



Pax Scotia

Issue 60

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The United Nations at 80: Can it achieve its goal to avert war?

Mary T. Yelenick, a retired attorney, is Pax Christi International's Main NGO Representative to the United Nations in New York. Other members of the Pax Christi International UN Team in New York include Beth Begley, Abigail Abysalh Metzger, Marie Dennis, Doug Hostetter, Sophie Jay, Joe Donnelly, Moses Osiro, and Aileen Meehan. Mary is also a Member of the Board of Pax Christi International, and of its Executive Committee. In this year of anniversaries, few are as significant as the founding 80 years ago of the UN.. Here Mary weighs the organisation in the balance...

Eighty years ago witnessed the emergence of a host of new institutions and instruments designed to prevent the atrocities of World War II from ever being repeated. Among those entities — in addition to Pax Christi International, formed in 1945 by a French woman seeking reconciliation with her German neighbours — was the United Nations, whose Charter described its purpose as being “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”

Yet while Pax Christi International members continue to pursue the goal of promoting and uplifting peace and reconciliation, it is less clear whether the United Nations community similarly adheres to its founding principle. This is because there persist at the United Nations significant structural impediments to its founders' goal that future wars be averted.

The principal such impediment lies in the veto power wielded by each of the five Permanent Members of the Security Council. Those Permanent Members, whose composition reflects the “victors” of World War II (the United States, France, the UK, China, and Russia), do not shy from wielding the veto — some, such as the US and Russia, more than others. The Security Council also largely ignores Chapter VI, Article 27 of the U.N. Charter, which states that Security Council Members who are parties to a dispute shall refrain from voting with respect to that dispute.

It has been very eye-opening, as a member of Pax Christi International's NGO Team at the United Nations for the last decade, to witness the degree to which one nation out of 193 UN Member States can exercise its power to override the votes and positions of the majority of the global community — a power that, too frequently, kills. It has also been frustrating to witness how the geographical membership of the Security Council has remained unchanged in a vastly changed global environment.

But it has also been buoying to witness the courage of smaller nations, largely excluded from the UN circles of power, who take their places on the 15-member Security Council for brief terms — and who maximise their short time on the Security Council to model what the UN founders must have contemplated: issuing clarion calls for global peace and solidarity; repudiating the lies that the possession of nuclear weapons makes the world safer; and demonstrating how people from divergent nations can act in the interests of all.

Strikingly, many of the members of the Security Council who have impressed me the most — and who have demonstrated the power of the United Nations in framing and pursuing true security — have been women.

It is in those members of the Security Council — nations less known, less exalted, less powerful, and less beholden to global weapons manufacturers — that I have found the strength and beauty of the United Nations. It is the future that was once contemplated, and to which we can, and must— in the interests of all of humanity — devote our work.

We will continue to work toward the goal that one day the United Nations will live up to its great promise, with its members recognising the madness, folly, and existential threat to all posed by war anywhere on this small planet.

Mary T. Yelenick



Rab Burnett is a retired teacher, Laudato Si' Animator, member of the Care of Creation Office, Pax Christi Scotland and the Scottish Laity Network, and a grandfather of six. Here, on the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis's Laudato Si encyclical, he explores its impact on the world - and himself.



Climate: when will we enter into that new relationship with Mother Earth?

Personal Impact

In choosing the name Francis, the then Cardinal Bergoglio gave a clear indication of how he hoped his papacy would evolve. Francis of Assisi, "the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation, ... with which we don't have such a good relationship." In Laudato Si' he fleshed out this hope as he invited "every person on this planet" to enter into a new relationship with Mother Earth and all who inhabit her.

For me four things stand out:

- * The forceful rejection of the notion that our being created in God's image justifies absolute domination over other creatures
- * The complex crisis we face is both environmental and social: we are to hear, and respond to, both the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor
- * The current economic model is an "economy of death" and needs to be transformed to an "economy of life"
- * The challenge: "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?" As a grandfather this question resonates most deeply within me and drives me forward to prayer and action.

Commitment of Church

Within the Catholic community in Scotland there are some strong signs of hope with Eco-Congregations, the growth of Laudato Si' Schools, parish Care of Creation groups, individuals who have become Laudato Si' Animators. The work of the Justice and Peace Commission, SCIAF and Pax Christi are all signs of active hope, as is the Care of Creation Office of the Bishops' Conference Of Scotland.

However, there are differences between and across dioceses regarding awareness of Laudato Si' and its message. Sadly some clergy and laity appear indifferent to its challenge; whilst others are openly hostile and dismiss it as being an area that Pope Francis should not have got involved in! They question the scientific evidence and his critique of the dominating economic system "being based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods" and leading us to a 'throwaway culture'.

Let us join Pope Leo XIV in praying "for the conversion of many people, inside and outside of the church, who still do not recognise the urgency of caring for our common home".

Climate and Peace

The UK government's decision to cut overseas aid by £6bn to pay for increased defence spending should be seen in the context of the climate cost of military action and climate change as a driver of conflict.

Recent research has found that global militaries are responsible for nearly 5.5% of total global greenhouse gas emissions. If it were a country, it would be the fourth biggest emitter in the world and yet it is one of the least regulated sectors in terms of climate impact.

Climate change is now recognised as a driver of conflict, as often the regions most affected by droughts, floods, and extreme weather events are also the most vulnerable to violence and instability. They are also the nations who have contributed least to the climate crisis and often where our overseas aid was most productive.

Our increase in defence spending ties us into a brutal cycle: war hastens climate change, and climate change feeds the conditions for future wars.

I remember, in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan naming and denouncing the Masters of War who lie and deceive. For the sake of Mother Earth, and all who inhabit it, we need to reject their lies and deception.

Rab Burnett



Mike Mwenda, based in Zambia, is an environmental and human rights journalist, passionate about documenting the stories and struggles of marginalised communities. He freelances for international publications such as *LifeGate* and *The Bulletins*, bringing global attention to local issues. Beyond journalism, Mike works with the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI), an international organisation dedicated to promoting mental health and psychosocial support for children and young people in East and Southern Africa. In this role, he coordinates projects focused on child and adolescent mental health and actively advocates for the mental well-being of babies, young children, and their caregivers. He is currently pursuing a degree in developmental studies.

A view from the Global South: UK's Gaza Shame



Mike Mwenda

The brutal war currently being waged by Israel against the defenceless Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank can only be described as a modern-day genocide.

The horrifying images and videos of destroyed homes, lifeless children, and grieving families are being livestreamed daily on our smartphones and television screens. The scale of suffering is unimaginable, yet it continues to unfold before the eyes of the world in real time.

Israel is acting with complete impunity. They have sealed off the borders, cutting Gaza off from essential supplies, with no meaningful humanitarian aid allowed in. Reputable humanitarian organisations that once distributed food to the territory have been sidelined and replaced with American- and Zionist-aligned groups, whose distribution systems fail the desperate population.

The consequences are visible: Gazans are shot at and bombed daily as they trek long distances just to reach food aid, while children are wasting away from malnutrition.

What is even more disturbing is the response of the international community. Instead of taking decisive action to stop the atrocities, many nations have chosen to remain passive observers. Some have issued statements of concern, but little has been done to hold Israel accountable or to protect the lives of innocent civilians. The very institutions meant to safeguard human rights and uphold international law appear paralysed.

In particular, Britain must be ashamed for disbanding and labelling a nonprofit human rights group as a terrorist organisation simply for calling for an end to the war on defenceless people. And yet, Britain continues to this day to supply military components to Israel's war machine, ensuring that the killing and destruction go on.

Worse still, powerful nations such as the United States and several of its allies, including the European Union, are not just silent but actively complicit.

They continue to supply Israel with weapons, funding and political cover, enabling the violence to escalate further. This complicity makes a mockery of the principles these nations claim to stand for, deepening the sense of injustice felt by millions around the globe.

Oh, my Gaza! my heart bleeds for you.

And we must ask ourselves, what kind of humanity have we become? How have we reached a point where the suffering of children is livestreamed across the world while leaders look away? When did human life become so cheap, so expendable, that entire communities can be starved, bombed, and silenced without consequence? History will remember this moment; not only for the brutality inflicted but also for the deafening silence of those who could have acted.

I commend the little but great efforts of Pax Christi Scotland for bravely calling for an end to this war and for championing the cause of peace when so many others remain silent. Voices like theirs remind us that compassion and justice still exist, even in these dark times.

I strongly believe that this war cannot and will not be settled on the battlefield. Lasting peace will never be achieved through bombs and bullets but only through genuine negotiations, diplomacy, and a courageous commitment to justice for all.

Mike Mwenda

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, book projects, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

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Membership Reminder

Please pay in November on the membership page of our website, or, if you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment. If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page or by standing order - thank you.

Membership fees per annum are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities: <https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

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Where have all the protest songs gone?



Anne Dobbing, Pax Christi Scotland executive board member, who wrote the words below, explains (right) what prompted her to write a protest song for 2025 - a year when we cry out for peace

I watch the suffering in Palestine at the moment - and in other places too - Sudan, Eritrea, Haiti, Congo - and I wondered where today are the protest songs and the singers who jogged the consciences of the people around the world when I was a young girl. I thought of songs such as Streets of London, Blowing in the Wind, Black and White, We Shall Overcome, and I wondered why there is comparative silence from musicians in calling out the violence and carnage inflicted on children, men and women.

So I wrote a song myself, to the tune of Where have all the flowers gone?

I don't think of myself as a musician, though I do play the piano a little. I am a retired teacher and just a granny to an 8-year old grand daughter, growing up in a splintered world. My song may not be high quality, but it is heart felt - and I would love to hear it sung by really anyone that feels able. Songs can sometimes cross boundaries of politics, beliefs and opinions, and open the awareness of people to real issues of importance that were previously ignored.

Anne Dobbing

Where are all the protest songs?

Where are all the protest songs,
Shouting Palestine?

Who is left to write a song?

No one I know.

Music makers churn out words

But Gaza's children die unheard

Will no one sing for them?

Where have your voices gone?

Where are all the protest songs?
Shouting Palestine?

Where's the anger, where's the
passion?

Does no one care?

How can you choose to turn
away

While soldiers slaughter every
day?

Stop this insanity,

For God's sake make some
noise.

Where are all the protest songs,
Shedding tears for Palestine?

Who is left to mourn the children

Lives snatched away?

Mothers weep while bullets fly

Search the rubble for a baby's cry

And as the world looks on

Palestine mourns its dead.

Where are all the protest
songs,

Singing Palestine?

Who is left to shame the
tyrants

Who steal the land?

Bulldozers flatten people's
homes

Boastful men create 'iron
domes'

And talk of 'real estate'

As Gaza's people die.

Where are all the protest
songs

Screaming Palestine?

When will people learn to
value

All humankind?

What will be the legacy

Of genocide witnessed
silently?

Debased humanity,

Too cowed to write a song.

*Written by Anne Dobbing, hoping
someone will sing this somewhere.
Tune: Where have all the flowers
gone?*

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