



# newsletter

of the Maine Chapter  
of the United Nations Association



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## NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

These are parlous times for the international community and for the United Nations. This Newsletter is not the place to record the moves and counter-moves by the members of the Security Council concerning compliance or otherwise by the government of Iraq with resolutions of the Council, or the assertions by the United States government that the United Nations "is on trial" or in danger of becoming "irrelevant." However the issue of Iraq eventuates, the day-to-day work of the United Nations will continue, across a wide range of political and economic issues. Likewise, the UNA-Maine, whose growing membership reflects the increased interest of Maine citizens in the work of the UN, will continue to pursue its programs, which will be chronicled in this Newsletter.

## ANNUAL MEETING ELECTIONS

Officers and Directors of the Chapter for the year 2003 were elected at the annual meeting, on December 7, 2002. The new line-up appears on the left-hand side of this page. The principal changes were:

**Thurston Holt** moved from Director to President

**Bob Howe** moved from President to Treasurer

**Trudi Schneider** moved from Treasurer to Director

**Anne Brautigam** and Suzanne Hedrick were elected as Directors.

**Anne Brautigam:** Long interested in international affairs, partly due to her children's Peace Corps activities in African and Indian Ocean countries. Served on the Boards of the Bluegrass chapter and the Kentucky Division for many years and was Secretary of both organizations.

**Suzanne Hedrick:** Born in a small papermill town in Maine, she has a background of teaching and working in the cause of international peace and justice, particularly with WITNESS FOR PEACE on whose New England steering committee she now sits.

**Bob Howe** leaves the post of chapter president after four years in that capacity, with the gratitude of the Board and the membership. During his tenure, chapter membership expanded to an all-time high; the Model UN grew from a modest beginning as a mock Security Council, with 30 students participating, to a planned 5-body model, with 250 students.

**Thurston Holt** has given yeoman service to the Chapter Board of Directors over a period of nine years, during which he served variously as Treasurer, Acting Secretary, Chair of Nominating and Membership Committees. He has coached in three of the model UNs and served as judge in the World Affairs Council "World Quest."

The Newsletter is a quarterly publication of the UNA Maine.  
Editor -Bruce Stedman; Production Manager - Selma Sternlieb

## MODEL UN 2003

Plans are proceeding for the 5th annual model UN in Maine, again under the leadership of board member, professor Lynn Kuzma of USM. The event is scheduled to be held at the USM Gorham campus from May 13 to May 15th. Fifteen schools and 250 students are expected to participate, deliberating in five different UN bodies. The Board has decided that the increased size of the event warrants an increase in the level of our financial participation from \$2500 to \$3000. All chapter members and many non-member friends will be approached for contributions to this worthy program.

## RALPH BUNCHE CENTENNIAL

A year-long 100th anniversary program is planned, to run from August 2003 to August 2004, to celebrate the life of Nobelist and distinguished international civil servant, Dr. Ralph Johnson Bunche. The organizers of the centennial are the Ralph Bunche Centenary Commemoration Committee and the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies. The UNA Maine Chapter expects to sponsor an event in Maine as part of this celebration. Details will be published as they become available.

## NEWS BRIEFS

*excerpted from UN WIRE, which appears five days a week at <http://www.unwire.org>:*

**December 11, '02:** Canada's House of Commons approved Canada's participation in the Kyoto protocol by a vote of 195-77.

**December 12, '02:** Scientists claim global warming could fuel a rise in the incidence of malaria, in an article published in NATURE. NASA scientists called 2002 the second warmest year on record, behind 1998 and ahead of 2001.

**December 16, '02:** A grassroots campaign to make up for \$34 million withheld by the Bush administration from the UN Fund for Population Activities raised more than \$145,000 since August. The Campaign aims at one dollar donations from 34 million Americans.

**December 19, '02:** UNEP (the UN Environment Program) and the Foundation for Global Peace and Environment launched a world-wide painting competition for children ages 6 to 15, with the theme of protecting oceans, skies and forests. Last year the contest attracted more than 9000 entries world-wide.

**January 2, '03:** Five new members were elected to the UN Security Council: Germany, Spain, Pakistan, Chile and Angola, replacing outgoing members Colombia, Ireland, Mauritius, Singapore and Norway.

**February 5, '03:** The International Court of Justice ruled unanimously that the US must temporarily stay the executions of three Mexican citizens, saying that it needed more time to investigate whether Mexican inmates on US death rows had received their legal rights to help from the Mexican government. In January, Mexico filed a lawsuit against the US, seeking stays for all 51 Mexican citizens facing the death penalty in US prisons. The court rejected the US argument that granting Mexico's request would "drastically interfere with US sovereign rights." The US is expected to continue to ignore Court rulings in death penalty cases.

## TALES OF SOMALIA

Recent publicity about relationships between the city and the Somali community of Lewiston have reminded the editor of experiences in Somalia during his service with the United Nations Development Program, in 1974, which may be of interest. [Somalia was formed on July 1, 1960 by merger of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. Its first head of state was (at the outset) a benevolent dictator named Siad Barre. Like Tito in Yugoslavia, he had the strength of character and public respect to enable him to keep the country unified, in spite of the restlessness of the largely nomadic clans and tribes which comprised the citizenry.]

### Diplomatic Relations

Not long after the birth of Somalia, its relations with the British government became severely strained over a dispute as to the correct location of Somalia's southern border. Britain had established a crown commission to look into the question and its recommendations gave certain small areas of territory, which the Somalis claimed, to her neighbors, Kenya and Ethiopia. The commission's report created a fuss in Mogadiscio. Matters came to a head during an official visit of mine. Our Resident Representative at the time was Mr. Ken Robinson, a citizen of Trinidad. The Somali Foreign Minister telephoned Ken and told him that his government had decided, with great reluctance, that they had no choice but to break off diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Ken expressed surprise and sorrow at the news, but the Foreign Minister interrupted: "Yes, yes, I agree it is sad. But Mr. Robinson, I'm calling you with a request. How, precisely should this be done? We want the procedure to be perfectly correct!" Robinson promised to get the required information, and telephoned the British Ambassador. "Do you not have a handbook

on diplomatic usage, which would contain information, for instance, on the proper procedures for breaking diplomatic relations? I wonder if I could borrow it?" The handbook was provided and delivered by the UNDP to the Foreign Ministry. A couple of days later, the entire diplomatic corps was summoned to the Ministry to witness the formal severance of relations between Somalia and Her Britannic Majesty's government. The Foreign Minister gave a sweet, brief speech about how sorry he was that his government had found it necessary to break relations, and he gave the Ambassador a generous amount of time to pack up and leave. The Ambassador replied with great civility, echoing the Foreign Minister's regrets. When their exchange was completed, most members of the diplomatic corps departed, but a few of us were detained and ushered into the Minister's private office, where the Minister and the Ambassador embraced, and then glasses of champagne were handed around.

As Robinson and I were leaving, the Minister asked for our verdict. Was it okay? We thought it went well. He said, "Well, the little book you lent me said 'it should be done gracefully,'" and it was accomplished according to the handbook borrowed from the British embassy.

### **Literacy**

The language of Somalia is Somali. Until the mid-1970s it existed only in oral form. The absence of a written language was obviously a terrible handicap for the government. Siad Barre decided that the Somali language should be converted to written form, and after extended debate it was decided that Latin, as distinct from Arabic, characters should be used for this purpose. (Spoken, Somali sounds much like Arabic.) Until that project was completed, one could say that the entire population was in a sense illiterate; everyone had to learn the written language from scratch. Siad Barre instructed that the first Somalis to be trained in the written language would be the secondary school students, who would then become teachers for the rest of the populace. Crash courses were undertaken with the students, and when they were completed, open-air schools were established around the countryside, where students, aided with blackboards and chalk, gave courses to the local people on reading and writing in the Somali language. I witnessed these courses in progress during one of my visits. Typically, a couple of dozen Somalis clustered around a blackboard, in the sand, learning their language!

Once on that visit I was travelling through the countryside with the District Commissioner, who explained the program as we were driving along. Then, we overtook an elderly gentleman, barefoot, walking along the track, leading a camel with a rope halter. "Now," the DC said, "let's put the project to the test." We stopped, and the DC called the old man over to the jeep. Greetings were exchanged, and the Com-

missioner asked, "What is your name?" The old man replied. The Commissioner asked, "can you write your name?" "YES!" the old man shouted, with obvious pride. So the Commissioner handed him a scrap of paper and a pencil stub, and asked him to show us. The old man screwed up his face with the concentrated effort he was making and slowly and carefully inscribed his name! The Commissioner congratulated him, shook his hand, and we drove off, leaving a happy camel driver in the dust.

### **Sand Dune Fixation**

A number of villages along the southern coast of the country, not very far from the capital, Mogadiscio, were threatened with inundation by sand dunes which were 'migrating' slowly inland, driven by the unceasing onshore winds. Siad Barre determined that they had to be stopped. The government acquired stocks of shrubs and grasses that were able to survive in sand, and assigned every able-bodied male in the country (including the president himself) to one day per month when he would be taken by lorry to the sand dune site, to spend the entire day planting this fixating vegetation by hand. The lorries were requisitioned from trucking companies. Several hundred men labored at the site every day, and since every male citizen was involved, there was no complaining or shirking; indeed, they took pride in the performance of that task. I remember that a particular minister was unable to receive me on a given day because "it is my day in the dunes?"

### **Culture Gaps**

At the time I visited Somalia on a drought inspection mission, the USSR was the principal source of foreign aid for the country and had also established a huge naval base on the northern coast. Our Resident Representative at that time was a Soviet citizen, an engineer. (UNDP needed to appoint citizens of important donor countries to our field posts, but it wasn't easy to find a country which would willingly accept a Soviet national as a UNDP Resident Representative. Somalia was one such country.) The Resident Representative was a relatively new appointee, and his wife had just arrived in Mogadiscio to join him. She traveled by Soviet naval vessel. They entertained me at dinner in their home, and in the course of the conversation I remarked that I was impressed by the skill of the young Somali pilots who flew us around the country in huge ancient Soviet helicopters. The Resident Representative's wife cautioned me. "These people will never be able to master complicated technical skills, so be careful!" The lady had been in the country a few days only. She had no personal knowledge of the qualities of Somalis. What she was telling us was what she had learned from other Soviet citizens, presumably aboard ship. It was an indication of the parochial attitude of the Soviets, demonstrating why their foreign missions had great difficulty in establishing good local relations with client populations.

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