

## THE WORLD AFTER WILENSKI: AN AUSTRALIAN WHO MATTERED

Inaugural Peter Wilenski Memorial Lecture by Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Canberra, 22 June 1995

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Peter Wilenski's career was breathtaking in its range and level of accomplishments. The little egg-headed Jewish kid who came to Australia from Poland as a refugee in 1943 became the student leader, the physician, the head of four Federal Government Departments and the Public Service Board, the adviser to Prime Ministers and Governments, the reformer of the public service, the diplomat who represented his country at the United Nations, the eminent scholar, the author of a shelf of books and articles on public policy issues and, by no means least, the devoted husband of Jill and father of Michael and Katie. Peter's was a life that mattered, to Australia and to the world, as well as to those who knew and loved him. It is nothing short of a tragedy that it was cut short by cancer at the appallingly early age of 55: he just had so much more to contribute.

How was it that this rather unlikely character - gentle, unassuming, unthrusting as he was - was able to achieve so much? Part of it was simply making the best use of his time. Colleagues in New York remember him arriving at the Australian Government mission one morning limping slightly, owning up eventually that he had sprained his ankle in a fall while using an exercise machine: on deeper questioning, it became apparent that the accident was attributable to him being deeply absorbed in a book at the time.

But more than all that, the real keys to Peter's glittering career are to be found in his sheer intellectual brilliance; the courage with which he was prepared to re-examine old certainties and received wisdoms; the strength of his own vision and convictions as a committed, instinctive, true-believing democratic socialist; and his immense human qualities of gentleness, good humour and sheer decency that endeared him to people all around the world, and which made him so remarkably effective a communicator and persuader.

Those qualities - his intellect, his convictions, his ideals, his practical effectiveness and his personality - were gifts that he brought unsparingly to the service of Australia and the international community. His was a life dedicated to public service, in the most literal meaning of that term, one that changed the world for the better, as the tributes and messages of condolence which poured in after his death last November testified. Among them, unusually and significantly, was a message from the United Nations Secretary General Dr Boutros Boutros-Ghali said, in part:

[XVII/95]

Dr Wilenski was a diplomat and scholar of the highest calibre. While representing his

country at the United Nations, he also served the international community with integrity and distinction, advancing the debate about the role and future of the world organisation... I extend my condolences to the Government and people of Australia on the loss of a fine statesman and a man of great compassion and humanity.

The legacy for which Peter is perhaps best known and remembered in this country is his contribution to transforming the quality of Australian public administration, a topic on which I am delighted to see that Dr Michael Keating will be speaking in a subsequent lecture in this series. But it is the special impact that he had on Australia's international relations, in particular the role he played in the United Nations from 1989-1992, and in his all-too-brief period as Secretary of my Department, that I want to speak about today. It was this period of his career which represented in many ways the apotheosis of all he stood for - his reforming intellect, the humanism and commitment that marked his approach to issues, and the principled voice he exerted for Australia internationally. And his voice and his ideas continue to reverberate in the present day conduct of Australia's external relations.

In the context of our international relations, Australia has some distinct advantages, both natural and created, which we can bring to our dealings with others. The size of our economy, (now about the fourteenth largest in the world), our strong trade performance, our land mass and our defence capacity, have helped define us not as a great or even major power, but certainly as a significant middle power whose voice deserves to be heard. How much that voice is heard depends very much on what we make of our basic physical assets, and there are a number of qualities here that we can and do bring to bear. We lack the historical and ideological baggage which encumbers and inhibits the conduct of foreign policy by larger and older states. We are pragmatic, open to new ideas, able to see and take account of the perspectives of others, intellectually innovative in coming up with new concepts and strategies which will advance the interests of a range of countries and thus command their support and energetic and persistent in pursuing those concepts and strategies. Lacking natural allies and the means, even if we should wish to do so, to impose our will on others, we must be light on our feet if we are successfully to advance Australia's national interests and continue to "punch above our weight". Like other middle powers, we must rely on persuading other nations to share their efforts and join forces to maximise our collective influence. Doing this effectively has been the key to the success we have had in re-shaping our traditional relationships with the US and Europe and in forging new and mutually beneficial partnerships with the countries of East Asia and others in our region.

Middle power diplomacy - and in particular the formation of varying patterns of coalition with other middle powers, or with less significant countries or with superpowers as the case may be, the membership depending on the issues concerned - is most successful when it targets areas where tangible results are achievable. Middle powers simply do not have the resources to select all the dishes on the international menu: we have to have a clear concept of our national priorities and a realistic sense of the extent of our influence, and the limits of that influence. And we need accurate judgments about the political receptiveness for any new or changed approach. But above all, we must ensure that the preconditions are there, in terms of a critical mass of like-minded partners, for the enterprise to get off the ground.

This approach to diplomacy works at many levels. It has been conspicuously successful in recent years in the context of the emerging sense of community in the Asia Pacific region, with the creation of two major structures - the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation grouping and the ASEAN Regional Forum - which are advancing, respectively, our economic and security interests. It finds a natural home as well in multilateral settings, in particular the United Nations where Australia has adopted this perspective since the earliest days of the organisation in the mid-1940s, with the efforts of far-sighted founders, in particular Dr H V Evatt, to ensure that the new organisation would genuinely reflect the views and needs of all its members, not just the major powers.

We have had many fine advocates and persuaders advancing the cause of the UN, and Australia's role in it, over the years, but perhaps none more so than Peter Wilenski. His role in making the United Nations a more effective and responsive organisation was highly important for Australian national interests, as well as for those of the international community. Peter Wilenski was a leading internationalist and a defender in particular of the underprivileged and least developed. But that in no way came at the expense of his defence and promotion of Australian interests in the UN. He had a strong and clear vision of Australia's place in the world and of the role that would serve us best: a nation which was constructive, moderate, open to the views of others but which was still able to pursue its interests openly and effectively. Much of our current acceptance as a country of the developed world but one that is willing and able to work with developing countries in the UN goes back to his influence. His intellectually rigorous approach and his attention to detail on major diplomatic initiatives of the time, contributed to our reputation and our continuing ability to "punch above our weight" in the UN. It is on Australia's role in the UN, and what is capable of being achieved within the UN system, that I particularly want to focus tonight.

Peter Wilenski became Australia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1989, at the end of the Cold War, a defining moment in international affairs and a time of extraordinary readjustment in the UN itself. During his time there, the hopes which many people had initially held for a new era of peace, after the decades of sterile confrontation between the superpowers, were to prove illusory. It is true that the threat of nuclear warfare between the superpowers eased considerably, and the removal of the element of superpower rivalry brought significant progress in dealing with some of the world's most intractable problems, including conflict in the Middle East and Southern Africa. It is also true that these changes enabled the UN itself to play a more effective role in conflict resolution in areas such as Cambodia and Central America. But those gains stand in contrast to the long series of new and savage conflicts that have arisen within national borders - of which those in Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda are only the most recent examples - tearing existing states apart and eclipsing the traditional threat to peace posed by conflict between states.

The combined impact of these conflicts has, unhappily but unquestionably, damaged the standing of the United Nations. The UN's important role in its economic, social and humanitarian work, in responding to the 'silent emergencies' of poverty and deprivation, has been overshadowed by the public image of an organisation unable to meet its responsibilities and unequal to the central challenge of ensuring peace. Of course this imagery is often deeply unfair, recognising neither the innumerable constraints under which the UN operates nor that, at the end of the day, the UN can only achieve what its member states

allow it, or give it the resources, to do. But it is obviously necessary for the UN to develop a clear and confident sense of its role in this new environment.

One of the hardest new realities to come to grips with, conceptually and practically, is that it is no longer possible in such an environment for the international community to ignore conflict occurring within state borders which does not pose a significant military threat to other states. The compartmentalisation which existed through the Cold War years - in which peace and security issues, development issues, and human rights and justice issues were treated as being in completely different conceptual and institutional boxes - is no longer tenable. Basic economic needs, let alone the needs of individuals and groups for dignity and liberty, cannot begin to be met in environments where personal security cannot be guaranteed. And that means, in turn, that the international community cannot simply turn away from being involved in protecting human security in many of those situations which might previously have been regarded as wholly internal in character. The UN has, of course, recognised this and it has become involved in essentially intra-state conflicts, such as those of Bosnia, Somalia and Rwanda. But for the most part that involvement has been hesitant, half-hearted, lacking in confidence, worried about its rationale, too little, and too late.

The UN urgently needs to reach out boldly to try to recapture some of the original vision of its Charter. Crucially, it must reintegrate the relationship between the three basic objectives of peace (meeting the need for security), development (meeting economic needs) and human rights and justice (meeting the needs for individual and group dignity and liberty). That need, for the reintegration of the UN - a theme which I developed in my speech to the General Assembly last year - was one which Peter Wilenski foresaw and for which he tirelessly worked. There were few more aware of how sterile and false is the argument that choices have to be made between security and development and human rights: they are all universal values, they are all capable of being pursued together, and they should be so pursued.

So far as **peace and security** are concerned, if the international community is to respond fully and effectively to the new challenges in the post-Cold War era, it must look beyond its traditional approaches, which have seen security almost wholly in military terms. I have argued in *Cooperating for Peace*, the "Blue Book" which was launched at the UN General Assembly in 1993, that our thinking should be based around the foundation concept of "cooperative security". That term is meant to embrace and capture the essence of three earlier ways of defining overall the approaches to security that should have been adopted at various stages by the international community, viz; collective security, common security and comprehensive security. "Cooperative security" is designed to shift the focus away from traditional, defensive, state-centred thinking - and at the same time convey the flavour of consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, prevention rather than correction, and interdependence rather than unilateralism. In practice, it refers to a whole range of different strategies designed to both prevent and resolve conflict. It certainly includes the traditional UN roles of peace keeping and peace enforcement, but its main weight is at the preventive end of the response spectrum, in particular peace building and preventive diplomacy.

"Peace building" covers preventive strategies designed to address the basic causes of disputes and conflicts - strategies aimed at ensuring that they don't arise in the first place, or that if they do arise, they

don't subsequently recur. Those strategies can apply at both national and international levels. At the international level they involve various arrangements designed to minimise threats to security, promote confidence and trust, and create frameworks for dialogue and cooperation - especially through arms control and disarmament treaties; legal regimes such as those on maritime passage and the status of refugees; dispute resolution mechanisms like the International Court of Justice; and multilateral dialogue forums, like the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Europe or, in our own region, the new ASEAN Regional Forum.

Within nations, peace building is a long-term preventive strategy which focuses on potential causes of insecurity, but it can also embrace post-conflict reconstruction efforts designed to prevent the recurrence of hostilities. Peace building seeks to encourage equitable economic development in order to enhance human rights, broadly defined, and to facilitate good governance. These are, of course, goals which we ought to be pursuing not only for their own sakes, but also because advancing them contributes directly to national and international security. Policies which enhance economic development and distributive justice, encourage the rule of law, protect fundamental human rights and foster the growth of democratic institutions are also security policies. They should be recognised as such and receive a share of current security budgets and future peace dividends.

Economic development, human rights, good governance and peace are, in fact, inextricably connected and mutually reinforcing. Peace is a necessary precondition for development; and equitable development eradicates many of the socio-political conditions which threaten peace. It comes as no surprise to find that those countries whose economies are declining, whose political institutions are failing and where human rights are abused, should also be the ones experiencing the greatest amounts of violence and turmoil.

Preventive strategies must not only try to remove the underlying causes of insecurity, but also address actual disputes which may, if they are not resolved, deteriorate into armed conflict. Peace building, then, has to be supplemented by strategies to maintain peace, the major strand of which is "preventive diplomacy". This term embraces a variety of strategies to resolve, or at least contain disputes by relying on diplomatic or similar methods, rather than military ones - activities such as negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement. Such methods can, of course, also be applied after a dispute has escalated into armed conflict; and it may also be necessary to adopt the response of preventive deployment, that is, with a military rather than diplomatic approach, to deter the escalation of a dispute into armed conflict.

Like peace building, preventive diplomacy tends by its nature to be a low profile activity, lacking the obvious media impact of blue helmet peace keeping and peace enforcement operations. It often succeeds when things do **not** happen. It is most successful when it is applied early, well before armed conflict is likely. It is unfortunately the case that, too often in the UN system, preventive diplomacy efforts have been attempted too late, when the dynamics of escalation are so advanced that a slide into hostilities is almost inevitable.

Despite the importance of this activity, the UN devotes relatively few resources to it, even though it is now universally acknowledged to be the most cost-effective means of dealing with potential conflict. There are only some forty UN officials assigned to tasks immediately relevant to preventive diplomacy. This compares with more than 70,000 UN peace keepers and approximately 30 million armed service personnel world-wide. Some reforms to UN practice have been implemented but far more needs to be done.

In *Cooperating for Peace* I put forward the proposal that regionally-focused UN preventive diplomacy units should be established. Staffed by senior professionals expert in dispute resolution, closely familiar with the areas and issues on which they work, and with the experience and stature to be able to negotiate at the highest levels, preventive diplomacy units could operate not only at UN headquarters, but also in the field, in regional centres. They would require adequate resources and infrastructure, with appropriate back-up personnel and equipment, and close consultative links with regional organisations, specialist scholars, peace research and other academic institutes. Since the Blue Book was written, we have been doing a lot more work in refining and developing ideas on what these centres might look like on the ground in two particular contexts - the Middle East and the Asia Pacific region.

Preventive diplomacy is not cost free but it is certainly highly cost-effective, and a large increase in the UN's capability could be achieved at minimal cost. The creation of, say, six regional preventive diplomacy centres, of the kind I have described, with a total staff of one hundred and the necessary support funding, would cost little more than US\$20 million a year. By comparison, the UN's peace keeping budget for 1993 was \$3.7 billion, and the cost of its operation in Mozambique was over \$1 million each day.

The quest for social justice which characterised Peter Wilenski's life and work made him a powerful voice for a more effective UN role in **economic and social development**. He was a tireless advocate for reforming and revitalising UN agencies to allow them to respond better to the needs of the least developed - to, in his words, "...mobilise political will in developed and developing countries so that we can all begin chipping away at the wall that separates the poor from development."

Support for these goals remains a strong feature of Australia's role in the UN. We warmly welcomed the Secretary-General's 1994 document *An Agenda for Development* which, following on as it does from his earlier *An Agenda for Peace*, fully recognises the relationship between peace and development, and acknowledges that equitable development eradicates many of the socio-political conditions in which threats to peace breed. It places an entirely appropriate emphasis on individual human beings as the end object and beneficiaries of our developmental efforts.

A more integrated effort will clearly be required of the United Nations system if the objectives set out in the *An Agenda for Development* are to be achieved. It is imperative that we improve the system's ability to develop and implement social and economic development programs in a more coordinated and coherent manner, including by finding ways to allow the Bretton Woods institutions and UN bodies to work in closer harmony.

An example of a more systematic approach the UN system might be able to adopt is the recent package of reforms undertaken by the Economic and Social Council. Here again Australia has been able to play a role well above our weight level through having our current Permanent Representative in New York, Richard Butler, as chair of ECOSOC leading the push for reforms. These reforms are, of course, a direct legacy of the work of the so-called Wilenski Group which Peter formed. Streamlining the top levels of the organisation by reducing the number of positions, providing for annual sessions, high-level debate and the avoidance of overlaps with the work of key subsidiary bodies breathed life into a moribund and duplicative body. The new approach to operational activities, and the joint program which ECOSOC agreed to earlier this year to tackle the health and development impacts of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, demonstrate the achievements that are possible through such reform.

Peter Wilenski was always strongly supportive of **human rights** - as am I, despite the legion of sceptics - Peter Wilenski's personal contribution was seen in his support for an activist role for Australia in the Third Committee and at the Commission on Human Rights, producing a period of unprecedented Australian influence on UN human rights issues. He encouraged officers in New York, Geneva and Canberra to think seriously about the issues, to be prepared to try out new ideas and not to be tied down by Western group positions, or by the typical UN tendency to take the path of least resistance.

It was an approach that yielded results. Australia became a leader in dealing with moderate developing countries on human rights issues, for example in working with them to give an appropriate place to the right to development in UN forums, in encouraging human-centred concepts of UN action, and in gaining a degree of support from ASEAN countries for UN General Assembly action on Burma/Myanmar. We were able to fend off numerous attempts by hardliners, both in the Western and the Non Aligned Movement camps, to promote positions which would have broken down the climate of co-operation in the immediate post- Cold war years. That is a climate which is now under much North-South strain, but it was one which allowed some significant gains in human rights co-operation in those years, for example an acceptance that human rights violations anywhere are a legitimate matter for UN consideration, and a reassertion of the universality of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Through a process of coalition building we won support for a number of critical Australian objectives, such as the passage of Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the consensus adoption of the Convention on Rights of the Child Convention, and placing Burma/Myanmar on the human rights agenda of the General Assembly.

Peter Wilenski's commitment to social justice and human rights was also clear in his relentless pursuit of equal status for women. Together with Dame Anne Hercus of New Zealand and Yves Fortier of Canada, he was perhaps the foremost champion of the rights of women in the Secretariat, a role which eventually won recognition on the front page of the New York Times. There could be no doubting the energy and commitment of his Canadian and New Zealand colleagues, but Peter Wilenski added a capacity for philosophic articulation and hard-won bureaucratic experience from fighting this battle at home. He was fully familiar with the spectrum of arguments and objections to equal status action, and he knew every telling response to them. He made his mark not only through speeches and lobbying in various Committees, but also with the advice and advocacy which women's groups in the Secretariat sought

from him. He was the flag-bearer for new (that is, new for the UN) ways of doing business, for example treating sexual harassment as a serious problem, and accepting that targets were to be pushed up continually to attain equal opportunity at all levels

Peter Wilenski's unrivalled knowledge of public sector management equipped him perfectly to be Australia's standard bearer in the quest to bring change to the management of the United Nations, a task which he saw, and relished, as the ultimate challenge for a public sector reformer. He found an organisation that had enshrined in its Charter the principle of merit as a criterion for recruitment and advancement but which in practice often subverted its founders' intentions by cronyism, a parochialism which provided for such abuses as P5 and other sinecures, the principle of "equitable geographic distribution" and sexism. As Peter was often heard to say, the only explanation for the fact that half of world's population was so poorly represented in the UN, especially at the top of the organisation, was that it had failed to apply objective considerations of merit in its selection procedures.

Wilenski was a strong advocate of better management practices, including training, the flexible allocation of resources to meet changing priorities and accountability for managers: these inform much of what is now, three years after he left New York, being introduced by Under Secretary-General Joseph Connor in a package of personnel management reform measures. Working with other members of his group, he was an advocate, as well, for better organisational structures and processes, designed to allow for more effective communication - both vertical and horizontal - in UN organisation, to bring together the related but structurally and sometimes geographically disparate or isolated units of the UN, and to overcome the top-heavy nature of the organisation. In addition to the group's success in reforming ECOSOC, which I have already mentioned, and UNESCO, it had major success - with the help of Boutros Boutros-Ghali on his elevation - in cutting the number of Under Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General positions.

Reforming the UN is a Herculean and perhaps endless task, and one which, as he acknowledged himself, Peter Wilenski could not hope to complete. Australia has been maintaining the pressure, however, in a number of areas where reform is crucial to the effectiveness of the organisation. Perhaps most importantly, the Secretariat needs to be restructured to ensure that the Secretary-General has an effective chain of command through which to exercise authority over major UN operations. Restructuring is needed to consolidate and coordinate the more than forty separate departments offices, agencies, instrumentalities and commissions which presently report directly to the Secretary-General: as I have had occasion to remark before, flat management structures are all the current MBA rage, but this is ridiculous! Australia has supported a proposal for a new senior structure at UN Headquarters in which the Secretary-General would have four Deputy Secretaries-General responsible respectively for Peace and Security, Economic and Social Operations, Humanitarian Operations and Administration and Management.

A number of individual areas, including the management of peace operations, both at Headquarters and in the field, also need to be improved. The creation of the new Department of Peace Keeping Operations in 1993 did enhance the Secretariat's capabilities in this area, but much more remains to be done, in particular to improve the UN's capacity for planning and running operations. The present structures for

delivery of humanitarian relief also need to be overhauled, and I have proposed the creation of a new disaster response agency which would take over the relief and basic rehabilitation functions of UNHCR, UNICEF and the WFP and work directly to the proposed new Deputy Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

Above all, there is a clear and present need to reform the Security Council - not so much because it is ineffective as but because it is clearly unrepresentative of the broad range of interests and perspectives of the UN as a whole, and this is beginning to have an impact on its legitimacy. The Security Council is the lynch pin of the whole UN peace and security system, and it is in nobody's interest that its credibility should be allowed to gradually erode. To ensure that it remains effective, outstanding questions about its size and shape will need to be resolved quickly. Australia has been one of the countries leading the debate on possible options in this respect - not because we have any aspirations ourselves for permanent membership of the Security Council, but because we take seriously our responsibility, as a country which takes the UN seriously and is itself taken seriously by others, to do everything we can to make the system work better.

It is one more unhappy irony of Peter Wilenski's life and death that he should have left us before this, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. I think he would have enjoyed this year, not only for the chance to reflect on the many good things the UN has accomplished in its first half century - he was, after all, like all of us of democratic socialist persuasion, and a few others as well, a true believer in the UN - but also because of the way in which it has focused our thinking on the challenges of the next fifty years. He would have had fun in helping meet those challenges, and was better equipped than almost anyone else in the international community to lead the charge. Peter Wilenski was a great Australian, one who served the world as not many are able to do, and who served his country magnificently in the process.

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