

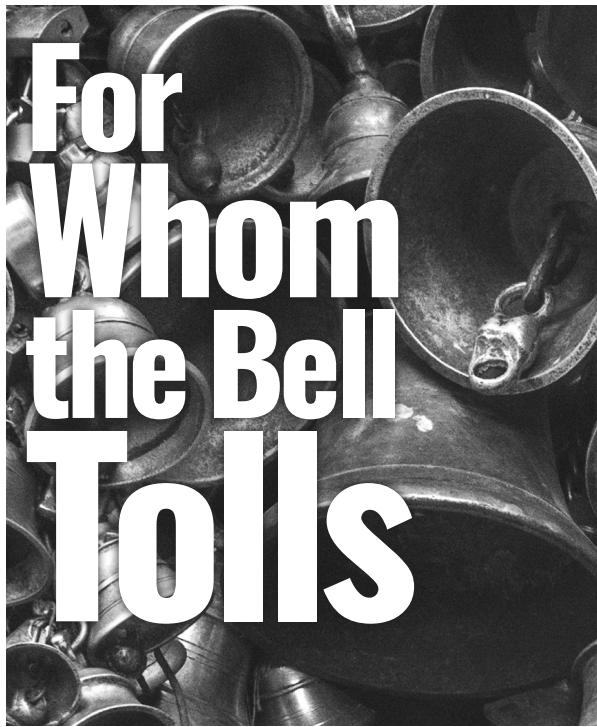


the Beacon

SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

Journal of the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church

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The title *For Whom The Bell Tolls* is from a novel by Ernest Hemingway (later a movie), written at the end of the Spanish Civil War. It depicts Hemingway's involvement in that war, the anti-fascist fight that was a prelude to World War Two. Hemingway believed that the fight against fascism was not just for the Spanish people but rather for all humankind.

The title was inspired by a statement written 300 years earlier by an English clergyman, John Donne, in a work entitled *Devotions upon emergent occasions*. Church bells were rung on a person's death; Donne suggested that the bells were ringing for all of us, as the human race is one entity and we are all responsible for each other.

The last few lines of Donne's statement illustrate why Hemingway drew inspiration from the work:

*Each man's death diminishes me
For I am involved in mankind
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for me.*

The message and inspiration are just as real for us today as they were for Hemingway in the 1930s or Donne in the 1600s. As we now approach more 'lockdowns' in response to the coronavirus, the necessity of looking out for each other should be obvious to all. We see massive stimulus packages being given in so-called developed countries whose


governments could be described as neoliberal at best and neofascist at worst.

It was George Galloway, a UK parliamentarian for almost 30 years, who said:

Of course, within this bout of socialism, there are many footprints – much bigger than a pig's – of some being more equal than others – Sir Richard Branson, for example, who will fare much better than the rickshaw driver in Piccadilly Circus. But it nevertheless shows that in the third decade of the 21st century, after 250 years of hegemony, capitalism has left us two pay cheques away from penury and one virus away from existential disaster. And only the money of its victims can save it.

As with Ernest Hemingway fighting fascism in Spain in the 1930s, we must never lose sight of the bigger picture. The people who have sold off our healthcare system, have removed or slashed funding for public works, have developed rorts on an industrial scale, all are still at the helm, ensuring that their 'masters', those of the 1%, are looked after.

As we are doing our best to look after our fellows during the pandemic, we must note that the imperial war machine continues to march on, barely missing a step. It's not just Spain, as Hemingway reminded us all those years ago.

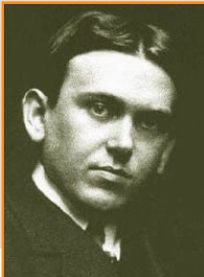
Many are saying that the contradictions within capitalism will cause its implosion, that the coronavirus will be the straw that broke the camel's back. Our view is that the system of exploitation and greed will not wither away of itself. The bell tolls for us all...we must continue the fight for a world free of exploitation and understand the great distance between what is and what might be and refuse to be satisfied with that disparity. 

Attention Beacon Readers

As the virus lockdown increases, and we are isolated from each other, the written word becomes ever more important. Beacon Board has been grappling with this situation as the church is closed until the virus is contained. So, we are asking for your cooperation to ensure you continue to get Beacon. The April edition will be the last sent out individually as we conform to virus guidelines. Beacon is on our website but many of you may prefer to receive it electronically to your own computer or perhaps that of your close family or a neighbour. You can do this by sending Donna Sensi (Church Office Manager) your email address or that of someone close and we will send you the Beacon electronically. You can email Donna at admin@melbourneunitarian.org.au and we will send you the Beacon each month as it is produced. Stay well and stay safe.

EDITORIAL

why Unitarians are different



"The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself...Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane and intolerable...The notion that a radical is one who hates his country is naive and usually idiotic...He is, more likely, one who likes his country more than the rest of us, and is thus more disturbed than the rest of us when he sees it debauched. He is not a bad citizen turning to crime; he is a good citizen driven to despair."

HL Mencken

Rev. Victor James, a minister of this church, talked about the 'social expression of religion'. Some would say it is the spirituality of Unitarianism. This is a talk about Unitarianism, a unique religion, our even more unique church, and a unique history of this church. Historically our church has a reputation that far outweighs its size. It has a history rich in social action, in our commitment to social justice, to democracy and to our determined adherence to the church motto of 'seek the truth and serve humanity'.

These words, carved high above our church door, are what guide our work because 'truth' is a word that today has lost its meaning, yet truth is the most potent weapon we have to genuinely serve the people.

That minister, Rev. Victor James, carved the words above the church door himself and he practised them by speaking out bravely about what he believed. I believe this church continues that practice.

In the 1950s, our church was a leader in the campaign for world peace and opposition to the Cold War. Our church was taking a stand against imperialism when that word was not yet acceptable. Indeed, in April 1974, the then minister of this church preached a sermon he called 'The anatomy of revolution', in which he quoted widely from Karl Marx. Our church stood firm and exposed the Ustasha fascists who were organised and demonstrated with their Nazi symbols outside this very building to intimidate us from exposing the truth about their role in Australia. Joan Cocksedge, church member, has written a book about their role. Our radio program 3CR consistently proclaims the truth. Our church journal *Beacon* has steadfastly maintained the truth since its inception. I want to read just a paragraph about *Beacon*, written by the Rev. Peter Ferguson (a past president of ANZUUA) as a foreword to my book on the history of the *Beacon* – *Shining a Light Beacon 1939–2009*.

Without fear or favour there has been a point of light on the great issues of our times both here

and overseas. Over the years, its editors and contributors have held aloft this vision of peace. At the same time they have exposed the double standards, the subtle deceptions and sometimes the sheer absurdities of the ruling powers.

The Beacon is perhaps the most unusual church magazine of its kind anywhere in the world. It has little to say about pie in the sky when you die; instead it focuses on the here and now – the real world. It calls for us all to become more aware of the insidious forces at work in the world whose origins lie in a pathological need for wealth and power at the expense of others.

We have a great deal to be proud of when we call ourselves Melbourne Unitarians.

Now, let's deal with the issue of the word 'church', which some in our church community find it difficult to accept. I choose to agree with that minister, Rev. Victor James, that in Latin the term 'church' simply means an assembly of people who come together. We come together to share our commitment to a better world, a world without war, without poverty and want, and where every person can reach their full potential.

In the July 1942 *Beacon*, another church minister, Rev. William Bottomley, said:

The distinguishing feature of Unitarianism is that it emanates from the free spirit of Man. The Unitarian movement had its origin among those who dared to think for themselves, rejecting the domination of priest, church or book. Its fundamental principle is the integrity of the individual soul, exercising in its own right to freedom of thought and voluntary responsibility.

Unitarians in Melbourne have tended to be different to many other Unitarians around the world. While most Unitarians are questioners, refusing to accept dogma or asserted historical and biblical creed, Unitarians who come to this church as well as asking why, how, when, where, are encouraged to take a

further step of following up these questions with action around the issues of economic justice, peace, democratic rights, the environment and all people's right to enjoy the fruits of their labour and to live a dignified life.

What is it about us that makes us stand apart from other formal religions? Our church has been vilified, called the godless church, the atheist church, the communist church, we have been named in Hansard. Why do the more traditional religions often disregard or even dislike us?

Unitarianism grew out of differences with the Christian orthodoxy. It was a religion that challenged the status quo, a religion that asked 'why?' Traditional religion is based on faith, an acceptance of long-held notions handed down over centuries and adopted unquestioningly. We are a religion of challenge, of demand for reason, of a quest for understanding based on rational thought.

There are many branches of Unitarianism; some adhere to the old ways, preferring to accept rather than oppose, but the Melbourne church has always been at the forefront of challenge, preferring to utilise reason rather than rote, truth rather than titillation.

As I said, the leadership of this church developed its humanist framework from two religious challengers, Rev. William Bottomley and Rev. Victor James, and their example of 'seeking the truth' rather than accepting with trust. That has been the prime mover in our reputation as a church with a difference.

Unitarians who come to the Melbourne church tend to be rational, reasoning people who approach life with robust common sense rather like those Unitarian children in Sunday school who were drawing pictures. The teacher asked one child, 'What are you drawing a picture of?'

'I'm drawing a picture of God,' the child replied.

'But nobody knows what God looks like,' objected the teacher.

'They will,' said the Unitarian child, 'when I get my picture done.'

This is the attitude of most of us who attend this church, and we welcome those who share this confidence in people and in our ability to reason and find answers. Our commitment to truth and reason unadulterated by adherence to doctrines or dogmas with little foundation makes this church today more important than ever before because there has never been a more pressing time for when a forum for truth was required.

I want to quote from an address given by Rev. Victor James in September 1954, explaining how he came to humanism.

He said:

The change with me began when quite innocently, from a Baptist pulpit, I stated that the Genesis story of the Creation was a legend that ought to be considered against its background and ought not to be accepted as a literal truth. I was then forced to choose between compromise for the sake of family

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peace and friendly relations and what I believed to be true. I made that choice and severed my connections with all churches. Then some years later, I heard of the Unitarian Church and was attracted to it mainly by the close relation I discovered among Unitarians between belief and action and the emphasis they placed upon the social expression of religion.

I was also impressed with the fact that in Unitarian Churches there was extended to the Minister to declare what he/she honestly believed...if that freedom had not been granted to me to speak the truth as I saw it then I doubt whether I would have entered the Unitarian Ministry.

In seeking the truth and demanding that right, Victor came to see 'the way in which environment shaped people, formed their ideas, and how important it was to make close contact with people to understand them better...'



THE PHILOSOPHY, THE STRUCTURE AND THE RESOURCES WE HAVE INHERITED ARE THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR FUTURE WORK.

Victor developed a new thesis that the noblest pursuit in which anyone can be engaged was the liberation of mankind. Victor went on to postulate: 'There is no greater aim in life than the liberating of ourselves, of liberating the whole of human society from its limitations, liberating us for better and nobler tasks.'

Victor emphasised that he was a humanist; he placed his emphasis on humanism and saw the future of mankind as dependent on the fullest development of its potential, and it was his leadership that encouraged this church to move towards a humanist philosophy.

The government of Unitarian churches is congregational. There is no body of creedal discipline or doctrine or teaching to which any individual Unitarian or any specific congregation is bound.

Unitarians can be Christian, atheist or humanist but we arrive at this position without coercion or imposed dogma. This is the legacy left to us by William Bottomley and Victor James. It is a legacy of truth, courage and the determination to build a better world. They did this over many years by expressing their views, challenging orthodoxy, developing campaigns for peace and justice and they did this against savage calumny from the other churches and government.

Since that time, the Melbourne Unitarian Peace Memorial Church has continued to develop a fine record of campaigning for social justice, democracy and human rights. Our church has long been in the forefront of campaigns around these issues. We have been among the leadership of campaigns

opposing the Vietnam War, for world peace, against homelessness, defending the environment, fighting for human rights, supporting asylum seekers, the issues of our First Nation's people, and trade union justice.

The inheritance bequeathed to us is invaluable and it is our task to decide how we can continue to shoulder this inheritance and build on its foundation. For build we must; if we don't, this wonderful church will fail.

So how can we carry forward this great legacy in this church today? How can we build on the noble words and actions of those who chartered our path here in Melbourne? How can we build, develop and extend this work? What can we do to encourage and implement programs and activities that will bring to this church those who share our desire for a better and more just world?

The philosophy, the structure and the resources we have inherited are the foundation for our future work. Melbourne abounds with many who share our philosophy of 'seek the truth and serve humanity'. We have a splendid journal, *Beacon*, which is widely admired, we have a radio program that reaches many and we have dedicated members and supporters. We need to develop programs that can build on this foundation ... not just a Sunday service but programs and ideas to grow the church.

We all bring with us particular skills, we all need to ask how can I help build this church and its *Beacon* and radio program? What can I do to encourage others to join and help in this future? What campaigns should follow our splendid speakers on so many urgent topics?

The church can be the foundation for a giant leap forward: a force against the growing corruption, environmental destruction, racism, colonialism, aggressive wars and poverty that we daily witness. How can we build this momentum and how can we contribute?

Victor James said: 'As Unitarians when asked about belief in God or the existence of a supernatural world we must reply that the most important question facing mankind today is not 'Is there a life after death' or does God manifest himself as a unity or a trinity, but what is the future of mankind?'

In our society today and worldwide we are witnessing corruption, destruction and exploitation more widespread than ever before. The contempt with which those in power hold the people is evident in their behaviour. Their interest is not in serving the people but in serving themselves. We have a huge responsibility therefore to build opposition to this and promote a society that does serve the people. That is why this little church in East Melbourne is so important and why every member and supporter is of such value.



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The drought has been devastating the inland for years. Several inland towns are now running out of water while that scarce resource is being sold off. A Singaporean food company is selling 89,000 megalitres of Australian water to a Canadian pension fund [12 December 2019 Daily Mail Australia].

A Chinese-owned company has been granted approval to run a 96 m litre a year commercial water mining operation in severely drought-hit southern Queensland where locals are on water rations and communities are at imminent risk of running dry [28 Dec 2019 Guardian].

We have witnessed bushfires in rainforests and the burning or starvation of over a billion native animals. Millions of hectares have been destroyed, thousands of homes and 34 human lives have been lost. The regional economy will take years to recover, and this year's bushfire threat has not yet passed.

Canberra went from terrible air pollution due to bushfire smoke to huge damaging hailstones, then back to threatening bushfires within a few days. Melbourne and Sydney temporarily became the most polluted cities in the world. The nation witnessed climate refugees being rescued by the navy in Eastern Victoria, with major highways closed for long periods. This has been followed by torrential but patchy rainfall, flash floods and the threat of at least one dam collapse.

Meanwhile our national government continues its generous support for oil, coal and gas, with taxpayer subsidies and soft taxation policies. For example, in 2020, our gas output will probably outstrip that of Qatar, which gets \$26.6 billion in tax but Australia gets only \$600 million [12 March 2018 SMH].

ExxonMobil Australia, with a total income of \$42.3 billion over the past five years, paid not one cent in income tax in this country [31 January 2020 Michael West Media].

While supporting these contributors to the climate emergency, the Government engages in climate emergency denial. The School Climate Strike movement, involving millions of people around the world, was supported by some 300,000 Australians late in 2019.

These demonstrations were ignored by the Government [13 February 2020 The AIM Network]. Just why this might be seems clear.

'Since 2011, mining and energy corporations have donated \$8.4 million to the conservative coalition's state and federal branches. Comparatively, the Labor Party, which accepts climate science, has received only \$2.8 million' [6 January 2020 Byline Times].

Alongside these climate emergency-related crises we have a series of crises related to falling respect for our government and a growing threat to the continued legitimacy of our political institutions.

Government corruption – sports rorts and 'changing sheds' – saw a quarter of a billion dollars used to shore up LNP votes in the last election, while Newstart remained below poverty level.

The most recent outrage is a threat to place more welfare recipients on the debit card, which has already devastated many families.

Then came the Coronavirus, which created an outburst of anti-Chinese racism, the re-opening of Christmas Island for the quarantine of Australians returning from China, and loud groans from those businesses and educational institutions dependent upon the Chinese market for their clients.

We wait to see how the needs of business weigh against the safety of the nation in the minds of our rulers.

If any doubts remain as to the importance of taking political action to deal with the lies and corruption facing us in Australia today, then we are lost.

Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Geneva (6 December 2018) – On 10 December, we mark the 70th anniversary of that extraordinary document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is, I firmly believe, as relevant today as it was when it was adopted 70 years ago.

Arguably even more so, as over the passing decades, it has passed from being an aspirational treatise into a set of standards that has permeated virtually every area of international law.

It has withstood the tests of the passing years, and the advent of dramatic new technologies and social, political and economic developments that its drafters could not have foreseen.

Its precepts are so fundamental that they can be applied to every new dilemma.

The Universal Declaration gives us the principles we need to govern artificial intelligence and the digital world.

It lays out a framework of responses that can be used to counter the effects of climate change on people, if not on the planet.

It provides us with the basis for ensuring equal rights for groups, such as LGBTI people, whom few would even dare name in 1948.

Everyone is entitled to all the freedoms listed in the Universal Declaration ‘without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status’.

The last words of that sentence – ‘other status’ – have frequently been cited to expand the list of people specifically protected. Not just LGBTI people, but also persons with disabilities – who now have a Convention of their own, adopted in 2006. Elderly



**ALL HUMAN BEINGS
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EQUAL.**

people, who may get one as well. Indigenous peoples. Minorities of all sorts. Everyone.

Gender is a concept that is addressed in almost every clause of the Declaration. For its time, the document was remarkably lacking in sexist language. The document refers to ‘everyone’, ‘all’ or ‘no one’ throughout its 30 Articles.

This trailblazing usage reflects the fact that, for the first time in the history of international law-making, women played a prominent role in drafting the Universal Declaration.

The role of Eleanor Roosevelt, who chaired the drafting committee is well known. Less well known is the fact that women from Denmark, Pakistan, the

Communist bloc and other countries around the world also made crucial contributions.

Indeed, it is thanks primarily to the Indian drafter Hansa Mehta, that the French phrase 'all men are born free and equal', taken from the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, became in the Universal Declaration 'all **human beings** are born free and equal'.

A simple but – in terms of women's rights and of minority rights – revolutionary phrase.

Hansa Mehta objected to Eleanor Roosevelt's assertion that 'men' was understood to include women – the widely accepted idea at that time. She argued that countries could use this wording to restrict the rights of women, rather than expand them.

Born out of the devastation of two World Wars, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the Holocaust, the Universal Declaration is geared to prevent similar disasters, and the tyranny and violations which caused them. It sets out ways to prevent us from continuing to harm each other and aims to provide us with 'freedom from fear and want'.

It sets limits on the powerful and inspires hope among the powerless.

Over the seven decades since its adoption, the Universal Declaration has underpinned countless beneficial changes in the lives of millions of people across the world, permeating some 90 national Constitutions and numerous national, regional and international laws and institutions.

But, 70 years after its adoption, the work the Universal Declaration lays down for us to do is far from over. And it never will be.

In 30 crystal clear articles, the Universal Declaration shows us the measures which will end extreme poverty, and provide food, housing, health, education, jobs and opportunities for everyone.

It lights the path to a world without wars and Holocausts, without torture or famine or injustice. A world where misery is minimised and no one is too rich or powerful to evade justice.

A world where every human has the same worth as every other human, not just at birth but for the duration of their entire lives.

The drafters wanted to prevent another war by tackling the root causes, by setting down the rights everyone on the planet could expect and demand simply because they exist – and to spell out in no uncertain terms what cannot be done to human beings.

The poor, the hungry, the displaced and the marginalised – drafters aimed to establish systems to support and protect them.

The right to food and to development is crucial. But this has to be achieved without discrimination on the basis of race, gender or other status. You cannot say to your people – I will feed you, but I won't let you speak or enjoy your religion or culture.

The rights to land and adequate housing are absolutely basic – and yet in some countries, austerity



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measures are eroding those very rights for the most vulnerable.

Climate change can undermine the right to life, to food, to shelter and to health. These are all related – and the Universal Declaration and international human rights conventions provide a roadmap to their achievement.

I am convinced that the human rights ideal, laid down in this Declaration, has been one of the most constructive advances of ideas in human history – as well as one of the most successful.

But, today, that progress is under threat.

We are born 'free and equal', but millions of people on this planet do not stay free and equal. Their dignity is trampled, and their rights are violated on a daily basis.

In many countries, the fundamental recognition that all human beings are equal, and have inherent rights, is under attack. The institutions so painstakingly set up by states to achieve common solutions to common problems are being undermined.

And the comprehensive web of international, regional and national laws and treaties that gave teeth to the vision of the Universal Declaration is also being chipped away by governments and politicians increasingly focused on narrow, nationalist interests.

We all need to stand up more energetically for the rights it showed us everyone should have – not just ourselves, but all our fellow human beings – and which we are at constant risk of eroding through



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our own, and our leaders’ forgetfulness, neglect or wanton disregard.

I will end, where the Universal Declaration begins, with the powerful promise – and warning – contained in the first lines of its Preamble:

‘... Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

‘... Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief,

and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.

‘... It is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse as a last resort to rebellion against tyranny and oppression that human rights should be protected by the rule of law.’

And we would do well to pay more attention to the final words of that same Preamble:

‘... every individual and every organ of society keeping this Declaration constantly in mind shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.’

We have come a long way down this path since 1948. We have taken many of the progressive measures prescribed by the Universal Declaration at the national and international levels.

But we still have a long way to go, and too many of our leaders seem to have forgotten these powerful and prophetic words. We need to rectify that, not just today, not just on the 70th anniversary next Monday, but every day, every year.

Human rights defenders the world over are on the frontlines of defending the Universal Declaration through their work, their dedication and their sacrifice. No matter where we live or what our circumstances are, most of us do have the power to make a difference – to make our homes, communities, countries, and our world better – or worse – for others. Each of us needs to do our part to breathe life into the beautiful dream of the Universal Declaration.

For this was the gift of our ancestors, to help us avoid ever having to go through what they went through.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the UN General Assembly at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris three years after the end of World War II. It was the product of 18 months’ work by a drafting committee, with members and advisers from all across the world, and – in the words of one of its principal architects, René Cassin – ‘at the end of one hundred sessions of elevated, often impassioned discussion, was adopted in the form of 30 articles on 10 December 1948’.



Our church is a public and usable asset with portable seating and excellent conference, meeting and function facilities. We welcome its use by those who support our motto ‘Seek the Truth and Serve Humanity’. Interested individuals or groups can contact the church office – we would be delighted to speak to you. A donation is payable.



International Women's Day: So much more to do

Twenty-five years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most comprehensive roadmap for women's rights, the hard-fought victories gained are being reversed, and in some areas, we are going backwards.

8 March 2020

International Women's Day. This is no time for complacency. This year's theme is 'I am Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights' and comes after the release of the latest report by UN Women 'Women's Rights in Review 25 years after Beijing', which takes a look at the victories and challenges in achieving full rights for women.

This document is based on the Secretary-General's report and on data provided by 170 Member States, along with input from hundreds of civil society activists around the world.

MORE MINUSES THAN PLUSES

In a word, the findings of the report are disappointing. While progress has been made in healthcare and education, there has been stagnation and even reversal in other areas. 'Overall change has been too slow for the majority of the world's women and girls. Progress is now under threat from rampant inequality, runaway climate change and the rise of exclusionary politics' (UN Women).

'Today, not a single country can claim to have achieved gender equality. Multiple obstacles remain unchanged in law and in culture. Women and girls continue to be undervalued; they work more and earn less and have fewer choices; and experience multiple forms of violence at home and in public spaces. Many hard-won victories are being reversed.' Depressing reading in a world which claims to be civilised, well into the so-called Third Millennium.

THE STARK AND UNADULTERATED FACTS

So, let us look at the report and highlight some of the facts, and see whether we have achieved gender equality in any way, shape or form: Women are 25 per cent more likely than men to be living in extreme poverty. In national parliaments, only one in four seats are held by women. Women do three times as much unpaid work as men, 4.7 hours a day compared with 1.7 hours for men. Over the last two decades, the gender gap in labour force participation among adults aged 25 to 54 has stagnated. Women are paid 16 per cent less than men. Only 25 per cent of managers are women. Thirty-one per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 are not in education or employment training. Eighteen per cent of women aged 15 to 49 have experienced some form of violence in the last year perpetrated by their partner.

ONLY 40 PER CENT OF WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE SEEK ANY FORM OF HELP.

Only 40 per cent of women who experience violence seek any form of help. In 2017, every single day, 137 women were murdered by their intimate partner. The review on the report, produced by the UNO, states: 'Rising inequalities and economic exclusion are a symptom of development models in which gains are not shared equitably. Pushback against gender equality is becoming stronger'.

THE MOST SICKENING OF ALL

Violence against women and girls provides the most telling and sickening statistic of all. The figures quoted by UN Women indicate that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced some form of sexual intimate violence in their lifetime perpetrated by their partner.

Six hundred and fifty million women worldwide were married as minors. Two hundred million women aged 15 to 49 have undergone female genital mutilation. Fifteen million teenagers have been raped. And, no, we are not speaking of some underdeveloped society in the back of beyond. This is a humanitarian crisis which affects all countries, classes and societies. In the USA, 23 per cent of female undergraduates reported sexual harassment or unwanted sexual advances. In the European Union, ten per cent of women have been the victims of some form of sexual cyber harassment. Eighty-two per cent of female parliamentarians report having been the victims of psychological harassment.

The figures just go on and on and on and on and on and on and on and are repeated year after year after

year. True, some progress has been made, but the bottom line of this article is the question: Can we say that on International Women's Day 2020, gender equality has been achieved?

THE PITIFUL REPLY IS NO, IT HAS NOT. NOWHERE.

If this article has stirred some kind of reaction in male and female readers alike, there is actually something that you can do. The UN Women website is an excellent resource with information on projects being undertaken and advice on what people can do. Surely the world can do better than this?

HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day started in the United States of America, launched by a declaration of the Socialist Party of America on 28 February 1909 using as a basis the need to guarantee women's rights in an increasingly industrialised society and was taken up by the international community at the first International Women's Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1910. The horrific and inhumane conditions at the New York Triangle Shirtwaist factory, which caused the deaths of 140 garment workers (mostly women) in 1911, provided an added impetus at a time when women were pressing for the right to vote, and demonstrations in Russia prior to the 1917 Revolution were the first signs of women's emancipation in that country, culminating in the declaration by Lenin of a Women's Day on March 8; in 1965 it was declared a public holiday by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

WHY MARCH 8?

Women had been demonstrating for their rights since pre-Classical times (e.g. the sexual strike called by Lysistrata in Ancient Greece, the March on Versailles by Parisian woman calling for 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' in the 1790s). Copenhagen had chosen 19 March for the celebration of an International Women's Day but in 1913, Russian women chose the last Sunday in February (following the Declaration by the Socialist Party of America in 1909) as the date for their International Women's Day to call for peace on the eve of the First World War. As springtime and local customs to give the first flowers to women combined, the end of February/beginning of March began to be the time of year observed by the feminist movements, until in 1917, Russian women called a strike on the last Sunday of February to protest against the War (23 February) in the Julian Calendar; 8 March in the Gregorian

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WE ACKNOWLEDGE

Traditional owners of the Kulin Nation, past Warriors, Elders past and present.

from our readers



ADMIN

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D Hanrahan & H Smith, Vic

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Thanks for your paper – the only one who knows something about telling the truth!

E Bron, NSW

DEAR BEACON

Can anyone offer a 5-year forecast for Australia? With a corrupt government (state and federal), bribes as 'donations' to buy democracy, tax spending waste, jobs for mates, no reliable industry, water shortages and corruption in allocation rights, climate change denial, external costs (we pay) of landfill and plastic waste on land and in our oceans, wildlife deaths due to negligence and pollution, Murdoch lies and propaganda running the media, increased poverty and homelessness, increased household debt levels, compliance to corporate tax evasion, apathy, bank corruption, increased surveillance of the innocent, what is the natural progression of the mismanagement of Australia for the benefit of the few?

I couldn't hazard a guess. Would another reader like to have a go?

A Walmsley, NSW

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Feature: Why Unitarians are Different

The Age of Crises

Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

International Women's Day: So much more to do

Letters to the Editor

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