with the air we breathe, you and I may barely notice our human rights so long as they are respected, but, as the voices of millions suffering acutely from their absence testify, we all cry out for rights when they are denied us. The UDHR gives words and standards to our common humanity and frankly, all of us should be raising our voices, and standing up, in support of that common humanity and against the policies and practices that de-humanise.

That’s why for me, the UDHR is THE stand-out text because it is also a “stand-up” text! For, tough as human rights standards are at times to uphold; inconvenient as they are to those who seek to hold power without accountability and while under pressure they remain, nonetheless and they endure. Their gift persists. No other values system has spread globally so rapidly, to be incorporated into so many constitutions, laws and policies the world over. Dozens of editions of the UDHR now exist, in print and digital forms, from plain language adaptations making it more accessible to all to beautifully illustrated volumes. No other text has been translated into as many languages – 500 plus so far¹, allowing people the world over to read the Declaration and claim their rights in their own tongue.

The journey for human rights over the last seven decades has taught us that while legal protections are essential, solidarity and leadership for rights are key. We owe much to the solidarity of civil society and of human rights defenders for what has progressed, and we need much more from official leaders to help bridge the gaps that remain – leadership that is rooted in robust compassion and respect for rights and not steeped in bigotry, fear or hatred.

In our daily lives, in our schools and work places; from our places of worship to our palaces of entertainment; in our personal, political and community lives – all of us can take this step forward to stand up for that fundamental truth which the UDHR preserves and to which opposition is morally inconceivable – that indeed, born we all are – equal in dignity and rights. Those are my go-to words from my go-to text – motivating me, and countless others around the world over in our everyday lives. For the women and men of the United Nations that is our heartbeat and a cause for which so many of our UN colleagues the world over have even risked their lives.

Such is the power of one text with universal appeal; a book that enshrines universal values and common humanity.

The advent of the UDHR unleashed a flurry of commitments in the form of global treaties and conventions for the promotion and protection of human rights; creation of new mechanisms and architecture for enhancing human rights accountability and, most importantly, unprecedented changes in the way human rights guarantees were recognized at the national and local levels.

As we look back at the journey over the last seven decades, it highlights an unfinished agenda and a complex web of multiple intersecting challenges which require robust change leadership for which human rights are the foundation. Leadership...
based on compassion and love and not bigotry and hatred.

We need to stand up for human rights. Because as the Universal Declaration states so beautifully at the outset, all human beings are equal in dignity and rights. We all in our daily lives, our schools and work, and our political and community life, all of us can uphold that fundamental truth and build a better global community for us all.  

To learn more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its 70th anniversary:
www.ohchr.org
www.standup4humanrights.org

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1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set a world record of being the most translated text when the Guinness Book of Records recognised in 2010 that the Declaration has been translated into languages and dialects from Abkhaz to Zulu.
La déclaration universelle des Droits de l’Homme
L’autorité intacte d’un texte visionnaire

La Déclaration universelle des droits de l’Homme, adoptée au lendemain de la seconde guerre mondiale, est encore aujourd’hui au cœur de la protection des droits de l’Homme dans le monde.


Certains pourraient penser que soixante-dix ans plus tard, la Déclaration universelle est un texte appartenant à l’Histoire, certes respectable, mais qui n’aurait pas su évoluer avec son temps pour prendre en compte les nouveaux droits, notamment ceux dits de troisième génération comme les droits environnementaux.

La question ne se pose pas ainsi. Aujourd’hui, la Déclaration universelle demeure la pierre angulaire du système de protection et de promotion des droits de l’Homme. C’est parce qu’elle existe, parce qu’elle a affirmé l’universalité et l’indivisibilité des droits que d’autres traités et instruments internationaux protecteurs des droits de l’Homme ont pu émerger par la suite.

Elle reste ainsi le plus solide des remparts des normes et des principes auxquels les États ont librement souscrit et qu’ils sont tenus d’appliquer. Les combats pour la défense des droits de l’Homme sont encore nombreux, comme le montre le combat des minorités dans de nombreuses régions du monde, qui s’inscrit dans la droite ligne du premier article de la déclaration universelle : « Tous les êtres humains naissent libres et égaux en dignité et en droits. » La force de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l’Homme, c’est qu’elle n’est ni « inter-gouvernementale », ni « internationale », mais « universelle », c’est-à-dire destinée à tous les hommes et à toutes les femmes, quels que soient leur nationalité ou leur statut.

Les droits de l’Homme ne sont pas une notion occidentale, un concept géographiquement ou historiquement situé ou daté. Ils sont le bien commun de l’humanité.

Alors que certains remettent en cause les droits de l’Homme au nom d’un relativisme fondé sur la culture, la religion, l’histoire ou la tradition, la France continuera de défendre leur universalité. Nous le réaffirmons : la lapidation, l’excision, les mutilations ou les mariages forcés d’enfants sont des violations des droits de l’Homme, la torture, la détention arbitraire, le manque d’accès à la justice, l’usage de la violence et de l’intimidation pour entraver la liberté d’expression, de manifestation ou d’association le sont aussi et bien qu’il n’existe, aucune culture, aucune tradition, aucune religion, ne saurait justifier ou minimiser la gravité de telles violations.


L’action humanitaire, le développement, la paix et la sécurité s’inspirent de la Déclaration universelle des droits de l’Homme.


Les droits de l’Homme sont un accélérateur de la paix et du développement. On ne doit pas choisir entre les uns et les autres : ils sont interdépendants. On ne rappellera jamais assez les premiers mots de la Déclaration universelle, qui aujourd’hui comme hier doivent nous guider : la


Au-delà, la France a proposé la suspension du véto au Conseil de sécurité en cas d’atrocités de masse. Le Conseil de sécurité ne peut rester passif quand de tels agrissements sont commis.

Et elle continue de promouvoir les droits de l’Homme partout où elle le peut, car beaucoup reste à faire pour mieux prévenir les crises les plus graves, défendre les citoyens et les communautés les plus vulnérables, lutter contre les discriminations, mieux coopérer aussi avec les États dont les moyens sont insuffisants.

Nous ne devons pas enfin nous abandonner au pessimisme:

À côté des développements négatifs que nous découvrons mieux grâce aux progrès de l’information globale, nous devons aussi relever des progrès concrets dans les esprits et dans le respect des droits de l’Homme partout dans le monde.


Ainsi, les États qui ont, aux cours des derniers mois, décidé d’abolir la peine de mort: la Mongolie, la Guinée, le Burkina Faso et bientôt la Malaisie.

Les progrès concrets dans les esprits et dans le respect des droits de l’Homme partout dans le monde, et notamment en France, sont illustrés par la décision de nombreux pays, dont la France, d’abolir la peine de mort récemment. Cela montre que les progrès sont possibles, que nous pouvons réussir à promouvoir les droits de l’Homme partout où nous le pouvons.

1 Ambassadeur, Représentant permanent de la France auprès de l’Office des Nations unies à Genève et des organisations internationales en Suisse

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ATHÉNÉE COINTRIN  |  ÉTOILE GENÈVE  |  MARBRERIE CAROUGE  |  A&S CHEVALLEY NYON
L’ouvrage n’est pas un manuel d’histoire, ni un traité de droit international, ni un manifeste politique, mais une libre réflexion s’étayant sur l’étude et la pratique des relations internationales pendant de longues années. Il peut paraître iconoclaste, car il propose non pas une nouvelle réforme, mais une réécriture de la Charte. Illusion certes, mais occasion de réfléchir au problème, en profondeur.


La Charte est vieille de trois quarts de siècle. Les situations ont beaucoup évolué. Le système international, de plus en plus marginalisé, doit se réinventer. D’abord, le concept même d’État ne correspond plus à sa définition initiale. Il devait remplir trois conditions cumulatives : un pouvoir unique, sur un peuple homogène, à l’intérieur d’un territoire défini par des frontières reconnues. Cette caractérisation théorique a été ébranlée à l’époque contemporaine, pour plusieurs raisons. La libération des peuples colonisés a multiplié par quatre le nombre des sujets du droit international public. Plus récemment, l’explosion des technologies de communication et le processus accéléré de mondialisation ont bouleversé les paramètres. Les régimes de pouvoir ont évolué. En outre, de nouvelles entités politiques, comme les mésogéopolies ou des régions sub-étatiques revendiquent, souvent à bon escient, un mot à dire dans le contexte intergouvernemental. Presque partout, les populations nationales ont cessés d’être homogènes. Les migrations ont entraîné des métissages aux niveaux culturel, ethnique, et religieux, par exemple. La circulation des informations, des finances et des biens s’est largement libéralisée. Les frontières tentent encore de bloquer les mouvements migratoires de groupes ou de personnes. Les « réseaux sociaux », publics ou privés, transcendent toutes les limites géographiques. Ainsi, les trois composantes de l’État, dans son acception traditionnelle, sont un pouvoir, un peuple et un territoire, représentent-elles de pures fictions, même si l’État demeure indispensable, car c’est autour de lui que s’organisent les relations internationales.

Les pouvoirs régalien les plus fondamentaux, à savoir le droit de battre monnaie et le monopole exclusif de l’usage de la force s’estompent. L’État souverain n’est plus obligé seulement par sa propre volonté. Des contours ont été tracés par l’établissement d’organisations intergouvernementales, dont les règles ont été explicitement acceptées. Au plan économique, les États sont pris dans un carcan de traités commerciaux et financiers qui limitent leurs marges de manœuvre. Ceux que l’on prétend « en
voie de développement» ne bénéficient pas tant de coopération, que d’assistance extérieure, qui dicte leur conduite. Par ailleurs, le monopole étatique du recours à la force a perdu de sa substance avec l’interdiction de la guerre. La prévention des conflits, le maintien de la paix et la reconstruction après hostilités appartient désormais à la communauté internationale, dans son ensemble.

A ce contexte nouveau, il convient d’ajouter le basculement progressif des forces. L’Occident qui a scénarisé le système interétatique démeure puissant, mais n’est plus le centre exclusif du monde. Il est bien sûr habilité à conserver ses valeurs, mais doit aussi faire preuve de réalisme et de tolérance.

Dans la situation actuelle, le système multilatéral n’est plus en mesure de donner réponses aux grandes questions que sont la dignité de l’homme, la sécurité de tous les États, la paix et la préservation écologique. Il n’est pas équipé pour faire face à trois phénomènes qui vont en croissant: le réchauffement climatique, le terrorisme et les migrations de masse. Les débats sur la «crise du multilatéralisme» sont aussi anciens que l’institution elle-même! Il faut porter au crédit de l’ONU qu’elle ait su, bon an mal an, traverser les tempêtes. Toutefois, à l’évidence, la Charte est devenue anachronique. Elle doit être remplacée par un nouvel instrument juridique et institutionnel correspondant mieux aux exigences de notre temps.

Très brièvement, les six «principaux organes» de l’institution doivent être redéfinis. Il convient d’affirmer la prééminence de l’Assemblée générale, y compris sa compétence de contrôler le Conseil de sécurité. Pour que ses résolutions soient crédibles, une certaine pondération des votes s’impose. Nauru (13 000 habitants) n’est pas égal à l’Inde (1,3 milliard)! La composition du Conseil de sécurité fait débat, ne représentant plus l’état du monde. De plus, si le droit de véto ne peut être supprimé, son utilisation est à réglementer et sa nature à préciser: véto absolu, suspensif, voire translatif dans certains cas. L’ECOSOC cesserait d’être un organe vaine-ment délibératif pour devenir opérationnel, imposant à toutes les composantes du système un programme inclusif. Des instances non étatiques pourraient y être incorporées. Par exemple, la population d’une mégapole comme Tokyo étant mille fois celle d’un État membre comme Monaco, sa contribution dans la lutte en faveur de l’environnement est essentielle. Puisqu’il n’existe plus de tutelle depuis 1994, le Conseil des Tutelles serait supprimé et remplacé, dans la Charte, par le Conseil des droits de l’Homme. Les modalités devront être trouvées pour fusionner la Cour internationale de justice et la Cour pénale internationale afin d’établir une véritable juridiction mondiale. Enfin, le personnel du Secrétariat doit être formé selon un plan de carrière clair et libéré des contrôles administratifs ubuesques, afin de retrouver l’espoir de réussir et la joie de servir.

An anniversary for health and Human Rights – under threat or an opportunity for change?

As the world celebrates Human Rights Day, on the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is a rising tide of alarm that human rights are under threat.

REBEKAH THOMAS, GENDER, EQUITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS, WHO

Globally, civil society space is being curtailed, and intolerance is growing. Populations continue to expand and move, the result of conflict, environmental harm or economic plight. Reactive nationalism and populism and shrinking democracy is fueling intolerance, marking a return to positions that were unthinkable even a decade ago, and raising the risk that long-held gains can no longer be assured.

Against this backdrop, the extent to which the human rights narrative has taken hold in global health may come as a surprise. Yet a number of recent shifts suggest that the world’s foremost global authority for health, WHO, is embarking on a new and bolder trajectory, raising the question of what this means for the Organization’s work on the ground, and with its partners.

Foremost among these shifts is a commitment by WHO’s Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, to make the right to health the cornerstone of his vision, and the driving force behind the notion of ‘Universal Health Coverage’.

UHC hinges upon the idea of ensuring everyone can access the health services they need without discrimination or financial hardship, and that these services be of sufficient quality, responding to the needs of people, not politics.

This vision for UHC also draws explicitly on WHO’s Constitution – also adopted 70 years ago this year – and the commitment to the highest attainable standard of health for all. This position has been repeatedly re-asserted by global leaders, policy makers and activists, and enshrined in over 100 national Constitutions worldwide, making it a legally justiciable right, not just a slogan.

The commitment to health as a human right was also pivotal to the recently adopted Astana Declaration for Primary Health Care, that envisions:

“Societies and environments that prioritize and protect people’s health;
Health care that is available and affordable for everyone, everywhere;
Health care of good quality that treats people with respect and dignity;
People engaged in their own health.”

Like its predecessor Alma Ata, the Astana declaration acknowledges the importance of addressing health but also the social determinants of health, and the importance of health for all, conveying a powerful message about equity that is ever more relevant in today’s unequal societies.

While significant, these lofty statements and commitments underpin a more practical shift towards human rights in WHO’s work.

Firstly, the strong and consistent narrative on human rights from WHO’s senior leadership, far from being empty rhetoric, offers a unifying and emboldened platform around which to mobilize communities.

Civil society has long played a fundamental role in human rights – including in health – from the HIV response to the movement for the rights of people with disabilities. However, this role has been at best, fragmented, often limited to specific health programmes and functions. To address this, WHO will be reaching out to more diverse grassroots organizations, to ensure the relevance and impact of its work in the places that need it most.

Secondly, for the first time, the Organization has assumed a prominent role in human rights on the global stage in recently assuming the co-lead of a UN Development Group tasked with ensuring that Human Rights and the principle of leaving no-one behind remain central to efforts to achieve the SDG goals. The Group is co-chaired by WHO Deputy Director General Soumya Swaminathan, Nada Al-Nashif, Assistant Director-General from UNESCO and Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore. “Since its beginnings, WHO has been clear that health is a human right” said Dr. Swaminathan commenting about WHO’s contribution to the Group. “These are not empty words. It is about making sure that everyone, everywhere, can enjoy a full and healthy life in dignity and equality.”

Lastly, WHO is breaking new territory in terms of speaking out on human rights violations. From tackling discrimination in health care, to attacks on health care
workers, to virginity testing, to gender based violence – the acknowledgement that there can be no health without human rights, and no human rights without health has never been more crucial. A recent statement calling for an end to virginity testing demonstrates just how powerful a collaboration between health and human rights messages can be – invoking the clear evidence base for the lack of any scientific foundation for such practices and an inviolable normative standard protected by international law. In October 2018, WHO made a global call to eliminate violence against women and girls everywhere, to bring to an end virginity testing, a medically unnecessary, and often painful, humiliating and traumatic practice. These gynecological examinations are not only a violation of women’s and girls’ human rights, but in cases of rape can cause additional pain and mimic the original act of sexual violence, leading to re-experience, re-traumatization and re-victimization.

While many of these shifts will require a significant culture change at WHO, both global and in its field offices, as human rights come under threat globally, in the world of health, the importance of human rights discourse has never been stronger, or indeed more necessary.
Swapping charity for rights of persons with disabilities

The 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) brings the opportunity to take into account and ask ourselves how much we have done for the rights of persons with disabilities, while keeping in mind the goals we want to achieve.

Facundo Chávez Penillas, OHCHR

From the brief reference on social protection in UDHR Article 25(1), to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there are thousands of hours invested in the UN system to advance the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities. In this process a distinctive recognition should be given to the thousands of persons with disabilities who organised themselves to advocate for the recognition of their rights.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights

As for many other populations, the general recognition of dignity and rights in the UDHR was not providing the necessary protection for persons with disabilities, as later was proven by the adoption of a series of treaties on specific populations such as women and children. In 1948, persons with disabilities were generally treated as objects of charity or medical attention throughout policies and legislation. Their participation in society was limited to receiving that charity and was conditioned to be “fixed” through health and rehabilitation systems.

Persons with disabilities organized themselves to influence the inner workings of the United Nations and their contributions continue to revolutionize law and policy to this day. The paradigm shift of the human rights model, moving away from charity and medical models, was the corner stone of an infrastructure that aims to ensure participation, accountability, non-discrimination and empowerment under international human rights law.

Being free and equal in dignity and rights means that no one, no one, is less on the grounds of who they are. Having an impairment, actual or perceived, is part of who we (persons with disabilities) are as a part of human diversity and should not be a grounds for discrimination.

Nothing about us without us

In the early ’70s persons with disabilities around the world were mobilized and built on the discussion of how social constructs were impacting different groups. Persons with disabilities challenged the perceptions that were operating to facilitate the imposition of barriers to their participation on an equal basis with others. This process led to the identification of the charity and medical models of disability. Under these models, States and society had no responsibility and consequently were not accountable to persons with disabilities. Disability was perceived as a medical condition, equating it to the impairment the individual had, and not as a social construct.

In opposition to these models, the social model of disability was developed which recognises that persons with disabilities are subjects of rights and their impairment is a personal characteristic that should not be the focus of policy development. It should instead be on the environmental and attitudinal barriers that prevent or restrict the participation of persons with disabilities in society, on an equal basis with others.

In the early ’80s, persons with disabilities and the UN embarked on a journey and in the early 2000’s this led to the creation of new human rights treaty for persons with disabilities. After eight meetings, in 2006, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and in 2008 it entered into force. The driving force behind the passage of this historic Convention were vibrant organizations of persons with disabilities and their allies that under the motto of “nothing about us without us” provided an example of how a well-organized civil society can bring about change. The CRPD built on the social model of disability, into the human rights model of disability, which is currently binding for 177 parties to the treaty.
In small places, close to home
Such was the description of where human rights begin by Eleanor Roosevelt. We in the UN should ask ourselves: what am I doing to realize the rights of persons with disabilities in my everyday work? This is the question that the Secretary General asked himself last April and his response was that we are not doing enough. As a result, his Executive Committee (EC) decided on a series of actions among which includes the development of a policy, action plan and accountability framework to strengthen system-wide accessibility and mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities across the Organization’s operations.

The EC mandated the Working Group on SWAP, of the Inter-Agency Support Group to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, co-Chaired by the ILO and UNDP, to develop these items together with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management by the first quarter of 2019, for CEB consideration. This initiative can be a game changer in the UN and will allow it to lead by example.

A new horizon has opened for persons with disabilities, but these structural measures can only go so far. Improving leadership, increasing presence of persons with disabilities in programming, ensuring accessibility and reasonable adjustments, reforming procurement practices to increase inclusion of persons with disabilities, targeting persons with disabilities as staff in the UN, increasing internal capacity, among other measures, largely depend on the commitment of UN staff.

On 3 December, we celebrate the international day of persons with disabilities and human diversity. It is #Aday4All and activities are planned in different parts of the UN. Let us take the opportunity and make this a reminder and a prelude of the celebrations of UDHR70 on 10 December.

We all have the call to leave no one behind, reaching for the furthest behind first. We all have a role when ensuring the enjoyment of human rights, we all need to move towards an agenda for humanity.

Let us renew our commitment so persons with disabilities are also free and equal, with no exception.
Michelle Bachelet continues to champion Human Rights

Denied basic human rights herself under a dictatorship, the first woman president of Chile, Executive Director of UN Women, and successively Minister of Health and Minister of Defense in Chile, Ms. Bachelet has the experience and knowledge necessary to lead the UN Human Rights Council.

Ms. Bachelet was the first female president of Chile and served two terms: the first from 2006 to 2010 and the second from 2014 to 2018. During her first term, she bolstered the National Ministry for Women and increased the number of early childcare institutions. By appointing several women in her cabinet, she expanded the perspective on what women can achieve, and tried to enforce a higher participation of women in decision-making positions in her country. In the course of her first term, she faced strong student demonstrations demanding educational reform and dealt with the aftermath of an 8.8 magnitude earthquake. The Chilean constitution prevents any elected president from serving two consecutive terms; consequently, she continued to be an advocate for human rights in international organizations between her two mandates.

During her second term as president, she sought to reduce inequalities that subsisted even in a stable Chilean economy and to guarantee basic human rights such as education and health. A tax reform that raised corporate taxes and reduced tax exemptions to guarantee free education was passed in 2014. In addition, a law supporting reproductive rights by decriminalizing abortion under specific circumstances, and a second one legalizing same sex marriage were passed in August 2017.

In between her two presidencies, Ms. Bachelet was appointed as the first Executive Director and Under-Secretary-General of UN Women, the entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women all over the world. This entity supports UN Member States in setting global standards for achieving gender equality, which is recognized as a basic human right. During Ms. Bachelet’s term, one of the main achievements of UN Women was the agreement of Member States on the document CSW57 to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls.

Before becoming president of Chile, Ms. Bachelet served as the first female Defense Minister in 2002, a position in which she championed equality for women in the military and police forces. As Health Minister in 2000, she unclenched the health system by reducing waiting lists in public hospitals. In the years after obtaining her medical degree, she had worked with tortured children who were victims of political violence.

Ms. Bachelet had already started her medical degree when she was arrested with her mother and was tortured by the secret police of the then head of the military government, Augusto Pinochet. Their arrest came after that of her father, an air force general who opposed the military coup and died in custody after suffering months of torture. After almost a month in detention in January 1975, she was exiled to Australia and later to Germany, but was authorized to return to Chile, where she finished her medical studies and graduated as a surgeon.

Her personal experience, as well as her previous assignments, have prepared Ms. Bachelet for this new post of world importance. However, the duty of holding up to the light the actions, or lack thereof, of Member States and other countries regarding human rights violations demands a special courage not to be tamed by the diplomatic relations required to maintain the support of Member States. The resolutions of the UNHRC do not oblige their fulfilment, but do draw world attention to countries who fail to ensure their application, and provide a moral standpoint for those on the Council.

The recent withdrawal of The United States from the UNHRC (on June 19, 2018), has raised criticisms that different countries have made of the Council. For example, not speaking up about the human rights
violations in Member States such as Venezuela, or accepting new members with dubious records on the application of human rights, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, as highlighted by media outlets. The main criticism stated by The United States as one of its reasons for withdrawing from the Council is the latter’s alleged bias against Israel. Ms. Nikki Haley, former US Ambassador to the UN, said that the “disproportionate focus and unending hostility toward Israel is clear proof that the council is motivated by political bias, not by human rights.” However, before withdrawing from the Council, the US had faced strong criticism itself for separating children from their parents at the Mexican border. This policy was later changed to a policy of family detention, where children would be kept with their parents, but without a limit on their detention time.

The Trump administration denied that the criticisms made of the change in their migration policies affected their decision to leave the UNHRC. On the contrary, they affirmed, they had highlighted, on different occasions, the need for reform of the Council and the lack of those reforms was presented as a reason that reinforced their intention of withdrawal.

Currently, one of the main concerns of the UNHRC is the high level of migration on both sides of the Atlantic, with people risking their lives and those of their children to get to countries that could offer them a better life. Situations like the caravan heading to The United States with approximately 2,300 children, and the repeated crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, where thousands of people have perished, are examples of the relevance of the work of the UNHRC today. In this regard, Ms. Bachelet has said: “Historically people have always moved in search of hope and opportunities. Erecting walls, deliberately projecting fear and anger on migrant communities, denying migrants fundamental rights by limiting their right to appeal, curtailing their right to non-refoulement, separating and detaining families, cutting integration programs... such policies offer no long-term solutions to anyone, only more hostility, misery, suffering and chaos. It is in the interest of every state to adopt migration policies that are grounded on reality not on panic, which provide opportunities for safe regular movement instead of forcing people to take lethal risks.”

Her term as the UN Human Rights Commissioner has only just started, and one of the questions that is still to be answered is what her approach toward the many decisions to be taken will be. In her assignments, she has always championed human rights, and not only for women or children. The demands of her job are far greater in the current state of the world, with populist and discriminatory political parties gaining force in different countries and blocking the access to basic human rights of those people fleeing violence and insecurity. The resolutions of UNHRC under Ms. Bachelet will shed a light on her priorities: monitoring human rights and courageously speaking about those countries that do not respect them regardless of the power they hold or, in a more diplomatic stance, working in cooperation with Member States to assist them in the application of human rights standards.
Building a template of hope
Interview with HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan


SARAH BENCHERIF, UNITAR
This conference was under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan who opened the conference with a speech full of hope challenging conventional thinking and emphasizing diversity and dignity.

S. BENCHERIF: Y.R.H. has unceasingly devoted his efforts to promote interfaith and intercultural understanding and dialogue in the world. Why is it so significant to build up on common ethics, creeds and values across diverse faiths and religions to achieve human welfare and peace?

HRH PRINCE EL HASSAN BIN TALAL OF HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN: Religion is part of the human existence. It has been here since the 14th Century BC and will ever be so. It has taken different forms and provides a powerful tool to express our inner feelings and thoughts.

By knowing one another at a deeper level we improve community relations and foster greater peace at a regional and global level, it is imperative that we individually seek to contribute to this understanding. Such a sphere is established by a long process of interfaith dialogue and intra-cultural interaction. Such purpose can only be founded on well-established commonalities, it is therefore advantageous to seek what binds us before seeking what divides us. However, for people to know and to recognise each other they must first seek to know themselves. Thus all forms of external human interactions lead to discover the inner part of us. One must therefore illuminate on the ‘innate,’ our deep rooted values and meanings that are part of our nature as human beings. Thus diversity and plurality are not just about recognising our differences, but are also ways and means to disclose what unites us, and to perceive our common nature. Only human connectedness and interaction will allow us to seek and coexist with a common understanding, thus enabling us to unleash our full potential and endless possibilities.

What are the regional and international priorities in that sense? Can Y.R.H. tell us what are the main challenges/difficulties that he faced in his action.

I believe human existential security is the first priority. That is for any human being in the world to be able to live without being threatened in his existential needs such as food, water, education, dignity, etc... Unjust distribution of wealth, and global economic settings, proliferation of mass destruction weapons, chronic unresolved conflicts and a massive displaced population, are all factors and causes of political violence, individual despair and alienation.

Before defining our ethical and common values, we need to establish secure life conditions such as a world order not based on balance of power but based on human empathy. Some consider this suggestion idealistic and nonrealistic, but I consider, that the world’s population is becoming more aware of this issue and is more sympathetic with the sufferings, agonies and hardships that people are going through.

We need a significant shift from our current collective mindset to enable thinking from the wishful mode to the actual mode to enable progress. If we are going to get this message out to all, it is clear that we need better calculated strategies, with rationally articulated messages. Such messages are needed to steer the current global path away from that of division and destruction to that of unification and peace.

The United Nations has emphasised the crucial importance of the global community acting to address climate change. The West Asia-North Africa region is facing a huge environmental, social and human-security problem. What is Y.R.H.’s vision to address this global challenge (regionally and globally).

In order to achieve human security and social justice, it is essential that environmental governance be prioritised. Water, food, and security are intricately interlinked.

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time – a threat affecting global populations. Changes in policy and strategy are needed locally, regionally, and globally to safeguard the futures of
generations to come. Without drastic action today, climate change adaptation will be more difficult and costly.

Our climate knows no borders and man-made causes need to be dealt with, across nations, in a spirit of global cooperation. We need to widen our view and set up cross-border initiatives to preserve our habitats. As global citizens, we must take ownership of our natural resources.

On June 2013, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Y.R.H. as Chairman of his Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB). Knowing that water management in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is an issue of central importance, how has his leadership in championing global causes addressed this challenge and mobilized action by Governments and international organizations to advance this global agenda?

On a global policy level, I am keen to give greater prominence to the broader relationship between water, food, peace and security. When I was Chairman of the UNSGAB’s advisory board, we wanted to pinpoint what changes needed to be made in the water sector. We did this by identifying the three fundamental areas which, in our view needed more consideration and thought. These were: widening universal access to sustainable sanitation and safe drinking water, upgrading wastewater management and pollution prevention, as well as improving integrated water resource management and water use efficiency.

UNSGAB tirelessly advocated highlighting the water and sanitation problem by pushing it onto the agenda of international conferences and expositions by urging national governments to undertake national action. We strongly believed that water management solutions require multi-regional cooperation.

Since the 2010 high level forum on Blue Peace in the Middle East I have been closely working on water diplomacy through the Strategic Foresight Group (SFG). Our work today encompasses over 50 countries, across four continents. We also currently work within the focus areas of Water Diplomacy, Peace, Conflict and Terrorism, and Global Foresight. Our joint work has resulted in the creation of a new concept known as ‘Blue Peace’, the framework of which is now recognised all over the world, transforming water from a source of potential conflict into a source of cooperation and peace.

I have a variety of activities and initiatives which I undertake to support this agenda. To name a few I have been working closely with the Geneva Water Hub to ensure that water is given priority on the global agenda and that its role as a vehicle of peace is further strengthened. The global water challenge is not only about development and human rights but it is also about peace and security. Hence, this needs to be addressed urgently in an integrated and comprehensive way at all levels, ranging from the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral organisations to grass-roots level institutions. As I often say it needs a response in terms of new thinking.

There is a need to create a regional centre for water diplomacy and governance that correlates geographic and socioeconomic information with hydrological and political sciences for the sake of mitigating conflict and achieving...
Overwhelmed by Syrian refugees, as it has already been by the Palestinians for half a century, Jordan is one of the countries most affected by the refugee crisis. How does Y.R.H. see the humanitarian treatment of the refugee issue? Jordan has always believed that to be truly effective, the humanitarian should be integrally linked to the developmental. Jordan’s carrying capacity has been stretched beyond the limit as a result of hosting massive waves of Syrian refugees and unregistered persons. At the same time, Jordan has as many registered Palestinian refugees (2.1m) as the Palestinian territories combined (West Bank 0.8m; Gaza 1.3m).

The Arab Mashreq (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank/Gaza) has a total population of about 79 million. UN registered refugees from this region stand at 10.4 million (5.2 Palestinians; 5.2 million Syrians). A binary deadlock has bedeviled the Right of Return for Palestinians over the last 70 years. A similar impasse is emerging for the Syrians. Reconstruction awaits the resolution of these predicaments. The right of return is enshrined in law.

Germany has a population of 82 million, slightly higher than the Mashreq’s. Its open border policy for admitting asylum seekers (about 1 million), has led to heated debate, tensions and the rise of anti-immigration populist political movements. Per capita income in Germany is around $51,000. Yet it is facing domestic political challenges in hosting 1 million refugees. What about the Mashreq? It has to deal sooner or later with the fallout of 10.4 million registered refugees. Per capita income in the Mashreq is of course a fraction of that of Germany’s. It ranges from a low of $2,900 in Syria, to a high of $19,500 in Lebanon.

Philippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has recently echoed my call for a holistic approach that is inclusive of all stakeholders. He said, “It’s clear that we need a new, more sustainable approach, one that isn’t dependent on the vagaries of politics, contributions from a handful of donor countries, or wishful thinking that the conflicts forcing refugees from their homes will end quickly. He added that the private sector is vital to this effort and is central to the aims of the global compact on refugees that he will present to the UN General Assembly for adoption later this year.

As the conflicts in the region remain unrelenting, Jordan continues to host a considerable number of refugees, and contributes substantial assistance. The protracted nature of the Syria conflict, paired with limited national resources, the loss of trade, decline in tourism and limited foreign direct investment, are having an important impact on Jordan’s socioeconomic conditions.

For 2018, the United Nations and NGO partners are appealing for USD 4.4 billion to support ongoing national efforts in 5 countries to respond to the Syrian refugee situation, including addressing immediate protection and basic needs as well as resilience activities for refugees and host communities. Transitioning beyond current frameworks to consider broader infrastructural development for services and communities must be the way ahead, with a view to designing more inclusive and sustainable responses, and partnerships, including the private sector, and a stronger voice among the main stakeholders, refugees themselves.

Be it climate change, refugees or terrorism, the challenges facing the countries in West Asia and North Africa cannot be solved by one nation alone or even through bilateral solutions. Can Y.R.H. tell us more about his perspective on Inter-Regional Cooperation and multilateralism?

Recent multi-disciplinary focus by the World Bank on the dynamics of the political economy in the Mashreq, and its thematic analysis of policy issues within the geo-economics of reconstruction, is to be much welcomed. This approach has highlighted that a clear concept of the regional political economy in the Mashreq is the missing link in traditional bilateral approaches.

Parag Khanna in his book “Connectography”, says: “Mapping the complex dynamics among the three greatest forces shaping our planet – man, nature, technology – will require a whole new kind of geographic literacy”. He adds that this “should be the focal point for the synthesis of environmental science, politics, economics, culture, technology and sociology – a curriculum curated through the study of connections rather than divisions”. Some have called this nascent meta-discipline ‘sociography’.

Beyond law and politics the question becomes: how can peace and stability prevail with such wide disparities in a closely connected neighbourhood? How can the Mashreq, with all its refugees, escape its twin trap of middle income and rentierism (dependence on oil and aid)? Convergence to high income is the only answer. How can this be brought about?
Proposals for a Middle East Marshall Plan miss the point. Its original name after WWII was the European Recovery Programme (ERP). Germany, and other devastated economies had an industrial manufacturing base that needed to ‘recover’.

Post-War Reconstruction in WANA, and the resolution of the refugees issue, should not be about going back to business as usual. Building a high value added economic base in manufacturing and agriculture, as Turkey and Israel did, should be the top priority. The key question is: how can the Mashreq join the ‘late convergers’ to high income?

The refugee crisis continues to haunt the politics of EU member states. Regional host countries of Syrian refugees (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey) need, with the technical help of the international community, to develop and adapt an appropriate weighting mechanism for the footprint of refugees.

That algorithm should include hosting-burdens incurred while the flight of Return is held in abeyance. Syrian and Palestinian registered and unregistered persons should be covered.

About 1 million Syrian displaced persons have reached Europe as asylum seekers or refugees. EU Neighbourhood Policy for the Mediterranean needs a reset.

Europe’s experience after WWII, regarding post-war reconstruction and the Right of Return, should be revisited. The Cold War did not stop reconstruction in Western Europe. Serious reconstruction in Syria’s neighbourhood should commence. It can be a major catalyst for resolving the protracted crises in the Mashreq.

Inter-regional cooperation and multilateralism are essential when it comes to humanitarian interventions. Approaching crises situations with a sense of ‘shared-responsibility’ can play an instrumental role in maximising impact, regardless of the proximity of a crisis situation to a specific region.

With increased calls to revisit the humanitarian landscape, the world is gradually shifting towards a more inclusive approach towards crisis response and prevention. Major global processes, including the September 2016 New York Declaration, call for a “whole-of-society approach” that encourages the involvement of all stakeholders including national and local authorities, international organisations, international financial institutions, regional organisations, regional coordination and partnership mechanisms, civil society partners, including faith-based organisations and academia, the private sector, media and the refugees themselves’ in displacement response and prevention.

To conclude, a message from Y.R.H to our readers, mainly United Nations staff and diplomats in Geneva?

The people of West Asia North Africa face an unprecedented set of interconnected socio-economic challenges. These include transition movements, protracted conflict, and unprecedented refugee flows. In the absence of a regional framework for responding to common challenges, these issues have aggravated development problems: deterioration in economic growth, investment and employment opportunities, as well as mounting pressures on the regional commons such as water, energy and the environment.

United Nations staff, and their many agencies have made real and significant contributions in addressing these challenges. NGOs have also done their part. I have discussed how to capitalise on this effort with our decision makers, in the public as well as the private sphere, including civil society and local and regional NGOs. My message to them has been that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. We should redouble our efforts in integrating the ‘externalities’ of UN agencies methods and ‘software’ so to speak, within our national agencies and their operations. This is as important as the ‘hardware’, and is instrumental in reaching out to those who have been left behind.

The basis for establishing a society of nations is our common humanity. In essence, the national and international are complementary.

Many years ago, Mazzini¹ wrote “God has given you your country as a cradle, and humanity as mother. You cannot rightly love your brethren of the cradle if you do not love your common mother.”

The view of our region as endlessly divided and conflict ridden has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is time to consider how wars end and how to build a restructured region in which people of all ethnicities and faiths can live productively and with dignity. In the correlation of sustainability and the empowerment of citizens in the region lies an inclusionist policy to stabilise WANA.

¹ Giuseppe Mazzini was an Italian politician, journalist, activist for the unification of Italy, and spearhead of the Italian revolutionary movement.
Turning health systems into learning systems will help us to achieve the health SDGs

In 2018, WHO celebrates both its 70th anniversary and one year since the election of its new Director-General. In December, it will also be one year since the appointment of the Deputy Director-General for Programmes, Dr. Soumya Swaminathan. UN Special had an opportunity to interview Dr. Swaminathan to ask about her first year in the position.

DR. GARRY ASLANYAN, DEPUTY EDITOR, WHO
Interview with Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, Deputy Director-General for Programmes, World Health Organization

Dr. Soumya, thank you for agreeing to this interview with UN Special. First of all, do you read or have you seen the magazine? Thank you for inviting me to be interviewed for your magazine. I have certainly seen your magazine in lobby areas of WHO and am hoping to get more time to become more familiar with it and its content.

What expectations or anticipations did you have of the position of WHO Deputy Director-General of Programmes when you assumed the position a year ago?
Last time I was in Geneva I was at TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases hosted at WHO, as Coordinator of Research. I learned a lot during that time and learned about WHO functions from the HQ perspective. I went back to India to focus on TB research, then I went to head the Indian Council of Medical Research that helps build capacity and promote research in medical colleges. I was not expecting a career move or return to Geneva. It did come as a surprise. When I took this position, I wasn’t sure what the position would be. It was a new position that did not exist before. But it was clear to me that it was a very exciting and unique opportunity, especially to be able to contribute to the impact that WHO makes in countries. I know first-hand the kind of value WHO has in countries. I know one can have a big impact and how critical the work of WHO is in countries. That is what really got me excited. I came with an open mind, willing to learn and be part of the new team.

What achievements in this past year are you most proud of?
To be honest, once I realized what the position is about, I felt it was an impossible task. I know much more now about technical departments, I understand better elements of various streams of our work. I can see the various strengths and some weaknesses in the way we operate. WHO excels in many areas and provides global leadership. I realized that my job is how to make sure we can meaningfully bring different pieces of our work together. I never wanted to limit myself to management, but rather to meet people and better understand how I can be more effective. For example, very quickly I realized that the work WHO did on air pollution was cut off from noncommunicable disease prevention. I was quite shocked. Air pollution is a well-known risk factor but there was a big gap. I brought the two departments together and now air pollution is one of five risk factors. We recently had the first ever Global Conference on Air Pollution in Geneva that helped outline a plan of actually how to curb air pollution and its impact on health.

That sounds like a busy year, how do you feel you have adapted to this pace?
You are right, the challenge for me is to manage my own time. There are only 24 hours in one day, but so much to do. I have learned to juggle things around! But one thing that really helps is how much I enjoy working with peers and colleagues who come from different nationalities, cultures and languages. But one thing that really helps is how much I enjoy working with peers and colleagues who come from different nationalities, cultures and languages. What I don’t like about working in Geneva is at times it feels too far removed from reality. I think it probably applies to all of us that we should do our best to feel grounded and connected to the communities and peoples we serve.

With your previous background and interest, how do you see...
Deputy Editor interviews Dr. Swaminathan in her office.

the research agenda shaping up for WHO?

I am glad you asked me this as, through my own experience, I know that research and researchers can only have impact if you are close to policy-makers. But nobody taught me this at the beginning of my career; I wish they had, as I would know why some of the papers I published were slow on uptake! I strongly believe that WHO’s role in research is very important, especially in public health research in areas where the global research community may not see it as a top priority. Take research on neglected tropical diseases, which affect a smaller number of people but cause enormous suffering for people in low- and middle-income countries. Also, as we are reimagining health systems with the new impetus for primary health care and universal health coverage, current systems have to turn into learning systems to help us achieve the health SDGs. Without research and health systems as learning systems, one won’t be able to constantly improve things.

What are your early observations about WHO’s current transformation process?

WHO has had reforms in the past. I think from what I understand, the main difference is that we are going to go deep into the very roots of our core functions and processes. What we are really trying to do is to cover the whole process. What do the end users think of what we do? How do we know we are having impact? I feel it is taking a more fundamental approach. It takes time and perhaps longer than people think it should but I am convinced it will have a more long-lasting effect on the way we work.

Looking ahead into your second year, what are the plans?

We have a unique opportunity as an organization. We had two UN high level meetings in the past year on tuberculosis and noncommunicable diseases and there will be one more next year on universal health coverage. WHO is now going to lead the SDG action plan on health by bringing 12 organizations and entities together. So a mandate was given to us for which I would like to see things implemented. Working with a few countries to help them revamp and reset their health goals where we can help to achieve them. I hope we can start the new year with a very clear vision of how we are going to galvanize around new work practices which we can test over the year.

Thank you!
THE YEAR 2018 IN REVIEW

A hectic year with successes and regrets. A Secretary-General with a vision, supported by committed staff members with reduced salaries. Our determination continues.

António Guterres

Without the multilateral system and respect for international rules, we risk a return solely to power relations, reward-sanction mechanisms and a cycle of frozen conflicts...That is why I will not sit back and watch an assault on multilateralism just when it is most needed.

António Guterres
WE WANT THE WORLD OUR CHILDREN INHERIT TO BE DEFINED BY THE VALUES ENSHRINED IN THE UN CHARTER: PEACE, JUSTICE, RESPECT, HUMAN RIGHTS, TOLERANCE AND SOLIDARITY...

THE YEAR

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS

A hectic year with successes and regrets.

A Secretary-General with a vision, supported by committed staff members with reduced salaries.

Our determination continues.

2018 IN REVIEW

New Disarmament Agenda

Secretary-General Guterres launched a new disarmament agenda on 24 May during a major speech in Geneva, with the hope of generating new momentum and mobilizing new partnerships for peace and sustainable security.
The ILO was created in 1919 and in 2019 it will mark its Centenary, and 100 years of working for social justice. But it’s not just its Cap Centenary, or its status as the oldest specialised agency of the United Nations that makes the ILO special. It has a separate membership from the UN. It also has a unique structure in which representatives of governments, workers and employers – the ILO’s constituents —play an equal role. This makes decisions more truly representative of trends in the global economy; hence its sobriquet – the ‘world parliament of labour’.

The founding of the ILO, in the aftermath of World War I, reflected a sea change in public opinion, politically, economically and socially. The First World War broke the mould in many societies and by 1919 there was a keen appreciation that social justice would be necessary if peace was to be secured.

Hence, the ILO Constitution’s Preamble includes the injunction that “universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.”

There was also increasing understanding of the world’s economic interdependence and the need for cooperation to ensure that growing international competition did not drive down working conditions. As the Constitution put it “…the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries.” These sentiments went on to be enshrined in the foundations of the ILO – literally.

Imagine a world with no weekends, no eight-hour working day, no minimum working age or protection for pregnant or vulnerable workers. That’s the workplace you might have faced if the International Labour Organization (ILO) did not exist.
THE ILO AND THE WORKERS’ RIGHTS

The Organization spent its first few years in temporary accommodation, in London and Geneva. When, in 1926, the ILO moved into its first purpose-built offices on the shore of Lake Geneva (the William Rappard Centre, now the home of the World Trade Organization), the foundation stone was engraved with the Latin phrase, *Si vis pacem, cole justiciam* (If you desire peace, cultivate justice). The formal gates of the building were also designed to reflect the uniqueness of the ILO. They require three keys to open, so symbolising the equal contributions of the three constituent groups.

But, even before it moved into the William Rappard Centre, the ILO had already made a mark on the working lives of millions of people.

The first International Labour Conference (ILC) – the meeting of the constituents – held in Washington DC in 1919, adopted six International Labour Conventions dealing with crucial labour issues, including hours of work in industry, unemployment, maternity protection, night work for women, minimum age and night work for young persons in industry.

As the number of international labour standards grew a Committee of Experts was set up, in 1926, to supervise them. The Committee, which continues its work today, is composed of independent jurists who examine reports on the observance of a range of standards which are submitted by governments. They also present the Committee’s own annual report to the ILC.
the United Nations, when it took over from the League of Nations in 1946.

It was during this time, the final months of the Second World War, that the ILO’s members took another crucial step that helped to ensure its long-term relevance, by adopting the Declaration of Philadelphia in May 1944. This reaffirmed the ILO’s vision and defined a set of principles that placed human rights at its heart, to meet the “aspirations aroused by hopes for a better world.”

The Declaration’s emphasis on human rights was to bear more fruit, with a series of international labour standards – legally-binding Conventions and advisory Recommendations – dealing with labour inspection, freedom of association, the right to organize and collectively bargain, equal pay, forced labour and discrimination.

In the post-war years, following its return to Geneva, the ILO’s membership doubled and industrialized countries became a minority, outweighed by developing economies. The essential ILO characteristic of tripartism was combined with a second – universality.

As calls for its assistance increased, field work expanded, along with staff numbers. In 1960 the ILO established the Geneva-based International Institute for Labour Studies and in 1965 the International Training Centre in Turin.

To meet the growing needs, a larger building was also constructed, on a hillside overlooking Lake Geneva. It was designed with three parts, to symbolize the government, worker and employer membership groups.

In 1969, on its 50th anniversary, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for improving fraternity and peace among nations, pursuing decent conditions and justice for workers, and providing technical assistance to other developing nations.

Other important milestones include the ILC’s unanimously adopted Declaration condemning Apartheid, in 1964, which positioned the ILO as one of the first organizations to impose sanctions on South Africa. Subsequently, in 1990, the future South African President Nelson Mandela – who had just been released after 27 years of detention as a political prisoner – addressed the Conference, thanking the ILO for its support.

In the 1980s the ILO also played a major role in the emancipation of Poland from dictatorship, by giving its full support to the legitimacy of the Solidarnosc independent trade union.

As the 20th Century drew towards its end, the ILO’s role continued to evolve to meet changes in the world of work, notably the growing march of globalization. Calls for its help expanded beyond the four core principles – forced labour, child labour, discrimination and freedom of association and collective bargaining – to encompass a more diverse range of issues, including the rights of indigenous peoples, HIV/AIDS in the workplace, migrant and domestic workers.

The organization championed the concept of “Decent Work” as a strategic international development goal, alongside the promotion of a fair globalization. The importance of work as an instrument of poverty alleviation was recognized in the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 1 on halving world poverty by 2015.

When the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formally adopted by the international community, decent work was once again a crucial component, notably for Goal 8, which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.”

With such challenging SDG targets the ILO’s work is far from finished. The ILO’s first century has proven that as one problem is tackled, others, new and unforeseen, arise to present challenges, such as technology and new forms of work. Much has been achieved in the past century, but much abides.

In a time of concern over inequality, equal rights and threats to social peace, the goal of "social justice” that the ILO’s founders wrote into the Treaty of Versailles remains an elusive and fluid target.

The UN’s first centenarian will have no time to rest on its laurels.
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ALEX MEJIA, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On the occasion of Oman’s 48th National Day, celebrated on the 18th of November, we met His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Office in Geneva to tell us more about his country.

ALEX MEJIA: How long has Oman been a member of the United Nations? How do you engage with the Sustainable Development Goals?

H.E MR. ABDULLAH NASSER AL RAHBI: The Reign of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos

After His Majesty ascended to power in 1970, he opened up the country, started economic reforms, and adopted a policy of modernisation by spending more on education, health, and welfare. He worked on diversifying the economy and placed a greater emphasis on developing bigger projects, roads and infrastructure. Thus, Oman became the fastest growing economy in the Middle East.

Before 1970, there were only three formal schools in the whole country, with almost 1,000 students. Today, and since the government has given high priority to education, there are over 1,000 state schools and about 650,000 students.

The Sultanate of Oman celebrates this year its 48th National Day.

Diplomatic and International relations

His Majesty’s ambition within the national priorities was to develop greater international relations. In fact, His Majesty was quoted as saying during an interview with one of the magazines at that time: “I would love to see Oman flag on the world map.” Since 1970, Oman has pursued a moderate foreign policy and expanded its diplomatic relations. Oman is an active member in international and regional organizations, namely the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council and it joined the United Nations on 7 October 1971, and has since ratified many conventions and agreements.

Currently, Oman has 48 embassies abroad as well as 28 consulates and two other diplomatic missions. It is important to mention as well that Oman has always been distinguished by its relations and communication with the world since long time ago, for example, the first Arab diplomat to be accredited to the United States was an Omani national Mr. Ahmad bin Na’aman, in addition to historic relations with China since the 17th century.

Oman strategic location in the region

Oman enjoys a strategically important position at the Arabian Gulf, and has land borders with the United Arab Emirates to the northwest, Saudi Arabia to the west, Yemen to the southwest and the coast is formed by the Arabian Sea on the southeast and the Gulf of Oman on the northeast.

Throughout its history of human civilization, Oman have opened up to others, and considered the values of dialogue, understanding, cooperation and communication with other civilizations and nations as human necessity, in order to undertake trade on the basis of a fair and equitable relationship.

Oman has traditionally supported Middle East peace initiatives, and recently, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, received the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. In fact, we have been working for 20 years on peace initiatives between Palestine and Israel. We believe that there is a crisis in the Middle East because of this conflict, and if we solve it, I think there will be peace in that area. As you also know, Oman played a very positive role as a mediator between the United States and P5+1 with Iran, and we are proud that we succeeded at that time by helping both parties to reach an agreement. We hope that all parties understand the necessity to preserve what has been achieved for stability and peace in that region.

In terms of economy, we are not producers of oil like other high producer countries. But the reforms and the efforts deployed under the reign of His Majesty the Sultan paid off and we are really proud of that, as it is mentioned in the World Economic Forum’s report, Oman has this year reached number 47, it has moved up 14 places since last year we were ranked 61 and Oman is categorized as a high-income economy. And on the eleventh of November 2018, there was the inauguration of Oman’s new Muscat International Airport with its latest technology and facilities, considered among the top 20 airports. This distinguished event that precedes the Omani National day celebrates once again our great achievements.

How your government sees the sustainable development goals, how are you working to implement them?

Actually, the sustainable development goals are one of the priorities in Oman. We have a committee from the government to design this planning for 2030. We also have our plan
for traditional tourist ships, Salalah Port that is considered one of the most important ports recognized regionally and internationally, Sohar industrial port that lies in Al-Batinah North Governorate and Raysut port in Southwestern of Oman.

We know that you are a logistical center and that the vision of His Majesty is to make it even bigger to concentrate all this traffic. Can you tell us a little more about Musandam? How important is that region for your country? Musandam is located in northern Oman. As you know, third of the world’s seaborne oil passes through the Strait of Hormuz every day, which makes him one of the most important maritime passages in the world, and it is located between Oman and Iran. The Musandam gas plant production capacity is around 20,000 barrels of exportable per day and 80 tons of petroleum gas per day. We believe it is an important geographical point for the whole world due to the large quantity of oil coming from this area to the world, and we should ensure stability there. In Oman, we always say that peace is stability, and peace is very important for progress and for the bigger economy.

Now going from the general to the specific, I would like to ask you about the permanent mission that you lead here in Geneva. Given the number of interactions and the big agenda, how do you prioritize? It is a good question. I have been here for 6 years and I can see that the load of work in Geneva increases every year. Small missions in Geneva, cover more than 35 organizations, in addition to agencies related to the United Nations. Therefore, I think it is very important to prioritize. I focus on the organizations that help improving the economy, like ITU, WTO, UNCTAD, WIPO, and ITC. We work also closely with the Human Rights Council because it is a very important entity of the United Nations. We have also the National Human Rights Commission in Oman that was formed by a royal decree in 2008.

Under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, we had two reviews in 2011 and 2015. We have worked a lot on human rights issues, which is not easy, but all countries need to work on it, and we are in line with other countries that started this procedure long time ago.

There are also other organizations like the ITU that focuses on the high-tech world now, and we are working closely with them and with the Conference on disarmament.

Moreover, we try to show our cultural strengths. Every year, we organize many activities related to music and arts. Last June, at the WIPO, we exhibited traditions of Oman. We showed how these traditions are transferred to modern times. Handcrafts, silver, and traditional clothing are very important tools to share, and we are working on promoting them. Geneva is a good platform to do that and introduce others to our distinguished heritage.

Could you give us a message for the people that follow the magazine, for young people working in the UN or in the diplomatic community in Geneva?

Young diplomats can benefit from their presence here, and perhaps they will become Ambassadors in the future in Geneva. I see that the UN is like a big open university, with 35 organizations, it’s an opportunity to learn everyday about what is going on in the world, in economy, human rights, health and technology. So, I believe that young diplomats are lucky to start their career here. Geneva is like a big workshop, so I advise them to work hard, learn, and to invest their time here wisely and carefully.

Last but not least, I would like to seize this occasion to convey my appreciation to the esteemed Swiss government that offers the proper framework for diplomats and great learning opportunities for development and prosperity.
The negotiating process of the 2030 agenda
Part 1 of 3: innovations and controversies in negotiations

The transformational potential of the 2030 Agenda and its resonance, in all parts of our troubled world, could not have been achieved without a transformational negotiating process. This is its story in three parts.

NIKHIL SETH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UNITAR
The political process for negotiating the 2030 Agenda had two distinct phases. In this edition and in the upcoming February edition, you will read about the first one: the work of the Open Working Group (OWG), mandated by the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. The second phase was the Intergovernmental Negotiations in the General Assembly (January–July 2015) and will be covered in the March edition of UN Special.

Renewed hope
At the eve of the Open Working Group’s work, multilateral diplomacy, especially multilateral sustainable development diplomacy was at its nadir. The Copenhagen climate conference (2009) had been crippled and the Rio+20 conference (2012) had only 30–35% of the text agreed to, a few days before the Presidents and Prime Ministers were to arrive in Rio de Janeiro. Multilateralism and its processes looked irredeemably broken. While the Rio+20 outcome document, “The Future We Want”, was saved by some deft handling by Brazilian diplomacy, the future of multilateral diplomacy and its tried and tested tools from an earlier century were clearly not working.

Something had to be done and soon if the 2030 Agenda process were to be freed from the shadow of Copenhagen and the stodgy negotiating process of the General Assembly. What unfolded in the SDG process was a remarkable turnaround which validated multilateralism like never before and placed the UN back at the heart of efforts for peace and prosperity, for a planet which is safe for the future and defining actions with people at the center.

What were the ingredients of this magical process and the transformation leading to a credible multilateral process with a meaningful outcome? Was it just a lucky configuration of political leadership and secretariat support or was it the product of a strategic thought through approach, based on an understanding of previous not so successful attempts at forging consensus? The innovations in negotiations as well as the stupendous leadership of the process provided the magic that worked.

The first innovation – the Open Working Group formula
The Open Working Group started with some birthing pangs. Originally mandated to be a group of 30 representatives nominated by member states, the mandate was interpreted generously providing space for 30 “Troikas” or groups of member states to accommodate all 70 member states who had expressed an interest in belonging to the OWG. Any other selection or election process would have left 40 member states disgruntled and excluded. While the “Troikas” were self-defining within different regional groupings, they often cut across the more traditional understanding of interest groups.

The most commented on group was “Iran – Nepal – Japan”, a rather unusual bonding. EU countries formed small groupings with non-EU countries (e.g. Australia, Netherlands, UK) and with all 70 member states accommodated we were ready to go. This was a significant innovation and became a transparent and “open” method of articulating interest. With the Open Working Group formula all had a place on the discussion table and a voice which was distinct and propelled by the diversity of national interests.

The second innovation – openness to all stakeholders
All stakeholders, as a shorthand for governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, and of course the UN System, were brought into the negotiations. The door was cracked open in Rio at the Earth Summit in 1992. Yet by 2012, it was not a question of civil society “observing” negotiations but participating in a meaningful way.

However, there is always pushback to this openness and the OWG was no exception. The chairs of the OWG, guided by the secretariat, provided suitable windows for the participation of the non-governmental entities. The secretariat took the extra step of briefing the NGOs every morning, explaining the day’s activities and negotiations, urging different interests to align with the day’s discussion rather than focusing only on their specific interest. This organized participation helped a more meaningful engagement and provided greater space and ultimately greater ownership of the final outcome.

The third innovation – confidence building
The process of confidence building within the room, especially between the co-chairs and member states, was another area of innovation. No texts for negotiation appeared suddenly. Each building block was carefully placed, starting with a process of stocktaking which presented issue
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I am indebted to Macharia Kamau, Pamela Charik and David O’Connor and their book “Transforming Multilateral Diplomacy: The inside story of the Sustainable Development Goals”. I have drawn extensively from this accurate record.

Mr. Seth had a ringside seat both as the head of the UN Secretariat for the Rio+20 process, where the seeds of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were sown, and head of the DESA support team to the intergovernmental process for the negotiation of the 2030 Agenda.

Overcoming controversies
During the entire process, the Open Working Group and the intergovernmental negotiations, controversies and contentious issues came in waves. Some were large, threatening to engulf everything, while others came as smaller ripples which were minor irritants, at best. In the second part of this three-part series I will give you a flavour of some “contentious issues” during the first phase of negotiation. Stay tuned for the February edition of UN Special.

briefs prepared by the UN System Technical Support Team (TST), high-level and balanced panels, inputs from social media (8 million respondents to MYWorld Survey) and rooting the process in the outcome of Rio+20.

Each draft which was put before the OWG carefully reflected the views expressed in the room. The secretariat’s strong support to the chairs, especially in accurately summarizing comments from the floor, helped in raising their credibility and the credibility of the process. Keeping issues at the technical level, avoiding political loading of debates and the neutral role of the political leadership of the process was crucial to its success.

The fourth innovation – Technical Support Team
The UN System entities were grouped through the Technical Support Team (TST) co-chaired by DESA and UNDP. This helped a one window entry to the UN System and helped channel their technical expertise through the TST. The inclusive process also helped in controlling the urge of individual agencies to lobby the political process prompted, often, by specific funding and thematic concerns of UN agencies.

These four different and innovative approaches worked and served the process well. But the change they represented would not have been possible without the leadership required and the secretariat backstopping to overcome the overall political mood, reeling from the impasse at Copenhagen and the mixed results at Rio+20.

Great political leadership
This turns me to the exemplary political leadership provided by the Ambassadors of Kenya (Macharia Kamau), Hungary (Csaba Korosi), and later by Ireland (David Donoghue). Backed by support from the UN SG (Ban Ki Moon), now DSG (Amina Mohammed), and a strong DESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) secretariat. All the right support was in place.

The leaders were perceived as neutral, were patient and good listeners, above the dictates of narrow interests. They were driven by the common goal, set the highest standards, eschewed any surprises, reflected the different positions accurately, guided the discussions, had time to engage with all points of view, occasionally contradicted positions of the groups to which their countries belonged, generally shared a good interpersonal chemistry, rarely demonstrated a sense of despondency and were engaging communicators and negotiators. Quite a lucky configuration of great diplomatic talents.

The DESA team I had the fortune to lead, was also a group of hard working, meticulous, fair, and balanced individuals who won the confidence of the co-chairs, the UN System entities, the NGOs and member states.
GLOBAL AFFAIRS / AFFAIRES GLOBALES

The Return of Racism

MOHAMMAD-MAHMUD OULD MOHAMEDOU

“What is history and where does it take place?” ponders Sebastian Haffner in his unfinished work *Defying Hitler*, written in 1939 and published posthumously. “History teaches us, but it has no pupils” had already answered Antonio Gramsci twenty years earlier in his 1919 *Letter from Prison*. Overdone by the mainstream media, and per such absence-presence of history, the so-called multiculturalism at play during the wedding of Prince Harry with actress Meghan Markle in May 2018 would have us believe that the British royal family’s embracing of other cultures is a sign of times of racial progress – just as would be the case with France’s cheering welcoming of its World Cup football team winners, a squad made up in vast majority of children of African immigrants. Would that it were so. Racism and racial discrimination are to the contrary making a spectacular comeback. The latter being as much an echo of earlier forms of inequality as it is showing continuity in patterns of dispossession, one wonders: has racism ever left us?

If such an epiphany – which makes the 2010s look so much like the 1970s, the other big decade of racial tension and identity clashes – has so much acuity today, it is primarily because of the prevalence of a misleading narrative of continued social progress and of linear and cumulative progress of tolerance within societies round the world. Such a narrative is ahistorical and constitutes indeed one of the great contemporary myths. If admittedly, there have been significant milestones – such as, notably, the international campaign to end Apartheid in South Africa – the swiftness and breadth of the current wave of re-emerging racism is importantly underwritten by a history of non-resolution of the problem.

Three overarching phenomena preside over the current revival of racism, namely the negative exemplarity of a number of political leaders round the world, the societal banalisation that masks the extent of the issue and the intellectual rationalisation which enables its expression. The first, the most important, is the one of a ‘social jurisprudence’, as we can term it, enacted by several leaders and according to which executive behaviour has explicitly introduced acceptance and mimetism thus packaging racism in parameters of acceptability. Front and centre in this sequence are the actions of United States President Donald Trump. There is no overstating the negative role play by a head of state considered “racist” by 49% of Americans in a July 2018, and whose election was arguably less shocking than the ex post facto rationalisation that it generated amongst many quarters in the United States and beyond, leading to this standardisation of neo-racism.

Seven days into his presidency and quite symbolically at the occasion of the Holocaust remembrance day (which did not fail in irking many in the Jewish-American community), President Trump signed on 27 January 2017 Executive Order 13,769, commonly known as the “Muslim Ban”, a ruling which, in a democratic republic, introduced formally a discrimination against individuals on the basis of their religion. The upholding of this decision – which, in some cases, impacted US nationals – by the US Supreme Court on 26 June 2018 cemented institutionally such official policy of discrimination.

Initiated in this way, the Trump era played out subsequently on a martellato mode of constant normalisation of proto-racist acts opening the possibility of discriminatory practice or merely revealing it, Internationally, African states (as well as Haiti and El Salvador) were called “shithole countries” and, domestically, America plunged full feet into an as-of-yet unacknowledged but fast moving new racial crisis. Antisemitism increased by 60% in 2017, the highest increase rate in several decades, and anti-black sentiment augmented as perceptibly seen in a number of incidents playing unceasingly out across the nation. Black individuals were singled out and subject of harassment in public pools by simple citizens granting themselves a right to control and call the police to express “suspicion” towards a twelve-year-old boy delivering newspapers, boys mowing a lawn, families holding a picnic in a public park or using the facilities of a gym for which they had paid.

Amidst such self-deputisation and racial profiling, there are today, according to the Southern Poverty Law Centre, 954 hate groups active in the United States. The phenomenon is also qualitatively striking as witnessed, revealingly, in the
If clearly there is racial trouble in the United States where residential segregation and asymmetric policing persist (44% of Latino males are arrested by age 23), one would be mistaken in deeming the problem solely American or European. Racialism is also making a comeback in the Global South. In Libya, where, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), migrants are sold in open markets; in Algeria, where Sub-Saharan migrants are transported and left in the desert without food or water; in Lebanon where Kenyan women were beaten in plain sight and a black child denied access to a daycare centre; in India, where the memory of Hitler inspires for some the killing of Muslims; and in Myanmar where a modern-day genocide is playing out before the international community – not to forget the raiding of Roma camps in Ukraine.

The second phenomenon, which in recent years has enabled the recrudescence of racism is its banalisation. Considering erroneously that the issue is no longer an urgent problem in need of attention and resources, many societies have trivialised the question. Consequently, they became less apt to map the evolution of its landscape and detect its resurgence. In truth, societies round the world are accountable in deeper ways for many started showing signs of racism fatigue and indeed irritation when presented with evidence of its persistence. Such irresponsibility-cum-insensitivity is quite consequential as it hits doubly those facing the effect of racism; with, on the one hand, denial of the issue (e.g., white people reportedly less inclined to consider President Trump racist, according to an Associated Press/NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research February 2018 poll displaying what actress Anne Hathaway has called “white privilege”, and denial of the victims’ experience. Such dynamics partake of the materialisation of an unexamined phraseology whereby the same experience is represented, processed and eventually dealt with differently depending on the identity of the person. Accordingly, a Malian doctor contracted from a medical cabinet in Bamako to one in Paris is an “immigrant”, and an unemployed man journeying away from social misery in Liverpool to work as bar tender in Dubai is an “expatriate” (with a hip-sounding ‘expat’ variation).

Thirdly, racism is back because discrimination has been intellectualised and increasingly conceptually authorised. Proliferation of hate speech has thus been facilitated by a bamboozling that makes such speech appear as a legitimate opinion, like any other normal point of view. It is presented as a mere manifestation of free speech, and any questioning of its legitimacy, much less its legality, is deemed censorship. Such intolerance in the name of tolerance is probably the single most insidious form of a nouveau racism that wraps itself in the mantle of freedom, but which is in reality profoundly anti-democratic. In France, for instance, during the summer of 2017, amidst enthusiastic passivity, a woman was forced by representatives of the state to undress in the name of... her freedom, thus revealing the extent of the institutional racism that had overtaken that country. Above and beyond the by-now familiar French obsession with Muslims and elite (mis)construction of that population’s image, what emerges more significantly is the unexamined question of a contemporaneous racism anchored both in replayed colonial dynamics and in a newly-released, self-righteous stance – what Jim Wolfreys has called “respectable racism in France”.

Eventually, the sum total of these dystrophies is collapsed in a passivity-cowardice-rationalisation mix. Accordingly, Facebook’s CEO Mark Zuckerberg can come to offer convoluted and contradictory explanations – primarily meant to maintain the supremacy of his network – to indicate that he does not see the need to suspend fake news denying the historical reality of the Holocaust – an event, which revealingly is reportedly increasingly forgotten by new generations. What we are currently witnessing is a post-modern form of racialisation of hatred; a truly Orwellian world in which one can be detained for speaking a foreign language.

In truth, education remains at the heart of the racism problem, as both a cause and a solution. Far too many young boys and girls hear their parents utter racial epithets in private about this or that group, and such a founding negative exemplarity is then set on its lasting course. Beyond childhood; invisibilised by those economists mesmerised by market logics, consumption logics or impersonal data sets (and who missed on its materialisation in post-Brexit UK, as investigated by the United Nations special envoy Tendayi Achiume; and still unaddressed by the mainstream media, the rise of acceptable racism is one the great new ills of the troubled international affairs of our era.  

Article previously published on:  
1 Professor of International History, the Graduate Institute, Geneva
Quite a year at the UNOG Centre for Learning and Multilingualism (CLM), crowned by two UN Secretary-General Awards!

In February 2017, the Staff Development and Learning Section (SDLS) at UNOG took on a new identity and became the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism (CLM), a name that better reflects the language objectives of the Organization as expressed in General Assembly resolutions as well as in the SDGs – our roadmap until 2030.

UNSG Awards
The UNSG awards commend inspirational teams or individuals whose professional commitment is an inspiration to the Secretariat as a whole. The number of nominations this year was 170, a big increase on last year. A panel of 16 staff members from seven departments and four duty stations had the tough task of determining the winners, based on the substance, impact and overall merit of their projects. There are four categories and four finalists in each category (this year: client service, multilingualism, mentoring and innovation). The awards ceremony took place at UNHQ on 24 October. Chaired by Ms. Jan Beagle, Under-Secretary-General for Management, and Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General, it was attended by person by finalists or their representatives, with those far from New York following the proceedings live via UN Web TV. The suspense was high for CLM staff members on that Wednesday evening in Geneva and you can imagine how delighted they were to receive not one, but two, of the four 2018 awards!

The first, in the category of multilingualism, was for the project “Harmonization of Language Learning and Assessment throughout the United Nations Secretariat”. This is a project CLM conducted in partnership with the Language and Communications Programme at UNHQ. Its goal is to create a Secretariat-wide United Nations Language Framework for language learning and assessment that will build consistency across all UN language programmes whilst remaining flexible and adaptable to the local realities of different duty stations.

The second award, in the category of multilingualism, went to the project “UN Online Examinations and Tests System”. It recompensed another collaboration, this time between OHRM/UNOG CLM and OICT, for their development of a cloud-based system using open-source technology. It now delivers all major Secretariat examinations and tests, including the Young Professionals Programme, Language Competitive Examinations, and the Global General Services Test to more than 80,000 test-takers in all UN Member States. It has eliminated the need for printing and shipping, as well as staff and candidate travel and has given greater access to applicants in remote and underrepresented areas of the world.

New CLM online enrolment system
At the initiative and under the supervision of one of the members of the above-mentioned team, Jean-Pierre Gaviano, Senior Training Assistant, in collaboration with Allyson Frias, Website Administrator, CLM has used similar technology to develop in-house a new online enrolment system. The objectives were similar too: use less paper, streamline administration, save time and serve clients worldwide more efficiently. The system was piloted for the first time in June for enrolments on the summer courses, and was rolled out this autumn for enrolments on all language courses to be offered in January 2019. Some 1,200 applications have been received to date. Most of the language courses offered at CLM are now in blended format, but some are fully online. Thanks to this tool, such courses are now accessible to eligible staff members worldwide.

Summer courses in the official languages
CLM offered its first summer courses – three in French – in 2016. In 2018, 10 courses in French, three in Spanish and two in English were run to full capacity. Learners included newly recruited staff, people who are too busy the rest of the year, spouses and people preparing for the Language Proficiency Examinations in September. Other courses focused on oral expression and grammar. The summer of 2018 was particularly hot, but that did not deter learners from following semi-intensive courses, two hours a day over two weeks with some online consolidation. The summer school type ambience at this time of year – relaxed and collegial – was conducive to learning and communicating and the 94% success rate (courses evaluated by students as good or excellent) testifies to this. Here are some of the (many) positive comments made by students:

“The structure – intensive format with daily classes – was very useful. The focus on oral was also very useful.”

“Much exposure to spoken French, which has noticeably improved my understanding of French. The interactive approach was excellent and the teacher’s approach very useful. Excellent course, thank you!”

SARAH JORDAN, DEPUTY EDITOR
Since its rebranding, CLM has focused on upgrading and extending the services it offers its clients and these efforts are receiving recognition and recompense. Here is a recap of the high points of the last year.

Much exposure to spoken French, which has noticeably improved my understanding of French. The interactive approach was excellent and the teacher’s approach very useful. Excellent course, thank you!”
AN EXCELLENT, COMPACT, HIGH INTENSITY COURSE BY A SUPERB TEACHER.

“...The relaxed atmosphere and small group setting – Use of media – Not much focus on theoretical concepts and grammar.”

“The fun games in the first week to really motivate speaking. Having video clips and then answering questions. The interactive and relaxed nature of the class... the cultural events mentioned by the teacher and the small talk with the teacher before and after class. The teacher was very attentive to each student even though we were many...”

“...I enjoyed the chance to speak freely with colleagues at the same level of French as me. I am therefore more comfortable to make mistakes and actually practice speaking French.”

The Management of CLM have taken good note and in the summer of 2019, courses will be offered in all six languages!

Knowledge and Learning Commons (KLC) – films in the six official languages

Since the launch of the Knowledge and Learning Commons, the UNOG Library and CLM have been developing synergies. Learning a language involves studying grammar and vocabulary, but culture has a big role to play too. To quote Ms. Corinne Momal-Vanian, UNOG Director of the Division of Conference Management and UNOG Focal Point for Multilingualism, multilingualism is in our DNA. Our six official languages are key to discovering and understanding a multitude of cultures, and films can open windows on them. At the request of Thomas Neufing, Chief, UNOG CLM, a team of cinephile language teacher volunteers (Almudena Rueda, Evgenia Alexeeva-Viol and myself) organized a mini “film festival” during the autumn term with the projection of six films, one in each of the official languages, at the beautiful UN Cinema, the Kazakh room. And what a learning curve it was! A lot more goes into organizing such events than we had previously imagined. Special thanks to Ms. Paloma Redondo for her graphic design skills and to Ms. Natalie Alexander for coordination with the UNOG Library. A first for KLC, was the projection of a seventh film, in collaboration with the foremost Festival of Latin American films in Geneva, Filmar. Ms. Virginie Ferre, Chief, Language Training Programme, welcomed Ms. Vania Aillon, Director of Filmar, to the United Nations and an afterwork audience of 60 or so enjoyed the touching Colombian film directed by Catalina Mesa that won the Festival in 2017, Jericó, el infinito vuelo de los días, with opening remarks from Ms. Aillon and her Press Attaché, Ms. Luisa Ballin.

Close to 300 spectators enjoyed the films projected free of charge as a result of this initiative. The films projected were as follows and will be used as pedagogical tools in CLM classes in the future.

What all these CLM stories have in common is staff commitment – teams and individuals going that extra mile because they enjoy what they do and care about their clients. The UN Secretary-General Awards received 170 nominations, but in every duty station all over the world there are literally thousands of staff members upholding the Organization’s values. In these difficult times, we can all draw strength and encouragement from this.


The goal of increasing female participation in peace operations is equally valid for all three components of missions: military, police and civilian,” – says Luis Miguel Carrilho¹, Police Adviser and Director, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). “We actually found a strong synergy between women serving in civilian roles and uniformed women. They provide a feeling of more social inclusion and inspire each other,” – adds Kristina Koch, Chief of the Recruitment Section, UN Department of Field Support (DFS). The discussion is taking place on the occasion of the annual meeting of the UNITAR Division for Peace Advisory Board in Geneva. Despite the inconvenient timing in the middle of workday and limited room capacity, the space is full with audience of various ages and backgrounds.

Indeed, the years when the cause of ubiquitous in-depth gender mainstreaming lacked wide popular and political attention have passed, as gender dimension enters the spotlight of every area within the 2030 Agenda, with peace and security not being an exception. There is sufficient evidence that the presence of female peacekeepers enlarges the mission skillset, facilitates access to female ex-combatants and civilians, and overall increases operational effectiveness as well as impact and credibility of the United Nations. Importantly, equalizing gender balance in peace operations contributes significantly to the broader issue of women empowerment at the societal level in troop-contributing and receiving countries alike. As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the meaningful inclusion of women “unlocks greater resources”, which becomes vital in the midst of political turmoil and financial instability, where the international community increasingly perceives itself to be at the moment.

Moreover, as noted by Trine Heimerback, Minister Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway in Geneva: “Monitoring respect for women’s rights and security is essentially a way of predicting conflict,” – and in this sense, it is directly related to the goals of improved early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms.

Equally, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is actively paving its way into political fora of the highest level: the landmark UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 2242 (2015), and Canada-led Elsie Initiative (2017) are only few groundbreaking instruments meant to champion this game-changing issue. However, while the number of action plans and the level of commitments are growing, “the ultimate thing that we care about is reality,” – continues Ms Heimerback.

**Women in peacekeeping: From needing protection to providing it**

*At the time when violent conflicts persist all over the globe, political will and carefully tailored training can attract more female changemakers into the field.*

**EKATERINA SITNIKOV, UNITAR**

“The goal of increasing female participation in peace operations is equally valid for all three components of missions: military, police and civilian.” – says Luis Miguel Carrilho¹, Police Adviser and Director, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). “We actually found a strong synergy between women serving in civilian roles and uniformed women. They provide a feeling of more social inclusion and inspire each other,” – adds Kristina Koch, Chief of the Recruitment Section, UN Department of Field Support (DFS). The discussion is taking place on the occasion of the annual meeting of the UNITAR Division for Peace Advisory Board in Geneva. Despite the inconvenient timing in the middle of workday and limited room capacity, the space is full with audience of various ages and backgrounds.

Indeed, the years when the cause of ubiquitous in-depth gender mainstreaming lacked wide popular and political attention have passed, as gender dimension enters the spotlight of every area within the 2030 Agenda, with peace and security not being an exception. There is sufficient evidence that the presence of female peacekeepers enlarges the mission skillset, facilitates access to female ex-combatants and civilians, and overall increases operational effectiveness as well as impact and credibility of the United Nations. Importantly, equalizing gender balance in peace operations contributes significantly to the broader issue of women empowerment at the societal level in troop-contributing and receiving countries alike. As highlighted by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the meaningful inclusion of women “unlocks greater resources”, which becomes vital in the midst of political turmoil and financial instability, where the international community increasingly perceives itself to be at the moment.

Moreover, as noted by Trine Heimerback, Minister Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway in Geneva: “Monitoring respect for women’s rights and security is essentially a way of predicting conflict,” – and in this sense, it is directly related to the goals of improved early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms.

Equally, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is actively paving its way into political fora of the highest level: the landmark UNSCR 1325 (2000), UNSCR 2242 (2015), and Canada-led Elsie Initiative (2017) are only few groundbreaking instruments meant to champion this game-changing issue. However, while the number of action plans and the level of commitments are growing, “the ultimate thing that we care about is reality,” – continues Ms Heimerback.
And reality is clearly falling behind with the desired pace of progress still existing only on paper. Whereas in 2014, women accounted for roughly 22% of the civilian personnel with the respective figures for police and military sectors of 10% and 3% (DPKO), in 2018, these numbers remain largely unchanged. Even less often than in peacekeeper’s uniform per se, women find themselves in leadership positions within the mission governance structures, which critically inhibits gender mainstreaming at the level of strategic policy planning and implementation.

Barriers that preclude greater qualitative involvement of female, in the first place – uniformed, personnel in peace operations are manifold and pertain to the entire cycle of recruitment, retention, promotion and potential re-deployment. As highlighted in the 2018 baseline study by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)\(^2\), presented during the discussion by the Deputy Head of Gender and Security Division Ann Blomberg\(^3\), those barriers range from the lack of conducive social norms, support networks and relevant information to inadequate recruitment criteria, the lack of adapted facilities and of specialized training, to name only a few. “In Liberia, we had two hospitals with 100% male staff each, which forced women to seek medical care in neighbouring countries. That was extremely uncomfortable,” – remembers Lt. Gen. Chikadibia I. Obiakor, Former Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations and Former UNMIL Force Commander. He continues: “This just means that the UN has to do quite a lot of in-house work too”.

On top of all, culture keeps acting as a powerful lens that deflects the effects of the existing obstacles in various contexts and communities. Thus, while African and Asian countries remain the main troop contributors and the WPS Agenda is increasingly shifting from being North-dominated to incorporating other types of needs and perspectives, cultural and contextual variations enter the frontline of the related discourse.

As 2018 is coming to an end, it seems that growing publicity backed by the accumulating number of policy papers have managed to secure substantial political will at the international as well as partially – at the national level. Recently, increasing the number of uniformed and civilian women, particularly in key positions, has been identified as one of the key milestones on the road towards excellence in peacekeeping within the novel Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative of the Secretary-General. At the same time, DPKO has introduced some quotas on women deployment for troop- and police-contributing countries (TPCCs). Still, the policy-implementation gap is narrowing slowly.

So, what is exactly to be done to accelerate the progress? First of all, the importance of creating a stimulating environment and changing attitudes of both men and women towards female peacekeeping should not be underrated. On this path, targeted social media campaigns have already proved efficient, while expert gatherings and high-level events, like the one convened by UNITAR, at the international headquarters and in the field alike help generate strong support networks of relevant stakeholders. Remarkably, “the immediate power but also long-term general impact that is running from unexpected initiatives is hard to overestimate,” – believes Annika Hilding Norberg, Peace Operations and Peacebuilding Cluster Leader, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). To illustrate the idea, Ms Hilding Norberg aptly borrows the business concept of positive disruptive innovation, giving the examples of the deployment of the first all-female police units from India in 2007 and of the Maj. Gen. Kristin Lund’s appointment as the first female force commander in 2014, both of which were shocking at the time, but produced unprecedented positive influence.

Critically, sufficient resources and expertise should be devoted to the development of women’s capacities to be recruited and promoted to the positions of responsibility within peacekeeping missions through specialized training. Additionally, a lot of applied research is yet to be done to shed light on some still opaque areas such as specific barriers existing between national and international levels of recruitment into armed forces, gender-sensitive language and country variations. Overall, this extensive task list with unfix boundaries calls for the broad and proactive involvement of competent institutions, ideally – in the partnership form.

As pointed out by Ms Heimerback of Norway: “The Agenda of Women, Peace and Security is not a gender issue, it’s a matter of national and international security.”

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\(^2\) A short interview with Mr Luis Miguel Carrilho on UN Radio (in French) can be found at: https://news.un.org/fr/audio/2018/10/1027052

\(^3\) The full version of the study is available at: https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_Baseline_Report_2018.pdf

\(^4\) A short interview with Ms Ann Blomberg on UN Radio (in English) can be found at: https://news.un.org/en/audio/2018/10/1023662
Message de fin d’année de la part du Conseil de Coordination de l’ONUG

PRISCA CHAOUI, SECRÉTAIRE EXÉCUTIVE DU CONSEIL DE COORDINATION DU PERSONNEL, ONUG

Chers collègues,
2018 fut une année bien chargée à maints égards. Ce fut une année où les fonctionnaires, toutes catégories confondues, ont vu leurs conditions de travail visées mais ce fut aussi une période marquée par des développements positifs.

Ainsi, le dispositif de prestations centralisées de services, plus connu sous l’appellation de GSDM, a été lancé. Le but de ce dispositif est de centraliser les fonctions transactionnelles dans deux ou trois lieux d’affectation où le coût de la main d’œuvre est moindre. En termes concrets, cela implique la perte de 48 postes administratifs à l’ONUG. Grâce à l’action des syndicats du personnel, la décision finale relative à la mise à l’exécution de cette initiative a été reportée à mars 2019. La bataille n’est pas encore gagnée, mais elle n’est pas perdue.

Au GSDM, est venue s’ajouter la coupe de salaires des fonctionnaires de la catégorie professionnelle et au-delà. Ces coups furent décidées suite à l’enquête sur le coût de la vie menée en novembre 2016 par l’organe qui se veut technique mais qui en réalité ne l’est pas, à savoir la Commission de la fonction publique internationale (CFPI). Les résultats de cette enquête ont été entachés d’irrégularités selon une analyse faite par deux statisticiens. Toutefois, au lieu de reconnaître les erreurs commises, la CFPI a persisté dans son arrogance en imposant les coupes. Les fonctionnaires à l’ONUG ont fait face à la CFPI avec la même persistance. Les arrêtés de travail et deux grèves, ont ramené les coupes de 7,5% à 5,1%. Il s’agit d’une victoire partielle mais nous devons tous être fiers de ce résultat. Grâce à nos actions, la CFPI, qui vient de nommer un nouveau président, a accepté de mettre en place un groupe de travail pour revoir ses méthodes de travail.

Pour ce qui concerne notre futur espace de travail, je regrette de voir que nos préoccupations ont été ignorées. Ainsi, le nouveau bâtiment H, construit dans le cadre du Plan stratégique patrimonial, appliquera la politique, devenue caduque dans beaucoup d’entreprises, de l’espace de travail partagé ou ‘hot desking’. À notre plus grande surprise, et malgré les assurances données par l’Administration selon lesquelles cette politique ne sera pas appliquée dans le bâtiment existant, une proposition a été soumise à l’Assemblée générale afin d’approuver des dépenses supplémentaires de 67 millions de dollars visant à équiper ledit bâtiment de système de ventilation en vue d’offrir aux fonctionnaires des espaces de travail partagés. De plus, il est regrettable de voir que contrairement à la nouvelle stratégie pour l’égalité des sexes, notre Administration n’a pas pu identifier une parcelle sur laquelle réaliser le projet de crèche que nous avions initié il y a plusieurs années et que nous étions prêts à financer entièrement.

L’objectif est nullement de tracer un tableau négatif, car on peut noter plusieurs avancées. L’une d’elles est que désormais, l’Administration prend au sérieux les plaintes pour conduite prohibée. Il est vrai que tout a commencé avec la priorité donnée au harcèlement sexuel sous l’impulsion de mouvements globaux. Toutefois, l’attention n’est plus désormais accordée au seul harcèlement sexuel mais aux autres formes de conduite prohibée.

De plus, en ce moment, l’Assemblée générale examine un projet visant à supprimer les barrières auxquels font face de nombreux agents des services généraux souhaitant accéder à la catégorie professionnelle. De même, l’Assemblée devra statuer sur des recommandations de la CFPI visant à augmenter la rémunération considérée aux fins de la pension et à introduire une indemnité de fin de service pour les détenteurs de contrat à durée déterminée, dont le contrat arrive à échéance sans être renouvelé.

La Caisse des pensions, qui a souffert d’une mauvaise gestion pendant les trois dernières années, est en train de se remettre sur les rails. Une étude actuarielle avec des taux de mortalité mis à jour, a montré que l’état de santé de la Caisse est rassurant. Cela signifie que si le système commun des Nations Unies venait à cesser ses activités, la Caisse serait en mesure de respecter ses obligations pendant trente ans. De plus, le Bureau de la gestion des placements a atteint son objectif de référence en matière de rendement des investissements.

Il est essentiel de tabler sur nos nombreuses réussites pour continuer notre lutte pour la sauvegarde de nos droits et de nos conditions de travail. Il ne faut nullement oublier que nous opérons dans une organisation où les dictats politiques sont plus forts que tout. Avec votre soutien inlassable et le dévouement aux valeurs et idéaux de l’ONU qui nous anime tous, nous allons continuer notre lutte pour aller de l’avant. Nous constituons l’ONU d’aujourd’hui et de demain.

La nouvelle année nous réserve son lot de surprises avec la réforme lancée par le Secrétaire général et les changements de taille qu’elle induit. Celles-ci risquent d’être positives. Il faut y croire.

Bonne année à toutes et à tous et restons unis dans notre combat pour une Organisation qui respecte nos droits!
MARINA APPIAH, WHO

I was elected to office as President of the 66th Committee of the WHO Headquarters Staff Association on 15 December 2017. Having been on the Committee for five years, I was confident that I could count on the support of fellow Committee Members to push through and implement the agenda that I believed was central to the work of the Committee, which is defending staff rights. My previous years of experience in the Committee also made me more conscious of the ways of working that could make us more effective. Thus, it was important for me, among other things to:

1. build a united committee;
2. encourage colleagues on the Staff Committee to identify what they are good at and use these skills set and knowledge for the benefit of staff;
3. build consensus with our regional Staff Associations on policies that have global implications for staff matters; and
4. maximize our joint and collective outcomes at the annual Global Staff Management Council (GSMC) meeting.

Reflecting on achievements during the year, I have found great value in delegating tasks and functions to colleagues I felt or knew had stronger competencies and skill sets to facilitate delivering on tasks. On most occasions, the colleagues responded and worked diligently to provide their best in contributing to, or addressing emerging issues of concerns to staff, such as mandatory geographical mobility policy and non-ending issuing of temporary staff contracts for projects that have long life span.

The impact of this way of working and approach also manifested in the production of concise briefs submitted to the Director General; and acting to respond to needs pertinent to staff.

Regarding collaborative efforts on issues and policies of common interest to all staff associations, it was clear to me that despite headquarters staff out-numbering those in the regions, any form of dissension amongst the staff associations would work to our disadvantage. I have therefore actively ensured that Headquarters Staff Committee has constant dialogue with our regional counterparts through WebEx on policies that globally affect staff, and have been opened to listening and accommodating concerns and perspectives from the regions and other WHO affiliated staff associations. This mutual and active partnership has yielded positive results. For instance, it has encouraged management to give considerable thought to two policies that are being revised: prevention of harassment in the workplace, and managed mobility.

Also, the cooperation among the staff associations ensured the drafting of recommendations that were mutually satisfactory to us from the recent Global Staff Management Council (GSMC) Meeting held in last October.

However, the main challenge has been building a united committee. This is because a good number of us did not know each other professionally or personally, and therefore took baby steps in trusting each other when we started our tenure of office. This has had the cascading effect of inadvertently judging each other’s actions harshly, second-guessing each other, being mutually disrespectful etcetera.

The passage of time produced some clarity on forms of behaviour. What is outstanding is what we do from hereon in with what we now know about each other. My expectation is that we choose to work in a collegial manner.

My current tenure of office as President ends shortly. I am seeking re-election to the Staff Committee for another two years. The Presidency is only an option when I am elected to be on the Committee. That said, I choose to dream about what I consider a healthy Staff Committee: one where colleagues, including me, who are elected to office actively choose to be people of integrity. I say this because I have on many occasions had meaningful conversations with colleagues to convert them from being non-dues-paying members to paying ones. My sales pitch has been and still is based on the benefits that dues-paying members receive. These include representing staff on key Staff Management Committees and having legal insurance coverage to challenge administrative decisions. Despite these benefits, many colleagues have shrugged their shoulders and refused to be identified with the Staff Committee because they are aware of incidents of unbecoming behaviour by some elected staff representatives. Whether these are factual or not, the perception of lack of credibility, reduces the number of willing dues-paying members.

Second, I think it is incumbent on us as SC members to look past personal likes and dislikes and work for the interests of staff; to understand that apart from our own great ideas, others also have something to contribute. Their contribution may not be as grandiose or readily evident as ours or may take time to emerge.

Third, we should remember that it is okay to be unpopular with constituents so long as our words and actions demonstrate at individual and group levels, integrity, and commitment to the best interests of staff in general, without obvious evidence for personal gain.

Finally, we must show appreciation for the role of the Federations, and be willing to work with them as they, in their role, deal with Member States and are privy to high-level decisions that we may know nothing about.

All in all, it has been a good year characterised by numerous challenges and opportunities for collective actions, and from which lessons can be drawn. I have enjoyed the collaboration and support from the HQ Staff Committee Members and with the regions. Moving forward, I expect, and it is my sincere belief that the WHO Headquarters Staff Association will remain relevant and effective, and will continue to thrive in the coming years.

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1 This is the body of representatives of Management from all major offices and Presidents and Vice Presidents of the WHO Staff Associations.
Look out for lead paint on children’s toys and furniture

EVELYN KORTUM AND JOANNA TEMPOWSKI, WHO CHEMICAL SAFETY TEAM

With the holiday season approaching, and the shops bursting with gifts for children, it is worth paying particular attention to brightly painted toys among the enormous range available today.

They look fun and attractive, but some toys are painted using lead in the manufacturing process. This toxic metal, which is odorless, can be absorbed by the body and cause serious, long-lasting health conditions especially for young, growing children.

Currently only 70 countries have laws in place to control or eliminate the use of lead in paint. However, some laws do not necessarily encompass toys or other items for children. Where there are laws in place, there may even be separate legislation for toys, but not on lead in paint in general.

Olga Speranskaya, Senior Policy Advisor at the International Persistent Organic Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN) recently observed that “most developed countries banned decorative lead paint over 40 years ago. They adopted regulations to control lead content in paints used at home, at schools or kindergartens. However, studies conducted by IPEN over the last nine years in more than 55 countries show that high levels of lead in paint still exist in most of these countries”.

Objects coated with lead paint are a hazard to young children because, as part of normal behaviour, they tend to put things into their mouths and lick, chew or suck on them. This may gradually loosen the surface paint, which is then swallowed. Also, some children actively pick off and swallow paint flakes from items such as toys and furniture.

Children easily absorb lead from ingested paint. Lead has no biological function in the body. It accumulates and affects practically all organ systems, potentially causing both acute and chronic health impacts. Young children are especially vulnerable because their nervous system is still developing. Even low levels of lead exposure in this age group can interfere with intellectual and behavioural development and can result in reduced intelligence quotient (IQ), dyslexia, attention deficit disorder and antisocial behaviour. This not only has an impact on the child and their family but can also have a societal impact if many children are exposed to lead:

“If a child comes back with one IQ point loss, the parent doesn’t notice,” said Leonardo Trasande, a researcher on children’s environmental health. “But if 100,000 kids come back with one less IQ point, the economy notices.”

In addition to effects on the nervous system, in older age groups, lead exposure can cause hypertension, renal impairment, and toxicity to the reproductive organs. Because of the wide range of toxic effects even at low levels of exposure, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified lead as one of ten chemicals of major public health concern.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) and WHO are taking action on lead paint. In 2010, UN Environment and WHO founded the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint (the Lead Paint Alliance) after a call by governments for action on this issue. The Lead Paint Alliance is a voluntary collaborative initiative involving diverse stakeholders with the broad objective of promoting the phase-out of the manufacture and sale of paints containing lead. The Alliance works to increase awareness among policy makers about the hazards of lead paint and to encourage them to adopt, implement and enforce laws prohibiting lead paint.

You can find out if lead paint is regulated in your country by looking in the WHO Global Health Observatory. If you know that lead paint is not legally controlled in your country then lobby your politicians to do something about it and join the annual International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week during the last week of October. During this week, governments, NGOs, academia and others run campaigns in their countries and communities to encourage the phase-out of lead paint. In a comment on the 2018 campaign week, Dr. Maria Neira, Director of Public Health, Environment and Social Determinants of Health at WHO said “It is now high-time to massively strengthen efforts and get everyone on board”. She called on every country to take action on lead paint. In 2010, UN Environment and WHO founded the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lead Paint (the Lead Paint Alliance) after a call by governments for action on this issue. The Lead Paint Alliance is a voluntary collaborative initiative involving diverse stakeholders with the broad objective of promoting the phase-out of the manufacture and sale of paints containing lead. The Alliance works to increase awareness among policy makers about the hazards of lead paint and to encourage them to adopt, implement and enforce laws prohibiting lead paint.

Despite countries increasingly taking measures to protect children from exposure to lead from toys and other items, it is wise advice to stay vigilant about the things that you buy. Look for quality labels and buy from reputable manufacturers. In case of doubt, ask the vendor or the manufacturer directly about possible lead content. Be careful about second-hand or antique toys and furniture as these may be coated with old lead paint. While the topic of this article is lead paint, we would also like to mention the need to take care when buying children’s items that may be made from lead e.g. cheap jewelry and lucky charms, as these are also dangerous. Spending a few moments to check before you buy is worth the effort.

Other sources of information
http://www.who.int/gfn/pha/chemical_safety/lead_paint_regulations/en/
Three Sisters, written in 1900 by Anton Chekhov, is probably the most famous play in the Russian repertoire. La Comédie theatre in Geneva is offering two very different interpretations of it for its 2018–2019 season. For the first, What if they went to Moscow?, it’s unfortunately too late, so I won’t dwell on it, except to say that it made the front page of Le Temps newspaper, where it received rave reviews. Expectations are therefore high for a Siberian theatre company’s rendition of the same Russian classic scheduled from 17–28 January 2019 at the Théâtre du Loup. The play will be performed in Russian sign language with English and French subtitles (Russian and French subtitles for some performances). Expectations are therefore high for a Siberian theatre company’s rendition of the same Russian classic scheduled from 17–28 January 2019 at the Théâtre du Loup. The play will be performed in Russian sign language with English and French subtitles (Russian and French subtitles for some performances). This has nothing to do with the hard of hearing; rather it is the artistic choice of the young director, Timofei Kouliabine, a leading figure in his native Russia. Not a single word is exchanged by the actors, who say everything while saying nothing. This play too has had great acclaim – notably in Paris.

For something more contemporary, two plays inspired by the controversial Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier (Dancer in the Dark, Dogville, Melancholia…), may be to your liking. The Kingdom (Le Royaume), from 22 January–6 February, is a La Comédie creation, based on von Trier’s 1990s TV series and reflects, not without humour, on the absurdities of our world. In The Direktor, from 8–15 February, a company owner hires an actor to pose as the director of his company to avoid assuming his responsibilities, but with unexpected consequences.

The documentary show Gen Z – Searching for beauty, from 26 February to 2 March, could be interesting for millennials born after 1995, because it is performed by them and is about them! A young troupe of 18 actors, professionals from Belgium and amateurs from the Geneva area, who “dream of beauty and of tomorrow that will be another day” give a different insight into this generation too often characterised by clichés.

Another La Comédie creation Maybe I should just take a walk (with no destination) is programmed later in the season, from 23 to 26 May. It too is performed by generation Z, but this time with actors newly graduated from the Manufacture theatre school in Lausanne, directed by the Italian theatre company, Motus. This production invites us to travel the roads of the West, dear to American author-actor Sam Shepard, who inspired this play.

For this season, there are some new and novel approaches to pricing at La Comédie, including Saturday at any price whereby theatregoers can pay between two and 50 Swiss francs to see a show. These tickets can only be purchased in person at the theatre from 1 p.m. on the day of the performance (not online) and raise the question “How much am I prepared to pay to see this?”. Cards for four or 10 tickets at a discounted price are also available and are transferrable. Another interesting possibility for International Geneva theatregoers is that of benefitting from a reduction on presentation of a valid season ticket from a theatre anywhere in the world.

In two years from now, La Comédie will have moved to its new premises in Eaux-Vives. There, in a 21st century building, it will have greater technical scope, which promises even more international creations. However, in the meantime, the two new directors of La Comédie, Natacha Koutchoumov and Denis Maillefer, in what is right now the oldest theatre in Geneva, have already programmed a resolutely original and modern season for 2018–2019.


Regroupés en sections thématiques (société, politique, nouvelles cultures urbaines, genres…), les films montrés chaque année pendant 10 jours témoignent de la vivacité d’une cinématographie internationale passée sous le radar des circuits de distribution. Le public y trouve des réalisations sous toutes formes : fiction, documentaire, expérimental, animation, longs et courts métrages. La programmation audacieuse et pointue du festival favorise les voix minoritaires, la liberté de ton, la qualité cinématographique, l’impertinence. Sur le plan compétitif, un Jury de critiques internationaux remet le Prix de la Ville de Genève à la meilleure œuvre.

Le Festival Black Movie peut se réclamer d’un rayonnement global, confirmé par la venue annuelle d’une vingtaine de cinéastes en provenance de tous les continents, par la présence et la reconnaissance de nombreux journalistes étrangers, et par les collaborations soutenues avec des festivals de premier plan : Festival international du film de Rotterdam (Pays-Bas), Festival international du film de Jeonju (Corée du Sud), Festival international du film de Transylvanie, Festival du film documentaire de Saint-Louis du Sénégal, Festival international des cinémas d’Asie de Vesoul (France)…

Chaque année, une programmation pour les spectateurs les plus jeunes est présentée dans la section du Petit Black Movie. Des masterclasses et des tables rondes sont organisées en parallèle aux projections afin d’approfondir les problématiques soulevées par les sections thématiques. Parce que le festival revendique sa dimension humaine et conviviale, systématiquement saluée par les réalisateurs venus présenter leurs films, il offre au public d’entrer directement en contact avec les cinéastes, que ce soit lors des Q&A organisées après chaque séance ou lors des mémorables Nuits Blanches du lieu central.

L’éclatisme revendiqué du Festival Black Movie a reçu très tôt les faveurs d’un public curieux et fidèle. L’attachement de celui-ci ne s’est jamais démenti et s’est même accentué avec les années, en regard d’un nombre de propositions diurnes et nocturnes stable. Ce sont ainsi 30 000 festivaliers qui ont répondu présents lors l’édition 2018, ce qui place le festival dans le peloton de tête des manifestations cinématographiques les plus fréquentées du canton de Genève.

Informations pratiques
www.blackmovie.ch
www.facebook.com/BlackMovieFestival

Lieux principaux
Maison des Arts du Grütli, Cinéma Spouthik, Cinéflix, Alhambra
Lieu central (Nuits Blanches) : Cercle des Bains
ART & CULTURE

Surtitles at Théâtre de Carouge: a medium of cultural and social integration

On November 6, we opened our new venue, La Cuisine – and our 2018-2019 season – with James Thierrée’s Raoul. This followed the success of La Grenouille avait raison, which Thierrée created at Théâtre de Carouge in 2016, and for which he won the Molière for best director in 2017. As it was a wordless performance, anyone could enjoy it without the need for additional equipment. As for the rest of the season, we won’t let the spectators down either. The hard-of-hearing and non-French-speakers often consider theatre an inaccessible art form. Since 2013, we’ve made our productions accessible to a wider audience by providing surtitles (live translation or transcription).

Unlike film subtitles, which appear at the bottom of the screen, surtitles are projected above the stage during live performances. Surtitles are displayed by an operator who projects them in sync with the actors’ rhythms of speech, which vary from one performance to the next.

The surtitler’s role is crucial. The surtitles must be succinct enough so that the audience has time to read the text and see what is happening onstage. The text is translated, cut, and adapted, and the surtitler must attend rehearsals, or work with recordings: in total, about one month of work.

At Théâtre de Carouge, Olga Timofeeva is in charge of coordinating and operating surtitles. She’s collected feedback from audience members about the service. Here are some examples of what they have to say:

“None of us speaks fluent French, so we really appreciated the surtitles. I am no longer afraid of going to the theatre in Geneva.”

“It was difficult to read the surtitles at the beginning. I just read the surtitles and couldn’t see actors[...]. But [I got] used to it and didn’t feel uncomfortable about the distance [...] anymore.”

Surtitles are clearly useful and appreciated, but projecting them above the stage appears not to be the best option for everyone. They cannot be seen from everywhere in the venue – for instance, hearing-impaired patrons must be seated at the front and are therefore unable to see the surtitles. Sometimes the set design does not allow for the projection of surtitles. Furthermore, surtitles may be distracting to patrons who don’t require them.

For these reasons, Théâtre de Carouge has developed an electronic tablet surtitle system. Tablets are handheld, and patrons can choose between French, English, and simplified French. As the screens are not bright, the tablets do not disturb other spectators, and they can be used with any set design.

Théâtre de Carouge has 30 of these tablets. We are developing software with colour options for the hard of hearing. The individual tablet system is a universal solution allowing hearing-impaired spectators and non-French-speakers to enjoy our shows at no extra cost. Each tablet has a wireless connection to the sound booth, where a surtitler controls the projection.

We offer performances with audio description and tactile set tours for visually-impaired patrons. The theatre is equipped with a magnetic loop, allowing hearing-impaired patrons to adjust the volume for themselves. For further information, visit www.tcag.ch.

Tablets will be available on Friday 1 and Wednesday 6 February 2019 for Molière’s Le Misanthrope; Wednesday 3 and Friday 5 April 2019 for Je suis invisible!, based on A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and on Thursday 2 and Friday 3 May 2019 for Amour et Psyché.

Reserve tablets by calling +41 22 343 43 43 or emailing info@tcag.ch. Additional surtitle dates can be scheduled for groups of 20 plus. For information and booking, email otimofeeva@tcag.ch.
MARIE-JOSÉ ASTRE-DÉMOULIN
Merci à Gustave Revilliod¹, donateur du merveilleux parc où j’ai eu la chance de travailler toutes ces années. Merci aux jardiniers qui éveillent la beauté de ce lieu, merci aux gardes qui en assurent la sécurité, merci aux centaines, aux milliers d’entre vous, chers collègues avec qui j’ai ri, échangé, évolué.

Merci pour le plaisir que j’ai eu, comme professeure de français, à partager avec des centaines d’entre vous l’intimité des salles de classe à 8 heures du matin ! Enveloppée de vos odeurs de savonnettes et face à vos visages encore fripés de sommeil, je me suis régalée de vos accents colorés et nourrie des questions que vous posiez. Vous m’avez apporté de nouveaux éclairages sur ma culture et fait aimer ma langue au-delà de ce que je n’aurais jamais pu imaginer.

Et puis, il y a eu mes interventions dans le cadre des modules de «management et communication», de biens grands mots pour parler de... nos rapports humains, des liens que nous établissons les uns avec les autres. Les «autres»: ces collègues, superviseurs, supervisées, ces êtres complexes qui nous fascinent autant qu’ils nous agacent et dont nous n’espérons, au fond, qu’une seule chose: être... aimés.

«Aimés», le mot semble fort et pourtant, sans trahir nullement la confidentialité à laquelle je me suis engagée, je peux dire qu’en dix ans de pratique du coaching individuel et de l’accompagnement d’équipes, j’ai rencontré à 99 pour cent (bon... à 95, peut-être) des personnes bien intentionnées et qui désiraient, avant tout, le bien-être de ceux qui les entouraient.

Oui, bien sûr, j’ai aussi aperçu quelques «toxiques» mais ils sont plutôt rares et ils ne méritent pas qu’on s’en souvienne. La plupart du temps, ils sont juste si étouffés par leurs soucis de carrière qu’ils en empêchent les autres de respirer.

Je l’avoue aussi (ou peut-être l’avez-vous deviné), au fil des années, l’ONU est devenue pour moi une drogue dure, une substance infiltrée dans mes veines et dont je n’ai aucune raison de vouloir me sevrer. En cette fin 2018, c’est à mon statut de fonctionnaire internationale que je renonce mais certainement pas à mon engagement envers les valeurs que prône notre Organisation et qui ne cesseront jamais de me porter.

1 Le Musée de l’Ariana consacre en ce moment une exposition à Gustave Revilliod – à ne pas manquer! https://www.tdg.ch/culture/ariana-rend-hommage-gustave-revilliod/story/23374435

La chose que j’ai aimée le plus, qui m’a emportée au-delà de tous les autres sentiments, qui m’a rendue accro à l’ONU, ce sont les moments que j’ai passés avec mes collègues qui vivent dans le monde. Chaque semaine, j’ai le droit de choisir un ou deux collègues de mon choix pour partager avec eux une petite partie de mon parcours. Et c’est pour eux que j’ai écrit ce livre. C’est pour eux que j’ai écrit les phrases qui vous ont touchés. C’est pour eux que j’ai écrit les phrases qui ont fait pleurer vous et moi. C’est pour eux que j’ai écrit les phrases qui ont fait sourire vous et moi.

Je l’avoue, les moments que j’ai passés à Addis, Bishkek, Kampala, Katmandou, Rabat ou Gaziantep avec Birgit, Vincent, Rachid ou Sergio (je fais ici référence à l’un de ces collègues que nous appelons un «local» et non pas à l’illustre Sergio mort à Bagdad – et qui, cela étant, nous honore également) figurent parmi mes plus grandes sources de joie et de fierté.

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L’ONU fait partie de mes racines et de mon histoire et, comme pour toutes les histoires, il y a les faits mais il y a surtout, la
Vous aimeriez partager votre opinion sur le magazine et son contenu ?

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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

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