

Does the UN have a future in the Middle East?

Old and new conflicts have visited immense devastation on the peoples of the Middle East. One could be forgiven for thinking that the United Nations is fiddling while the Middle East is burning. The UN's apparent impotence should not, however, obscure its significant contribution to human security in the Middle East as in other parts of the world.

Global trends are particularly encouraging, though seldom recognised. High-intensive conflicts between states have become rare since 1989. There has been less than one interstate conflict per year on average since 2000, down from almost three during the 1980s. And the total number of deaths associated with conflicts, both within and between states, has declined from about 80,000 in 1990 to a little over 20,000 in 2011.

UN norms against the unilateral use of force have greatly helped to contain the levels of global violence. So have the UN's steadily expanding efforts in peacekeeping, peacebuilding, mediation and conflict prevention.

Regrettably, when it comes to the Middle East, the UN's performance has been less impressive. As I write, the Middle East is on the brink of a regional sectarian war that has already engulfed Iraq and Syria, with many civilians wantonly kidnapped, tortured and killed. In July and early August the militants of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Istis) seized the north of Iraq, linking it with a major swathe of territory previously taken in eastern Syria.

A Save the Children report published earlier this year estimated that at least 1.2 million children had fled the conflict, and become refugees in neighbouring countries, while another 4.3 million children in Syria were in need of humanitarian assistance.

Syria, Iraq, Gaza, Israel and Libya are the current flashpoints, but let's not forget that Iraq has been at war for the best part of three decades, and ethnic communities and religious minorities in much of the Middle East continue to experience discrimination and violence, while Israel's nuclear arsenal offers a powerful justification for hostile neighbours to follow the same route.

Nevertheless in virtually every Middle Eastern conflict the UN's presence has done much to contain the scale and duration of military hostilities, and significantly alleviated the human suffering.

The United Nations presently has a number of peacekeeping and political missions deployed in this region, helping to monitor truces and ceasefires. The Secretary-General's good offices facilitate negotiations and arrange ceasefires, while the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights keeps the international spotlight on the actions of the parties to various conflicts.



The UN in Bethlehem, West Bank

The UNHCR has brought relief to millions of displaced Syrians, as well as several thousand refugees of other nationalities in the region.

The United Nations, it is true, has not been able to prevent large scale civilian casualties or war crimes in Iraq, Syria, Libya or in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinians. Nor have the necessary steps been taken to establish the Middle East as a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. Three factors largely account for these failures: the conduct of great powers, notably the United States, intent on pursuing narrow economic and strategic interests; the continued flow of arms, military training and money to opposing sides by great and regional powers alike; and the ambitions of authoritarian governments, local warlords, and terrorist organisations that have no respect for the sanctity of human life.

It is often said that the UN cannot become a potent force for peace in the Middle East, unless its member states act responsibly. But governments may not be so inclined unless they come under sustained pressure: first, from their own citizens on whose support they ultimately depend for their survival; and secondly from the combined efforts of governments committed to the principles of good international citizenship.

Clearly, the engagement of civil society within and between countries is crucial. Such engagement requires an expanded program of cross border exchanges and projects, especially between groups and movements located in the West and courageous groups working for reconciliation in the conflict zones of the Middle East. The future effectiveness of the UN's presence in the Middle East will largely depend on the depth and breadth of the interfaith, inter-ethnic and inter-civilisational dialogue which animates and informs it.

*Emeritus Professor Joseph A. Camilleri OAM,
La Trobe University and Pax Christi Victoria, Australia
www.josephcamilleri.org*

Reforming the UN

It was in 1993 that Pax Christi and the CIIR (now Progressio) invited the late Erskine Childers to speak at a public meeting in Heythrop College. His theme was strengthening the United Nations system, and the title he gave his talk was 'In a Time beyond Warnings'. He made it clear that he thought the world community was running out of time to deal with all the major problems facing it.

Childers' long experience as a UN officer in many countries, and his enthusiasm for the 1945 UN vision, made him a powerful speaker. He was no UN basher. If he suggested reforms it was, he said, 'to improve on the already extraordinary...', the UN machinery can and does work. For instance, he would have been delighted at the recent news that the Marshall Islands are taking the nuclear powers to the International Court for failing to negotiate abolition 'in good faith'.

Some of the reforms he recommended are still very badly needed. The undemocratic Veto system is still in place though the United States has overtaken the Soviet Union as Veto wielder.

The UN structure still looks more like a loose federation of its many agencies rather than a single focussed body. Even geographically the agencies are in different places all around the world.

The UN funding system remains inadequate and haphazard. Why should the Secretary General have to pass a begging bowl around whenever there is a crisis - which means most of the time? Compared to the world military budget of nearly 2 trillion each year the funding of the United Nations is absurdly low.

The text of that 1993 talk is still available from Pax Christi. So too is the 2013 booklet produced by Swedish UNA and the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation entitled *Reform Proposals for a Democratic United Nations and the Rule of Law*. This is an up-to-date summary of many of Erskine's ideas.

But reforming proposals assume knowledge of the UN Charter and enthusiasm for its great task. To be honest, I see little of either on many visits to schools, colleges and parishes. Since the UN, years ago, decided to close its Information office in London access to UN publications is difficult. Yes, I know that information will be on the web but there is nothing like a publication in one's hand. The UNA has now a very low membership compared to years gone by and the Council for Education in World Citizenship, once so active and well supported, no longer exists in England.

If we made ourselves familiar with the UN Charter we would not be led to believe that the Security Council is free to call for military action whenever it so decides. Look at the restrictions in Art. 42.

Though most member states would like us to believe that there is nothing in the Charter that allows intervention in their affairs, Art.2.7 says something rather different. The rule about no intervention only applies in matters essentially within 'domestic jurisdiction'. The Universal Human Rights agreed in 1948 cannot be simply domestic jurisdiction.

It is time to take on the challenge of inspiring and renewing. The Charter after all was produced in our name. I know of no other world document which starts its preamble with such ringing words as those that open the Charter: 'WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED TO SAVE SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS FROM THE SCOURGE OF WAR...'

A simple first step? Get every parish to display permanently on its notice board the A4 card copy of the Preamble to the UN Charter. It is available from the Movement for the Abolition of War.

Bruce Kent,
Vice-President of Pax Christi

Peacemaking Resources

www.un.org/en/

A very useful site with info on history and current workings of UN and sections on Peace and Security, Development, Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and International Law.

cyberschoolbus.un.org/

A website for teachers on the work of the UN including how to run a mock UN Assembly, lesson plans on themes listed above, quizzes and games.

www.una.org.uk/content/una-youth-campaign-pack-2012-13

Useful resources from UNA UK for those working with young people.

[The Challenging Road to Peace since the First World War](#) is an exhibition created by Tavistock Peace

Action Group. It will be on display for two weeks starting on Monday 15 September at Kingdon House, Tavistock, Devon.

The 21-board exhibition describes the causes of the War, and features Conscriptio and Conscientious Objection. Using a time line over the last 100 years, it looks at the legacy of wars, weapon developments, the organisations that regulate international relations as well as the laws and treaties arising from these, and then offers a list of 'Champions of Peace'. It finally examines what makes for a more peaceful world asking what the viewer can do to help bring this about. The exhibition can be booked via Rupert Gude rupert.gude@gmail.com. No hire charge but borrowers would need to collect the exhibition from Tavistock or pay for courier delivery.

Pax Christi International - a vibrant presence at the UN in New York

Pax Christi International (PCI) has had special consultative status at the United Nations since 1979. Day by day there seems to be little change here at the UN - but looking back over the past 10 years I see amazing changes: communication, outreach to youth, sustained insistence on gender equity, an emerging sense of power among the non-nuclear states, a growing sense among NGO's that all issues are interconnected. As the Millennium Development Goals mature and meetings continue to articulate 'The World We Want Post 2015' in April 2015, it is clear that a more inclusive and integrated world view is being expressed. It is acknowledged that where there is conflict there is no development, although disarmament is not on this radar. (www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Post_2015_UNTTreport.pdf)

The Work

PCI is now a member of the *Working Group on the Security Council* (ngowgsc.org), literally a 'seat at the table' at frequent briefings with individual members of the Security Council and their staffs. This provides off the record insights and networking opportunities. Marie Dennis represents Pax Christi International with Alex Hiniker as backup.

Beth Begley and Alex Hiniker, with other NGO's in the disarmament community, attend briefings with Angela Kane, High Rep. of the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (ODA). These are primarily opportunities to bring to the table our issues and efforts, to discuss logistics for upcoming ODA events, and to network. Alex has assumed a pivotal role in communication. Beth is vice-president of the NGO Committee on Disarmament, Peace and Security.

PCI has Special Consultative Status with Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna.

Mobilisation is beginning for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review. In 2014, Paul, Jose and Marie from PCI were present, as was Susi Snyder from PAX (Pax Christi Netherlands). Globally, all are invited to participate in the Net Zero campaign that will kick off on Sept 26 (www.unfoldzero.org) - the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

The Arms Trade Treaty has 41 of the 50 ratifications necessary to enter into force. (www.controlarms.org). Wim Zwijnenburg of PAX has been the leader of the European regional delegates at treaty negotiations. In addition to nuclear issues, Alex also works on Syria and South Sudan where PAX has local staff. Cheryl Morrissey is on the executive committee of the NGO Committee on Financing for Development and has co-authored 3 interventions. Abigail Metzger is active with the NGO Committee on



L-R front Cheryl Morrissey, Madeline Labriola, Mary McDonald, Abigail Abysahl Metzger, Marie Dennis, back Rev. Paul Lansu, Patrick Ryan, Beth Begley, Jose Henriquez, Matthew Marquardt.

Israel and Palestine and networks both here in NY and in Washington D.C. Pat Ryan and Mary McDonald follow Indigenous issues. Madeline Labriola is our Treasurer.

Beth is also Secretary of the interfaith Committee of Religious NGOs, which works on Interfaith Harmony Day, monthly programming and the potential role of religious traditions in peacemaking and the prevention of violence. Beth is also working with the organisers of the People's Climate March on Sept 21. (<http://peoplesclimate.org/global>). This is an effort to mobilise an overwhelming expression of public support here in NY and worldwide for an effective climate change treaty. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has convened a Climate Change Summit here for Sept 23 (<http://www.un.org/climatechange/climate-summit-2014>). This is a chance to make our values visible.

Now that so many aspects of the UN are on the net there are many ways to connect. You can view UN proceedings live on UN web TV. (www.un.org/webcast/contact.html). All of the issues addressed by NGO committees have email lists and many have web sites. We all know that decisions are made at the home capital. Work here is important - work on the national level is just as important. We have the tools to work so much more closely together. How can we best do that?

Beth Begley, Pax Christi International team member at the UN in New York.

If you would like to connect with the work Beth is happy to be contacted: b.begley@paxchristi.net

Diary

21 September, Sussex

Memorial for Humanity, on UN International Day of Peace. Gathering at 2.30pm at Beachy Head Peace Memorial then walk along Peace Path. Organised by Eastbourne for Peace & Liberty.

21-27 September: World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel

Resources on the Pax Christi website to help plan events and times of prayer or contact office 020 8203 4884.

23 September, Newcastle

Ecumenical Service for WWPP1 at St

Mary's RC Cathedral, Newcastle-upon-Tyne at 7.30pm. Pat Gaffney of Pax Christi will participate.

24 September, Nottingham

Human Rights and Peacemaking in Palestine. Talk for WWPP1 at 7.00pm with Ann Farr of Pax Christi. Cathedral Hall, St Barnabus Cathedral, Nottingham NG1 5AE.

4-11 October Drone Week of Action

4 October National Demonstration at RAF Croughton, Northamptonshire. More

information and resources here <http://dronecampaignnetwork.wordpress.com/>

9 November, London

Movement for the Abolition of War, annual Remembrance Day lecture with speaker, Michael Morpurgo. 3.00pm at Imperial War Museum, London. Details from www.abolishwar.org.uk

Check our website Calendar and Members' Report page for more news of events, and do let us have your news!

Approaches to Remembrance and First World War Commemorations

Pax Christi has been collecting suggestions about how to make sure that peace is central to Remembrance and First World War centenary events. Our website *First World War Peace Plans* page offers information on events, articles and talks, general resources including films and visual materials, as well as suggestions for services and vigils paxchristi.org.uk/news-and-events/first-world-war-peace-plans/. Do share your own events and resources with us as the centenary progresses.

What tone, language, and symbols are appropriate?
What distinctive peace messages do we want to convey?
Here are some of the suggestions arising from our recent Remembrance Seminar, or sent in by members.

Approach and messages:

- Respect. Engage in discussion about what we are ‘remembering’ and appreciate why people place such value on Remembrance Day.
- Does our Eucharistic remembering, ‘Do this in memory of me’, shed light on how we might best remember war, violence and sacrifice? Might this help us to face criticisms of being unpatriotic and reclaim a deeper meaning that calls for ever-new efforts to work for peace and justice?
- There is nothing glorious about war and no room for triumphalism or nationalism. Liturgies and events need to reflect the international dimension of war. Parishes and communities today include many people with direct experience of war. Towns may have twinning links with war-torn areas, or countries that were involved in the First World War. How might these links be woven into commemoration events?
- The human cost of war, from the First World War to the present, is part of our remembering. Do we acknowledge the real costs of war and confess our national complicity in it? This might include looking at support for the arms trade, the Trident nuclear programme, and lack of investment in peacemaking initiatives today. *The First World War in Numbers* is on our website, and more statistics can be found on this excellent new website: [Arming All Sides](http://armingallsides.on-the-record.org.uk/) <http://armingallsides.on-the-record.org.uk/>
- We can tell the lesser-known stories of the peacemakers of that time: the conscientious objectors, Benedict XV, the women who campaigned to end the war. *Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience* (available on our website) includes some of these. Pax Christi now has information on 90 Catholic COs for you to research further, and celebrate the COs of your area.

Appropriate language, symbols, and readings

- Should we say of the war dead, ‘those whose lives were taken away’ in place of ‘those who lost their lives’ or ‘those who gave their lives’?
- If red poppies are used, can white poppies be used too? Someone wrote, ‘I wear a red poppy because I remember and a white one because I hope’. In using red poppies do we recall their true significance, the need to lament war and of the commitment to ‘war never again’?
- Other symbols that might be used:
 - A prayer tree, real or created, on which people hang their prayers of remembrance and reconciliation written on cut-out white leaves.
 - The photo-image of earth from space
 - A map of the world with places of conflict today clearly marked
 - A peace candle, perhaps passed on from an older to a younger member of the community during a prayer of commitment
 - White poppy seeds, planted as a symbol and commitment to work for peace.
- In ‘naming’ ceremonies or litanies of the war-dead of a parish or community can COs, medics, peacemakers, aid workers, diplomatic teams, journalists be included?
- Use quotations from peace poets: Sassoon’s *Remorse or Suicide in the Trenches* or Wilfred Owen’s *Parable of the Old Man and the Young*, or *Futility*, or *Dulce et decorum est* - and quotations from Pope Francis and other recent Popes on war.
- Include voices of those who have fought in recent wars from Veterans for Peace UK, veteransforpeace.org.uk/

News from the office

Peace Sunday, 18 January 2015.

The theme is *Slaves no more, but brothers and sisters*. Please put the date in your parish Diary and start thinking about how best you might mark the day. Liturgy and other materials will be sent to parishes in November and we have many resources on our website, why not take a look. The personal involvement of members is invaluable in making Peace Sunday work and secures financial support to Pax Christi!

On-line giving

We now have the facility for on-line donations and membership. Please let others know of this easy way of supporting Pax Christi.

Peace Education Schools Outreach Day: 11 November 2014, Manchester Friends Meeting House

Pax Christi, in collaboration with Quaker Peace & Social Witness, are facilitating another Peace Education Schools Outreach Day. The workshop is for members who would like to do some peace education outreach to local schools. Participants will have the opportunity to share peace education project experiences, ideas, or plans, and engage with new peace education resources.

There is no charge to attend the event but participants must book their place in advance - spaces are limited. Contact Matt on: education@paxchristi.org.uk

Pax Christi promoting Zaytoun Palestinian products

Planning a stall or event for the World Week of Prayer for Palestine and Israel, or a Diocesan event or Christmas market? Pax Christi now stock Olive Oil, Sun-Dried Tomatoes, Za’atar, Dates, Almonds and Olive Oil Soap, together with the simple Olive Wood sets of Stars and Angels made in Bethlehem. This is a great way to support the people of Palestine and raise awareness of the issues of Palestine and Israel.

If you are interested contact Peter Hickey on 020 8203 4884 or orders@paxchristi.org.uk.