

WHAT HAS THE UNITED NATIONS DONE FOR ME LATELY?

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Note: This is an informal transcription of my set of speaking notes for the talk that I gave on January 8, 2019 for the Greater Lansing United Chapter of the Nations Association and are not intended as a formal publication. Portions of these notes describing activities of the UN and its specialized agencies are copied or paraphrased from some of the internet pages concerning those organizations, but do not provide attribution to that work except for the occasional link to web sites.

1. Introduction

a. Generally UNA members and others know about some of UN activities around the world

i. **Development** - [UN Development Programme](#)

1. \$5 billion / year into results for sustainable development, inclusive and effective democratic governance, and resilience building
2. Promote social stability
3. Battle corruption
4. Fight human rights abuses
5. Health, education and social well being
6. Fight poverty

ii. **Peace and Security** - [UN Peacekeeping](#)

1. 14 operations – 7 in Africa, 3 in Middle East; Haiti
2. strengthen ROL, train police, develop Human rights

- iii. **Human Rights - [UN Human Rights Council](#)**
- iv. **Refugees - [UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency](#)**
 - 1. An unprecedented 68.5 million people around the world have been forced from home. Among them are nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18
- v. **Nuclear Safety and non-proliferation- [International Atomic Energy Agency](#)**
 - 1. Inspects reactors in 90 countries, more than 1000 nuclear installations to ensure no diversion of nuclear materials for military use
 - 2. Exchange of information and development of safety guidelines on reactors and radioactive materials
 - 3. Monitoring of Iran's nuclear-related commitments

2. Overview

- a. But all of this seems far removed from the ordinary lives of most Americans
 - i. We support the UN because it is the right and moral thing to do
 - ii. But often UN is perceived as benefitting only the developing countries, or the war torn regions of the world
- b. Goal of this talk is to bring the UN home to us - as American citizens and residents carrying out our normal every day activities
 - i. Why DO we care? What DOES the UN do for us personally?
 - ii. Why is this important?

- c. What UN does – especially through its specialized agencies - becomes part of basic fabric of our lives, and we have no awareness of what it really does to make our lives as we live them possible
 - i. This lack of knowledge makes possible attitudes like that of Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo questioning the value of multinational organizations like the UN](#)
 - ii. Similar attitudes are unfortunately prevalent within European Union countries and this lack of knowledge helped to lead to the Brexit decision in the UK
 - d. Ultimately we need to remember the very real impact that the UN has on our own lives, and include that information in our local advocacy efforts
 - e. So I am going to tell you a story of a not very unusual day and then examine how the UN system agencies made that day possible.
3. The Story
- a. Friend Judge Mohamed flew in from Egypt to NY on Egypt Air and then to Florida and I met him there
 - b. I checked the weather report on radio
 - c. I put on T Shirt and swim suit, and we went to the beach for the day
 - d. Friend gave me book on Ancient Monuments of Egypt
 - e. Friend called parents in Egypt from his cell phone to let them know he had arrived safely
 - f. Friend sent postcard to his parents and dropped it in the mailbox
 - g. We had dinner at Il Palazzo Italian restaurant
 - i. Sea scallops
 - ii. Pasta Fra Diavolo w/ imported pasta and Italian tomatoes

- iii. Crispy chicken cutlets w Taleggio cheese
 - iv. Glass of Pinot Grigio
4. So let's examine each of the elements of this simple story to see how the United Nations activities impacted them and helped to make them possible
5. **Friend flew in from Egypt** - We know the work of FAA – but what about other countries' airlines?
- a. [International Civil Aviation Organization](#) - UN specialized agency, established 1947
 - i. [Specialized Agencies](#) – autonomous organizations created by UN but legally independent with their own budgets and rules, funded by voluntary contributions from governments, institutions and individuals
 - ii. The ICAO Council adopts standards and recommended practices concerning air navigation, prevention of unlawful interference, and facilitation of border-crossing procedures for international [civil aviation](#). In addition, ICAO defines the protocols for air accident investigation followed by transport safety authorities in countries signatory to the [Convention on International Civil Aviation](#), commonly known as the [Chicago Convention](#).
 - iii. ICAO works with the Convention's 191 Member States and industry groups to reach consensus on international civil aviation Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and policies in support of a safe, efficient, secure, economically sustainable and environmentally responsible civil aviation sector. These SARPs and policies are used by ICAO Member States to ensure that their local civil

aviation operations and regulations conform to global norms, which in turn permits **more than 100,000 daily flights in aviation's global network** to operate safely and reliably in every region of the world

iv. In our story, ICAO

1. Enabled Egypt Air to fly across national borders and to land in case of emergencies
2. Assured safety standardization on global level for Egypt Air flight
 - a. recommends practices that specify
 - i. design and performance of aircraft
 - ii. performance of pilots, flight crews, air traffic controllers, maintenance crews
 - iii. Safety Audit Oversight Programme
 1. inspects various countries' civil aviation operations
 - iv. prescribes standards for security measures (metal detectors, questions about luggage)

b. [World Meteorological Organization](#)

- i. UN Specialized agency, created 1950
- ii. Role: Collects, instantaneously redistributes analyses weather data from member states, making possible worldwide weather forecasts (10,000 planes and ships, 10,000 land based stations, 30,000 weather reports and 2,000 charts per day)
- iii. WMO's Vigil System enabled Egypt Air to determine best routes to fly to avoid bad weather

6. We checked weather report on radio

- a. WMO
 - i. Weather reporting

- ii. Global warming studies and reporting:
 - 1. Note: Intergovernmental Programme on Climate Change – created by WMO and UN Environmental Programme created 1988
 - 2. Issued alarming new report late 2018 on Global Warming of 1.5 degrees Centigrade

b. International Telecommunications Union

i. General

- 1. established 1865
- 2. world's oldest intergovernmental organization
- 3. became a UN specialized agency in 1947
- 4. 193 member states and over 700 private-sector entities and academic institutions
- 5. allocates global radio spectrum
 - a. radio, TV, mobile phones, satellite communications, aircraft and marine navigation and safety, wireless computer systems
- 6. and satellite orbits
- 7. develops the technical standards that ensure networks and technologies seamlessly interconnect

- ii. In our story. Enabled receipt of radio report without interference

7. Put on a T-shirt: Made in Indonesia from material in Malaysia

a. Where did the T Shirt come from?

i. UN Conference on Trade and Development

- 1. Permanent intergovernmental body, part of UN Secretariat, founded 1964
- 2. Goals
 - a. Work at national, regional and global level

to maximize trade and development,
integrate developing countries into world
trade

- b. Promote entrepreneurship and innovation
- c. Help local firms move up value chains
- d. Attract investment and make it more
development friendly
- e. Increase access to digital technologies
- f. policy analysis, technical cooperation
activities
- g. Achieve beneficial integration into the
international trading system

3. **In our story**, small company that wove the T shirt
was enabled by UNCTAD program working with
the government of Malaysia

b. How did the T-shirt get to the US for sale?

- i. [Automated System for Customs Data](#) (software
package developed by UNCTAD)
 - 1. Efficiently tracks goods electronically, using
modernized customs procedures
 - 2. Assists in more than 70 countries, reduces error,
fraud and corruption, improves trade and also
revenue collection
- ii. [Global Trade Point Network](#)
 - 1. Its main objective is to facilitate access for small
and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to
international markets, in particular using the
most up-to-date technologies in electronic
commerce. Through the electronically
interconnected network of Trade Points in many
countries of the world, SMEs can gain access to

the latest information and telecommunication technologies and services, make their products known to potential customers and find business partners in other countries

2. enables producers to link with distributors and banks
3. Along with World Bank and IMF - offer training for governmental officials, improve economic management, assist with balance of payment difficulties
- 4. In our story,** the Global Trade Point Network enabled the T shirt manufacturer to find funding and link to a distributor who sold the T Shorts to the US store

c. **UN Development Programme**

- i. UN funds and programmes are distinctly different from specialized agencies. In general, the funds and programmes are established by a resolution of the UN General Assembly and have a focused mandate. They are funded either mainly or entirely through voluntary contributions and have a governing body that reviews their activities. Coordination is facilitated through ECOSOC and the Chief Executives Board
- ii. UNDP focuses on sustainable development and livelihoods for the poor and also climate and disaster resilience and crisis response
- iii. In our story, UNDP provided assistance to the farmers who grew the cotton for the T shirt

8. We went swimming in the Atlantic Ocean

- a. International Maritime Agency is a specialized UN agency founded in 1958

- i. IMO promotes cooperation among government and the shipping industry to improve maritime safety and to prevent marine pollution.
 - ii. 51 treaties related to international shipping; 21 of these are related to environment – such as treaties on separate ballast tanks, and on double hulls for oil tankers
 - iii. through International Maritime Organization, pollution from tankers has been reduced more than 60% - so no clumps of oil and tarry substances from accidents, spills and discharge of bilge water
 - iv. Since 1997 also deals with pollution from chemicals, other harmful substances, garbage, sewage and, under an Annex VI adopted in 1997, air pollution and emissions from ships
 - v. **In our story**, we were able to swim without encountering oily and tar-polluted water
- b. [UN Environmental Programme](#)
- i. Part of UN Secretariat, established 1972 as result of UN Conference on the Human Environment
 - ii. Goals
 1. Monitoring, assessment and early warning
 2. Promote environmental activities throughout UN system
 3. assesses global, regional and national environmental conditions and trends and facilitates information exchange on environmentally sound technologies
 4. Technical, legal and institutional advice to governments
 - iii. Note: Campaign on plastic bags
 1. Israel (3 cents per bag, 1 year 80% reduction in

use, 50% reduction in plastic bags in sea off Israeli coast);

2. Tanzania total ban 2017, no bags in the Serengeti

iv. **In our story:** sea was NOT free from plastic bags due to inaction in the US!

9. We enjoyed the sun

a. Depletion of ozone layer was a serious danger to human, plant and animal health (danger of skin cancer, DNA mutations in plants and animals)

b. [Vienna Convention on Protection of the Ozone Layer](#) (1985) and [Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer](#) (1987)

i. universally ratified, 6 amendments brokered by UN Environmental Programme in 1987 (also by World Meteorological Organization)

ii. Industrialized countries ceased production of all ozone depleting substances by 1996

iii. results in global effort to reduce emissions depleting the ozone layer

iv. [98% reduction in worldwide consumption](#) of ozone depleting substances

v. Note: ozone layer will still take until 2050-2070 to be fully restored

vi. **In our story:** we were able to enjoy the sun without fear of immediate sunburn – [without action, due to ozone depletion, by 2065, 5 minutes exposure to the sun in Washington DC would have caused sunburn](#)

vii. Note: most recent amendment to the Convention is 6th - [Kigali Amendment](#) which came into force in force Jan. 1 2019 addresses use of Hydrofluorocarbons which are used to replace the ozone depleting substances, but are major greenhouse gases

- viii. 65 countries ratified so far – US signals will begin process of ratification
10. **We were able to enjoy the day without fear of getting sick**
- a. US international visitors:
 - i. Projected 80+ million international visitors in 2019
 - ii. Aside from those from North America, most will come from UK; China; Japan; Brazil
 - b. [World Health Organization](#) - UN Specialized agency founded 1948
 - i. The mission of the WHO Infection Prevention and Control in Health Care initiative is to assist Member States in reducing dissemination of infections associated with healthcare, by assisting with the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of national infection control policies
 - 1. The ultimate goal is to assist Member States to endorse quality promotion of health care which is safe for patients, health care workers, others in the health care setting and the environment, and to accomplish these goals in a cost-effective manner
 - ii. WHO acts as a coordinating authority on international [public health](#) which deals with health and sanitation and diseases and sends medical teams to help combat [epidemics](#)
 - iii. Diseases combatted by WHO
 - 1. Smallpox
 - a. The last known natural case was in Somalia in 1977. 13 year effort; It was declared eradicated in 1980 following a global immunization campaign led by the World

Health Organization

b. Saves \$1 billion per year in immunizations

2. Polio

a. 85% of infants around the world received three doses of polio vaccine.

b. Targeted for global eradication, polio has been stopped in all countries except for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nigeria. (original goal was full eradication by 2000)

c. 32 wild polio cases in 2018 – Pakistan; 101 [vaccine derived](#) (mutated) – occurs where not broadly based immunization, infection from those recently vaccinated

d. Note work of Rotary International and the UN Childrens Fund supporting the [Polio Eradication Initiative](#)

3. West Nile encephalitis (disease knows no boundaries, imported into New York City from Israel, Tunisia)

a. [WHO regional office](#) for Europe and WHO region of the Americas are intensively supporting WNV surveillance and outbreak response activities respectively in Europe and in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean

4. WHO is pressing for international eradication of tetanus, whooping cough, diphtheria (85%), TB 1974 - 5%, now 80%, (Saves 3 million lives per year)

5. Zika virus

a. started in Americas

- b. WHO declared a public health emergency in 2016
 - c. due to international prominence of alert, 45 vaccines are now in trials, some in human trials
 - d. WHO determined in 2018 to list it as one of 7 diseases listed on the [Blueprint list of Priority Diseases](#) (along with Ebola, MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome), SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome))
 - 6. Ebola: WHO aims to prevent Ebola outbreaks by maintaining surveillance for Ebola virus disease and supporting at-risk countries to developed preparedness plans; supports vaccination programs – training, capacity building; awareness
 - a. Note: WHO initial response to Ebola was hampered by cuts in funding by US
 - b. Note WHO Ebola awareness posters in Tanzania airports
 - 7. Influenza: Global influenza virological surveillance has been conducted through WHO's [Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System](#) (GISRS) for over half a century.
- 11. **I received a book from Egypt book on Ancient Monuments of Egypt**
 - a. [World Intellectual Property Organization](#)
 - i. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations created in 1967 and headquartered in [Geneva](#), Switzerland
 - ii. purpose is to encourage creative activity and to promote the protection of [intellectual](#)

- [property](#) throughout the world. The organization administers several treaties concerning the protection of intellectual property rights
- iii. Along with WTO (discussed later) negotiates and enforces firms' IP rights in foreign countries (enables establishment of foreign subsidiaries, export of high tech goods), helps protect patents and trademarks
 - iv. Through treaties WIPO provides protection to works of artists, authors and composers, in more than 120 countries
 - 1. affords patent protection in more than 100 countries
 - 2. Result is easier and less costly to protect works, easier to distribute new products and ideas without relinquishing control over property rights
 - v. In our story., the international protection for intellectual property rights of authors provided by WIPO enabled author of book to protect and earn from his work
- b. Now – what about what the SUBJECT of the book was – Ancient monuments of Egypt
- i. Cultural Preservation: United Nations Economic and Social Council [UNESCO](#) (founded 1946)
 - ii. [World Heritage Program](#)
 - 1. Encourages State Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their World Heritage sites
 - 2. Helps States Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training

3. Provides emergency assistance for World Heritage sites in immediate danger
 4. Assists in protection and preservation of nearly 1100 sites in > 170 countries
 5. 1960s - Saved Abu Simbel from being covered by the Nile after Aswan Dam was built - cut into blocs and moved, piece by piece, several hundred feet higher, built artificial mountain behind it as a backdrop
 6. Luxor, Karnak, St. Catherine Monastery, Bent Pyramid and Step Pyramid
- iii. So in our story, the preservation of the monuments that are the subject of the book is assisted by the World Heritage Program of UNESCO
12. **Friend called parents by mobile phone to let them know he arrived safely**
- a. International Telecommunications Union
 - i. Communications
 - ii. mobile phone systems and frequencies
 - iii. promotes cooperation in assigning positions for stationary satellites
 - iv. standards which foster efficient interconnection of national communications infrastructures
13. **Friend wrote a postcard to his parents and dropped it in the mailbox**
- a. International mail system
 - i. How does a postcard paid for in the US get delivered to Egypt? Who pays for the cost of delivery in Egypt? What happens if there is lots more mail going TO Egypt from the US than FROM Egypt to the US?
 - ii. How is it arranged that we pay the same price for an

international letter no matter whether it is going to Egypt or the UK or Kyrgyzstan?

b. [Universal Postal Union](#)

i. General

1. Established in 1874
2. became UN specialized agency 1948
3. It sets the rules for international mail exchanges and makes recommendations to stimulate growth in mail, parcel and financial services volumes and improve quality of service for customers.
4. coordinates postal policies between member nations, and hence the worldwide postal system. Each member country agrees to the same set of terms for conducting international postal duties.

ii. Impact

1. Standardization of mail tariffs
 - a. were about 1200 tariffs, now substantially reduced, standardized
 - b. same price from US anywhere in world for 1st class mail; other countries similar
2. Distribution of postal receipts based on difference in total weight between the 2 countries; impact of e-commerce has impacted this – under current negotiation
3. allows mail to move easily across borders, prevents losses of mail

14. Had dinner in Il Palazzo

a. Sea scallops

i. [UN Convention on Law of the Sea](#)

1. Came into force 1994

2. 146 states ratified
 3. US has not ratified it but recognizes as codification of customary international law, participates in modifications discussions
 4. Coverage
 - a. Establishes national maritime jurisdiction (fishing, exploitation rights)
 - i. Territorial waters
 - ii. continental shelf
 - iii. exclusive economic zone (200 mile border)
 - b. Protects national resources, prevents over-fishing (US IS a party to this treaty)
 - ii. So the scallops served at dinner were safely and sustainably fished from US waters without interference or overfishing by other nations
- b. Chicken
- i. **Food and Agriculture Organization**
 1. UN specialized agency established 1945
 2. Mission to defeat hunger, establish food security
 3. Efforts to combat disease threatening food security through disease surveillance, and advocacy and communication
 - a. **Avian flu**
 - i. FAO organized international efforts to prevent spread of highly virulent strain of avian flu in West Africa 2015
 - ii. H5N1 has killed tens of millions of domestic birds and probably tens of thousands of wild birds
 - iii. widely estimated that at least 200

million domestic birds (out of a total world population of 10 billion) have either died or been culled as a result of H5N1

- iv. in the last 10 years there has been a progressive increase in the number of outbreaks of avian flu in poultry compared with the previous 40 years
- v. Danger of Crossover – over 1600 human cases since 2013, with 1/3 of patients dying (exposure through eating improperly cooked birds or close association in farms and wet markets)

b. Rinderpest

- i. [FAO led effort of destruction and sequestration of Rinderpest virus](#)
- ii. not present in US, but did affect Africa, Asia, Europe
- iii. Only second disease (after smallpox) to be fully eradicated (last known case 2011)

4. Improved agricultural, irrigation practices, climate change issues – improve lives, reduce economic migration

- ii. So efforts of FAO led ability to eat chicken at inexpensive prices due to prevention of Avian flu which could devastate US poultry production causing economic hardship and increasing prices

c. Imported Italian tomatoes

- i. Food safety: WHO and FAO UN have established

1. [CODEX Alimentarius Commission](#)
 - a. intergovernmental body with over [180 members](#), within the framework of the Joint Food Standards Programme established by the [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) (FAO) and the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO)
 - b. purpose of protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade
 - c. Commission also promotes coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations.
 - d. First to recommend at international level expiration date on food products
 - e. standards for more than 200 food commodities and safety limits for more than 3000 food containers
 - f. Sets norms for additives and limits for residues of pesticides
2. So the canned tomatoes on my pasta were safe because their growth, harvesting, packaging and shipping met UN international standards for health and safety

d. Pinot Grigio

- i. so how did the wine (and the tomatoes) GET to the US?
- ii. Contract for purchase
 1. [UN Commission on International Trade Law](#) (UNCITRAL)

- a. Established 1980 by the UN General Assembly as a subsidiary of the GA
 - 2. [Convention on International Sale of Goods](#) (drafted by UNCITRAL)
 - a. standardized terms for contracts between parties of signatory states (unless they agree otherwise)
 - b. what is an offer, an acceptance, what are the rights and obligations of buyer and seller in case of a breach, or an inability to perform?
 - c. creates certainty, reduces transaction costs
 - 3. [UN Convention on International Bills of Exchange and International Promissory Notes](#) (by UNCITRAL)
 - a. Standardizes payments processes for international transactions in goods
 - 4. [UN Convention on Independent Stand-by Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit](#) (1995)
 - a. Codifies basic principles and standardizes use and terms off independent guarantees and stand-by letters of credit
 - 5. So the UNCITRAL conventions facilitated and standardized the entire process of contracting for and paying for the Pinot Grigio, reducing transaction costs and uncertainties
- iii. Importation of wine
- 1. [World Trade Organization](#) (WTO)
 - a. WTO was established instead of the failed proposal for a specialized agency dealing with [trade issues](#), the [International Trade](#)

Organization.

- b. NOT a UN organization but maintains close relations and cooperation with UN
- c. of major importance in international trade
- d. operates a global system of trade rules negotiated by all the member states
- e. acts as a forum for negotiating multilateral trade agreements with goal of reduction of tariff and other non-tariff barriers
- f. resolves trade disputes between its members
- g. supports the needs of developing countries
- 2. As a result of the negotiated WTO rules on tariff and non-tariff barriers, the wine and the tomatoes were imported with low tariffs (wine tariff into US is now only \$.05 per bottle)
- iv. Shipping of the wine
 - 1. UN Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea Act (Hamburg Convention 1978)
 - a. Sets standards for liability and compensation for loss of goods
 - b. United Nations Convention on the Liability of Operators of Transport Terminals in International Trade (1992) is still in process of signature and ratification
 - 2. UN Convention on Law of the Sea
 - a. Rules for navigation on high seas (including liability for shipping)
- v. Name and label on the wine: WIPO maintains a register of more than 3,000 national trademarks

15. **Conclusions**

- a. World is truly a global community, even for Americans with only 2 international borders
 - b. There is a strong need for global cooperation in all areas
 - i. Peace and security
 - ii. Economic activity
 - 1. US has lowest % of international trade as a portion of GDP of any developed country – currently 12%, never higher than 14%
 - 2. But this is still \$2.3 trillion export, \$2.9 trillion import
 - 3. US is 3rd largest exporter behind China and EU
 - iii. Crime control
 - iv. Health
 - v. protection of environment
 - c. UN plays a major role in this - although often an unnoticed one
 - d. So when work for the UN, support its activities
 - i. we are not only acting out of a moral imperative
 - ii. not just saving the rest of the world
 - iii. we are saving OURSELVES - acting in our own national and personal self-interest
 - iv. making a stronger and safer United States in a stronger United Nations
16. Note: for one of numerous maps of the UN system organizations, see [this map](#) created by the American Model United Nations