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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

A Publication of the *Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors*

Issue 35

Psychotherapy in the 21st century

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A Profile of courage

'Ama' Adhe Tapontsang

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The triangle of terror

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Somatic therapy

Libya's proxy war

REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

Refugee Transitions reports on a broad range of human rights issues, focusing attention on the impact of organised violence on health. It provides a forum for discussion and analysis of current conflicts around the world and the initiatives that support the settlement of refugees and their stories of survival.

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A Libyan boy holds the rebellion's flag, 15 April 2011. MARWAN NAAMANI / GETTY IMAGES

CEO's Message

Welcome to the 35th edition of *Refugee Transitions,*

Welcome to Issue 35 of *Refugee Transitions.* Much has happened since the last issue was published before COVID-19 became an ubiquitous term in every household. The COVID-19 Pandemic has transformed the way we work, socialize, and go about our lives in ways that would have been unthinkable a few months ago. Amidst increasing uncertainty and fear of the future, the impact has been worst felt amongst the most vulnerable sectors of our society. Indeed the Pandemic has affected our clients disproportionately socially, economically and in terms of access to services. In addition, the suspension of arrivals has placed additional stress on those awaiting the arrival of loved ones from difficult and dangerous situations.

For STARTTS, adapting to new realities in these uncertain times has presented numerous challenges, but also opportunities. I am immensely proud of the successful transition STARTTS made to a largely online and telephone based model of service delivery in response to the COVID-19. While we are now resuming a face-to-face work modality, we have learnt new skills and developed innovative approaches that will enhance our capacity to assist our client group. I would like to thank all staff members for their resilience, resourcefulness and ingenuity in ensuring we were able to continue to support our clients in this different, COVID-19 reality.

In this issue we have focused on the human rights dimensions of COVID-19 times. We have seen widespread protests against systemic racial discrimination and inequality in the US that highlighted similar issues in Australia and many other countries and reinvigorated the struggle for race equality. On the other hand autocrats in too many parts of our world seem to be utilizing the response to the pandemic as increased cover to commit human rights abuses while avoiding accountability and expanding their power.

In this issue we have published a conversation about this subject with world renowned experts and have examined the most pressing human rights issues of the day, with articles about the COVID-19 Pandemic and the impact of violence. We also report on the Free and Equal Conference held in Sydney that examined for the first time in a long while how we are faring in relation to protecting and safeguarding human rights in Australia.

Our clinical articles include two interviews on somatic therapy and on the evolution of psychotherapy and the body mind integration.

Refugee Transitions continues to examine the most pressing issues, from the consequences of inequality, poverty and war. We include an in-depth analysis of Libya's proxy war. No major political or humanitarian disaster has been as overlooked or ignored by the media and the world as the crisis in Libya.

There are other articles on programs and services that shed a light on the work of STARTTS as well as its 30 year history. The 30th anniversary has provided a good opportunity to look back at our achievements and plan for the future.

Human rights are not abstract ideas. They are real, and our very humanity is attacked whenever they are violated. Ensuring human rights abuses and its negative impacts on mental and physical health are reported on is also part of our work, and *Refugee Transitions* is part of this commitment.

Jorge Aroche

Chief Executive Officer / STARTTS
Outgoing President, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, (IRCT)

Refugee children play around their family house in Khan Younis refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip, 24 June 2020.

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Libya's proxy war

MODERN CONFLICTS

After nine years of vicious civil strife, Libya faces a worsening humanitarian crisis. The recent call for a ceasefire will determine if the nation descends further into chaos or moves towards a peaceful future. OLGA YOLDI writes.

Libya has been plunged into turmoil since 2011, when its Arab Spring uprising, backed by NATO and the US, overthrew dictator Colonel Muammar Qaddafi who had ruled the country for 42 years.

At the time, it seemed Libya had a lot going for it: a country with the largest oil reserves in Africa, a small population of six million, a relative high standard of living and an ancient culture. There was hope that Libyans would transition easily into democracy and go about nation-building, aided by their vast wealth. The reality could not have been further from that hope.

As soon as Qaddafi was gone, regime loyalists and opposition revolutionaries began fighting. At the same time longstanding enmities between tribes and towns repressed by his regime resurfaced causing unrest. While revolutionaries were united in their fight to overthrow the dictator, they failed to unite or share power after Qaddafi.

They had no unified leadership or consensus on the nature of the new Libya they wanted to create.

To make matters worse, Qaddafi had destroyed vital state institutions. Fearful that the military might challenge his authority, he had dissolved the national army and replaced it with brigades led by his sons and cohorts. Without the core institutions and political structures of a civil society, there was no base on which to build a new democracy.

In the absence of a neutral stabilising force, Libyans were left at the mercy of the revolutionaries, who soon split into militias and turned on each other, holding the country hostage. "Terrorist groups and armed militias exploited the turmoil and used ungoverned areas as a basis for radicalisation and organised crime, contributing to the country's fragmentation and posing threats to its neighbours," wrote defence analyst Amir Asmar in *Foreign Affairs*.

Elections took place soon after the revolution – but without a constitution, legal framework or adequate preparation, they only increased the unrest. "When elections did happen in July 2012 they took place amid acts of armed coercion by federalists, tribal fighting in towns in the west and south and rising extremist violence in the east," Libya expert Frederick Wehrey wrote in *The Washington Post*.

According to Wehrey, the newly elected government, the General National Congress (GNC) was unable to tackle the growing lawlessness and insecurity. Instead, it became dependent on militias, entrenching and solidifying factionalism. As militias strengthened their bases the legitimacy and authority of the central government weakened and by 2014 Libya was immersed in civil war. The revolution had failed to deliver the democracy that revolutionaries had dreamed of.

Former US president Barack Obama told Fox News in April 2016 that the worst mistake of his presidency was the failure to prepare for the aftermath of Qaddafi's overthrow. He partly blamed then British prime minister David Cameron for "the mess", saying he had not done enough to support the North African nation. By the time it became clear Libya had become a lawless state, it was too late to intervene effectively.

Today Libya is devastated by civil war. The country is split between east and west and divided between two rival governments, both fuelled by a coalition of militias backed by foreign powers that have stepped into the security and political vacuum. All exploit the country's dysfunctional war economy and compete for power, territorial control and the spoils of the state.

On one side of the conflict is the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. GNA is linked to the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood and controls Tripoli and parts of the northwest. It was formed in 2015 by the UN to unify two rival administrations that came out of the 2014 elections.

On the opposing side is the House of Representatives (HOR), which initially agreed to become part of the GNA but refused to do so when Islamist militias that overran Tripoli reinstated the former GNC, the government the HOR was to replace.

HOR speaker Aguila Saleh, who heads the rival government from the eastern city of Tobruk, does not recognise the GNA and nor does an HOR ally, renegade warlord Khalifa Haftar – a former general who helped Qaddafi seize power in 1969, but after breaking with him in an alleged coup went into exile. When he came back after Qaddafi's ouster he built a coalition of powerful militias from among Libya's various eastern and central tribes called the Libyan National Army (LNA).

In May 2014 in an effort to liberate the country from Islamists who had established bases in Libya, Haftar's LNA launched an offensive and evicted militias linked to al-Qaeda from the cities of Benghazi and Derna, with extensive military support from foreign backers, who see him as the best candidate to stabilise Libya and contain the Islamist threat. Haftar gradually extended his grip to the country's east and south.

Bolstered by these successes, in April 2019 he launched an attack on Tripoli determined to unseat Sarraj's GNA and make himself Libya's sole military ruler. But rival militias allied to Sarraj from across western Libya came together to repel Haftar who suffered setbacks. Haftar's LNA militias shelled Tripoli airport and blocked oil terminals, using cluster munitions and landmines. Hundreds of civilians were killed and wounded, creating a humanitarian crisis.

Then 2000 mercenaries belonging to the Russia-based Wagner group, which has links with the Kremlin, suddenly arrived to fight alongside Haftar's LNA. Haftar appeared to be poised to win the battle for Tripoli when Turkey sent air defences and 2000 Syrian mercenaries to support Sarraj's militias, causing Haftar a series of defeats.

"Instead of a quick, decisive victory establishing Haftar as Libya's undisputed leader, the offensive resulted in a stalemate," writes political analyst Jalel Harchaoui in the *Clingendael Spectator*. Haftar spent the next 14 months trying to seize Tripoli, but ultimately failed.

Since last year Russia and Turkey have increased their opposing engagement in Libya. Analysts say both seek a presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and secure oil and construction deals. Not only Russia and Turkey are

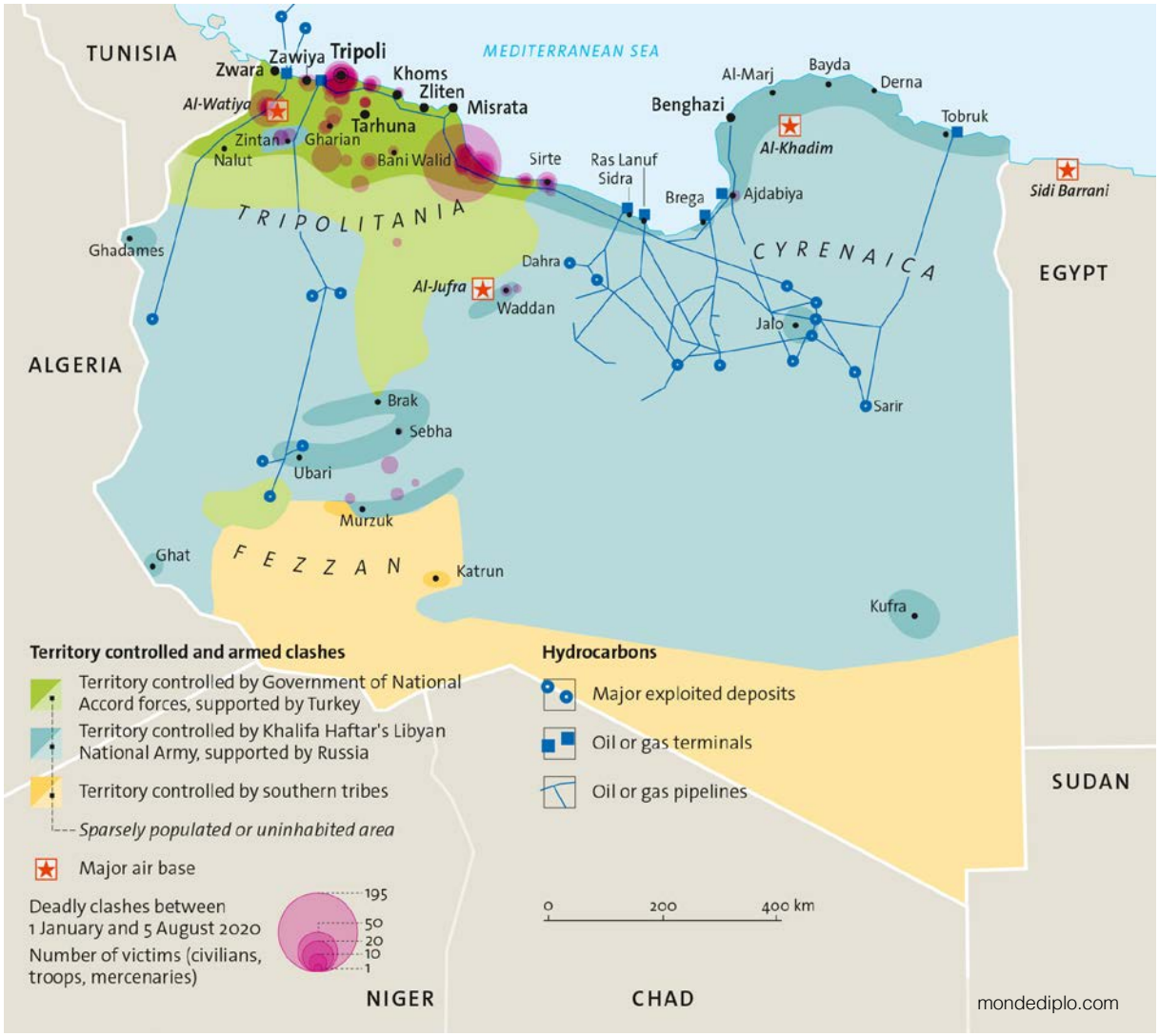
Commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA) Khalifa Haftar (C, front) leaves the Greek ministry building after a meeting with Greek Foreign Ministrer Dendias in Athens

meddling in Libya: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Jordan and even France are providing financial, diplomatic and military aid to Haftar, turning the conflict into a dangerous proxy war. On the other side, Turkey, Qatar and Italy are supporting al Serraj's GNA militias.

"All foreign powers are getting their hands dirty," writes researcher and political analyst Emaddedin Badi of the Middle East Institute in Foreign Affairs. "All are pursuing their own geostrategic and economic interests in Libya. All have assisted the two sides in violation of the UN arms embargo."

Egypt, which shares a border with Libya, conducted military operations in Libya in 2015. Last August President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi threatened military action if GNA militias took the city of Sirte, the gateway to Libya's Oil Crescent. While al-Sisi supports Haftar, he recently joined forces with some of Libya's powerful tribes and has the support of the HOR. Apart from security concerns and economic interests, media reports say al-Sisi fears the

"Drones are cheap and, like the deployment of mercenaries, they are a hallmark of foreign military interventions in the Libyan war…" Wolfram Larcher



increasing influence of Turkey in Libya.

The UAE, on the other hand does not share a border nor has tangible interests in Libya, yet it has been a key driver behind Libya's civil war. The UAE has supplied Haftar with drones, fighter jets and advanced weapons. While it does not admit to have a presence in Libya, in 2017 it set up military bases in the east to gain a foothold in the country and enable Haftar's territorial expansion. Press reports indicate that the UAE has also sent mercenaries from Sudan to fight alongside the LNA.

"One of the primary motivations of the UAE's support for the LNA leader Haftar is its obsession with Islamism," Badi wrote. "Abu Dhabi wants to establish an authoritarian dictatorship in Libya that will stamp out any and all forms of political Islam, putting it at odds with Qatar and Turkey, both of which would prefer to see Islamists hold at least some power in Libya."

It is harder to understand France's involvement in Libya. While their official policy supports the GNA, France discreetly supports Haftar's war effort. President Emmanuel Macron recognises him as an essential part of any solution to the Libyan crisis. This puts France at odds with Turkey, which it blames for the current situation in Libya. "We are supporting a legitimate government while the French government is supporting an illegitimate warlord, jeopardising NATO security, Mediterranean security, North African security and Libya's political instability," said Turkish presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalim. According to Badi, Paris' support of the authoritarian Haftar doesn't sit easily with its liberal democratic values, but it is in line with its efforts to develop military alliances with authoritarian leaders in other parts of Africa to secure the Sahel, the transitional zone between the Sahara and Sudan.

Neither the European Union nor the US has a clearly defined policy on Libya. America's main concern in the region has been counterterrorism: officially it supports the GNA, but President Trump has also supported Haftar. The European Union is divided over Libya, its main concern being migration flows.

There is no doubt that the level of foreign interference

in the Libyan conflict is unprecedented. This is a proxy war fought by multiple nations using armed drones and other advanced weapons. No wonder Libya has become the largest drone war theatre in the world according to Ghassan Salame, former head of the UN mission in Libya. Observers say that since April 2019 there have been more than 1000 drone attacks. Drones not only provide valuable information about enemy positions, but many can also attack such targets immediately and with high precision.

"Drones are cheap and, like the deployment of mercenaries, they are a hallmark of foreign military interventions in the Libyan war … drones minimise the risks and costs of intervening powers, thereby encouraging them to meddle in conflicts where no vital interests are at stake," writes Libya expert, Wolfram Lacher a scholar at the German Institute for International Security, in the *Texas National Security Review.* "With minimal investment and little or no official footprint, foreign powers have reduced risks to their regular forces and avoided blame for their actions."

LNA and GNA have both openly blamed foreign forces for major attacks on Libya. The targeting of civilian infrastructure has caused much horror and suffering, particularly the airstrike on a migrant detention centre in July last year that killed at least 53 civilians. It was the work of UAE aircraft, the GNA insists.

"When a bomb falls from Libya's skies, the guessing game of who dropped it begins," Lacher writes. "Any of at least five foreign states might be responsible, in addition to two rival air forces that are associated with two competing governments and militia coalitions. Many strikes go unclaimed; when a particularly deadly bombing triggers an outcry, the culprits can go to great length to blame it on their enemy."

Indeed, the lack of accountability and impunity for such acts of violence against civilians and infrastructure is of great concern, as is the indifference and acceptance of the West. These assaults, UN officials and human rights activists say, constitute war crimes. It is estimated that 19,000 lives have been lost since 2014, with another 300,000 driven out of their homes and 1.3 million in need of humanitarian assistance.

"In Benghazi and Tripoli, I saw first-hand how civilians are suffering because of the catastrophic consequences of this conflict," said Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, recently. "Neighbourhoods on the former front lines in Tripoli are badly scarred and families have little if anything to return to. People are also at risk of being killed or injured by dangerous unexploded munitions. Infrastructure is falling apart. People have little electricity, drinking water, sanitation or medical care in the middle of a growing

"Peace initiatives suffer from an inherent problem: few of the major players are serious about reaching a settlement".

— Emmaddedin Badi

A Libyan rebel scans the frontline as a facility burns on the frontline

pandemic." The conflict has largely destroyed Libya's health system. Hospitals and clinics have been damaged and other facilities are falling apart.

The Human Rights Watch 2020 report on Libya covers the many abuses perpetrated by militias, including war crimes. Militias have carried out executions, abducted and tortured civilians, detained thousands of people indefinitely without judicial process, while torture and ill-treatment are widespread in prisons. Militias have abducted and attacked politicians, journalists and human rights activists. Eight mass graves are reported to have been discovered by GNA forces after they retook Tarhouna, an area previously under Haftar's control.

The conflict has also affected the economy, which is in ruins. In Libya everybody depends on oil revenues and prior to the revolution more than 95 percent of state revenues came from oil and gas. When the UN Security Council declared only the Libyan government (GNA) could lawfully export oil, it didn't specify who could control Libya's fields and refineries. Haftar seized control of Libya's oil fields, but was not able to sell it because of the UN sanctions, so both sides decided to cooperate and signed an exports revenue-sharing agreement.

Last January Haftar shut down the country's oil infrastructure to demand a larger share of oil revenues, he blockaded oil ports and terminals to cut GNA's revenue flow, triggering a collapse in outputs from 1.2 million barrels per day to 90,000, costing Libya more than $US9.8 billion in lost revenue, according to the National Oil Corporation. This led to the Central Bank calling for austerity measures and the devaluation of Libya's reserves. Apart from exacerbating electricity and fuel shortages, the blockade is having a devastating impact on civilian living standards as the Central Bank cannot pay salaries or subsidies.

At the same time a shadow economy has emerged, costing Libya billions in lost revenue. Chatham House, a London based think tank that focuses on Libya, estimates that 30 per cent of oil is diverted from the supply chain and smuggled into Tunisia and Malta, meaning a yearly tax loss of $1.8 billion. "The smugglers use the chaos of the ongoing conflict to hijack fuel transport which they then resell at higher prices or export abroad. Both conflict parties partly profit from refined smuggling," writes Marius Zeevaert in E International Relations.

Last June Sarraj's GNA finally regained control of Tripoli and recaptured most of north-western Libya. Haftar retreated, but there was no conclusive GNA victory. Press reports say the GNA is building momentum to advance on Sirte and central Libya. While there is an uneasy standoff around Sirte, lately the front lines have remained relatively quiet.

So far, all attempts at reaching a comprehensive peace agreement have failed. In January German Chancellor Angela Merkel led an attempt at mediating a ceasefire. Leaders from Turkey, Russia, UAE, Algeria, Egypt, France, Qatar, Algeria, Britain, US, Italy and China attended the Berlin Conference. Unfortunately, none of the militias who are the real power players in the conflict were invited, nor were the heads of Libya's economic institutions.

All the nations, including those called out for meddling in Libya, agreed to refrain from interference in the armed conflict or the internal affairs of Libya. Merkel called for leaders to respect the UN arms embargo and to agree to a ceasefire, but she failed to bring Haftar and Sarraj to the negotiating table.

"Peace initiatives suffer from an inherent problem: few of the major players are serious about reaching a settlement," Badi writes. "Neither Haftar nor the UAE were ever genuinely interested in an inclusive Libya in which Haftar would share power with the GNA."

In the months after the Berlin conference all countries meddling in Libya violated the commitments made in Berlin. Both GNA and LNA continued to receive weapons.

In January Russia and Turkey called for a ceasefire, and around that time European officials also tried to forge a ceasefire, but observers say it was more an attempt by Mr Putin and Mr Erdogan to set the terms of any future peace talks by excluding their European rivals. "What we are seeing is competition over who defines the international framework for any negotiations to end the conflict" said Wolfram Lacher. "Putin and Erdogan are mounting a challenge to the European claim to leadership on Libya."

A ceasefire cannot be enforced without an effective arms embargo and the disarming and demobilisation of militias. The UN Security Council placed an embargo on Libya in February 2011. Analysts say that from the start there were challenges because of the lack of a global enforcer willing to sanction the violators. Reports by a panel of UN experts continually reveal the extent to which weapons continue to reach Libya in total disregard of international law. The worst violators are those countries meddling in Libya, but militias and smugglers also import and sell arms illegally.

As a result, Libya is now awash in weapons. Much has come from Qaddafi's 1000 depots. A prolific arms buyer, Qaddafi spent billions and left behind unsecured warehouses that were looted during the civil war, but many weapons have been shipped to the militias, many of whom are also engaged in arms smuggling.

So far efforts to control the weapons traffic have gone nowhere. "Arms supplied to one faction often end up in the hands of its enemies, making embargo and targeted

Children look out as they sit in a car boot in Benghazi, Libya. AAP

New elections may not resolve Libya's problems, as they have mainly caused violence and divisions in the past.

weapons transfers nearly impossible," political analyst John Feffer writes in the New Observer. He notes international and national institutions are too weak to force combatants to lay down their weapons and too weak to provide peacekeepers to enforce a ceasefire".

"The problem is young Libyans in militias have no incentive to hand over their weapons which are their only source of security and the only bargaining power vis-à-vis the new political order," writes Abdul Rahman Alageli, an associate fellow of Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programme. "If they disarm, they would effectively surrender power to another force they distrust without guarantees of reform."

About 200,000 militiamen claim authority over different territories and all are paid by the state – but some are also involved in the criminal underworld in human trafficking and fuel, weapons and drugs smuggling.

Dismantling the war economy might prove one of the most difficult challenges because those profiting from it

Libyan rebels soldiers embrace as they grieve at Martyr Square formerly known as Green Square, for the Eid Al-Fitr prayer

have a vested interest in perpetuating the current state of lawlessness and corruption. "All say they want peace, but are reluctant because many are benefiting from the status quo," Ghassan Salame says. "We lack the political will, nationally and internationally."

Analysts say that only profound international and national support for economic reforms can break this vicious cycle. "Peacemaking efforts, international conferences or even direct elections are doomed to failure if they do not address the root causes of Libya's malaise: bad economic incentives and flawed institutions," writes scholar Jason Pack of the Middle East Institute. "The way forward requires a deep understanding of the structures of the Libya economy and their origins. Without transparency, no high-level diplomacy or bottom-up national dialogue can fix Libya. The root causes of this ongoing civil war are not political or military. They are economic."

Observers say comprehensive economic reforms are needed, including diversifying the economy through the expansion of the private sector, increasing investment, developing service and tourism industries, expanding education and training to give young Libyans skills and, most importantly, developing a modern and transparent financial system by combating the rampant corruption which affects almost all elements of the state.

None of it will happen while the chaos and uncertainty persist. But with the Libyan economy at its worst and a pandemic expanding rapidly, the situation has become critical.

Libyans are tired of the chaos, violence, insecurity and angry over power cuts, lack of services and deteriorating living conditions. In September residents of Benghazi and Tripoli took to the streets, calling for an end to corruption and the opening of the oil plants closed by Haftar. They set fire to a government building. Militias fired on the protesters, killing one and wounding many.

In September GNA leader Sarraj announced his intention to step down. Both he and HOR spokesperson Aguila Saleh called for a ceasefire in an effort to enter the political process. While the announcement brought a glimmer of hope, the only problem is that neither Sarraj nor Saleh have the power, legitimacy or the authority to enforce it.

Currently several peace talks are taking place. Apart from the UN-led talks, there are the talks between Turkey and Russia, plus talks in Morocco between the rival Libyan parliaments aimed at replacing the GNA and developing a roadmap for elections.

Libyans are tired of the chaos, violence, insecurity and angry over power cuts, lack of services and deteriorating living conditions.

Absent from these talks is General Haftar. While he still has considerable military and financial power and controls large areas, he has lost support from international backers. Press reports say his political career may be over. However, LNA militias are still stationed in Sirte and at oil terminals, and he has enough weapons, militias and mercenaries to thwart peace plans as he has done before. Haftar has agreed to lift the oil blockade and reopen key oil fields and terminals, but only for one month. According to media reports, France is still pushing for him to have a political role and there is no sign of UAE withdrawing its support.

"Haftar is not happy," said Mohamed Eljarh, a political commentator and researcher at the Centre for the Middle East. "This is why I think there is the possibility of him trying to do what he does best – sabotage these attempts at political talks through military action."

It remains unclear how the proposed ceasefire would be enforced or how long it would be in effect. "This is but one step in what will be an arduous process especially since local parties distrust not only one another but also the international parties involved," Emaddedin Badi said.

New elections may not resolve Libya's problems. They have only caused violence and division in the past. A new government would face extraordinary economic, political and security challenges in exerting its authority over the entire nation.

To get Libya to the path of peace and stability a new kind of peace partnership is needed that involves engagement and support from the international community and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. A renewed compromise with all parties to restore the rule of law, build institutions; promote economic reforms and economic development and allow the re-emergence of civil society.

Most importantly, such a compromise must put a stop to external meddling in Libyan politics. It would also require galvanising Libya's factions into cooperation to enter a political process through an inclusive dialogue so that eventually all parties can find a place in Libya's future. R

Psychotherapy in the 21st century

HEALTH

The evolution of psychotherapy now demands the integration of mind and body, leading to calls for a more pluralistic, cross-disciplinary and scientific approach to treating mental illness. In Sydney last year a world-renowned expert in the field, psychologist Dr John B. Arden, presented workshops organised by STARTTS on the integration of neuroscience and psychotherapy. He spoke to Jorge Aroche, Mariano Coello, Nooriah Mehraby and Melanie Leemon about his latest book.

NM: Your book *Mind-Brain-Gene: Towards Psychotherapy Integration* draws from multiple areas of research – genetics, epigenetics, neuroscience and psychoneuroimmunology – to describe the complex interconnections taking place in our minds. In what way is it a departure from more traditional schools of thought?

Indeed, the book enlarges the scope dramatically. We can no longer just talk about the brain and leave the body out. We know different states of mind relate to different operating networks (the default networks, salience and executive networks). We now understand the mind is the constant cycling of these different states which interact through feedback loops. Each mental operating network corresponds to particular activation patterns in the brain.

The mind contributes to self-organisation and to our sense of individuality, as we evolve within our families and relationships. So not only are body and mind integrated, but we also now have a better understanding of how the immune system interacts with our emotions and behaviours, and can unravel our capacity to maintain a positive mood and clarity of thought.

We need to acknowledge that our experiences and our responses to those experiences will in fact change our brain, our immune system and gene expression, resulting in either mental health or mental illness. For example, we have come to realise that chronic inflammation and autoimmune disorders are strongly associated with depression and anxiety. We now know that the dysregulation of the immune system, the diet and gut bacteria profoundly affect our mental health.

In my book I have combined the fields of psycho-neuroimmunology, epigenetics with the neuroscience of emotional, interpersonal and cognitive dynamics. I have also combined mindfulness with psychotherapeutic approaches, in order to achieve an integrated, more

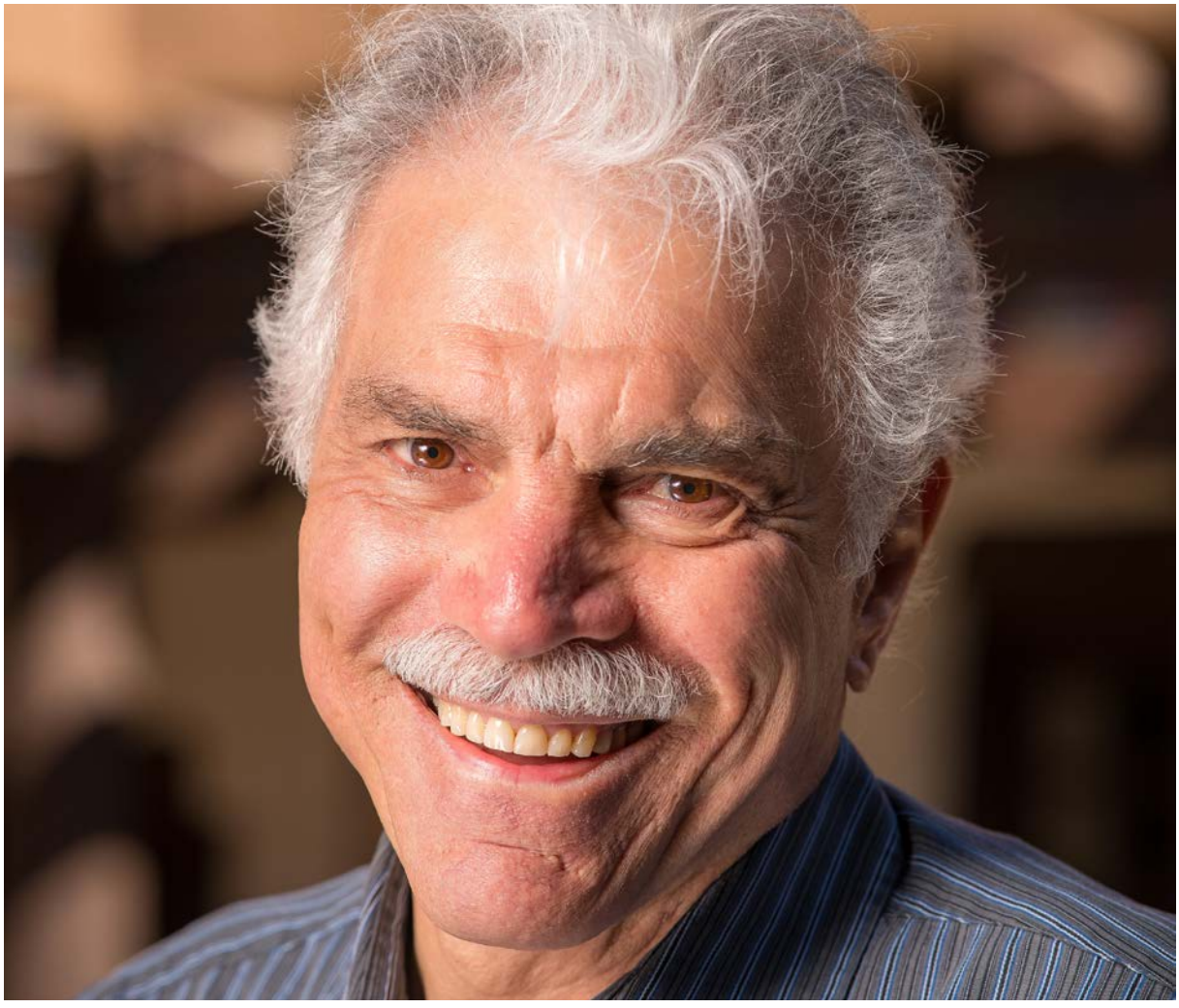


Photo courtesy of Dr John B. Arden

complex vision of psychotherapy. I have also explored the relationship between insecure attachments, deprivation, child abuse, trauma, anxiety disorders and depression, to produce epigenetics affects.

MC: You have written about the adaptation of genes and what happens to us when our immune system is inappropriately activated. Autoimmune disorders are becoming more prevalent and may be linked to intergenerational trauma. We have populations that are victims of genocides with high prevalence of these disorders.

Yes they are. In my book I have included an overview of psychoneuroimmunology and epigenetics – how gene expression changes. Genes do not determine behaviour, but adapt to the environment. What genes are turned on and off depends on the person's environment, life experience and lifestyle. Lifestyle is critical, so I always emphasise the importance of building on the SEEDS – social activities (having many significant relationships), doing exercise (the best antidepressant), engaging in education (constantly learning to keep the mind agile) and healthy sleep (to restore the mind and body). These are fundamental for a healthy body, mind and immune system. Otherwise we run the risk of inappropriately activating various genes that will dysregulate the immune system.

My book explains the factors that influence the brain, the gene expression and feedback loops. By feedback loops, I mean the constant triggers and reactions of the various elements taking place and the ways they affect and feed on one another in positive or negative ways. Feedback loops rump up the system in a constant interplay. I would define feedback as bidirectional causality.

So feedback loops encompass who we are. We are the result of all these interactions taking place, turning on and off genes in our immune system, and brain. They

occur at different levels because the different systems are interconnected at multiple levels and if they don't interact they get out of sync and become dysregulated, causing the person to succumb to ill health. Feedback loops get dysregulated with extreme disruption in a person's life caused by trauma. Excessive stress and trauma can in fact contribute to dysregulate the immune system. It can turn on genes, making networks dysregulated and causing autoimmune disorders such as diabetes.

JA: The integrated model you wrote about is complex because it involves different types of expertise. This is the challenge your workshop leaves us with. You keep challenging us in different ways about the integration of mind and body. While the counselling approach is important, people are affected at many different levels and may require a broader range of interventions. The question is, how can we orchestrate an integrated approach to treatment to help people rebuild their lives after torture with limited resources? And, what do you think is the best way of helping those experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There are practical challenges in applying this model as you don't have endless resources, but gradually it is possible to enlarge the picture or at least part of it. We may not be able to do everything at once, but we need to realise there is more to treatment than just the counselling approach. Therapists need to be in that mindset. I understand they will have varying degrees of expertise and interests. Not everyone needs to get to that level, as long as there is a general awareness and understanding of the concepts presented at the workshop

I would say that 90 per cent of people that experience trauma do experience depression. People can be depressed and anxious at the same time. To treat PTSD, therapists need to help clients stay in what we call "the window of tolerance" and expand it gradually. However, sometimes the person's memory systems may be impaired. For example, the hippocampus may be atrophied and explicit memory capacities may be impaired. Even if memory capacities are impaired it is possible to revitalise those areas of the brain with something as simple as doing aerobic exercise, diet, getting good-quality sleep and social support. Psycho-education is also crucial for the person to become aware of what is happening to their brain and start self-regulating the emotions. Inactivity and social isolation, on the other hand, have negative effects as well as sleep dysregulation.

Of course, depression is a black hole and one of the most complex disorders to treat, because so many systems shut down. With depression, a shutdown occurs between thought, movement and emotion. So therapists need to pay attention to the many intersections taking place. They also need to assess if there is a risk of suicide or destructive behaviours, because thought, movement and emotion are so deeply affected by depression that a well-orchestrated approach will be needed to lift them out of it. Depression is the loss of mental networks, and inactivity fuels it.Anxiety relates to depression. To treat it we need to revitalise the hippocampus. Antidepressant medication can work, but exercise is the best antidepressant. Mindfulness is useful to control rumination (which is excessive default mode activity) as is concentrating on a mental task. To treat depression, we need to look at a person holistically and work towards restoring harmony between feedback loops, because depression is the result of these systems not working together. Our job as psychotherapists is to get them in balance.

If we are working with someone who has experienced trauma, he or she may have an overactive default network – they will be constantly thinking about what

We are the result of multiple interactive variables that need to work together and psychotherapists need to pay attention to all of these, otherwise they could delay the person's recovery.

happened to them, why it happened and perhaps be stuck ruminating about the past. When people have been traumatised they are hypervigilant and cannot readily differentiate between what is a threat and what isn't, because of the imbalance between these networks. When you are working with someone with dysregulated memory systems you need to access the executive system or the working memory systems. Having said that, trauma doesn't necessarily always destroy lives. Beethoven was a person with multiple life stressors, yet he had a very productive and in many ways fulfilling life.

MC: You mentioned the influence of gut microbes on health and how they can influence mood and behaviour. What happens when you get low diversity of bacteria in the gut?

You don't only develop chronic inflammation, you also have low levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, so you don't feel so well. That is the reason a healthy diet is so important. How do you deal with inflammation? The problem with anti-inflammatory drugs is that they don't have a good effect on multiple systems and you also get some side effects. In my opinion a balanced diet and exercising on a regular basis are the most beneficial ways to contribute to mood stability and alertness, which contributes to having good sleep architecture. Research conducted by the World Health Organisation showed that not exercising has worse health effects than smoking.

NM: Are digital devices altering the brain? There has been talk that computers weaken our brain or that our brains are changing by constant use.

Yes, digital devices are altering our way of life. We are adapting to a repetitive pattern of instant gratification and we are isolating ourselves from other people. Not being connected with others impacts negatively on our social brain networks. Sitting down most of the day and not getting out in the open air is not good for our health. At the same time, reading computer screens at night dysregulates our sleep cycle because excessive light in the evening suppresses the release of melatonin – which affects our sleep pattern by often causing insomnia, which means we are groggy the following day.

So while the internet has brought many benefits in terms of access to immediate information, we need to ensure we keep the balance right because it can also cause addictions, particularly to games.

ML: How can you help people with addictions?

People with addictions have dysregulated neurotransmitter systems. Every drug yields a less pleasurable outcome the more you use it, because the dopamine circuits get tired. There are, of course, different dopamine types.

Video games have addictive patters. Social media is addictive. The big question for those addicted to something is, where are you getting your pleasure from? Probably not from a wide repertoire of pleasurable activities. This is where balance of the different networks is crucial. In Iceland they went from having high levels of alcoholism and drug use among their youth to the lowest in Europe. How did they do it? Other European countries adopted the Iceland model. In doing so they developed a multilevel intervention plan that changed their life style to acquire satisfaction from different sources rather than from alcohol only. You need a broad repertoire of pleasurable activities to maintain the balance. We call it "complex thought satisfaction".

MC: It was kind of refreshing listening to you at the workshop. It helped me to reflect on the complexities we face every day as therapists. As you said it is not necessary to speak to the people we assist in technical terms, yet you still need to name the areas of the brain we are working on in relation to the interventions. At times we have over-explained the concepts. This is something to reflect on in terms of how we conduct psycho-education and how we innovate with our programs and interventions.

Two words keep coming up: complexity and simplicity. There are complex systems but we have to simplify them making them clear and coherent. What we need to do is "depathologise" concepts as much as possible. The more we do so the more the person is going to feel less impaired. That is the reason I don't like the word clinician, which only conveys a dichotomy, the client versus the psychotherapist.

NM: What are the key messages from the workshops?

That therapists need to broaden their knowledge to be able to assess the person they assist more holistically, to provide more integrated interventions. As mentioned earlier, we are the result of multiple interactive variables that need to work together and psychotherapists need to pay attention to all of these, otherwise they could delay the person's recovery.

It is important for therapists not to pick one school of thought and say: "This is the area I am familiar with and the area I am going to focus on and I don't want to learn much about the rest." I would say to them:

Integrated, collaborative health care is the way forward. Psychotherapists need to help people change their brain, their bodies, their lives, their interactions so that their lives a more functional, enjoyable and adaptable.

"Broaden your perspective and knowledge, get familiar with areas you never thought you would be familiar with. Don't limit yourself to the area you are most interested in, but learn about the areas you are least familiar with. Those are the areas you should start to cultivate." Don't say "that is the domain of specialists"; instead, think of yourself as a "multi-dimensional health care worker".

Integrated, collaborative health care is the way forward. Psychotherapists need to help people change their brain, their bodies, their lives, their interactions so that their lives a more functional, enjoyable and adaptable. Our job is to make the networks work well together, balanced and in harmony, and we need to help them orchestrate the fluidity between them. Psychotherapists are like conductors of a symphony orchestra and the orchestra is comprised of all these elements (feedback loops or mental operating networks) that make us who we are. So we need to understand how these systems interact with one another. The mind is comprised of the interacting activity in all these areas of the brain and the body. And it is our job to orchestrate these interactions in a much more coherent way than we ever did before.

I understand this is a sea change in the way we address mental health. We are now looking at the common denominators between the different schools of thought and trying to connect and integrate them.

As mentioned earlier, the brain and body are part of complex, interacting systems. This is quite a challenge for those that have been trained just to do counselling. Psychology is evolving at a fast pace and incorporating other fields of science, so the person who studied psychology in the past today would be studying a totally different psychology. The courses have changed, the theories have evolved, it is very different. If I wanted to study for a PhD now compared with doing so in the past, it would be totally different.

So yes, psychologists need to continuously adapt, evolve, change and expand their knowledge and skills, probably more so than in any other field because we now know so much more about the interaction between the mind, the brain and the immune system.

Psychology and medicine are now intersecting, so functionally medicine and psychology are two sides of the same coin. We can call it behavioural health or behavioural medicine. The world of the 21st century is so much larger, embracing so many more aspects than ever thought of before. I hope my book contributes in some way to that sea change. ℟

HUMAN RIGHTS

About 100 people gathered at the Sydney Hyatt last October for a discussion about human rights in Australia, organised by the Australian Human Rights Commission. OLGA YOLDI reports.

Australian voices

A national conversation about human rights

Protesters participate in a Black Lives Matter (BLM) rally at The Domain in Sydney, 5 July, 2020. AAP

Free and Equal: A national reform agenda for human rights in Australia for the next decade was the main theme of this conference, which attracted human rights activists, academics, advocates and community leaders. It covered issues ranging from Indigenous, disability and gender rights to strategies to bolster and future-proof current Australian human rights frameworks.

Australian Human Rights Commission president Professor Rosalind Croucher AM said the conference was born out of a desire to bring people together to reimagine our system of protecting human rights, look at what kind of Australia we want to live in and consider the kind of legacy we want to leave our children.

"The debate that has dominated over human rights recently has been largely unproductive, pitting different sectors of society against each other and dividing the community, resulting in a stalemate," she said. "We have lost the art of making a debate respectful and tolerant of expressions that are different."

Professor Croucher said that while we have a good sense of rights and freedoms in Australia, we don't have a well-understood, let alone embedded, framework to help us with the challenges that confront us. "While our laws are important, they are just a one type of action that ensures human rights are realised," she said. Multiple actions across multiple areas are required to make progress."

Our current human rights framework consists of federal anti-discrimination legislation including the Sex Discrimination Act (1984), Age Discrimination Act (2004), Disability Discrimination Act (1975), Racial Discrimination Act (1975) and the Australian Human Rights Commission Act (1986).

A new draft bill on a Religious Discrimination Act is now being reviewed. "Prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of religious beliefs or activities is consistent with the tolerant, pluralistic nature of Australian society," Professor Croucher said, "but the draft bill now under consideration needs changes to make sure everyone's rights are protected. Religious freedom [should] not come at the expense of others' rights, including the right of protection from discrimination." she noted that while our human rights system was innovative in the 1980s, it had been surpassed by developments in other countries: "We have lost sight of the overall purpose of protecting the human rights of the whole community."

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and former president of Chile, Her Excellency Dr Michelle Bachelet, who delivered the keynote address, said Australia lacked a comprehensive national charter of human rights laws, and that multiple actions across

multiple areas were needed to make progress in this area: "The patchwork of laws need updating, its gaps filled and its broad exemptions clarified." She said the present laws also tended to be framed in negative terms, prohibiting particular action rather than in positive, proactive terms: "As a result the model is dispute-focused rather than system-focused."

She mentioned that 600 Australian children under the age of 14 were locked away in youth jails, with Indigenous children almost 70 per cent of the total. "This is harmful and not in the best interest of the child." She urged the government to lift the age of criminal responsibility – now just 10 – to at least 14.

Dr Bachelet spoke about the Australia's human rights trajectory and raised concerns about Prime Minister Scott Morrison's criticism of the UN, noting that the scrutiny Australia received was based on standards we had helped create.

"Australia has benefited from a wealth of advice and recommendations from the UN Human Rights Commission. It has ratified most core treaties. It has been reviewed regularly by international human rights bodies and has received at least nine visits by UN special rapporteurs.

"Sometimes I do hear Australian commentators bemoan all this attention, suggesting the UN human rights machinery should focus its attention elsewhere, but this scrutiny is not the function of some international policing system enforcing rules from outside," she said. "It is based on international standards that Australia has helped to create, which successive Australian governments have voluntarily adopted and which Australians themselves have sought to engage and leverage in their efforts to make Australia a better, more inclusive and humane place."

Dr Bachelet raised concerns about Australia's mandatory detention policy. "I know Australia's asylum and migration policies have become entrenched over the years by successive governments. But I strongly believe that we are at a point now where it is time to roll back these policies or at least mitigate their worse effects." She urged the government not to reverse small steps taken such as by repealing the Medevac law, which allows doctors to recommended medical transfer of sick asylum seekers and refugees from offshore centres to Australia, which she saw as a small improvement to Australia's upholding its asylum obligations. "I am concerned that plans to repeal this law may mean more and costly court battles, with lives put at risk."

Dr Bachelet also raised concerns over gender inequality in Australia and said enabling women to gain positions of leadership in politics and society would help achieve a more equal and freer nation. She believes Australia needs to acknowledge human rights violations against Indigenous people, particularly as their pain and trauma continues to scar our society today. This resonated with Indigenous speakers at the conference, who said acknowledgement of history was essential for Australia to be able to advance human rights. They recommended a truth-telling process to achieve healing and reconciliation.

"We cannot talk about human rights and freedoms until we address the unresolved historical legacy of trauma and land dispute..."

Helen Milroy

Indigenous defence lawyer and also activist Teela Reid, who advocates constitutional recognition of Indigenous people, said she felt inspired by her discussions with Indigenous women and girls across the country and spoke about the importance of including women in these debates. Ms Reed, a Wiradjuri woman, was part of the leadership meetings that began the foundation for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which seeks to enshrine a First Nations voice to Parliament through changes to the Constitution.

Last year the Minister for Indigenous Australia, Ken Wyatt, promised a referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament and started engaging with the Council of Indigenous Leaders as the best way forward.

While having a voice is seen as essential for Indigenous Australia, child psychiatrist and Emeritus Professor Helen Milroy reminded the audience of the importance of addressing inter-generational trauma. "We cannot talk about human rights and freedoms until we address the unresolved historical legacy of trauma and land

Protester holding a stop racism now placard outside Flinders Street Station in Melbourne, Australia

Supporters of asylum seekers protest outside the Mantra Hotel in Preston, Melbourne, Saturday, May 16, 2020. The refugees detained at the hotel were on Manus Island before coming to Australia under the medevac laws. (AAP/Michael Dodge)

dispute … we need to think hard about what will be required to safeguard the future of our children."

For Northern Territory Professor Mick Dodson, a treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is the way forward: "Treaties have the potential to fix the relationship between colonisers and Indigenous people." He advocated for the adoption of international legal standards for dealing with the past and framing the future, saying The Uluru Statement from the Heart may not only enable Indigenous Australians to have a voice, but also can help in the formation of a commission to establish treaty and truth-telling processes.

Dr Dodson also advocated for a First Nation's government. "We would do so much better if we were allowed to govern ourselves and make our own decisions. Evidence overseas shows that Aboriginal-controlled institutions do much better." He noted that a First Nations government exists in Canada (for the Inuit) and the US (for Native Americans), where Indigenous people run their own affairs. "We need to support this concept in Australia," he added. Dr Dodson acknowledged it may take decades to negotiate a self-government system: "The challenge is to maintain political pressure and public interest when those processes take such a long time."

There was consensus among Indigenous speakers that it is time for all of us to work together to move forward. "One thing people don't have is time, but we

… human rights are absent from the current public policy debate in Australia, yet all political decisions should be informed by human rights considerations and politicians should be held accountable to that standard.

can achieve much if we all focus on the same goal, so I say 'Stand up, speak up, walk with us to achieve this together'," Dr Dodson said.

Yet change cannot take place until we embed the language of human rights in the political discourse. Professor Croucher said that because human rights involves a language of dispute, "each time a controversy arises people are entrenched in their own views and not on the broader conversation we need to have". Indeed, human rights are absent from the current public policy debate in Australia, yet all political decisions should be informed by human rights considerations and politicians should be held accountable to that standard. After all, Australia was a leader in the framing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has ratified most core treaties and supported and promoted human rights in the past, is a member of the UN Human Rights Council and has committed to advancing human rights globally.

Only Victoria's government, following that of the ACT, took the lead in 2006 by enacting a Statutory Charter of Rights, where submissions to Cabinet about new laws and major policies must be accompanied by a human rights impact statement. If parliament enacts laws which are inconsistent with human rights, it must publicly justify its actions, explicitly recognising that parliament has a responsibility to uphold human rights.

The conference offered an opportunity to reflect on the Australian human rights journey, the steps forward, backwards and – most importantly – the steps that need to be taken, particularly in relation to advancing Indigenous rights. It is also time to examine our treatment of asylum-seekers and look at how best we can comply with human rights conventions, rather than relying solely on domestic laws that don't reflect our international obligations.

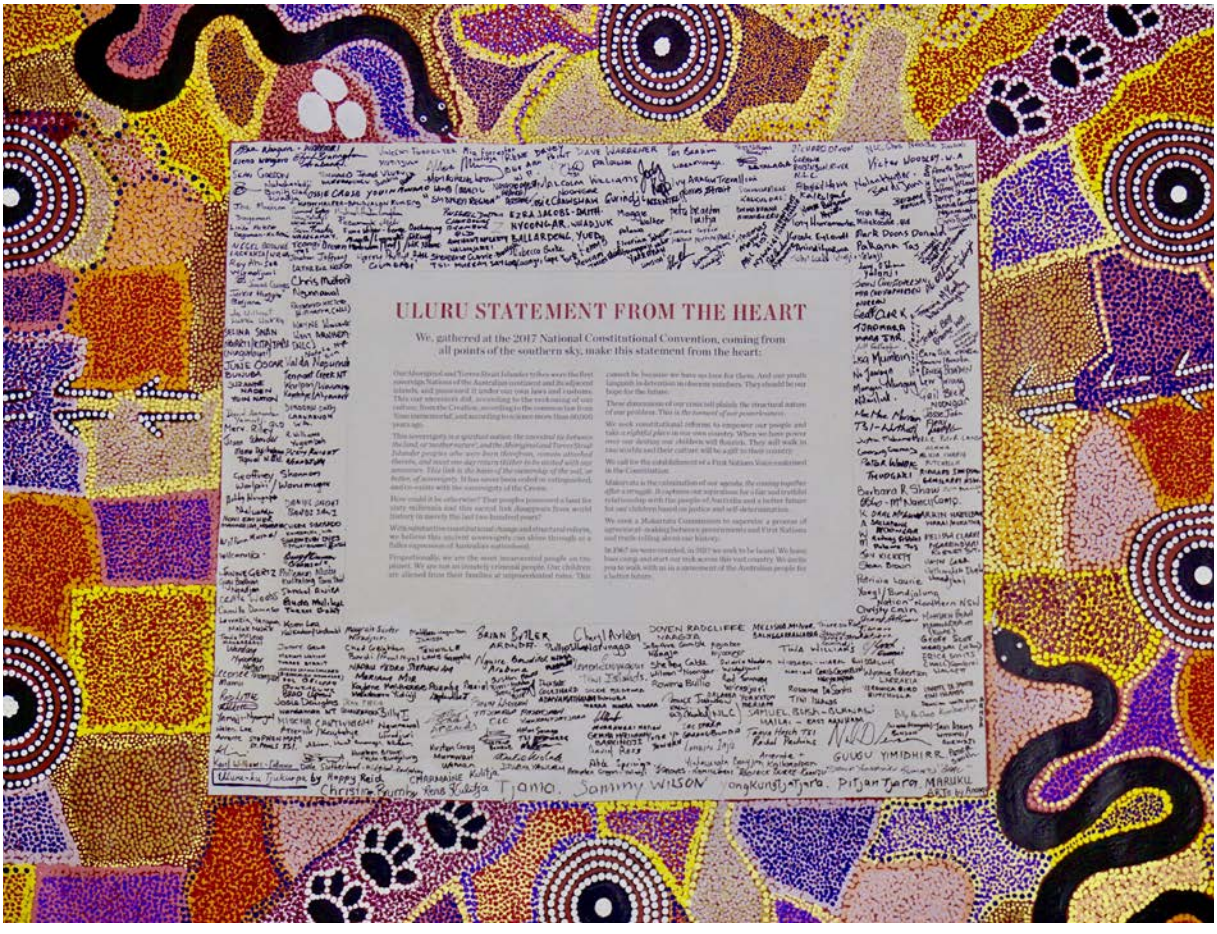
Professor Croucher recommended an agenda for federal law reform, particularly federal anti-discrimination laws, to make them more comprehensive and fairer, and easier to understand. She also mentioned the need to create an Australian human rights act and adopt a Bill of Rights.

The commission is inviting public submissions as part of a national conversation on a roadmap to guide government action and community partnerships to fully realise human rights and advance equity.

As the world changes and new and unexpected challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement arise, there has never been a better time than now to get our house in order. R

For more information visit: ***humanrights.gov.au***

"We hear everything in our hearts. We hear it all with our heart, mind, body and soul as one." – *Rene Kulitja*



Uluru statement from the heart. Artist, Rene Kulitja. Source: fromtheheart.com.au

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was translated into more than 63 different languages for Australia's multicultural communities by SBS.

Uluru Statement From The Heart

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are aliened from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future. ꟿ

A child is seen outside the new temporary camp for migrants and refugees, on the island of Lesbos, Greece, September 23, 2020

Global Perspectives on Torture

The UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture took place on 26 June amid Black Lives Matter protests around the world. To commemorate the event, STARTTS organised a webinar. Author and Emeritus Professor Stuart Rees, University of Sydney chaired the discussion. Speakers included Jorge Aroche, president of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) and CEO of STARTTS; Lisa Henry, secretary general of the IRCT; James Lin, Istanbul Protocol project coordinator and human rights barrister, author, academic and founder and head of Doughty Street Chamber, Geoffrey Robertson AO QC, spoke about human rights in the shadow of a pandemic.

JA: The main consequence of the lockdown is that it has made it more difficult for victims of torture to access services. Authoritarian governments are using the COVID-19 pandemic as a distraction to perpetrate human rights abuses on their citizens. We need to remember that some people in many regions and countries are far more vulnerable than others. I am referring to Palestine, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, India and Afghanistan, to name a few.

COVID-19 continues to have disastrous impacts on lives and livelihoods around the world. The pandemic has also triggered an increased use of technology that has enabled us to transcend our limitations in time and space. A good example is this session. But as the impact of the pandemic begins to be felt at various levels, it has also become obvious it is impacting on some more than others, and of course the most vulnerable are the most impacted.

In Australia the most affected are people on temporary visas, including asylum seekers, because they lack access to the safety nets that support people financially and can't access services in general. Also included are most of our other clients, for whom the services provided by STARTTS and community organisations make a big difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

There is evidence that social isolation and uncertainty induced by the lockdown causes an abundance of traumatic triggers for refugees. Of course, this is certainly not a criticism of the lockdown measures put in place to contain the pandemic and save lives. We have, in fact, supported and embraced such measures. However, it's important to recognise that no matter how appropriate they are, they also have a lasting negative impact on our clients. We fear that this impact is also being felt by the 70 million refugees and internally displaced people around the world, particularly those in highly vulnerable situations such as refugee camps and detention centres. We are not even close to seeing the peak of that impact.

We fear COVID-19 containment measures might also provide the perfect cover for repressive regimes to escalate repression and conduct torture with much less risk of criticism from the international community. Unfortunately, reliable information is hard to come by and when access is restricted, it becomes very challenging. At the same time the impact of the pandemic on economies, particularly on the economies of developing countries, is also affecting the most vulnerable.

LH: With COVID-19 we have seen international leadership at its worst and at its best. We have seen

Lisa Henry

Stuart Rees

excessive use of force by armies and police crackdowns of human rights defenders, extra-judicial killing and arbitrary detention. The kind of harassment of human rights defenders is unprecedented. The language of violence is gathering momentum. I heard stories in Africa of people being stripped publicly because they were meeting. The humiliation [and] the lack of rule of law as a result of the pandemic is unprecedented and very worrying.

At the same time we have witnessed the Black Lives Matter campaign, the killing of George Floyd in the US which has triggered the retraumatisation of torture survivors. The IRCT represents 158 rehabilitation centres that have assisted 57,000 torture survivors around the world. I am aware that police have destroyed some of these centres. There has been an increase in torture in many member countries. At an individual level, many people are losing loved ones to the pandemic, they face the loss of jobs, loss of housing, lack of access to food and schooling, and an increase in domestic violence. Many rehabilitation centres offer counselling services online and have health online forums, do online socialising and have published short stories.

Today, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture we remember all the injustices, and are fighting for justice and for the right to rehabilitation.

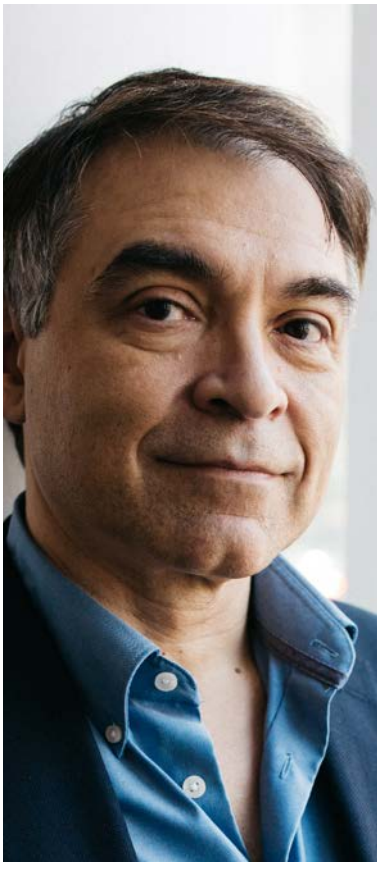
JL: We need to apply our experience in understanding the effects of torture. One of the most effective tools for ending impunity related to torture is the *Manual on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.* Commonly known as the Istanbul Protocol, this UN document outlines international legal standards and sets out specific guidelines on how to conduct effective legal and medical investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

Because of the pandemic, many courts and community services have closed. Travel is restricted, social distancing is a must. These measures present many challenges when conducting investigations on asylum seekers waiting for court proceedings, living in detention facilities, who are entitled to forensic medical evaluations to prove their claims. From a legal perspective evaluations are like witness testimonies. Now we have no choice but to conduct them remotely – however, these remote investigations are seen as less credible by judges and decision-makers.

So we have been discussing if it is worthwhile continuing with the evaluations or better to wait until we have the opportunity – who knows when? – to evaluate their cases in person. From an ethical and medical

James Lin

Geoffrey Robertson



Jorge Aroche

perspective, this presents challenges. Evaluations must be holistic. It is difficult to conduct them online, as we may miss key information.

We are also trying to find out how refugees are experiencing quarantine. In the Philippines, for instance, individuals who violate the curfew are kept in cages in the heat as punishment.

We have published a report on the effects of Conversion Therapy, a practice that includes psychotherapy and social isolation, with the aim of changing an individual's sexual orientation and identity.

On the other hand, COVID-19 has also triggered innovation in developing alternative ways of offering assistance. I recently delivered training in Afghanistan and was surprised of how well it went. You develop new skills in difficult situations.

GR: I would like to talk about the one person who did not survive torture, George Floyd. His nine-minute ordeal seen around the world was described as murder. Prosecutors had to decide if it was a second-degree or third-degree murder. The first person to describe George Floyd suffering accurately was singer Bob Dylan who said: "I was sickened to see the man tortured to death".

He remains the only person to use the word torture until the family's lawyer at the funeral said to the audience: "We can no longer cooperate with torture because torture – choking a person slowly to death, [which] was precisely what happened to George Floyd – a fate worse than death is being tortured to death."

Human Rights Watch told us last year that the most popular form of torture is suffocation as it leaves few marks. Torture in law is described as the affliction of severe pain, suffering – physical or mental – intentionally inflicted by a public official, such as a policeman. In this case it was horrific, because it was deliberate and intentional torture by a police officer.

Like many other states in the world, Minneapolis does not have the crime of torture. We have no crime of torture either. Very few of the 170 states that signed the Torture Convention have an actual local crime of torture. It is odd that so many countries don't have a specific crime to stigmatise the one form of killing that is the worst possible form of killing.

Commonwealth countries have "assault causing grievous harm". We don't label this utterly disgusting form of killing as torture. This has to change. There needs to be recognition of torture because in international law absolutely prohibits it.

There are problems with international law in relation

to torture, as it applies only to states. It doesn't apply to corporations, mercenaries, criminal gangs or security forces, who do a lot of the torturing. We should change the definition so the inflicting of serious pain on any powerless person amounts to the crime of torture, and it should also apply to international companies, mercenaries and security forces.

The other irony of the George Floyd case is that if the police had succeeded in taking him into the police van to the nearest police station, suffocating him to death there, it would have just been another black death in custody. There would have been no lawyers to visit him, no CCTV cameras recording the incident and no pictures as he struggled through the asphyxiation. There would have been no condemnation or anger around the world.

His case is a reminder of the importance of preventing and deterring torture in police stations, prisons and detention camps. Torture is prohibited even if governments are faced with a national emergency like the current pandemic.

When the lockdown began the European Commission for the Prevention of Torture issued a statement about the dangers of the pandemic. The UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture followed with another statement that said: "States must recognise the reality that prisons and detention centres are hotbeds for the spread of infection as are police cells, hostels, work camps and the like".

Indeed, we have already seen flare ups of the pandemic in work camps. All places where people sleep on top of each other, with social distancing, where there is no fresh air, exercise, sanitation and a lack of good food.

Looking at 28 countries with reliable statistics, by April this year there were 40,000 infections and 750 deaths in prisons. The state has a duty to protect the health and safety of those deprived of their liberty, otherwise failure to do so it turns a prison sentence into punishment of an inhumane and degrading kind.

How states protect the health and safety of prisoners? Simply by releasing low-risk offenders early and by emptying prisons as far as it is possible. The UK has released 300 low-risk prisoners, but in some of the worst countries in relation to human rights such as Egypt, Bangladesh and India, they refused to release a single prisoner, no matter how much danger they face. Governments should close refugee camps, even if that means accepting refugees.

For those who have to stay in detention, their stay must be proportionate and limited in time. For example, where COVID-19 restricts family visits, prisons must grant permission for prisoners to connect via Zoom and other means of electronic communication with families

There are problems with international law in relation to torture as it applies only to states. It doesn't apply to corporations, mercenaries, criminal gangs or security forces…

to help ameliorate uncertainty and isolation. Most importantly, police stations must have rules that allow immediate access to a lawyer or doctor. There must be [protective] equipment available in places of detention and staff must be trained to identify and treat patients.

Every state that deprives people of liberty has a duty to protect their health and safety. Failure in that duty exposes [people] to a form of mental torture that amounts to inhumane treatment. Freedom from fear is a very important freedom to remember in this time of the pandemic.

There have been some changes in the mechanisms we have available to deter torture in prisons and detention centres. The most important safeguard is visits. Police stations in every nation must have a law that permits prisoners to have a friend, a lawyer available. The evidence shows that when that is the case, fewer deaths and incidents occur. There are detention safeguards in relation to prisons that are generally effective only if they are unannounced visits, and this is important because the UN Convention on Torture recommends negotiating visits to prison. In Europe, visits are unannounced and seem to be effective. This means there is little torture as they will be afraid they will be discovered.

The UN system of requiring notification is less effective. People who get tortured are people who don't have lawyers. There needs to be a proper system for lawyers to be available in prisons. Unfortunately, torture occurs behind closed doors – except for Pinochet, who made his torture centres public because he wanted to terrify his opponents.

Is the pandemic a problem for torture survivors? The most recent studies suggest that if a torture survivor contracts the disease, he or she will relapse and have nightmares and flashbacks. These are a result of the disease renewing their memory. Government needs to provide rehabilitation and counselling services in this time to prevent further traumatisation.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention an important human rights achievement, the Magnitsky Law that is being considered at the moment by the Australian Parliament. This law is named after a torture victim who did not survive. His name was Sergei Magnitsky, a tax lawyer in Moscow who discovered that senior police and tax officials were using his former client companies for a massive tax heist, so he reported them to the police. The police arrested him instead of the wrong-doers, he was tortured to death and died out of sight.

But a client of his, Bill Browder, identified the torturers and began a campaign to stop them transferring stolen money through Western banks and enjoying their ill-gotten gains in the West. Obama liked the idea and in 2016 he passed the Global Magnitsky Act to target sanctions on human rights abusers. Canada followed, Britain followed and Europe. Now a joint committee of the Australian Parliament is having discussions on whether to adopt the Act, which recommends targeted sanctions against torturers and other human right abusers. These laws adopt the principle of human rights law, including the rule against torture, but they don't rely on international law because international law has so little force nowadays. They rely on national law, in this case Australian law. It will enable authorities to act against foreign torturers by stopping them from coming into the country or removing them if they are here, denying them places in universities, freezing their assets and imposing travel restrictions on foreign individuals who are deemed responsible for human rights violations. It doesn't send them to prison but it does stop them from enjoying the fruits of their crime. There are 120 submissions in favour of passing the law. But the decision is yet to be made.

I hope it will pass because there is nothing worse in setting back the rehabilitation of a torture survivor than meeting his torturer on the street. We must name, shame and blame torturers. Keep them and their money out of Australia. I hope it will be supported. ℟

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the impact on violence

— Institute for Economics and Peace

HUMAN RIGHTS

The pandemic will shift patterns of violence throughout the globe. While there has been a decline in some types of crime, battle deaths and riots due to lock-down measures, other areas such as domestic violence, self-harm and suicide are likely to have increased. There have been reports of substantially higher usage of suicide and mental health help lines as a result of the pandemic and social isolation. It is too early to tell for how long these new trends will persist, but it is likely that crime rates and riots will increase again once compulsory isolation is relaxed.

Looking at existing conflicts

As COVID-19 spread across the globe, governments imposed sweeping restrictions on movement in order to contain the pandemic. The pandemic and resulting government responses have quelled public protests in some places, while igniting them in others. Yet overall, there has been a reduction in riots and battles as a consequence of the pandemic.

The Figure below gives the trend in riots and battles recorded by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which covers most of the world except for the US, Canada and Oceania.

There has been a reduction in the number of battles and riots in the second quarter of 2020.

However, this is likely to be a short-lived phenomenon as the lockdowns are lifted and the economic downturn sets in.

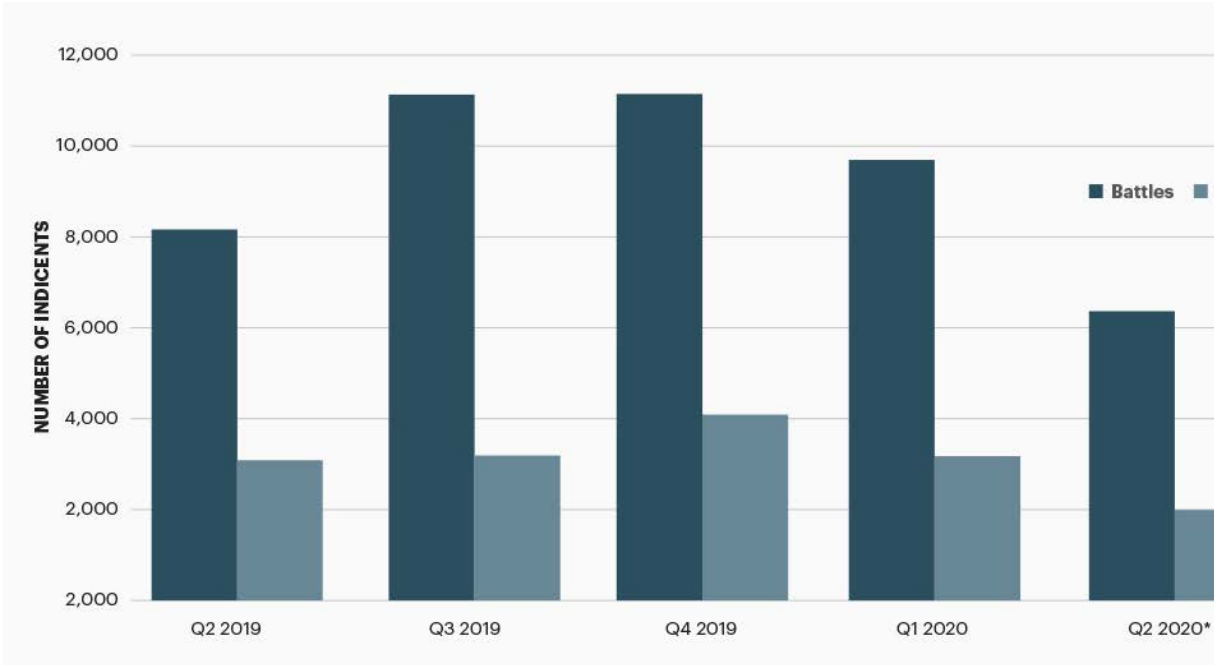
Combatants in Yemen heeded the UN request, as the Saudi-led coalition fighting Yemeni Houthis halted military activities in April. This was an important step on the path towards a permanent ceasefire to end the five-year war that killed 100,000 people. Saudi forces and the Houthis had initiated tentative negotiation talks already in 2019, but the global pandemic provided impetus to an agreement. As yet, the ceasefire proposal has not been formally agreed to by the Houthi rebels.

Student groups and civil organizations in Chile called for a suspension of protests in late March, but citizens also set up road blockades in actions calling for regional lockdowns and improved safety protocols. Demonstrations also declined in Colombia and Venezuela with the imposition of lockdowns. The restrictions were imposed indefinitely in seven states in Venezuela.

Russia and Eurasia have also recorded significantly reduced activity, as restrictive measures to limit the spread of coronavirus prevented many events from taking place. Russia postponed the referendum on reforms that would allow President Putin to extend his term beyond 2024, originally set for 25 April.

Restrictions on movement may dampen protest activity globally in the short run, but political and social tensions are likely to remain through the crisis. Some may even be amplified, as frustrations compound upon losses of livelihoods and free movement. This has been seen particularly in the US with the 'Black Lives Matter' protests, which has now turned into a global movement. Worldwide, millions of people are taking to the streets to protest police brutality and social inequalities faced by people of colour, amplified by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

As the economic fall-out increases and people become more accustomed to COVID-19, it is likely that the ten-year trend of increasing demonstrations, riots and general strikes will intensify. The effects of this on political stability will be pronounced.



Source: IEP

Exploring patterns of violence

The short-term impact of COVID-19 on patterns of violence has been mixed. On the one hand, social isolation led to a decline in crime rates by reducing the chances of assaults, muggings, fights and other violent crimes. Drug dealing has declined in many cities around the world, with traffickers finding it harder to reach potential clients. In fact, drug gangs in the US have agreed to a ceasefire so as to keep hospital beds free for COVID-19 patients. There have also been fewer reported cases of urban brawls and car accidents. On the other hand, as mentioned, domestic violence and self-harm have reportedly risen substantially as a result of confinement and greater psychological stress.

In Latin America, the pandemic led to a consolidation of power held by drug cartels in places where the state is nearly absent. With policing diverted to monitoring social distancing in city centres and suburbs, criminal organisations in urban outskirts tightened the stranglehold on residents, at times, even enforcing epidemiological social isolation.

Some types of cybercrime may increase during the time of the pandemic. As more people – especially those less skilled and experienced on the internet – look for information or go shopping on-line, cyber criminals have increasingly sought to take advantage of the unwary. They have created fake websites to collect fraudulently information from users – an activity known as 'phishing.' Google reported a 350 per cent increase in phishing websites after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and similar developments have been reported by other tech companies.

COVID-19 & Positive Peace

The term "Negative Peace" is used to describe an absence of violence or conflict. On the other hand, 'Positive Peace' is a term defined by IEP as the "attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. Peace is imagined as an environment with characteristics that allow for human potential to flourish.

The current global events surrounding the COVID-19 have demonstrated the interconnectivity of societal systems, what started as a health crisis has rapidly escalated to an economic crisis. The potential for this to lead to a social crisis increases daily.

Very shortly, the community is going to need to take peace seriously. IEP's Positive Peace work provides an eight Pillar framework that

- Demonstrates that peace is more than the absence of war.
- Is constructed through statistical evidence and not based on normative values.
- Is simple for audiences to understand.

There is immense value in IEP's Positive Peace framework as it allows audiences to interpret rapidly changing complexity, understand how peace can be maintained through this crisis and how they themselves can contribute. IEP uses this framework to conduct Positive Peace activation through:

In Latin America, the pandemic led to a consolidation of power held by drug cartels in places where the state is nearly absent.

- Publication of the GPI and the PPI with associated launches and press releases.
- Face to face Positive Peace workshops and programs including the IEP Ambassador Program with governments, practitioners and communities
- IEP's online Positive Peace Academy
- Formal education and professional development courses

IEP's work has been built up over the past decade and provides a strong evidence base for what attitudes, institutions and structures are necessary to create and sustain peaceful societies. IEP's reports and publications are available online at visionofhumanity.org

About IEP

IEP (economicsandpeace.org) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit research institute dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable, and tangible measure of human well-being and progress.

We achieve our goals by developing new conceptual frameworks to define peacefulness; providing metrics for measuring peace; and uncovering the relationships between peace, prosperity and the planet as well as promoting a better understanding of the cultural, economic and political factors that create peace.

IEP is best known for the Global Peace Index (GPI), an annual ranking of 163 countries on their levels of internal and external peacefulness. The GPI is considered to be the world's leading measure of international peacefulness. Our total work, which includes other initiatives such as on terrorism, achieved global media reach of 7 billion in the past 12 months. Our research and education information is also included in over 3,000 books and articles.

We have partnerships and collaborations with a wide range of academic institutions and think tanks in the field of peace and conflict studies, terrorism studies, development studies as well as economics and political science. Our work is widely used by the UN, World Bank, OECD and many other global organizations and nations.

We have offices in Sydney, New York, The Hague, Brussels, Mexico City and Harare and partners all over the world.

GLOBAL PEACE INDEX 2020 BRIEFING

Institute for Economics & Peace

2020 GLOBAL PEACE INDEX BRIEFING

MEASURING PEACE IN A COMPLEX WORLD

The Global Peace Index 2020 finds that the level of global peacefulness deteriorated, with the average country score falling by 0.34 per cent. This is the ninth deterioration in peacefulness in the last twelve years, with 81 countries improving, and 80 recording deteriorations over the past year. The 2020 GPI reveals a world in which the conflicts and crises that emerged in the past decade have begun to abate, only to be replaced with a new wave of tension and uncertainty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

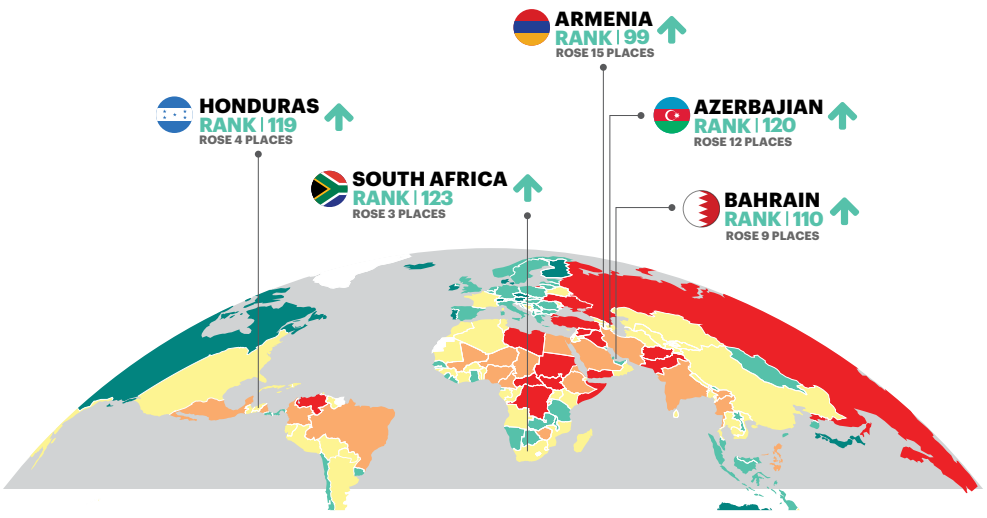
2020 key highlights

- The average level of global peacefulness deteriorated 0.34 percent on the 2020 GPI. This is the ninth time in the last 12 years that global peacefulness has deteriorated.
- The gap between the least and most peaceful countries continues to grow. Since 2008, the 25 least peaceful countries declined on average by 12.9 per cent, while the 25 most peaceful countries improved by 2.1 per cent.
- The global economic impact of violence improved for the second year in a row, decreasing by 0.2 per cent or $29 billion from 2018 to 2019. However, it is $1.25 trillion higher than what is was in 2012.
- By 2050, climate change is estimated to create up to 86 million additional migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia and 17 million in Latin America.
- The economic impact of COVID-19 will negatively affect political instability, international relations, conflict, civil rights and violence, undoing many years of socio-economic development.
- Civil unrest has doubled since 2011 – 96 countries recorded a violent demonstration in 2019, with Europe recording the most. Political instability is likely to be exacerbated by the emerging economic crisis.

FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE THE 2020 REPORT, SECTION 1:RESULTS

Five largest improvements in peace

Azerbajian, Armenia, Bahrain, South Africa and Honduras showed the largest improvements in peace in the 2020 Global Peace Index.

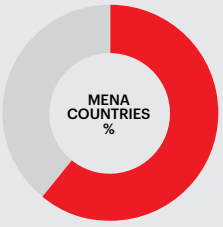


Global trends

PEACE DETERIORATION

2.5%

The average level of global peacefulness has deteriorated by 2.5 per cent since 2008.



DETERIORATION IN MENA

63%

Percentage of MENA countries that have deteriorated in peacefulness since 2008.

IMPROVEMENTS IN OVERALL PEACEFULNESS

<20%

Only two countries - Georgia and Sri Lanka - are 20 per cent more peaceful in 2020 compared to 2008.

Global overview

Last year the level of global peacefulness deteriorated, with the average country score falling by 0.34 per cent. This is the ninth deterioration in peacefulness in the last twelve years, with 81 countries improving, and 80 recording deteriorations over the past year.

Only two of the nine regions in the world became more peaceful over the past year. The greatest improvement occurred in the Russia and Eurasia region, followed by North America. North America was the only region to record improvements across all three domains, while Russia and Eurasia recorded improvements in *Ongoing Conflict* and *Safety and Security*, but a deterioration on the *Militarisation* domain.

South America and Central America and the Caribbean recorded the largest and second largest deterioration on the 2020 GPI. While South America's average deterioration in peacefulness was driven by deteriorations on *Militarisation* and *Safety and Security*, the fall in peacefulness in Central America and the Caribbean was driven by changes in *Ongoing Conflict*.

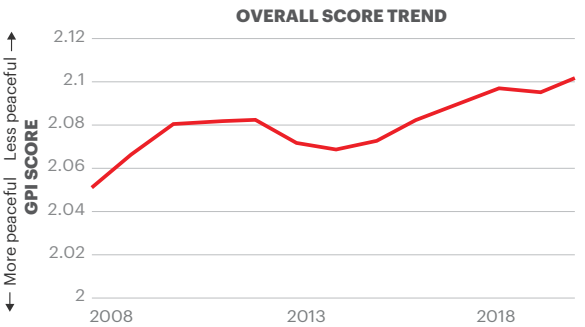
Peacefulness has declined 2.5 percent since 2008 with 81 GPI countries recording a deterioration, and 79 improving.

Environmental pressures continue to negatively impact peace. The number of natural disasters has tripled in the last four decades, with the economic impact also increasing – rising from US$50 billion in the 1980s to US$200 billion per year in the last decade.

This year's report also looks at the trends in civil unrest over the past decade. From 2011 to 2019, the number of riots, general strikes and anti-government demonstrations around the world increased by 244 per cent.

GPI overall trend and year-on-year percentage change, 2008–2020

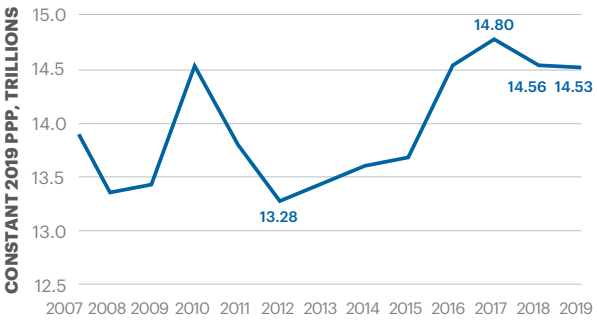
Peacefulness has declined year-on-year for nine of the last 12 years.



Source: IEP

Trend in the global economic impact of violence, trillions PPP, 2007–2019

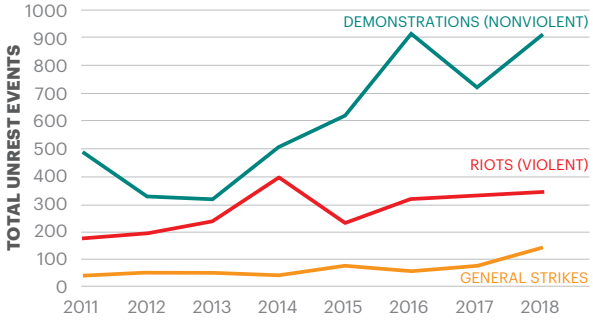
The de-escalation of conflicts, particularly in the MENA region, contributed to the 1.8 per cent decline in the global economic impact of violence from 2017.



Source: IEP

Global trends in civil unrest, 2011–2018

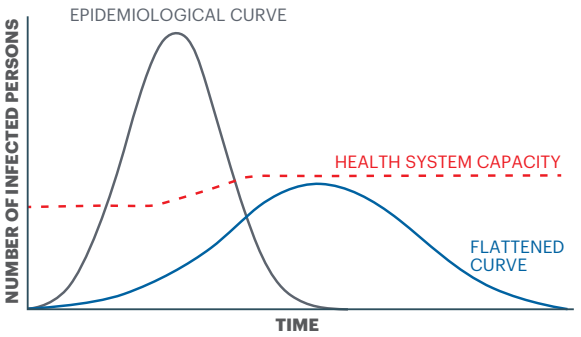
Incidents of civil unrest doubled over the last decade.



Source: Cross-National Time Series (CNTS), IEP calculations

The impact of Positive Peace on a pandemic response

Positive Peace can both help 'flatten the curve' and increase health system capacity over time.



Economic impact of violence

GLOBAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

The global economic impact of violence was $14.5 trillion PPP in 2019, equivalent to 10.6 per cent of global GDP, or $1,909 per person.

$1,909 PER PERSON OR

TEN MOST VS LEAST AFFECTED COUNTRIES

41% AVG GDP VS **3.9%** AVG GDP

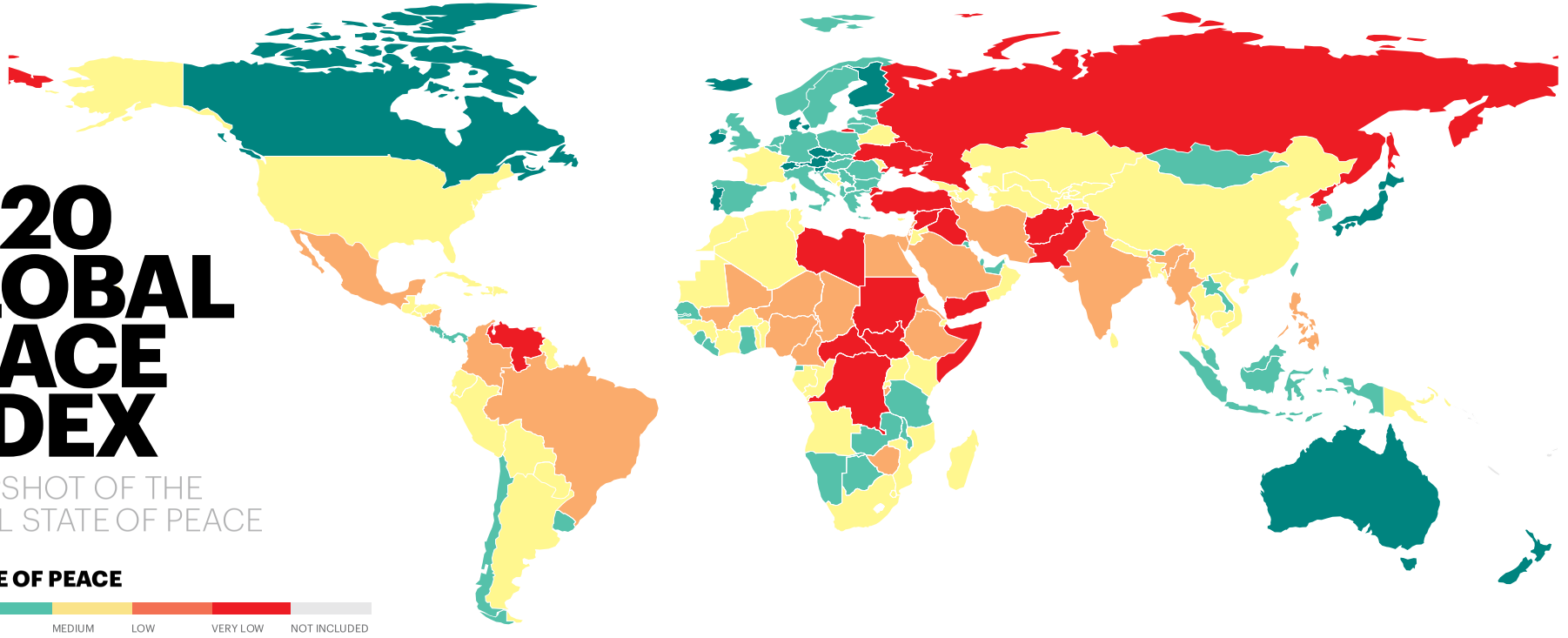
In the ten countries most economically affected by violence, the average economic cost was equivalent to 41 per cent of GDP. In the ten most peaceful countries the average economic cost was 3.9 per cent of GDP.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT

Globally the economic impact of armed conflict decreased by 11 per cent or $66 billion in 2019 to $521 billion.

2020 GLOBAL PEACE INDEX

A SNAPSHOT OF THE GLOBAL STATE OF PEACE



THE STATE OF PEACE

VERY HIGH | HIGH | MEDIUM | LOW | VERY LOW | NOT INCLUDED

The Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), ranks 163 countries (99.7% of the world's population) according to 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators of peace.

See the full list of rankings and explore the data on the interactive map at visionofhumanity.org. Click on a country to see the levels of peacefulness, compare two or more countries and use the timeline to see the changes in levels of peacefulness since 2008.

The GPI is developed by the Institute for Economics & Peace, an independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank dedicated to shifting the world's focus to peace as a positive, achievable and tangible measure of human wellbeing and progress.

IEP is headquartered in Sydney, with offices in New York, The Hague, Mexico City, Harare and Brussels. It works with a wide range of partners internationally and collaborates with intergovernmental organisations on measuring and communicating the economic value of peace.

economicandpeace.org
visionofhumanity.org
visionofhumanity.org/reports

GlobalPeaceIndex @GlobPeaceIndex @IndicedePaz @GlobalPeaceIndex

HUMAN RIGHTS

Former international footballer and sports broadcaster Craig Foster led the campaign to secure the hard fought release of refugee footballer Hakeem al-Araibi from a Thai prison. He delivered a keynote address at the STARTTS Refugee Ball.

The power of human rights

I CAME to thank you all for your support – not just of the campaign, but for what you do. I gave my time tonight to come and say: "well done!". What are the reasons? Because I met the wonderful people from STARTTS for the first time throughout this campaign, and I came to understand the power and the importance of the work that you, and all of those who support it, do at STARTTS 365 days of the year because, as you'll agree, there are many, many Hakeems.

Why was it important to capture this story in a book that we launched in the last couple of days? It was to tell the world about sport, what sport was and perhaps more importantly, what sport was not capable of doing in this case. It was also important to let Australia know what you did, what people outside this room did and what we're all capable of. That's what's most important here.

This campaign, we hope, demonstrated the heart, the love, the care, the compassion that exists within not just people who work in this field, not just within the NGO and Human Rights sector – and yes, they are extraordinary people here who I have met in the last couple of years, and particularly in the past 12 months since Hakeem al-Araibi was incarcerated for the third time in his life – but for everyone else in broader Australia and, indeed, around the world.

At a time when the treatment of immigrants and immigration certainly when treatment of asylum seekers is in such a horrible place around the world including in this country, we have shown that we can come together. We showed the power of enough people who care, of enough people with a sense of humanity. As I've said so often since that campaign and those fateful few months, one of the keys to it was this: we reached over 30 million people around the world. More than 150,000 people signed petitions in Australia alone and several million shared content on social media, we trended in 81 countries – and not one of those people looked at Hakeem al-Araibi and said, "There's a kid over here who is in trouble, but..." No one said "but" and no one should. Certainly in our game of football the word should be barred, and here it should be barred because we are a nation of immigrants.

In this country, to think that we can paint people who want to seek asylum as somehow different, as less worthy, is really disheartening, extraordinary and quite incredible in a country that is so wonderful in many

Craig Foster at STARTTS Refugee Ball. Photo: Milan Acosta.

respects. I believe in this country, I always will. We have significant challenges and all of us in this room know that in this sector we have been in a bad space for a long time, but I'm an optimist.

I believe we can get out of it and I'm hopeful that this campaign can play just a tiny part of that role because no one said "this kid Hakeem al-Araibi" – who we'd never met, Australia didn't know – no one said "yeah, but he's a Muslim". Not one person said that. No one said: "Yeah, but he's a refugee. Yes, he's being tortured; yes, he's being detained; yes, his life is in jeopardy, but he's on a protection visa, so why should we give him our help?" No one said that, and rightly so.

In this campaign we saw what Australia really is and we showed the best of what we're capable of, in my view. The day that Hakeem came back to Melbourne Airport was a wondrous day. He spoke to Australia and he was so grateful for what Australia had done for him. He went off to see his young wife, who he hadn't seen for months and who he thought he'd never see again, and she thought likewise. The next day I had a letter published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* [addressed] to Scott Morrison and Bill Shorten in which I said: "We really did a fabulous job together." And to be clear to everyone here – and thank you to Tracey Holmes for her wonderful comments, but I'm not Superman. I'm the same as you. There is no difference. That's what the campaign was about. Hakeem is me, I'm Hakeem. We speak a different language. He's so smart, he's learning English. I'm not learning Arabic very well, though I promised him I would!

There's no difference between us because I played football to a certain level, so what? We came together, two human beings with different life experiences, different passports and different age. He was exactly half my age. He was 25 years old, if you want to know. He was 25 years old and I said to my beautiful wife, Lara, who's here today: "My darling, we have lived double his life. We have had an extraordinary experience, we have a beautiful family and we must give this young man the same opportunity." Thankfully, with your help and [that of] so many others, we were able to do so.

I work at SBS but I worked for around 15 years with one of the most marvellous human beings I ever met. His name was László Ürge. You might know him as Les Murray. People wrote songs about him. He wrote songs himself. He dreamed of being a musician. Nevertheless,

he became an iconic broadcaster, one of the best this country has produced. In fact, he was produced by another country, Hungary, and came here in 1957 when his family paid people-smugglers for him to be able to seek a new life, as so many have done since and will continue to do.

I sat next to Les for 15 years and learnt from a master of his craft, and someone who Australia looked to as a guide, someone who was an elder of Australian society, certainly in the multicultural space. I know we have an SBS table here this evening and there'll be some tears during this talk about Les. People at SBS loved him, and rightly so, because he was a wonderful human being. He was an Australian-Hungarian. Hakeem al-Araibi is an Australian-Bahrainian, but the beauty is this country welcomed them and gave them a home, and they contribute to this country, Les and so many others, in extraordinary ways.

They contributed to my life. I'm a better person, I hope, because I know them or I knew them. Hakeem al-Araibi is just another and there are so many others in this room. There is no difference between us. Australia needs to understand, through this campaign, what they achieved and that that is the rule that we should apply every minute of every day of our lives. Are you with me? I believe that we can, [through] collective power, unity and humanitarian values. We are all the same. We all deserve respect. We deserve equality irrespective of any difference between us and we all have immutable, universal human rights.

I have three extraordinary children. Like you, what do we dream for them? I dream for a safe home. I dream for them to have opportunity. I dream for a great education. I work hard for that every day. So does everyone else. Everyone else has a right to seek those things in their life, to be safe, to be free from tyranny and torture. Hakeem al-Araibi today is free from torture because this country is an extraordinary place.

We're going to capture that spirit that we all believe in, but which has wavered in recent years, and we've lost a little bit of that essence, but we can get it back. Hakeem al-Araibi is free from torture but this room, and this campaign, proves that we can give others the same chance.

Just before I finish, I will tell you that I went last week to Port Moresby. When I wrote the letter to Scott Morrison and Bill Shorten, I said: "We did a wonderful job here, thank you to you." The government really stepped up with enough public pressure and that's the importance of community grassroots support. The government did a fabulous job in the end to get him out, but [in the letter] I said, "That's great. We've done this incredible work for this young man, but what we're doing to asylum-seekers elsewhere is just not right." The difference between what we did there and what we're doing over here is so great that they can't be reconciled. It's not possible.

In this campaign we saw what Australia really is and we showed the best of what we're capable of...

People in Australia can disagree on many things and this talk is not about policy, but I'll tell you one thing that's a hundred per cent sure and which I believe Australians know and will fight for: it's that we're all the same. It doesn't matter if you're seeking asylum or otherwise, you deserve to be treated humanely and you deserve to be given an opportunity at life.

Here's the hard part. Last week I went to Port Moresby and spoke to refugees, asylum-seekers, who have been there for almost seven years and, having been involved in this campaign, played for the country, had an opportunity to captain the team – to see what's happened there is something that's impossible to reconcile with who I believe we are. To speak to them and hear their stories about the trauma they have suffered is something no Australian could ever expect to have to do.

I sat with a large number of them last week and felt their pain. I listened to their stories and I pledged to them my support, as much as I can give, and to come back to Australia and to say to everyone here: "We did a wonderful job together for Hakeem. We need to let these people go and have mercy. Let them get on with their lives."

We are not metal. We are not stones. We have the same heart as everyone else and we just want an opportunity at life; that's what we did for Hakeem; that's what Australia is capable of. I believe we're capable of getting back to a space where everyone can be treated humanely, irrespective of where they come from, their religion, whether they're seeking asylum or otherwise.

I congratulate you on all of your work. It's a marvellous organisation. You have my full support and together, let us show Australia the best of who we are. R

STARTTS Refugee Ball, Hyatt Regency Sydney. Craig Foster with Jarrod Galbraith-Marten, Project Officer of Multicultural Futsal series and guests. Photo: Milan Acosta

STARTTS Refugee Ball, Hyatt Regency Sydney. Craig Foster with STARTTS CEO Jorge Aroche. Photo: Milan Acosta

The triangle of terror

A former member of Barrio 18 gang, crochets a hat during a workshop at the prison of San Francisco Gotera. - Members of two of the world's most feared gangs, El Salvador's Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18, prepare to reintegrate into society as they receive a range of classes in jail including DIY, music and knitting as part of a program known as "I Change." GETTY

MODERN CONFLICTS

The Central America Northern Triangle, formed by El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, is one of the most deadly regions in the world, where violence and murder have forced thousands to flee. ANTONIO CASTILLO writes.

William Moreno used to be a second-hand car dealer in the so-called "Esquina Caliente" (hot street corner) in Medina – one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods of San Pedro Sula, the second-largest city in Honduras. At 6pm on July 2 last year two sicarios (gang soldiers) on a motorbike gunned him down. His son, William Fredery Moreno, was also killed. The killing of Moreno and his son were two of the almost 4,000 murders committed in Honduras in 2019.

Almost a year has passed since the killing and yet nothing official is known of the motives for the murder. That is not unusual around here, though. Killings are reluctantly investigated and rarely solved. Street gossip gives you hearsay clues. Apparently, Moreno was in arrears with the extortion payments forced upon him by the local "clica" (cell) of the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS13 – one of the most notorious criminal gangs operating in the Central America Northern Triangle and beyond, including the US.

The Northern Triangle nations – Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador – are home to 33 million people. The label "Northern Triangle" goes back to May 12, 1991, when the three countries signed a trade deal in Nueva Ocotepeque, western Honduras. They are nations horrendously disfigured by the wars of the 1980s and 1990s. In this lawless region, extortion, drug trafficking, kidnapping, rape and homicide have been normalised. From January 2014 to December 2018, the Northern Triangle was the setting for 71,889 violent deaths or homicides.

Among the three countries, El Salvador is the undisputed epicentre of violence in Central America. A small country of 6.5 million – described once by Chilean poetess and Nobel winner Gabriela Mistral as the "pulgarcito" of Latin America (the little thump) – El Salvador has the highest homicide rate in Latin America: 58 per 100,000 inhabitants. The country's murder tally is marginally ahead of Guatemala and Honduras, with homicide rates of 45 and 43 per 100,000 people respectively. A report by the International Crisis Group said that nearly 20,000 people were killed in 2014 and 2017.

The Central America Northern Triangle endures a continuing, catastrophic humanitarian crisis, with levels of violence usually associated with war zones. In El Salvador, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, rates of violent deaths are higher than in any country at war except for Syria. Violent deaths

are so common that morgues have become "journalism rounds" – routine.

The staggering level of crimes in the Central America Northern Triangle is largely perpetrated by the so-called "maras", brutal criminal gangs that bourgeoned at the end of the 1990s. The term "maras" derives from the word "marabunta", a species of large and carnivorous ants characterised by attacking in groups. It is estimated that more than 900 "maras" are actively engaged in criminal activities in Central America, particularly extortion and drug-trafficking. They are one of the main sources of the region's mass suffering and killings.

The biggest "maras" – the best-organised and the most vicious are the Mara Salvatrucha, or MS13, and Calle 18 (Ward 18). Together they have an army of 60,000 heavily tattooed members, largely marginalised, unemployed and forgotten young men who found a way of life and a form of belonging in their illegal activities. In 2012, the US Department of the Treasury branded the Mara Salvatrucha a "transnational criminal organisation".

Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18 have their roots in the US in the 1980s, when more than a million Central Americans sought asylum there, to escape the civil wars that savaged a large part of the impoverished Latin American region. The two organisations were born out of fierce gang warfare among young refugees hardened and brutalised by the war back home.

In the mid-1990s thousands of Central Americans, including some members of the Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18, were deported to their home countries – to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. According to one estimate cited by the investigative foundation InSight Crime, 20,000 criminals returned to Central America between 2000 and 2004. That trend continues.

Citing a US law enforcement official, InSight Crime says the US sends 100 former convicts per week back to El Salvador alone.

Back home the "maras" began re-creating their criminal modus operandi learned in the mean streets of Los Angeles. And in contrast to the political factions involved in the 1980s and 1990s wars, factions that pursued ideological objectives, the maras pursue, as academic Everardo Víctor Jiménez wrote, financial "personal benefits"

In the pursuit of financial gains the Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18 have managed to gain – with the cooperation of venal police and civil authorities – full control of streets, neighbourhoods and municipalities. Back in the Northern Triangle, the maras criminals dominate large urban and rural territories by establishing themselves as an alternative to state power.

A report by the International Crisis Group indicates that the Mara Salvatrucha is active in 94 per cent of El Salvador's 262 municipalities. From here they impose on large sections of the population the so-called "tax of fear" – extortion. In Guatemala an investigation found that up to 20 per cent of homicides are connected to extortion.`

After months of threats against her life, "Helena" –not her real name – finally gave up. Helena is a transgender sex worker in the red-light district of Independence Avenue in El Salvador's capital, San Salvador. Every month, in addition to paying for water, food and rent, Helena has to set aside a few US dollars, the currency in El Salvador, for the extortionists. "They are very kind to offer you protection," she said in her wounded voice. She said she paid up to US$80 every month to one of the local cells of the Mara Salvatrucha.

In this region extortion does discriminate. The victims are the most vulnerable ones – owners of small businesses, street bread sellers, shoe repairers, bus and taxi drivers and sex workers, among others. Emilia is one of a dozen street sellers around the Municipal Market of San Jacinto, in El Salvador's capital. She, like the rest of her colleagues, have to pay about US$ 1 daily to the local cell of the Mara Salvatrucha. Owners of humble public transport companies are heavily "taxed" – they have to pay US$6,000 a week to stay safe. Hundreds of public transport workers have been killed after refusing or being unable to pay the extortion fee.

According to a 2019 study by Insight Crime and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, the Northern Triangle suffers the highest extortion costs in Latin America, about 2 per cent of its GDP. Salvadorans pay US$756 million annually for extortion, according to the Central Bank of El Salvador, and in Honduras up to US$200 million, according to the country's National Anti-Maras and Gangs Force.

Extortion has forced the closure of potential sources of employment. In 2016 and 2017 alone in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, a thousand 500 small shops were closed about 30 per cent of the businesses in the capital. Small businesses in Honduras generate between 60 and 70 per cent of employment, but are forced to pay US$200 million annually in extortion. In El Salvador, 72 per cent of small businesses have reported daily losses of up to US $20 million. In Guatemala, where extortion has increased by 72 per cent over the past four years, small businesses account for 85 per cent of employment.

The extortion market includes even school students and poorly paid teachers. In Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, the two biggest cities of Honduras, students are required to pay up to 100 to 200 lempiras, the currency of Honduras (between US$4 and US$8), per week to avoid being brutally

A Honduran migrant, part of a caravan trying to reach the U.S., climbs on a truck in Quezaltepeque, Guatemala October 16, 2018. AAP

beaten. In some schools, low-rank foot soldiers of the maras have taken control of the bathrooms: students wanting to use them have to pay a fee.

Thousands of schoolteachers are forced to pay a fee to access the schools where they teach, says Daisy Marquez, president of the College of Secondary Teachers of Honduras. No wonder that thousands of educators have left the Northern Triangle. In El Salvador there are schools that literally run out of teachers.

While extortion is a major source of financial gain for Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18, the biggest growth area is the illicit drug trade. Since 2006, when Mexican criminal cartels began moving their operations to Central America following the Mexican government's militarisation of the war on drugs, Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18 have become part of the production and trafficking of methamphetamine and other drugs. They also provide the Mexican cartels with essential criminal services such as well-trained sicarios.

As a result, the Northern Triangle has become the main smuggling corridor of drugs heading to the American market. The US Department of State estimates that near 95 per cent of the cocaine that enters the US from South America and even Mexico comes through the Central American corridor.

For the World Health Organisation, violence in this region is endemic and now chronic in some urban areas. It is a violence that not only costs lives, but it also perpetuates chronic poverty. Lina Barrantes, executive director of the Arias Foundation for Peace and Human Progress said: "Violence has a high social impact." It "affects the management capacity of the state, diverts government funds for development and at the same time reduces domestic and foreign investment".

The high level of violence is considered one of the key factors in the under-development, dire poverty and lack of opportunities – especially for young people – that the region endures. In the case of Honduras, the Inter-

Soldiers guard a corner in a gang-controlled neighborhood in Ilopango, El Salvador. AAP

....rates of violent deaths are higher than in any country at war except for Syria.

American Development Bank found that the cost of violence reaches 1.6 per cent of the country's GDP, about US$310 million. According to the World Bank: "Honduras has one of the highest poverty rates in the Western Hemisphere. Nearly one in five Hondurans lives on less than US$1.90 [per day]."

In this seemingly unstoppable cycle of violence, murder, fear and poverty, the only option is to join the long march into a life of displacement and exile. In Honduras, a country with about 66 percent of the population living in poverty, many families must leave their homes overnight because of threats.

The annual number of asylum-seekers from the Northern Triangle increased five-fold between 2012 and 2015, reaching 110,000 by 2015. In 2017, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there was a significant increase in asylum applications by citizens of El Salvador (59,400), Guatemala (36,300) and Honduras (34,900).

Salvadorean policemen from a new anti-gang task force parade in Comalapa, 38 km south of San Salvador

Among the displaced are thousands of minors, many of them unaccompanied. In 2014 more than 66,000 unaccompanied minors were detained trying to cross the southern border of the United States. Three out of four minors came from the Northern Triangle. In 2017, former US President Donald Trump approved new immigration guidelines calling for parents of unaccompanied minors to be prosecuted for "human smuggling".

Minors are escaping from being recruited by criminal gangs. They are recruited to replace those gang members who have been either arrested or killed. They are also recruited to engage in activities such as the collection of extortion payments, to transport drugs, to carry out weapons and neighbourhood surveillance. These are criminal initiation tasks that eventually lead them to becoming – usually at the age of 15 or 16 – "gatilleros" (triggermen).

A large section of those fleeing are women, mainly young. In a study the Organization of American States (OAS) reported that 45 per cent of people fleeing Central America are women who have experienced violence and want to preserve their lives and those of their families.

Carmina, 27, escaped from El Salvador when members of the Mara Salvatrucha began "ogling my daughter", Marcia, 12. She feared Marcia would become, as happens to many, a gang's member sexual slave.

Carmina, Marcia and thousands of other women flee to escape violence and murder. Between January 2018 and August 2019, according to the Regional Human Rights Monitoring and Analysis Team for Central America, about 2,200 women were murdered in the Northern Triangle.

Solutions to the Northern Triangle's violence and criminality have been labelled Iron Fist in El Salvador, Zero Tolerance in Honduras and Sweep-Up Plan in Guatemala. They have been underpinned by heavy-handed militarised actions, but all have been resounding failures.

According to a 2017 International Crisis Group report, "repressive and militarized anti-maras policies have proven to be not only ineffective, but also counterproductive", because they forced governments to increase military and police spending. According to the Arias Foundation, Guatemala and Honduras increased military spending by 18 per cent, cutting spending on education, health and employment programs.

One feature of this heavy-handed approach has been the mass incarceration of maras members in overcrowded prisons – which have become the new headquarters for the leaders of the Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18. From inside the jails they have strengthened their national structures and sharpened their ability to coordinate activities. In Guatemala, an estimated 80 per cent of extortions are handled from prisons.

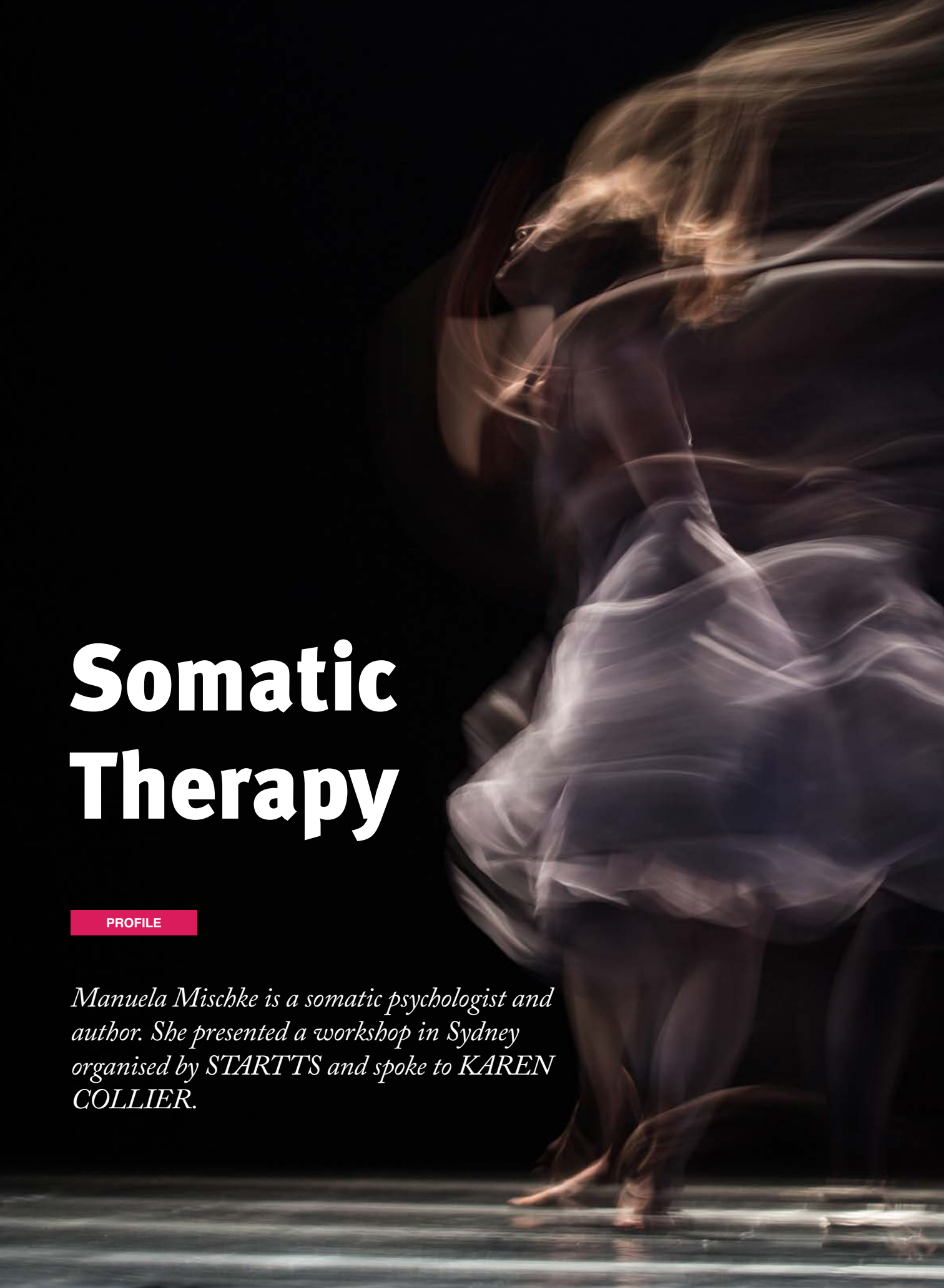
...the maras criminals dominate large urban and rural territories by establishing themselves as an alternative to state power.

In 2012 in El Salvador there was a rare attempt to find a peaceful solution to the violence and crime, a truce backed by the Catholic Church and the OAS. It failed. The truce was terminated in 2014 because of a lack of political will and support of the government. The heavy-handed strategy began again – and violence spiralled anew.

The lack of the rule of law and corruption are the two most common reasons for the failure of attempts to counter Northern Triangle violence. Transparency International has placed El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala well down on its global anti-corruption index. The three nations have four former presidents – Salvadoran Antonio Saca, Honduran Rafael Callejas and Guatemalans Otto Pérez and Alvaro Colom – in jail or under house arrest for corruption.

In this part of the world, the credibility of a state's ability to resolve the problem of violence and crime is questionable. What is unquestionable, however, is that in this part of the world fear and violence exist alongside growing despair. R

Antonio Castillo is a journalist and academic who teaches journalism at RMIT University of Melbourne



Somatic Therapy

PROFILE

Manuela Mischke is a somatic psychologist and author. She presented a workshop in Sydney organised by STARTTS and spoke to KAREN COLLIER.

Somatic psychotherapy seemed to evolve in relative obscurity over the past few decades alongside other modalities, yet now it's being demystified through evidence-based research. Why do you think that is?

The mindfulness movement has brought with it an interest in learning not only how to work with our mind, but also with our body. You can't really separate mindfulness from the body. As soon as you slow down and tune into yourself, you start feeling sensations and emotions and you begin to feel the body.

There is a body-mind connection that has been there for a long time. That's why people are interested in somatic psychotherapy. We spend more time now being sedentary in front of our devices and we are not so in touch with our bodies, with our earth. Both body and earth go together in my view. When you are in touch with your body, you are in touch with the earth around you, with your surroundings and with every living organism. As a culture we are hungry for connection to the self and to our own bodies. People, especially when they have experienced trauma, are disconnected from their body. That's why mindfulness is so appealing. I think somatic psychology is a holistic model to heal ourselves, to do therapy.

In your STARTTS workshop you spoke about "somatic intelligence". Can you explain what that is?

Somatic intelligence refers to this innate capacity to know how to heal oneself, to the innate ability to access knowledge of one's own body, knowledge that comes from sensations. We all have an innate capacity for self-healing. What we have lost is the connection to the innate knowledge of self-healing, or somatic intelligence, because we don't normally tune into our bodies.

This is where mindfulness comes in. When we slow down and begin to open up our awareness, we begin to feel and sense our innate somatic intelligence coming forward, which may manifest through a sensation in the chest, a fluttering in the belly. "Soma" means the body. It's the body language that comes forward. When people go on retreats they have somatic experiences, although they wouldn't usually label it that way.

This terminology was coined by Eugene Gendlin a long time ago [to define] the awareness and knowledge of the body coming forward, the alignment of the body and mind. We all have this capacity. In very important moments of our lives we tap into somatic knowledge, somatic intelligence – the gut feeling – to guide us. Some like to call it intuition.

Somatic intelligence is innate in everybody, and we don't lose it: we just lose the connection to it. When we experience trauma especially, our activation levels are so low that we lose connection to our somatic intelligence. But if we create conditions of safety, connection and compassion, the person will reconnect with it.

You've trained with Peter Levine, the pioneer of Somatic Experiencing. What inspired you to explore this path early on your journey?

I was very lucky to meet Peter when I was a graduate student and he was working with Marianna Ekberg. She had done some work in Latin America with survivors of political torture. She created a rehabilitation centre. We worked with survivors using a holistic model that included an acupuncturist, physiotherapist and us. I realised this was how trauma needed to be healed, because it is all in the body. I began to work with torture survivors and soon realised that talking about their pain wasn't enough to heal. While it was important, it was not enough to hear all the symptoms that they were experiencing, which were flashbacks, states of frozenness, night terrors and the classic symptoms of PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. It sounds strange, but I kind of fell in love with the silent language of the body. I felt like I had a toolkit to help these people. I realised I really wanted to work with trauma, as that is where I wanted to make a difference.

In your work with torture and trauma survivors, you realised as a therapist that trauma cannot be fixed. There's such authenticity in that. How did this realisation come about?

I was working with a torture survivor from Nicaragua. She experienced somatic symptoms like neck pain and had severe disabilities and restrictions on her body because of the torture. I asked her if there was a childhood memory that was resourceful for her. And she said: "Oh yes, there was a mango tree that I loved sitting under." I said: "Go ahead and let yourself sit under that mango tree and see how that feels to you and your body."

She did so. She calmed down and was very peaceful. She said that under that mango tree, she had become immersed in that moment. She was silent. Then she said: "They could break my bones, but they can't break my spirit." I then realised that she was traumatised, scarred, damaged and in pain, but her spirit was intact.

I also realised there was something deeply spiritual or sacred about even the most gruesome of experiences. The trauma experience gave her a heightened understanding of life. Then I understood that trauma is, in fact, a much bigger and complex phenomenon. This idea that we need to "fix" trauma takes away the valuable insights, growth and sacred experiences that come from it as well. I realised a trauma survivor needs to come into

Left to right: STARTTS Clinical and Research Coordinator, Mariano Coello, Resource and Information Officer, Samira Hassan, Manuela Mischke-Reeds, Clinician Trainer, Mooria Mehraby and DS Counsellor / PO Hazaragi, Rohulla Rahimi Photo: Karen Collier, STARTTS

a relationship with all of those experiences to truly heal.

As therapists I don't think we are there to fix anybody. We need to connect clients back to their somatic intelligence so they can tap into their own inner resources, learn how to calm themselves, use tools that can help, but also come into this deep understanding of why they are here and find their own connection back to faith or spirituality. Often people lose their faith or their spirituality because of the trauma they experienced. If we talk about fixing trauma, we are also taking away all these other insights about life, knowledge and depth. We are not in the business of fixing people, but of helping them connect to their own innate healing and wellbeing so that they can help themselves. That is the most powerful gift we can give to anybody.

This realisation is a breakthrough in the way we can work with trauma in the future.

I hope so. I'm not alone in this, a lot of people in the somatic world think that way. When therapists believe they hold all the knowledge required to help somebody with unimaginable trauma, it places them under an enormous burden. But how can they? They are just human beings too and don't have the answers. They may have some tools, some understanding, some research and some knowledge; that is all. It is too much [to expect] a therapist can fix someone. I don't think that's a good model of health and wellbeing.

We might be on the verge of a paradigm shift in this regard?

I think that is happening. A lot of people are realising that the traditional model is exhausting. That's why burnout and vicarious trauma is so common.

Absolutely, we are experiencing a period where trauma is collective and all-pervasive – the influence of the media, global crises, natural disasters and the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Fear and uncertainty is assaulting our nervous systems, particularly in the most vulnerable groups we work with. What is happening in the mind and body when we are traumatised? You describe it as a "disruption of the organismic self".

With trauma, we lose the connection to our somatic intelligence because our survival mechanisms are wired for protection and connection. We want to be safe and survive first, so when we are under threat or when we experience trauma, our survival mechanisms are brought into the foreground. We want to flee, we want to fight, we want to freeze, we want to appease. We also focus on the relationships that are perpetrating against us so that we don't get hurt. It takes up a lot of our survival mechanisms. I'm connected with one part of my innate intelligence, which is I'm learning how to survive. That is also part of my innate wisdom. It is coupled with a lot of fear and anxiety and it potentially overwhelms and

dissociates me and so on. In those circumstances I don't have access any more to the more creative aspects of myself.

What I mean by "organismic self" is the somatic intelligence, like when you feel yourself, when you consult your own body for answers, when you are quiet and tap into your own inner resources and information. When you are stressed and anxious you react, you don't respond. Responding means you are considering: you are having a thoughtful reciprocity to whatever you are engaging with. But when you are in the fight, flight, fright, freeze mode you just react, you are not in touch with yourself and you usually make pretty bad decisions based on basic survival [instincts]. You also misread the cues of your environment. You move further and further into a disconnection with yourself, with others and with the world around you, then you see the world as a hostile place. That is what I mean by the disruption of the organismic self. You're not in tune with yourself any more, you are just in survival mode.

In your work with fire-fighters in the US you described a trauma-informed technique you use, the process of "unlinking". How does this technique help treat PTSD, particularly in working with first responders?

First responders build up anxiety and stress responses and need trauma-informed therapy. While first responders are really capable, creative and resourceful people with good hearts, they are also human beings and have limits. They need to learn techniques to release stress responses and access trauma-informed therapy, which in my view includes the body and mindfulness.

I presented a mental health awareness workshop to about 300 firefighters in Silicon Valley that included mindfulness techniques, somatic awareness and resourcing. I explained what they needed to do while on call and between calls. I taught them unlinking techniques [where] they have a moment of reflection to unlink from the tragedy they have witnessed or the people they had just served, especially if they witness a traumatic event or death. Then I asked them to slow down, breathe and say to themselves: "Your suffering is not my suffering; your emergency is not my emergency, your death is not my death. Thank you for letting me serve you in my role and I am unlinking from you now." Then I introduced an activity designed to help let go.

This is most useful because that moment of conscious awareness and conscious transition is huge, as it enables them to bring down their arousal levels and come back to their body rather than being constantly in that reacting emergency response. That is practising resilience.

Some mental health professionals working with first responders burn out easily because the events they experience are so intense. One person told me: "My therapist got up and said, 'I can't deal with this any more' and walked out on him." The therapist may not have been trauma-informed and was not taking care of his or her own nervous system. Therapists must be trauma-informed to work effectively with first responders.

You have spoken openly about your own burnout cycles. Did you also find that vicarious traumatisation was something that you were never taught?

It has not been taught. Even if they talk about self-care, they talk about it after you have seen the client. Back when I was trained, nobody even said what self-care was. At the time nobody was giving therapists the necessary tools. Now we talk about being trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive. When you are on the front line of human suffering you underestimate the contagion aspect of trauma and anxiety. We are wired to inform each other from one organism to another when there is a danger and the way we do that is through fear and anxiety. So when somebody in our group and our herd gets anxious, we all feel it and it resonate with us. When we are around people who have unprocessed trauma, as therapists we activate our own nervous system all the time when we respond to it. So our body feels it and suddenly we are tired or feel anxious at the end of the day, we are no longer tuned in enough in that moment.

I went through many burnout cycles. I was lucky that I had the somatic tools and meditation practice to restore myself, and it was really through my own burnout cycles that I started to experiment with mindfulness, movement and breathing practices. I started to put myself back together and help other health professionals as well. Continual movement helped me the most. By doing these practices you get stronger, then you connect yourself with the deep resources of earth and spirituality and your own connection with life. It becomes a very unshakeable connection. That is exactly how I feel it. It makes you strong. If you don't do these practices, you burn out.

I read that you felt "the darkness of humanity" descending upon you at that time. How did you overcome that?

This is when it became very dark, I learned what political torture meant, that some human beings were inflicting unimaginable suffering on others. I lost faith in humans and I lost the connection to my own body. I felt frozen and became fearful. The teachings of the Dharma helped me. The first noble truths, the part that says "human life is suffering". I started to contemplate it. At the time, I was exposed to some Buddhist teachers. That was helpful to me. Also just doing the movements where I began to breathe, slow down and tense my body and I felt a connection with myself again. I had to rebuild that kind

of trust in my own organism, the somatic intelligence we were talking about earlier.

I did mindfulness and movement practice. I immersed myself in spiritual teachings to understand the larger connection of how trauma fits into human life. Then I was inspired by my clients. If a client can sit across from me and say "they can break my bones, but not my spirit", that was a turning point for me because I realised, "wow, if this person can survive that, then I can go through this darkness too".

That motivation really honours resilience doesn't it?

You go through one of those dark cycles and you come out more resilient, gain more skills and more understanding. Then I began to accept that trauma was very much part of life. I needed to fully embrace it, because I think when one starts as a young health professional, we feel we need to get rid of trauma. We need to fix it. No, we can't because it is very much interwoven into human life. There is suffering and there is non-suffering and they are completely interwoven with each other and we need to completely embrace it. I think that realisation helped me a lot and it was a deep acceptance. I am still helping to heal the trauma. It is very much part of my mission in life, but I am also accepting that it is there.

Could you tell us about the Hakomi method you practise and teach?

Hakomi is a mindfulness-based somatic psychotherapy based on principles such as a body-mind holism, non-violence, organicist, mindfulness. It looks at how the person is organising their world, their reality on all levels of experience, how they put their thinking together and how they experience their body and emotions, then what they believe about themselves, the world and how they relate to it. Then we look at what limiting beliefs a person has about themselves or the world. An example is when someone says "I'm not safe in the world" or "I can't be loved for who I am". That's the belief system. We look at belief systems through experiential work … we call it the unfolding process. It is an inquiry into the present-moment experience done in mindfulness.

You have had 25 years' experience working with people from different cultural backgrounds. Is the Western model and worldview in relation to healing applicable across cultures?

The body is a cross-cultural experience. We all have a body. That's helped me work with cultures where there was a language barrier, because the language of movement and body is universal because there is a nonverbal language. But I do think we have to be mindful about importing our Western ideas to certain cultures. Sometimes we impose ideas of health and healing onto cultures that might not be appropriate because they experience healing in a different way. They have to go through ritual – for example, in East Africa healing takes place through dance and song. And if you take a chair and I sit down and say: "tell me what you think, what you feel", they would say: "What? This is not the context in which I experience spirit health or healing." That is a very Western idea, sitting down in a room and closing the door. Sometimes trauma needs to be healed in community, not just through the one-on-one Western model.

It is also about connection, isn't it?

It is totally about connection, absolutely. And connection is what heals. It is about warmth. It is about the rhythm of connection. It is about the body.

Your presentation at START TS underscored concerning statistics about the prevalence of anxiety in the global population. What is prolonged stress doing to our nervous systems, the way we live our lives today? And how can non-clinicians also apply somatic practices in their daily lives to deal with this stress epidemic?

First is the recognition that this is what we are facing. Then there is the option of participating or not in this kind of stress culture. We all have a choice not to, a conscious choice. Now, there is also an addiction, because we get a dopamine hit when we check our social media and so on. In moderation, that is fine, it makes us feel connected, but studies show that if we are on social media too long it has an adverse effect. It depresses us and makes us more anxious. The issue is not if we should or shouldn't be on social media, but it is in the context of understanding the stress it can cause. Not all stress is bad, but we need to learn to begin to treat our body like the earth. We are rough on our bodies. We begin to respect it when we ask simple question: what do I need? What do I sense? We can all do it, we don't always need an expensive gym membership class. Everybody can lie on the floor and feel their breath. Everybody can take a moment. I have heard clients say that they can't meditate, but they can take a time-out moment sitting in the sunshine. It is about recognising that we live in stressful, over-informed times, though we are treating it as if we had no choice: but we do have choices.

What was your experience like, studying at the Naropa University [in Boulder, Colorado] at the time Tibetan Buddhism was being exported to the West after Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, fled Tibet into exile? What kind of foundation did that training give you?

When you are in touch with your body, you are in touch with the earth around you, with your surroundings and with every living organism.

I have been so lucky. I was very young, 25, when I went to Naropa University. It gave me every foundation in my life. I had also studied movement, dance and knew there was a deep connection with the body through movement. Mindfulness was the next logical exploration. I was very interested in the inner life, I knew that it was giving me something that I couldn't get from the outside, so I needed to go inside of myself.

My training [at Naropa] was rooted not just in meditation practice, but also on the contemplative outlook of life. It was also about considering choices and having a reflective and contemplative mind. I think that was so critical, as was the inquiry into experience itself, why am I here, how am I experiencing it? Those kinds of questions were just priceless, and that is where retreats come in now, where people are so hungry for retreat time. That's why people like studying mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn and Jack [Kornfield] made it very popular. People want peace and quiet, and a path back to themselves, they want to understand how they can come back to themselves. We recognise that we are all stressed. There is a collective recognition the way we are going is not good, but a lot of people just don't know how to get back.

Unlike then, there's now evidence-based research into the therapeutic benefits of contemplative practices.

Yes, it is wonderful that we have that evidence and all the effective neuroscience. The Tibetans have had this evidence for a very long time, too. They have very detailed maps and practices [a spiritual technology]. For Tibetans, the meditation practice is medicine and every Indigenous culture has some similar practice. Dance is the same. Our Western minds have not valued them. It comes back to [European] colonisation and the rejection of deep wisdoms of health and healing, which we are now beginning to recognise. Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy draws on indigenous wisdom.

From your perspective, what are the key differences between Western psychology and Buddhist psychology?

Western psychology concerns itself more with the mind and Buddhist psychology looks much more at the interconnection of mind, body and experience, with a focus on present moment experience. Western psychology concerns itself a lot with the past; Buddhist psychology references the past, but is concerned with the present. How do I live now and what choices am I making? Of course, the past informs the present and the future, but change happens in the present. Buddhist psychology points us to a kind of wisdom that we can discover in the present moment. But I also think the marriage of Western and Buddhist psychology is very powerful, we can take the best of both worlds. There have been a lot of advances in Western psychology that we should not negate.

Somatic psychotherapy may be the future of healing the entire person, or organism, in the treatment of trauma and stress disorders. What do you see in the next few decades?

What I really would love to see, especially for the treatment of trauma and stress disorders, is a multimodal approach that we learn from all of these approaches – from neuroscience, Western psychology and research, but also from Indigenous wisdom and somatic psychotherapy. I really hope we can open up not just the conversation, but also embrace this deep understanding of all those modalities. Human beings are complex, we are multidimensional, so trauma is also a complex disorder. We need to have a multimodal and also an inclusive approach not just the whole person, but also the cultural person.

I don't think there is one approach that treats trauma. I'm sometimes dismayed when I hear people saying, "I have the one method for trauma treatment". The search for good trauma treatment means we all have to bring our wisdom together. That's what I hope, because somatic psychotherapy tries to do that in a small way. I think trauma can be treated with somatic psychotherapy, because it holds the piece of the body.

What would your advice be to psychology students today?

Learn through the body, don't just learn through books. Be informed, do research, learn many methodologies. Don't be just faithful to one, but learn through your own experience and trust your own experience. Learn through your own body. That is huge, and it's not done enough. ℞

PROFILE

STARTTS and New Horizons are working on a community-based, psychosocial mental health program designed to support refugees and asylum-seekers living with mental illness. Matthew Potts, Ellen Alkon De La Jara, Catherine Kelly and Paz Roman Seyr report.

An innovative project in mental health

The Mental Health Community Living Supports Refugees and Asylum Seekers (MH-CLSR) program represents an exciting development in community mental health care in NSW. Developed in response to the NSW Mental Health Commission's report, *Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014-2024*. The program is guided by the principle of "the people of NSW [having] the best opportunity for good mental health and wellbeing … in the community and on their terms".

STARTTS is delivering this four-year pilot program, funded by the NSW Ministry of Health in four local health districts: Hunter-New England, Mid-North Coast, South-Western Sydney and Sydney. STARTTS is fortunate to be partnering with New Horizons – a well-established community organisation with specialist services spanning disability, mental health, youth, aged care, Indigenous and homelessness – to deliver the program. Existing programs and networks from the STARTTS and New Horizons offices are being used and linked into the MH-CLSR program to benefit participants and encourage multidisciplinary and collaborative practices.

MH-CLSR is person-centred, recovery-orientated, trauma-informed, culturally safe and responsive program. These approaches marry the learnings of the refugee settlement sector and the community mental health sector and the program's implementation has provided opportunities for greater collaboration between mental

health and refugee services.

Those working with refugee communities have long recognised the need for settlement services to be trauma-informed and culturally sensitive, and for mental health services to be recovery-oriented and person-centred. MH-CLSR aims to see all these approaches applied to better support people from refugee backgrounds, especially those who may have been unable to access mental health services.

The program extends support not only to those resettled through Australia's Humanitarian Program, but also to people seeking asylum living in the community and those holding temporary protection visas, including the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa. This is an important inclusion of people who are often excluded from services because of their immigration status, while also facing increased marginalisation and vulnerability.

STARTTS is now more than a year into the implementation of the program. It has been well-received by communities, service providers, health organisations and, most importantly, the participants and their families. A clear strength is its flexibility and creativity, giving space and control for participants to determine how they will be supported alongside their loved ones and other support networks. This is guided by a recovery oriented approach that "recognises the value of the lived experience and brings together the expertise, knowledge and skills of mental health practitioners" *(National Framework for Recovery Oriented Mental Health Services, 2013)*.

STARTTS' MH-CLSR team is working in line with the National Framework's approach to "challenge traditional notions of professional power and expertise by helping to break down the conventional demarcation between clients and professionals".

Client support workers are developing trust and working collaboratively with participants, their support networks and recovery partners to develop individualised personal recovery goals. Some may seem small and linked to daily activities such as taking daily walks or taking medication regularly; others may seem more ambitious, such as one-on-one English classes to improve workplace language skills. But however small or big, recovery goals

A clear strength is its flexibility and creativity, giving space and control for participants to determine how they will be supported...

are decided by clients and position their recovery through the lens of their own strength, resilience and resources.

While support is individualised, a family approach that recognises the need to include clients' loved ones is also used. It is particularly crucial to recognise the more collectivist nature of many communities from refugee backgrounds, and is also an opportunity to strengthen existing support. For some participants, this has meant children being given access to activities to provide parental respite, and elsewhere it has meant housemates and friends being actively involved in intake assessments and meetings with client-support workers.

Participants come from more than 18 countries and 20 language groups are represented, so STARTTS is drawing on the knowledge of staff who work sensitively and responsibly to consider the diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of participants. STARTTS staff are not only multidisciplinary professionals, but also from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds too. They integrate the client's culture, religion and worldview with their recovery. Clients' experiences, cultures and belief systems should not be ignored or minimised, but celebrated and embraced. Participants have been helped with attending places of worship, accessing the types of food they are familiar with and attending community events and celebrations. The program has also been well placed to tap into STARTTS' established connections and programs such as the African Learning Circle, the Rohingyan Interagency Network and Families in Cultural Transition program (FICT).

Strong community connections and long-established, trusted relationships have also enabled STARTTS' MH-CLSR staff to engage effectively with community leaders and raise awareness of the program. This in turn has allowed for the opening of forums and conversations within communities about how they care for community members experiencing severe and persistent mental health issues. An exciting recent development in the program has been the recruitment of bi-cultural assistant workers from participants' language and cultural backgrounds, which enables them to work more effectively with participants.

A shared-care approach also offers opportunities to engage and build relationships with health and community sector stakeholders in supporting people from refugee backgrounds with mental ill-health. Such collaboration means workers and organisations are better placed to understand how they can better support refugees experiencing mental-ill health. It has included strategic networking and training to develop the skills of frontline staff. Training opportunities will be extended to community members so they are better equipped to support any family and friends experiencing mental ill-health.

In March a Women's Wellness Event was held at STARTTS' head office in celebration of International Women's Day. This beautiful event created a space for participants from around Sydney to meet and enjoy activities such as henna, origami as well as the great community builder, sharing food. For Tikar*, a CLSR participant, the event was one of the rare times she had been able to go to an event and meet new people by herself. She was able to do some creative activities she'd never done before and even found a new interest in drawing and nail-painting. Leaving the event, Tikar commented that she had "really enjoyed herself, the people were very friendly" and left with a big smile on her face.

This epitomised what the MH-CLSR program is all about: creating spaces of safety and trust where people who have experienced mental ill-health can become connected with others, achieve stability and be creative. This recognises not only the potential they have to recover, but the potential to thrive, contribute and live in dignity in their new-found safety. ℟

** Name changed to protect identity.*

PROFILE

The Communities in Cultural Transition (CiCT) program has grown from a simple one-person job to a project led by an expanded team encompassing students and volunteers. DAVID AJAK AJANG looks back at its beginnings and his involvement in the project.

Communities in Cultural Transition Program

CiCT assists non funded community organisations formed by members of newly arrived small and emerging communities to build their capacity and leadership. The program uses a strengths-based approach and seeks to build on existing capacities and strengths of the community groups it assists. This program occupies a significant space within STARTTS Community Services Team and indeed within STARTTS as a whole.

I was one of the first South Sudanese refugees to settle in Australia between 1998 and 2003. This was before the South Sudanese, Sudanese, and other Africans started to arrive in large numbers around 2004.

In my community, I was hurled into an informal leadership volunteer role to help my countrymen and women settle smoothly in Australia before I had any paid position in the sector. I had no local Australian experience and no relevant education in those early years. Still, I had had a tough life as a refugee, which had given me a strong sense of purpose fuelled by a passion for social justice. I was hungry for knowledge. I wanted to know more about Australia and the world and to do more for refugees in general and my South Sudanese people in particular. I cared deeply about empowering people who were powerless, regardless of who they may have been, regardless of their backgrounds.

Nothing is as authentic as someone's life story.

Nothing is as authentic as someone's life story. I told my story and my community's story. I knew a lot about my community. I shared what I had lived through, things I had experienced, and events I had witnessed. I wanted to educate individuals and services to respond with a better understanding of newly-arrived refugee communities, especially my community.

My priority was that refugees must be respected, because I knew from my experience that to be powerless and disrespected by others is dehumanising. I wanted to be accepted as a resourceful, enterprising, honest, and knowledgeable advocate for my community. On occasions when working as a community volunteer with mainstream and other service providers, I sensed disrespect, I just walked out of those meetings.

As the CiCT project officer now, I cherish listening to hundreds of community leaders and volunteers, learning about what matters in their particular communities and groups as they advocate for their settlement and the social development of their communities as I once did. In Africa, we say, if you are on a journey, the people you meet on the way become part of the journey. CiCT has become an integral part of the settlement and social development journey of a number of refugee communities.

The culture we have built at STARTTS genuinely enables the perception of refugee communities as people with capacities which can be supported and enhanced for the benefit of their settlement and community as well as social development.

The CiCT program is an acknowledgment that no individual community development worker has the capacity to respond to the needs of communities. CiCT uses a pool of consultants to respond to the needs of refugee communities and pays these consultants a small brokerage fee. CiCT also has a considerable pool of volunteer consultants that support its work.

We have worked with over 150 refugee community associations and groups since the program started more than ten years ago. In that time, the program has assisted with skills development in areas such as conflict resolution, events management, leadership and governance, project planning, submission writing, marketing, health promotion, financial systems, graphic design, legal advice for incorporated association and advocacy.

The CiCT program is a resource that refugee communities tap into during their settlement and community development.

Refugee community leaders and representatives

of groups reach out to us at STARTTS. Many STARTTS staff members have extended networks in various refugee communities developed over years of partnerships and collaborative initiatives. This request is forwarded to me, followed by a detailed assessment of the group's needs and strengths. I then match the group with the most appropriate consultant. This engagement is only possible because of the deep-seated trust that individuals at STARTTS have built with refugee communities over the years.

CiCT acknowledges refugee community leaders and representatives are well-positioned to assess their own needs for support as they have grappled first hand with the issues and the services available. Leaders educate us on what matters in their own community right now and how they would like to be supported to either maintain or bring about needed changes in their communities.

In addition to building capacity community by community, CiCT has extended its activities to include annual forums and training courses for targeted groups.

CiCT held three very successful, high profile forums in 2017, 2018, and 2019 which were attended by 180, 230, and 280 people, respectively. The forums brought together people from refugee community organisations, the health sector, government, and the community services sector. In addition, it also created opportunities for the newly arrived refugees and established migrants to connect and develop relationships between and among their communities. It is these relationships and friendships that have

led to different communities and groups creating lasting connections. For example, as a result of the relationships forged at the forum, various religious groups have started visiting each other's places of worship.

The forums also created opportunities for mainstream services to connect and mingle with refugee communities. This has enabled them to access more services.

Besides the forums CiCT ran a very successful leadership training program for representatives of refugee communities in 2019 in partnership with Western Sydney University. To the best of our knowledge this was the first leadership course specifically for refugee community representatives held in Australia. The course was unique because it was targeted at an advanced leadership training course that was held in 2020.

In addition, CiCT has delivered several tailored leadership training programs for specific refugee groups.

Over the years the CiCT program has evolved and extended far beyond its initial remit and is now considered a flagship program at STARTTS.

With increased funding from STARTTS, I would like to see the CiCT program continue to innovate as the demographics of refugees in Australia change. CiCT can incorporate new learnings, address new challenges and provide new services. One way would be for CiCT to extend its services by assisting refugee communities settled in regional towns, instead of concentrating almost solely in Sydney. ꟿ

Photo: Legacy Photography

Finding a way

Bita Jayzan

First of all I would like to thank STARTTS, which is a shining light in the darkness as it gives refugees an opportunity to get ahead in their lives. I am one of them.

I started my journey to Australia in the year 2000. I was born in Iran, and I remember the Iranian revolution when I was three years old. I remember the smell of the burning fire and tar that overflowed our house.

When I was four, the Iran and Iraq war erupted, which lasted almost eight years. That meant that by the time it finished I was 12 years old. During my childhood, normally a time of enjoyment and discovery, my family and I were running from city to city for safety. I always felt different, not because of my low vision impairment, I simply felt different at school. Everybody would look at me as if I were a strange creature. I had to always practice religion

and wear a hijab, and I had to do everything that is strange to me and my own culture.

I finished high school through hard times, then I was old enough to start studying at university but couldn't attend because we had to flee again. Iran was no longer my home, but I was sure I could find a place far away from my country that would become my home. We decided to flee as a family, because we were not accepted and it was dangerous to remain there. This meant going to the other side of the ocean. Our journey was very hard, but I had to be strong as I came with my youngest brother. It was a long journey together, it was hard, but we made it. From Indonesia we went to Malaysia, and spent five days in the ocean in a rickety boat in wild seas.

When I arrived I said to myself, I have found a safe haven at last. This is what I had felt every time my family and I ran from city to city. When we would arrive in a new city I would ask my parents: "When will this running away be finished?". My mum would reply: "Be patient, the war will finish one day. When it's finished, we will let you know." That made me feel better: one day we would all be safe.

And then after spending five terrifying days on the ocean, I said: "I no longer need to flee anymore. We have finally arrived." When I disembarked and set foot in Australia, I kissed the shore, I couldn't believe this land was in fact Australia.

Then they took us to the Woomera Detention Centre. I'm sure everybody knows about Woomera. The first day I was there, it was a disaster. I was feeling so tired I couldn't move, I slept in. In the evening I put on my nice clothes, makeup and nice earrings. I was free at last, in Australia. But when I came out to go to dinner, dinner was finished! Then I realised I was in a detention centre. I was in a bad environment. I said to myself: "What are you doing, Bita? Go back, take off your clothes, put them in a drawer. We still have a long time to wait to be free."

And when I saw the long fences, I still remember thinking "one day, I will be free." Once beautiful animals were looking at us from behind the fence. They were looking at us and jumping up and down. I told my friend: "Do you know what they think? They think, 'Poor people, why aren't they free? Why are they behind fences?" Six months later it was finished. I came out without my brother because they had separated us. I came out by myself without my family – and I found out the visa I got was a Temporary Protection Visa, so for six years I had to wait to be able to study. So I thought: "What? Still not finished?"

Six years have gone by. I am now married. I built my life during these six years. And I heard about the Families in Cultural Transition program held at STARTTS. I learned that when I get my citizenship, I will be able to study, yes, I can study, and I can access services.

In these six years, I didn't just sit and do nothing. I found where the nearest library was and went there to study English for one or two hours each day. I learned English and now I have citizenship. I'm Australian now. I'm working.

It's hard to be Australian. Then when I attended the Families in Cultural Transition program, I thought, "Wow, what an amazing experience, what amazing information I am given and what an amazing program." When I finished it I felt I was so well-informed, I wished I had gained that information at the beginning when I came out of the detention centre. I would like to say to refugees now: "You are so lucky, so lucky to get this service when you arrive in Australia".

When I finished Families in Cultural Transition I met the lovely Yassmen, she was of great support. She put me on the right path and introduced me to other women in the community, including volunteers. I realised I wanted to be part of this women's group that met regularly, but I also wanted them to bring their children, as many are traumatised and a bit lost. I thought they needed to be supported so I asked Yassmen: "Please, I have an idea. I need to build something for these kids in this community, it's a playgroup". She said: "That's a good idea, Bita. Rosemary Signorelli is an amazing person, she can help you with this."

We met with Rosemary. She is a gem. She gave us not only a lot of information, but games and a few training sessions. So we were ready to build our Mini Mandy, an amazing playgroup, and we did. Lovely mums arrived. "Yes, come in," we said to them. "We're coming," they said. But why are mums leaving their children and leaving?. "You said two hours," they said. "We're coming back, we have shopping to do." "No, no, mum, you are now to sit next to your children. This is a playgroup. You need to be next to your loved one and, learn to connect with your little ones."

Rosemary, your message is ever in my mind. And we tried to help the mums to understand they need to play together with their kids, to build their relationship, build attachment, not only connection with each other. It was really hard, because the mums are also suffering from trauma and mental issues. We need to help these mums too.

My community is supporting me. My community is opening doors for me. Because of my low vision everyone is very helpful. I need to send a message to the parents of kids with a disability, because having children with disabilities is a disaster in our community, it is shameful, so parents tend to hide them, and leave them behind, and don't want to talk about it.

I would say to them: "Don't be ashamed of them, because that child with your support can build his abilities and a future." R

Jorge Aroche. Photo: Legacy Photography

A celebration to remember

PROFILE

In September last year more than 1000 people met in Fairfield to celebrate STARTTS' 30th anniversary. It was a unique opportunity to look back at the history of an organisation created in 1988 to help refugees deal with their past experiences and build a new life in Australia. OLGA YOLDI looks back on three decades of achievements.

Photo: Legacy Photography

Thirty years ago CEO Jorge Aroche, then a young psychologist, began working at STARTTS in a small house in Fairfield. Equipped with a single telephone line, the small team of psychologists and counsellors started to work with survivors of torture and trauma who had just arrived in Australia.

From its humble beginnings, STARTTS has emerged as a leading organisation that has grown and evolved with time. Today it employs 200 staff and operates from 10 offices across NSW and in the past three decades has assisted 70,000 survivors of torture and trauma from more than 100 countries.

"It has been an amazing journey," Jorge says. "We started the service on a shoestring budget, with few resources. We grew and learned as we embarked on large projects such as Operation Safe Haven, established to assist Kosovar refugees and setting up torture and trauma rehabilitation services in East Timor. These were large projects for a fledgling organisation! Since then we have worked with successive waves of refugees fleeing different conflicts around the world."

When STARTTS opened its doors in November 1988, says Jorge, nobody knew much about healing survivors of torture and violence. "We had to learn, and in doing so, learning became part of STARTTS' culture, a culture that has endured over time. Learning and transferring knowledge have been and continue to be a driving force that enables us to improve and innovate as an organisation, and to better assist our clients regain their lives after torture and suffering."

Indeed, innovation is a hallmark of STARTTS. The organisation is involved in the development of new knowledge-based methods to achieve better results, research projects, always keeping up to date with the latest findings in psychotherapy and , the new developments in neuroscience and inviting globally renowned experts to clinical evenings and workshops.

"In the past 30 years we have accumulated much knowledge that we have refined and applied not only to pilot groups, but also to thousands of clients," Jorge says. "But with knowledge comes the responsibility to share it so that others can benefit from it ... this is a challenge that has grown exponentially in the past few years."

STARTTS' Neurofeedback Institute (ANFI) is a new and exciting project designed to share expertise in cutting-edge areas, such as applying the latest advances in neuroscience to help reverse the effects of trauma on the brain. "It also includes our expanding training department, student internship clinic and the many research and teaching partnerships we have been fostering with tertiary institutions nationally and internationally," Jorge says.

"Another challenge, also very close to our hearts, is to use the substantial advances made in this field in recent

years to coordinate a NSW state approach for the resettlement of refugees, a project that has been spearheaded by Professor Peter Shergold." At the same time the Families in Cultural Transition (FICT) program and the School Liaison Program are two initiatives funded to address the impact of the additional intake of 12,000 refugees from Iraq and Syria. "These have truly supercharged our ability to assist families with children and young refugees," Jorge said.

Witness to War was another project led by STARTTS that supported individuals, families and communities negatively impacted by foreign conflicts. It provided a services gateway for survivors and training for service providers about the best ways to mitigate the negative impacts suffered by survivors of trauma living in NSW.

Community Living Skills Refugees (MH-CSLR) program is an initiative focused on assisting those refugees most impacted by trauma to better manage their lives and access specialised treatment. STARTTS has partnered with New Horizons to deliver it across NSW.

In the past 10 years STARTTS has opened services in regional areas as many refugees began settling away from cities. The percentage of clients STARTTS assists outside Sydney has increased from about 5 to 20 per cent in recent years. "We must make sure all our clients receive the best services, no matter where they settle in NSW," Jorge says.

STARTTS has a large community footprint, with a long history of assisting young people. Recently it joined the Compact Alliance, a coalition of 60 organisations across all sectors that have joined forces to support youth engagement projects to empower young people and help them become leaders in their communities. It has been extremely successful, reaching more than 22,000 young people in 130 schools. The latest evaluations show behavioural change is already happening among young people who want to connect, participate and give to their communities.

The anniversary also offered an opportunity to spotlight where STARTTS needs to redouble its efforts to meet the current and future challenges across the three key pillars of its work: community development, clinical services, and training and education. We live in uncertain times of disruption from a global pandemic, increasing inequality and many other problems, with too few solutions.

Jorge highlighted the challenges ahead in a world that is changing fast, and not necessarily for the better: "We live in a world that has become increasingly permissive of torture and human rights violations and resistant to dealing with the inevitable movements of refugees this triggers, and a world increasingly deaf to the plight of refugees.

"We need to sharpen our capacity to get our message across in a way that is both compelling and resonates with new generations. Our world is also being adversely affected by climate change. It is likely that in the future huge areas will become unproductive, and indeed unliveable, unless immediate, drastic and coordinated action is taken by people and governments everywhere. This is also a refugee issue. We know very well that competition for resources will force people to move because of famine and lack of water, which will result in conflict and repression. This is precisely the cause of many of the current refugee crises, and unfortunately there will be similar crises in future. So let's act before it is too late."

Keynote speaker and Multicultural NSW CEO Joseph La Posta says STARTTS has never been more needed than it is now. "Since 2015, 22,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants call NSW home. Last year alone we welcomed 5800 new Australians to NSW. I'm proud the NSW government has invested significantly to support refugee newcomers."

Government funding was also crucial to enabling STARTTS' achievements, as Jorge says: "Successive governments at state and Commonwealth level, no matter what side of politics, have understood the value of investing in the mental health of people who join our society after surviving unspeakable trauma. This investment has paid off in spades, and it is to their credit that – assisted by many capable bureaucrats – our elected politicians have acknowledged this. We have been able to benefit from ongoing bipartisan support for a long time now. We should all be very proud of this, particularly in the current global context."

It is the courage and contribution of the refugees themselves that deserves our admiration for overcoming all odds. While every refugee story is different, they all share a common pattern of courage and determination to survive, to persevere in difficult environments and rebuild their lives.

Jorge says first and foremost, STARTTS belongs to the clients, who provide inspiration, purpose and meaning to the organization.

"It is an amazing feeling to see so many of you here today to celebrate our 30 years of service to the community. It fills me with joy, pride and gratitude to see you, friends and colleagues both old and new, clients and ex-clients, representatives from community and government organisations, from an incredible array of refugee communities, STARTTS supporters from all walks of life… Thank you for being here with us, thank you for supporting us on this 30-year journey."

Bita Jayzan. Photo: Legacy Photography

While much has happened in these three decades, a small core group of staff have been with STARTTS since the early days. Clinical psychologist and coordinator of clinical services and research Mariano Coello was one of the pioneers who launched the organisation. He has had a key role in the growth and evolution of clinical services and the expansion of research projects. Deputy CEO Lachlan Murdoch, community services coordinator Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward, psychologist Marc Chaussivert and counsellor Luz (Lucy) Oscar Marin – a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia in recognition of her work – have all been part of a committed team that played a vital role in the transformation of STARTTS.

"I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the opportunity to be part of it," Jorge says. "I know most of my staff feel the same, and I would wager that most of you sharing this moment with us feel the same too, because the STARTTS journey belongs to all of us.

"Thank you for continuing to inspire us, so that we remain as committed to our work and as eager to tackle new challenges as we were 30 years ago – although I must say, a bit better prepared now, and a whole lot wiser."

Faith in refugees

PROFILE

PETER SHERGOLD AC, who has been the Chancellor of Western Sydney University since 2011, gave this speech at the International Peace Day service at Parramatta Mission on September 21 last year.

Photo: Sally Tsoutas, Western Sydney University.

In September 2015, in a brave political decision, the then NSW Premier, Mike Baird, publicly called for the Australian government to be more generous in its response to the human tragedy being played out so brutally in Syria and Iraq. Partly as a result, then prime minister Tony Abbot agreed to accept an additional 12,000 refugees on top of the 13,750 places allocated annually. Premier Baird committed NSW to doing more than its fair share in settling the growing number of arrivals and it did, taking more than 60 per cent of the increase.

The Premier asked me to take on the role of organising the provision of government services that would be made available to the newcomers. In the almost four years since my appointment as coordinator-general for Refugee Resettlement, NSW has provided a new home and a safer life to around 25,000 refugees. Most have come from Syria and Iraq. Their ethnic and religious diversity provides a graphic representation of the devastating impact of war on innocent civilian communities: unspeakable violence, terror and torture. The refugees identify themselves as Christians and Moslems, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Mandeans, Kurds, Armenians and Yazidis.

Now, for most of my time I go about my work as the consummate public servant. I try to ensure that government agencies work with each other in a collaborative fashion. I encourage them to build genuine partnerships with the frontline not-for-profit organisations that deliver so many government programs under contract. I've focused my attention on the delivery of settlement services, education, health and legal aid. I've given a particular emphasis to employment and training, establishing in the state a new Refugee Employment Support Program. It's helping newcomers to find pathways into work and, through that achievement, allowing them to rebuild their families' sense of self-worth and independence. In recent months I've taken a particular interest in talking to young refugees about the challenges they face.

It is worthwhile work undertaken in a rather boring fashion. Behind the scenes, I talk the dry evaluative language of outcomes, results and value-for-money. I am a bureaucrat. That means that I am not the sort of guy who prays for refugees. But, although I rarely discuss it, I do have faith in refugees. When on occasion I get tired and frustrated by the slow pace of political change, it is that motivating sense of purpose that sustains me. So what exactly is it?

My faith in refugees has three dimensions. The first

is the one I talk about most openly. It is, if you will, a secular expression of faith founded on informed reason and economic rationality. Some unfair critics would characterise it as neo-liberal persuasion. It is the belief, based on hard-nosed experience, that refugees from oppression collectively make a significantly economic contribution to their host society over time. Their experience of survival and escape often creates psychic trauma and distress that, if not addressed, can eat away at the soul and undermine a refugee's hopes of starting over.

Yet that same experience also produces many people who are risk-takers and utterly driven to build new lives. That desire to succeed, together with their firsthand experience of prejudice, creates entrepreneurship: running family businesses was often a way of manoeuvring around discriminatory barriers in their old country and remains for many refugees a means to achieve economic security in the new land.

This typical refugee background helps to explain why humanitarian migrants rather than skilled migrants are the most likely group in Australia to derive income from family enterprise and self-employment. Indeed, it is why so many of Australia's self-made business leaders are of refugee origin – people like Frank Lowy, Nathan Werdiger and Huy Truong. I have faith, based on solid empirical evidence, that many refugees will make a valuable contribution to our national prosperity. Most will work for others. A substantial minority will work for themselves. Some will end up employing others.

But there is a second element of my faith, of which I speak less frequently. It is an inner voice, but all the more important because it speaks quietly to myself. It is the faith that in acting in a humanitarian way we can commune with the 'better angels' of our nature. I take this splendidly evocative term not from some holy book but from the wonderfully liberating language of William Shakespeare (in Othello), Charles Dickens (in Barnaby Rudge) and – most uplifting – from Abraham Lincoln (in his inaugural address). I have faith that on occasion, we can rise above our normal selves and find our humanity in helping others. I hope and trust that my lesser angels are rarely so evil that they "would corrupt my saint to be a devil". Far more often they are simply mundane creatures, taking up too much of my short life. It is easy for all of us to find ourselves overwhelmed by the multitude concerns of the commonplace. Quite simply, we forget that each of us has within us a better self.

As Dickens put it: "The thoughts of worldly man are forever regulated by a moral law of gravitation [that] holds us down to earth." Our better angels become lost in the shadows of our everyday desires. I have a quiet hope that in acting in a generous fashion, by choosing kindness over meanness, altruism over self-interest, that we can discover a part of our common humanity that is too often hidden by the apparent ordinariness of our lived experience.

Some 50 years ago at school I was required to read Charles Kingley's The Water Babies. At 12 I did not fully comprehend Kingsley's theme of Christian redemption. Today I remember only two things about the book. First, that in the Victorian age young boys with brushes were forced to climb up chimneys to clean them of soot: truthfully, I understood even then that it was exploitative of child labour but secretly found the prospect of being a teenage sweep rather exciting. Second, I still know the names of the two fairies. I enjoyed rolling them off my tongue – Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby and Mrs Bedonebyasyoudid. Their names were, of course, juvenile expressions of the Golden Rule central to so many belief systems. Christians find its clearest expression at Matthew 7 which, in the glorious English of King James, exhorts us that "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you: do ye even so to them". At Brockhurst Baptist Sunday School I used to sing lustily: "The best book to read is the Bible." In all honesty I have to admit that, 65 years on, I had to ask Dr Google to help me find the reference.

So I have faith that in helping refugees to escape their personal hells, by extending a welcoming hand, we can ourselves glimpse a sort of heaven. And there, perhaps, I should leave my sermon, genuflecting to the words of the great 20th-century spiritual leader, John Lennon: "All you need is love"; "Give peace a chance"; Imagine".

But I am too much of the dull empiricist to leave my story there. For I have a third element of faith, which is that in helping refugees we actually help ourselves. There is plenty of evidence that doing good for others does good for us. Indeed, the mental and physical benefits to the volunteer can be greater even than for the person who is assisted. I do not believe that is what motivates most acts of generosity, but I do have faith in the statistical evidence that carrying out worthy deeds improves one's mood, increases one's self-esteem and lifts one's spirits. There is plenty of data that suggests that helping others reduces one's own blood pressure and lowers the risk of early death. Sometimes we actually feel better, experiencing what is sometimes referred to as the "helper's high".

These, then, are the three foundations of my faith in refugees : that our humanitarian impulse has real benefits to our future economic and social well-being as a nation; that in acting generously we can discover our better selves; and that by doing so we are able to live healthier and more purposeful lives.

The Chinese government would call this a win-win-win situation. To me it is a form of holy trinity. So be it. Amen. ꟁ

Actor and human rights activist, Richard Gere and Adhe Tapontsang protest the religious persecution in China at a rally in Lafayette Park across from The White House in Washington, D.C. on October 29, circa 1997. Alamy

PROFILE

Profile of courage
'Ama' Adhe Tapontsang (1932–2020)

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) recently observed the passing of torture survivor Adhe Tapontsang, one of the longest-serving Tibetan political prisoners in exile. In common with the late Nelson Mandela, she endured 27 years in prison for her resistance against China's military occupation of Tibet in the late 1950s. Reflecting on the quality of her courage, KAREN COLLIER spoke with Tibetan elders and human rights defenders about how they remember her.

ADHE TAPONTSANG was the embodiment of resistance to Tibetans. On 3 August 2020, the woman affectionately known as 'Ama' (Mother) Adhe to Tibetans died at 88 of natural causes in Dharamsala India, her home in exile. She was a freedom fighter until her last breath. COVID-19 restrictions prevented Australian Tibetans from gathering to pay their respects to one of the last resistance fighters of her generation, yet the community observed Ama Adhe's passing with solemn reverence inside their homes.

Activist groups held candlelight vigils in Dharamsala and other cities in honour of her legacy and role in the Tibetan struggle. The Gu-chu-sum Movement Association of Tibet, a global association of Tibetan political prisoners, paid respect "to the soul that has continued to encourage all those who are a part of the Tibetan freedom movement and defenders of human rights all over the world". Adhe was to experience the horrific transformation of her country under a ruthless colonial regime. As Chinese expansionism was met with fierce Tibetan resistance, violent and oppressive campaigns against ethnic Tibetans ensued, changing the fate of 6 million of Adhe's countrymen forever. Author Mikel Dunham described it aptly in *Buddha's Warriors:* "The Han Chinese introduced whole new worlds of cruelty and there was no one to stop them."

Ama Adhe was born in Nyarong in Kham Province, eastern Tibet, in 1932 to a nomadic family. Her birthplace became the first place in Tibet where Chinese military were stationed. China's invasion of Kham became a gateway for incursions into larger parts of Tibet to establish Chinese dominance. Ama Adhe and her husband had planned an escape to Tibet's capital, Lhasa, yet tragically, when her first child was one year old and she was pregnant with the second, her husband was poisoned by Chinese authorities. Shortly thereafter, Adhe joined the Chushi Gangdruk of the Khampas, a resistance movement that began in 1950. She led and inspired other women to help by supplying food and provisions to the Tibetan men who fought the Chinese. In 1958 the rebellion was crushed and Adhe was arrested and separated from her two young children forever.

It was not until 1985 that she was released from prison, when then Chinese president Deng Xiaoping pardoned political prisoners during a period of short-lived reforms. Of the 300 women who were imprisoned, she was one of only four who survived a system where prisoners were starved to death.

The passing of Ama Adhe marks the closing of a significant chapter in modern Tibetan history. The history of Tibet's freedom struggle was intertwined with the operations of the guerrilla outfit Chushi Gangdruk, formed as a national volunteer defence army in protection of their homeland and way of life. Chushi Gangdruk is an ancient Tibetan name for Kham, meaning "land of four rivers and six ranges", and refers to Kham and Amdo. It was comprised of Tibetans from those eastern Tibet regions, whose aim was to drive Chinese forces out of Tibet.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, as the guerrilla force battled the occupying Chinese, the most remarkable feat of Chushi Gangdruk was ensuring the safe passage of Tenzin Gyatso, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, who escaped from Tibet's capital, Lhasa, to India in 1959 after learning of a threat to his life. The profundity of this event in world history and its significance to Tibetans was best expressed by Dunham in 2005: "For most Khampas, Amdoans and Goloks, their last ray of hope was anchored to the safety of the Dalai Lama."

In the early stages of the Battle of Chamdo in 1950, Tibetan rebels defeated the Chinese troops. The Chinese were quickly reinforced by 15,000 soldiers of the Eighteenth Army and the outnumbered Tibetan warriors had to flee into the mountains. The few who survived were forced into exile. Ama Adhe played an important role at that juncture when she formed an underground resistance movement with more than 60 Tibetan women. Today, women of the Tibetan movement credit Adhe and many other Tibetan heroines who succeeded in blurring the gender distinction between those actively participating in the resistance movement.

In exile, the group conducted guerrilla operations from the northern Nepalese region of Mustang up to 1974, following then President Richard Nixon's rapprochement with China. The CIA had provided the group with limited material assistance and aid, as well as training for members of Chushi Gangdruk and other guerrilla groups. The CIA's covert mission, called Shadow Circus, was said to have been organised without the Dalai Lama's blessing.

The US involvement with Tibet came about during the Cold War period and the unfinished project of decolonisation in world history. As the temporal leader of Tibetans at the time, the Dalai Lama taped a message appealing to Khampas of the resistance and all Tibetans to lay down their weapons and surrender peacefully. The Tibetan people have adhered to the principle and practice of non-violence (*ahimsa*) ever since.

A former political prisoner and member of Chushi Gangdruk, Sok Shabdrung Dujom Dorjee Rinpoche, shared some thoughts of the few remaining resistance fighters with me one winter afternoon on Sydney's

"Ama Adhe's advocacy for Tibet was like a tree with strong roots. Now, after her passing, it's like the tree has fallen,"

— Sok Shabdrung Dujom Dorjee Rinpoche

Central Coast. "Ama Adhe's advocacy for Tibet was like a tree with strong roots. Now, after her passing, it's like the tree has fallen," he said stoically. There is no more fitting analogy for such a courageous woman. Tibetans from Kham consider trees "jewellery of the mountains". Rinpoche, a torture survivor himself, served a sentence amounting to 13 years in a Chinese prison – including patriotic "re-education" through forced labour – before his release in 1973. He was held on "death row" several times. After resettling in Nepal, he later sought political asylum and arrived in Sydney in 2002 with his family. Most Tibetans in Australia, about 2000 are former political prisoners who were resettled via the Humanitarian Entrants Scheme set up in the 1980s. "Ama Adhe is from my generation of Tibetans who saw China's invasion and struggled through the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward," Rinpoche recalled. "Her passing closes a chapter for that generation." Rinpoche said that Adhe had been offered political asylum in Australia, but was so committed to the Tibetan struggle she chose to remain in Dharamsala, the headquarters of the Tibetan freedom movement in exile.

Rinpoche spoke with a heavy heart when he described how the elders of his generation feel when survivors of the Tibetan resistance such as Ama Adhe do not achieve their desire to see the end of Tibetan suffering in their lifetime: "Her passing without seeing that day is one regret for the remaining elders still in exile." Adhe had been among the few Tibetan women who actually fought the Chinese. She was brave, Rinpoche said, "because she knew how to ride a horse and use a gun". Adhe's family name, Tapontsang, means 'commander of horses' in Tibetan. In 2012 the Dalai Lama requested that her story be documented for the Tibetan Oral History Project. The Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees.

Over the years of living in exile, Ama Adhe shared her experiences with people from all over the world who visited her home. I was honoured to meet her in 2005 as part of an Australian delegation and research trip prior to the official Australian visit of then-Tibetan Prime Minister in Exile, Professor Samdhong Rinpoche. I met with Ama Adhe at the Tibetan Reception Centre in McLeod Ganj, a former British hill station and suburb of Dharamsala, where Tibetan refugees are eventually settled after their arduous journey escaping from Tibet via Nepal. It's the final destination for Tibetan refugees seeking an audience with their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. In her late 70s at the time, Ama Adhe's physical stature and presence remained warrior-like, yet she had the most profound lightness of being.

She was the embodiment of resistance to all Tibetans. Speaking of her ordeal, the only time she cried was when she recalled the suffering of others. As we spoke, Adhe honoured the memory of those colleagues who perished in prison from starvation in the first three years of captivity. Every tear she shed for those Tibetan women was evidence of their existence, a testament of Tibetans' resilience and their unceasing desire for freedom.

Adhe was permitted to leave Tibet on condition that she remain silent about her 27 years in Chinese prisons, yet she made a promise to herself and to the Tibetans who did not survive that she would not let the truth about China's military occupation go unheard or unchallenged. The inspiring and deeply personal account of her life was recorded in the book, *Ama Adhe: The Voice that Remembers.* It is an engrossing record of a crucial time in modern Tibetan history, describing the inhuman conditions that she and countless Tibetans were forced to endure after the Chinese invasion. Her memories evoke sorrowful imagery of Tibet's fall. "All the snow-covered mountains turned red with blood," she wrote. When Adhe met the Dalai Lama upon her arrival into exile in Dharamsala, the spiritual leader of 6 million Tibetans advised: "As long as you are able, speak on behalf of the dead." She never ceased to do so. In the foreword to her book, the Dalai Lama commended her courage in public life and acknowledged how Tibetan women have equally sacrificed and participated in the struggle for justice and freedom.

Up until her 80s Ama Adhe travelled the world as an advocate for human rights and Tibet's freedom. Her story is a testament to the resistance and resilience of Tibetan women, for whom religious and cultural identity

The Dalai Lama escapes Tibet into exile where his retinue and Khampa bodyguards, following the 1959 people's uprising. Circa 1959. Photo: courtesy: OHHDL

are important to their sense of agency. In her final years in exile she devoted herself to creating art in memory of those who died in the Chinese camps, and served as the director of Art Refuge, a children's trauma intervention program at the Tibetan Refugee Reception Centre in McLeod Ganj. "Even if I die I shall be satisfied that I had the chance to relate the story about my colleagues," she said in an interview in 2012. "I have been around the world telling my story. I have been to 10 countries of the world and all the people have supported me … millions have sent me letters saying that I speak the truth and that they support me. While they [prisoners] are dead, I have survived and His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that I am their representative … I have already spoken about everything [to the world]; I have related everything to His Holiness and now if I die, I am fulfilled."

Tenzin Phuntsok Atisha, a Tibetan diplomat and representative of the Dalai Lama for Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia from 2003-2009, described his first meeting with Adhe to me recently with great warmth and reverence. Atisha was a member of the last fact-finding delegation to visit Tibet in 1985. "When I heard the news, I was really sad because Ama Adhe was at the forefront of Tibetan freedom fighters under China's occupation." As is traditional for Tibetans – and one of the many denied to Tibetans in Tibet – Atisha's family lit butter lamps in front of the Dalai Lama's photo upon hearing the news. "I was very lucky to have known Ama during my time serving in the Department of Information and International Relations" he said.

Tenzin Atisha had the opportunity to accompany Ama Adhe on a visit to Denmark during an international hearing and human rights conference in the European winter of 1989. "Ama Adhe had been invited to tell her story to an international audience and the Tibetan community, and I was her translator," he said. Atisha said it was a sad and emotional time: "She cried and I cried and all the Tibetans cried. This was my precious moment in time with Ama Adhe."

After that trip, Atisha said all Tibetans were encouraged by Ama Adhe's sacrifice. "She was tough to withstand the notorious Chinese 'struggle sessions' (thamzing)". The physical and psychological torture endured by Tibetans in the struggle sessions, or demonstrations of public humiliation, were beyond comprehension. According to the Central Tibetan Administration, at least 92,000 Tibetans subjected to struggle sessions died or committed suicide, and an estimated 173,000 Tibetans died in prison or "Reform Through Labour" camps" (laogai).

"The resilience of Tibetans is an extraordinary attribute of their personal traits, deeply incorporated in the cultural view and the Tibetan philosophy of life and religion, which help them overcome evil and dark times of torture, traumas and humiliation," said Gordana Hol, STARTTS Direct Services Coordinator.

Over the course of 25 years following China's annexation of Tibet from 1950, the Tibet Information Office in Australia estimates that 1.2 million Tibetans died as a direct result of Chinese Government policy. Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly in 1961 and 1965 explicitly recognised the Tibetan people's right to self-determination and called on China to respect this right. ꟿ

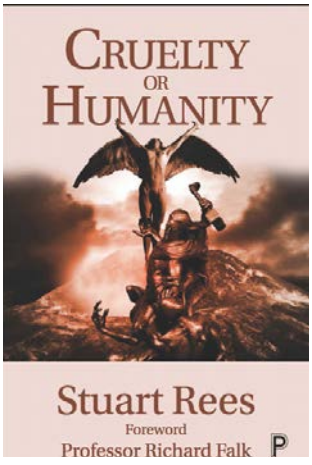
In January this year, Nepal and China signed a contentious extradition treaty that condemns captured Tibetan refugees in Nepal to the penal system of mainland China.

With thanks to Tenpa Dugdak for translations.

REVIEW

Cruelty or Humanity

Cruelty or Humanity: Challenges, Opportunities and Responsibilities by Stuart Rees. Reviewed by Richard Falk. Published by Bristol, UK: Policy Press in September 2020



We are living in an anguishing historical period. From one direction come dire warnings about human future if the challenges posed by climate change and ecological instability are not addressed within a rather tiny window of less than twelve years. From another direction come depressing indications that peoples around the world are choosing by their own free will, extremist autocrats, even demagogues, who are extinguishing fires of freedom, building walls to keep the unwanted out, and stigmatizing the stranger. In such an atmosphere, human rights are in retreat, empathy for the suffering of others is repudiated, international law is all but forgotten in the annals of diplomacy, and the United Nations is often reduced to the bickering of irresponsible governments seeking nothing grander than maximum national advantage, and in the process, let the common public good of humanity be damned. Facing such reality with eyes wide open is a challenge that few acknowledge, and even fewer have the stamina, insight, compassion, wisdom, and imagination needed to discern a brighter alternative future for humanity.

Stuart Rees is such an exception. His *Cruelty or Humanity* has the courage to portray reality in all its degrading ugliness without taking refuge in some specious bromide. His book addresses the range of cruelties that befall those most vulnerable among us in myriad specific circumstances. With an astonishing command over the global and historical landscapes of cruelty, Rees leads us through the wilderness of the most evil happenings, which have been enacted individually and collectively. And yet through it all he manages to guide us toward the light of hope without indulging sentimentality or embracing false optimism.

What gives this perilous journey its defining originality is the degree to which Rees brings to bear the knowledge and timeless wisdom of poets both to depict the intensities of the darkness but also to instruct readers that the disciplined and lyrical insight of a poet can better than the rest of us find shafts of light that illuminate paths leading to empowerment, transcendence, and liberation. Rees has actually written two parallel interacting texts brought together in a single fully coherent book: on one side, a fearless and comprehensive reportage of the facts and figures of human cruelty in many distinct settings of place and circumstance, stressing the plight of those most victimized, ranging from asylum-seekers to indigenous peoples tortured in their homelands, and extending to the horrifying torments endured by animals and a variety of thoughtless encroachments on our natural surroundings; on the other side, this depressing litany of cruelties inflicted on masses of people is simultaneously refracted through prisms of light offered by a multitude of poets who share the agony while intoning the most vital truth of all, that hope is not futile, that human society has dreams, aspirations, and untested anthropological potentialities. Rees shares with readers extracts from dozens of world famous, and relatively unknown poets, in this parallel form of narrative that interacts with the gory reportage of cruelty to offer a creative tension between entrenched evil and its transcendence.

Rees' undisguised autobiographical engagement with this inquiry gives *Cruelty or Humanity* a quality

of urgency and sincerity that it would not possess if confined to the scholarly canons of ethical and political detachment. The fact that Rees cares so deeply about choosing humanity over cruelty is evident on almost every page. He conveys his concerns without ever diluting the profound difficulties of overcoming the evil being done by humans, mainly men, to others stigmatized and rendered inferior, punitively instrumentalized to serve ambitions, manipulate fears, and satisfy sadistic urges of those in power.

In personalizing his immersion in this difficult subject-matter Rees' residence in Australia becomes evident in the manner he treats the severe cruelties over centuries inflicted on the original natives of the land, and currently reproduced in the manner that Australian asylum-seekers have been sequestered in an isolated island and often driven to suicidal desperation, a horror show that is mostly hidden from the world, but shocking when disclosed in all its ferocity. It casts doubt on the ritualized apologies that some liberal Australian politicians offer to the aboriginal people and their forebears for past wrongdoing. As a leader of Palestinian solidarity efforts in Australia, the cruelties of Israel toward the Palestinian people receive deserved attention from Rees in depicting the cartography of cruelty.

Rees advances a strong case for the positive side of the human condition, resting on the rock of shared humanity. He quotes these arresting lines from Maya Angelou, which really captures the essence of his ethical message:

"In minor ways we differ
In major ways we're the same."

The political implication of this affirmation is a strong embrace of the spirit and substance of equality, which implies a rejection of hierarchy, as well as making positive use of the interplay between the unity of humanity and the many differences evident in the way individuals and collectivities choose to live. Another poet, William Stafford, is quoted approvingly in words intended to repudiate hierarchy and its companion, stigmatization of 'the other' deemed inferior:

"I can't eat that bread."

In the end, Rees manages to nurture hope, which he rests on what might be best identified as 'the transformation-to-come.' This radical departure from the present will be recognizable only when political leaders begin to articulate their programs and policies in what Rees calls 'the language of common humanity.' Of course, a humanistic worldview naturally follows such a linguistic trope. It draws its normative direction from existing traditions of international human rights, international law, and a rising respect for nature. Whether such an axial moment, if and when it comes, can be operationalized in the form of humane patterns of governance will be the ultimate test of whether equality can become a way of life for the human species as well as an uplifting slogan.

In the end, we should be thankful to Stuart Rees for providing us with such an inspiring reading experience, which contains within it a roadmap that could help humanity escape from the species eco-ethical slide toward extinction. This will only happen if enough of us are responsive enough to Rees' damning diagnosis of the present and then heed his liberating prescriptions for the future. R

Richard Falk
Santa Barbara, California
Richard Falk is a distinguished international law and international relations scholar who taught at Princeton University for forty years. Since 2002 he has lived in Santa Barbara, California, and taught at the local campus of the University of California in Global and International Studies and since 2005 chaired the Board of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.
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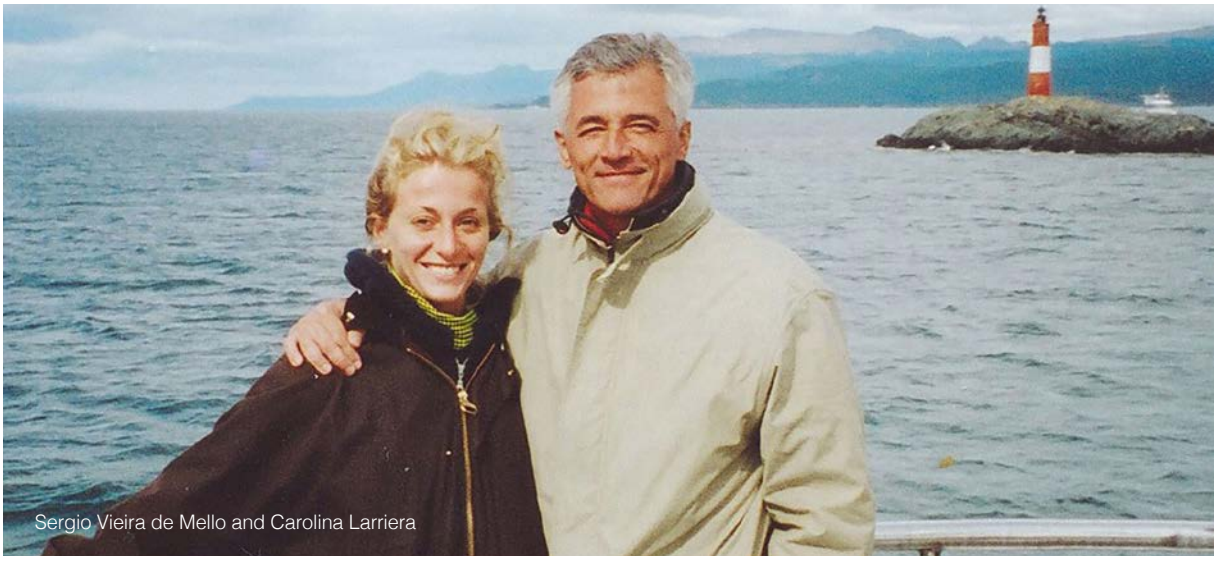


Sergio Vieira de Mello and Carolina Larriera

Sergio Vieira de Mello

REVIEW

A man in search of peace

By OLGA YOLDI.

SERGIO, a film released earlier this year, covers the life and tragic death of top UN diplomat Sergio Vieira de Mello, one of the most highly regarded people in the field of global diplomacy.

He was deeply respected and admired for his achievements in many UN humanitarian and political arenas. The film, which sets out to celebrate his life, premiered at Sundance in the US earlier this year and was directed by Greg Barker from a script written by Craig Borten.

"I wanted to explore Sergio more, his journey and struggles, his purpose in the world and being true and authentic to that purpose, which was his struggle," Barker said. It can now be viewed on Netflix

The action starts with Sergio (Wagner Moura) and his partner Carolina Larriera (Ana de Armas) arriving in Baghdad in 2003 with the challenging mission of restoring order in Iraq after the massive destruction caused by the US-led Coalition that brought down Saddam Hussein. Appointed as the special representative of the UN Secretary-General, Sergio hopes to bridge the gap between the Iraqi people and the Coalition. His mission was to help stabilise the country and enable elections for a quick return to Iraqi sovereignty.

But soon into the deployment in August 2003, a terrorist attack by al Qaeda strikes UN headquarters and leaves Sergio and others trapped underneath tons of rubble – where hours later he dies. The bombing, ordered by terrorist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, claimed 22 lives and injured more than 100 others.

The film shows that the deaths might have been avoided if the US Army had had the gear to lift the rubble and free Sergio and others who were trapped, but the world's most powerful army did not have such equipment – and only two American soldiers were assigned to lift the rubble with their bare hands. Of course, by the time they reached those trapped, it was too late.

Sergio has flashbacks of his life as he moves closer to death, so we see him in action in East Timor, Baghdad and falling in love with UN economic adviser Carolina Larriera. Their love story becomes the primary focus of the film, so unfortunately we don't get much of an insight into his life's work, just glimpses here and there.

Sergio, who was UN High Commissioner of Human Rights at the time, had reluctantly accepted the four-month appointment in Iraq. He had been pressured by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who was in turn pressured by the US government to appoint Sergio, as he was seen to be the best man for the mission

and the main hope of restoring peace in Iraq. His long trajectory in post-conflict transitions had earned him a reputation. He would show the Americans what to do and what not to do.

Born in Rio de Janeiro to a family of diplomats, Sergio lived in many countries as a child and spoke five languages. He studied philosophy at the University of Paris and the Sorbonne, and participated in the May 1968 student rebellion. He was with the UN all his working life, 34 years, holding posts in Bangladesh, Sudan, Cyprus, Mozambique, Lebanon, Cambodia, Bosnia, Congo, Kosovo and East Timor.

Described by a journalist as "a cross between James Bond and Bobby Kennedy", Sergio had firsthand experience assisting societies emerging from oppression, war and tyranny; implementing peace accords, overseeing elections, running the provisional government of East Timor and settling refugees. He was known for quickly understanding the dynamics of any given conflict, building bridges between opposing parties. He earned the trust and respect of rebel leaders, autocrats or ordinary people, and developed real solutions that could be accepted by all parties.

Former US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power, in her biography *Chasing the Flame: One Man's Fight to Save the World*, describes Sergio as "a guy who lived through and saw more human misery than maybe anyone else, and he still remained optimistic and inhabited the grey zone between right and wrong or good and evil. He actually got things done in the real world while still maintaining empathy, hope and as sense of fun, and was effective".

Power, who is now a professor of Global Leadership and Public Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School, met Sergio in Zagreb when she was a freelance journalist covering the war in Bosnia and Sergio was a senior adviser to the UN peacekeeping force there. She was impressed by his commitment and dedication to the principles for which the UN stands. "Sergio's ability to charm was so great," Power writes, "that each faction in the war came to believe he was on its side. He used the feelings of people to influence leaders. He was able to channel those feelings and leverage them in order to get results where others mediators just were unable."

In each posting he confronted violence, poverty, human rights abuses and difficulties of all kinds. One of his biggest successes was his leadership in East Timor where he was the Administrator of the UN Transitional Authority serving the de facto governor of the state between 1999 and 2002. He supervised the country's path to independence from Indonesia. Under his leadership the UN built the political and bureaucratic infrastructure of the new East Timorese state and handed power to its citizens as soon as it was possible.

In the 1980s Sergio helped resolve an intractable refugee crisis through multilateral cooperation. Thousands of Vietnamese people were arriving by boat on the shores of South-East Asian countries as they fled economic hardship and political oppression. At least 200,000 refugees were resettled and 350,000 remained scattered in refugee camps from Hong Kong to Thailand, but the number of people kept increasing and the situation was becoming unsustainable.

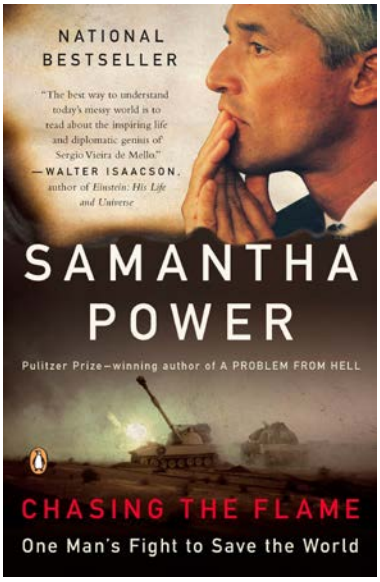
So the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) developed a plan that would facilitate the orderly return of the refugees to Vietnam, while also providing a screening process so those at risk of persecution could be identified and resettled in another country.

For the first time, regional cooperation between different countries (including Vietnam) took place that enabled a solution. The result was a multilateral agreement called the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) that allowed those found not to be refugees to return to their country. About 70,000 people were sent back to Vietnam. The Vietnamese government agreed not to punish them and allowed monitoring of the returnees. The CPA addressed all aspects of the problem, including the reasons for their flight.

"The CPA is a model for multilateral cooperation built on the principles of international solidary, burden sharing and proper acceptance of responsibilities," Sergio wrote. "Its purpose was to end the ongoing tragedy of the high seas and preserve asylum while reducing incentives for further mass outflow." Indeed, the CPA is regarded as the most significant example of successful UNHCR-led cooperation in recent history. Sergio, who was the UN bureau chief for Asia and Oceania, played a significant role.

In 1991 Sergio was assigned to work in Cambodia as special envoy for the UNHCR as part of a big UN peacekeeping mission following the Paris Peace Agreement. The mission entailed helping Cambodia achieve peace and reconciliation and its first democratic elections. It also included clearing the mines and repatriating 362,209 refugees from along the Thai border. Many would have to return to a territory under the Khmer Rouge control that they fled.

Thus, gaining the cooperation of the Khmer Rouge was essential. Samantha Power wrote that few outsiders had ventured into Khmer Rouge territory, but Sergio didn't hesitate and went deep into the jungle to meet a key leader, Ieng Sary – at one point having leave his car and wade it across a river. On his arrival he was cordially received by Sary and treated to a sumptuous lunch, where Sergio sought to convince him that his group could remain a significant player in Cambodia if they cooperated. They did. The repatriation went smoothly. That achievement greatly



enhanced Sergio Vieira de Mello's reputation in the international community.

When Sergio arrived in Sarajevo in 1993 to take part in a peacekeeping operation, the city was under siege from Serb snipers. He met Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and he told reporters: "The UN cannot tolerate the continuation of ethnic cleansing and forced eviction of civilians." The UN provided humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations. In the face of attacks against civilians by the Serbs, some UN officials wanted the peacekeepers to take a firmer stand and challenge the Serbs militarily. Sergio refused, saying it would violate the UN's neutrality and harm its broader humanitarian goals. However, while in Sarajevo he organised a clandestine UN convoy to transport Bosnian civilians past Serb checkpoints to the airport and out of the city, saving the lives of 298 people.

From the 1970s Sergio intervened in most major conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America in different capacities, but Iraq proved to be the most challenging.

Sergio had opposed the invasion of Iraq. Shortly before leaving for Baghdad he told a Wall Street Journal reporter: "After cursing the UN or calling it irrelevant or comparing it to the League of Nations … the US very quickly came back, as it were, even though they will never admit it, in search of international legitimacy. My guess is that the US and UK and those that have joined will realise … that this is too big, that building a democratic Iraq is not simple ... and that as a result they will realise that they have every interest in encouraging others who are seen to be more impartial, independent and more palatable to join in and help create these new institutions."

When Sergio arrived in Iraq he was appalled at what he saw as the Coalition's excessive use of force against civilians. At a press conference he said: "The day when Iraqis govern themselves must come quickly. In coming days I intend to listen intensively to what the Iraqi people have to say."

Unfortunately, Iraqis would not have a chance to determine their political future any time soon.

The terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1483, which authorised the Coalition to occupy Iraq, had been dictated by US diplomats. "Resolution 1483 effectively granted the Americans and the British the legal authority to choose Iraq's political leaders, spend its oil revenues and transform its legal, political and economic structures," Samantha Power wrote in *The New Yorker*. "For the first time in history, the Security Council was upholding the occupation of one UN member state by another."

Iraqis' growing hostility towards the Coalition and the UN presence in Iraq made it difficult for Sergio to meet his objectives. They hadn't forgotten UN arms inspections and the economic sanctions imposed on Saddam Hussein's regime that had crippled the economy for years, or the UN's association with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA).

At the same time, Sergio lacked the authority that he had enjoyed in East Timor and other countries to guide the transition adequately. Soon after Sergio's arrival Paul Bremer, the US Presidential Envoy to Iraq and head of the CPA, announced his intentions to expel Ba'ath Party members from government posts, ban the Ba'ath Party and dismantle the Iraqi Army. "Sergio now realised that the Coalition considered itself an actual government," Power wrote.

Sergio collaborated by becoming an intermediary between the Coalition and the Iraqi people. He travelled widely to meet Iraqi religious and civic leaders to gain their thoughts and perspectives on the new Iraq. Religious leaders insisted they wanted the Constitution to be written by elected Iraqi leaders, not a foreign power.

Bremer worked with Sergio to create the Iraqi Interim Governing Council, with Sergio providing the names of potential members. As soon as the Council was constituted, Bremer decided he no longer needed Sergio and cut him out of the process. "Bremer seemed unwilling to give the UN a substantive role," Power wrote, noting that Sergio offered his assistance, knowledge and experience to guide the transition, but was ignored. He demanded greater cooperation, but relations became strained. "Ignored by the US Army command, patronised by the arrogant US proconsul Paul Bremer, he knows that his presence in Baghdad was a terrible mistake."

The Council was dismissed by Iraqis as a product of the Americans. During this period the number of Iraqis killed by US forces rose and the hostility of Iraqis increased along with it. Sergio was highly critical of the occupation

"Resolution 1483 effectively granted the Americans and the British the legal authority to choose Iraq's political leaders, spend its oil revenues and transform its legal, political and economic structures … For the first time in history, the Security Council was upholding the occupation of one UN member state by another."

— Samantha Power

of Iraq. In an op-ed article he wrote: "An occupation can be grounded in nothing but good intentions. But morally and practically, I doubt it can ever be legitimate; its time, if it ever had one, has passed." He urged the Americans and the British to aim openly and effectively at their own disappearance.

This statement would be the first ever public UN condemnation of the Coalition human rights violations in Iraq, but was never released. A truck loaded packed with 450kg of explosives detonated on the street just below Sergio's office, eventually killing him.

According to Power, the US military wasn't equipped to respond to a large-scale terrorist attack and had not brought any useful equipment to Iraq. Fire-fighting equipment that could have helped had by then been looted. The film did not show, but as Sergio lay dying under the rubble, his last words were spoken to a rescuer who had managed to crawl down to him, were: "Don't abandon the mission."

The UN did maintain a presence in Iraq despite the danger it faced. "Why had Annan so eagerly accepted the Security Council's summons to go to Iraq?" asks Michael Massing in *The Nation*. "Why did he send his finest staff to enforce a non-existent mandate? Why, after the attack, had he chosen to keep UN staff in harm's way even when they were not performing vital tasks? What would it take for the UN Secretary-General in fact to learn to say no to powerful countries?"

A month later a second terrorist attack on the UN base killed a security guard, two Iraqi policemen and injured 19 people. In October 2003 the UN pulled out of Baghdad and the US was left on its own.

Paul Bremer remained in Iraq. Critics claimed his extreme measures (disbanding the Iraqi army, banning the Ba'ath Party and removing Ba'ath Party members from top government positions, then trying to privatise much of Iraq's infrastructure and mineral wealth), helped create and worsen an atmosphere of discontent among Iraqis, fuelling the insurgency against the American occupation.

In 2004 he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civil award. In 2007 Bremer appeared before a congressional committee investigating fraud and abuse and was questioned about missing funds ($8.8 billion of Iraq's money) during his tenure as head of the CPA.

The film finishes with real-life coverage of Kofi Annan honouring his fallen colleague on CNN. "His work there is left unfinished, but please God, we shall complete it," Annan said. "We cannot accept that Sergio had to die at this time, in this way, or that anything good can come of it. We cannot accept that all his brilliance, his energy, devotion to his staff and his loyalty to the ideals of the UN have so abruptly been taken from us. The people of Mozambique, Lebanon, Cambodia, Bosnia, Congo, Kosovo or Timor Leste will remember him as one who was there to help them in their hour of need to relieve human suffering and champion human rights.

"Sergio, you have entered that pantheon of heroes that the UN wished it did not have. You will shine forever among our brightest stars." ℟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☐ I attach my cheque/money order
☐ Please debit my credit card (Mastercard/Visa)

Card No. / / /

Expiry date /

Name on card

Signature

☐ I will be making a direct deposit into STARTTS account.
Please write 'STARTTS donation' in the subject line.

ACCOUNT NAME

STARTTS
BSB: 032 072
Account number: 114 851

To make an online donation visit www.startts.org.au **and click on 'Donate'.**

YOUR DETAILS

Name Tel number

Address

Suburb State

Postcode Email address

For more information about STARTTS' programs or making a donation, telephone (02) 9794 1900.

Please send your form to:
Communications Manager
STARTTS
PO Box 203
Fairfield NSW 2165

STARTTS is a registered charity. Your donation is tax deductible.

STARTTS

STARTTS

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) helps refugees deal with their past experiences and build a new life in Australia. Our services include counselling, group therapy, programs for children and young people, community development activities and body-focused therapy. We also work with other organisations and individuals to help them work more effectively with refugees. Opened in 1988, STARTTS is one of Australia's leading organisations for the treatment of torture and trauma survivors.