

# Small State – Big Issues

**Jim McLay**

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The Hon. Jim McLay, CNZM QSO, the New Zealand Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, received an honorary degree from Juniata College.

**E** *nga mana, e nga reo, e nga iwi; tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa; to all peoples and to all voices, greetings, greetings, greetings to all.*

You do me a great honor by conferring this degree, the more so by the wording of the citation that accompanies it. If, as the Greeks suggested, happiness is the full use of one's faculties, then at least in my life's largely unplanned diversity, I hope I can claim happiness.

You have, Mr. President, spoken kindly of my career, which saves me the awkwardness of recounting that. I've never liked that, and only do it when talking to what we call a "Careers Class" of high school students about to embark on life – and only then to highlight mistakes they might avoid. It suffices to say that I started out as a lawyer (until I found that wasn't very popular), then became a politician (until I found out that wasn't very popular), and then became an investment banker (and we know how popular they became); so diplomacy was put at some risk with my appointment to the United Nations.

This is an astonishing time to be at the UN; think, for example, of the "Arab Spring" – not the best characterization, as spring lasts three months, but this one could take ten years to shake itself out. It is truly dramatic to be there when an ambassador – no longer willing to serve his regime – resigns his post in front of the Security Council; and it is exhilarating to address the General Assembly and Security Council in the historic chambers I only knew from news clips. All that is heady stuff for a boy from Down Under in a small country sometimes described as "the last bus-stop on the planet."

Despite my reluctance to talk "career," I do look back on much with satisfaction such as steps taken to make government more transparent and accountable, and my work on the Whaling Commission. Much of what I did, and still do, in my public life has been driven by the firm belief that unacceptable situations and policies can be changed for the better, and that one of the reasons for seeking political office was to gain access to the legislative and policy-making levers that might affect that change. Above all, it has been driven by a belief in equality of opportunity, but not, I emphasize, equality of outcomes – which will always be different, according to one's talents and, more importantly, according to how they are used.

As a lawyer, I had, for example, entered Parliament with a clear idea of things that were wrong with the law. I remembered arguing a matrimonial property case, when the judge told me he had a "rule

of thumb” that a wife should get one percent of the home for every year of marriage. I asked (politely, as one must) if that meant a faultless wife of a quarter of a century, who’d forsaken her career for marriage and was then left on her own, would be entitled to just twenty-five percent of the home, and nothing else? “Yes,” replied His Honor, “That’s my rule of thumb, but I do vary it according to the circumstances of the particular case.” Well, I thought, that’s not fair; one day, I’d like to work to help change it. And I did.

I still recall the first time I appeared in a rape trial, and was so "indoctrinated" with the legal dictum that women were likely to make false allegations of rape, that I was obliged to attack the complainant's morality, based on her previous sexual experience. That too, I got to change.

I am a strong believer in equality of opportunity, and was certainly willing to change things to ensure that opportunity; but I don't believe that we can or should legislate to dictate equal outcomes. However, I am not doctrinaire on that, and I accept that, sometimes, as with community of matrimonial property, it is the only way.

Usually, though, I have advocated fair and equal opportunities, and the freedom to do the best with our abilities. Art, science, literature, industry, the professions, education, and athletic endeavor – all manner of effort and achievement – will best thrive when people are free to make their own decisions, their own mistakes, to risk failure but, above all, to achieve success. The atom was not split, and DNA was not discovered, by token scientists pursuing pre-guaranteed outcomes; the first four-minute mile was not run in a handicap race with the fastest competitor starting twenty yards behind, or even worse, twenty yards ahead; and those who eventually cure cancer and the common cold will only do so by striving to achieve something better than others who came before.

Politicians and policymakers should eventually realize that they can, at most, provide equal opportunities to seek those outcomes; we can’t dictate those outcomes. Some, although they learn that lesson, quickly forget it, thus proving the tart comment of that agile diplomat, Talleyrand, who, on the post-Napoleonic restoration of the Bourbons, said they had “learned nothing, and forgotten nothing.” Or, perhaps they ignored Einstein's definition of insanity – doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

## OPEN SOCIETIES

Many of the reforms for which I took responsibility – not least freedom of information legislation that was subsequently copied in other countries – were based on the idea of an open society, in which governments are accountable, responsive, tolerant, and non-authoritarian; where political structures are transparent and flexible; where all is founded on fundamental political freedoms and human rights.

Those ideas are hardly new. They have been with us for centuries, but had their modern origins with Henri Bergson in 1935. They were then developed during the Second World War by Karl Popper at

a time when he had been given refuge from Nazism and the Austrian Anschluss in New Zealand, and was lecturing in philosophy at Canterbury University. Popper believed in an open system that allowed individuals to think for themselves and make meaningful choices. I am not necessarily a disciple of Popper, but those ideas do appeal to me.

All this will come together in just two weeks when Oxford University Press publishes a new book, *Fairness and Freedom: A History of Two Open Societies: New Zealand and the United States*, by Pulitzer Prize winner David Hackett Fischer of Brandeis University.<sup>1</sup> It reviews two open societies, New Zealand and the United States, as having much in common, but also with many differences. Founded as English-speaking colonies, both sprang from the same fountainhead. Both are long-standing democracies (ours is the world's eighth oldest), with mixed-enterprise economies, pluralist cultures, and concern for human rights and the Rule of Law. But, despite those basic similarities, they went different ways.

Fischer points out that America developed on its frontier, New Zealand in its bush. Each offered different possibilities and choices. This audience will, of course, have its own, well-honed image of frontier America in the mid-1800s; but, to put things into perspective, let me share with you just three very brief, informal snapshots of New Zealand around the 1860s, barely twenty years after the beginnings of formal, European settlement.

This was a very young society. Most settlers came in their twenties or thirties, often as children. Life was hard, but there were attempts at civilization. In an account familiar, perhaps, to followers of the Oscars, a Mrs. Tripp brought a piano to her sheep station, but after the cart carrying it broke down crossing a river, it sat outside for six weeks, covered only by a tarpaulin. After it was finally delivered, a neighbor, Samuel Butler, played on it “for hours on end.” In 1864, having doubled his money in just three years (indicative of the exciting prospects offered by this new colony), Butler returned to England and, eight years later and published his famous *Erewhon* (an anagram of “nowhere”), regarded, then, as the best satirical novel since *Gulliver's Travels*. *Erewhon* attacked the religion and hypocrisy of Victorian England; it told of a civilization in a remote British colony, an anti-utopia where illness was a crime, children chose their parents, and beauty signified morality.

After those of Butler and Mrs. Tripp, my third snapshot is of Ernest Rutherford, born in Nelson, New Zealand, in 1871. He graduated from Canterbury University, went to Canada, then Britain, and became one of the great physicists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He classified radiation into alpha, beta, and gamma types, and discovered the atomic nucleus. He also split the atom, thus opening up the nuclear age. In 1908, he won the Nobel Prize; all this was achieved by someone who'd received his basic education within one lifetime of New Zealand's European colonization.

Fischer highlights the differences between these two societies using, for example, the way they went to war (as that provides a stark contrast between a small state and a large state), while pursuing a

common goal, the defeat of fascism. In World War II, New Zealand's troops fought in the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The Prime Minister and War Cabinet - indeed, the whole of Parliament meeting in secret session - kept a close watch on this New Zealand Expeditionary Force, knowing that if it was lost, it could not be replaced. Consider that contrast alone. Never could it be said of the great American armies that, if one was "lost, it could not be replaced."

Having regard to their vastly different resources, it is hardly surprising that two countries (even allies) should take up arms in so different a manner. New Zealand's troops launched aggressive, surprise attacks at night in order to minimize casualties. The Americans attacked in full daylight. Such an obvious difference highlights the contrast between two nations that are otherwise of such similar origin and were pursuing such a common cause.

So it is today. It would be easy to assume that, if they share common origins, values, beliefs and policies, countries, large or small, will pursue common objectives in a common manner. But that wartime example demonstrates ways that small and large countries are different and that they often approach today's issues differently, even when their interests and objectives are the same.

So how do two countries, divided by their similarities, approach the big issues of today?

New Zealand takes pride in its diversity; we are indigenous Māori; we are European; and we are the many peoples from Asia-Pacific and elsewhere who call New Zealand home. Pacific peoples were navigating their ocean – the world's largest – when others believed the world to be flat and were still confined to their coastal waters. Māori called it *Te Moana nui-a-Kiwa*, the ocean guarded by the god Kiwa.

New Zealand is a country of the Pacific, a country of its ocean; and that ocean shapes much of what we do and what we believe. New Zealand is greater in landmass than the UK; no one lives more than seventy miles from the sea; the vast majority live on its seaboard.

Our whole region is uniquely dependent on its ocean; our ocean underpins livelihoods, food security, and economic development. That is why we focus so much attention on that ocean, and on ensuring its sustainable development. That is why we give urgency to addressing acidification, pollution, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. That is why we believe in internationally agreed rules defining the rights and responsibilities of nations and their use of oceans. That is why we played a prominent role in the nine-year negotiation that led to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. And that is why, unlike the United States, we have ratified and given full effect to that important treaty.

Our key differences relate to Part XI, which governs the exploitation of minerals, and which some regard as contrary to U.S. security and economic interests. So although the U.S. helped write the Convention, and despite its founding belief in a society based on rules, it has never ratified that

Convention. However, because the Convention also reflects customary international law, the U.S. has always acted consistently with it; so our differences on that issue may not be as great as non-ratification might imply. It suffices to say that we have two countries with similar origins and similar beliefs, but, ultimately, with different views about rights and responsibilities in relation to the world's oceans.

Likewise is the International Criminal Court, established by the Rome Statute to prosecute crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression. Again, New Zealand has, for what it regards as good and proper reasons, ratified that Statute. And, for what it regards as good, proper (and, this case, more fundamental) reasons, the United States has not ratified it, even though it participated in its negotiation, and despite its proud history (at Nuremberg and elsewhere) in formulating much of the post-war jurisprudence on which the court's jurisdiction is based. We addressed that issue last night, in an informative, stand-alone seminar; I won't explore it further here tonight. In both cases, two open societies with much in common have reached very different conclusions about their respective interests and how best they should be pursued and protected.

We have had other even more fundamental differences on the issue of nuclear weapons. Twenty-five years ago, New Zealand and the United States parted company on the issue of visits by nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed ships; we were no longer treaty partners.

We were also instrumental in the drive to agree to the Treaty of Rarotonga, which established the world's second Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the South Pacific. The U.S. resisted those efforts, believing they restricted its security options, even though the South Pacific and other such zones were unlikely theatres of nuclear conflict. So, last May, we were pleased when President Obama submitted that treaty's protocols (and those of the similar African treaty) to the U.S. Senate for ratification, thus advancing his commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and to a world without nuclear weapons. Ratification would extend U.S. policy not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against regional zone parties who are members of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and who are in good standing with their own non-proliferation obligations.

New Zealand has long called for a world free of nuclear weapons so, understandably, we also welcomed the vision to that effect outlined by President Obama in Prague in April 2010. But, on other nuclear issues, differences still remain. New Zealand is a founding member of the New Agenda Coalition, which seeks an international consensus on nuclear disarmament. We also belong to what is known as the De-Alerting Group, which seeks to decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems, and has, since 2007, called for urgent action to address the significant numbers of nuclear weapons that remain at unnecessarily high levels of readiness. Since the end of the Cold War, despite real improvements in the international security climate, not least in the reduced number of nuclear weapons,

there has been no commensurate decrease in the alert levels of those weapons; many remain at levels of alert disproportionate to the current strategic situation.

It is regrettable that, two decades after the Cold War, many of its doctrinal aspects remain – not least, those high alert levels. Lowered operational readiness would be a real commitment to a diminishing role for nuclear weapons; and steps to lengthen the decision-making “fuse” for launching a nuclear attack would minimize the risk of unintended use, or use in error. Again, the U.S. and other nuclear powers take a different view. A debate about the merits of each position is unlikely to be a productive; far better, in this context, is that we understand why such differences exist between countries of remarkably similar origin.

It would be easy to misinterpret New Zealand's positions on all these issues as idealistic, unrealistic, isolationist, or the very least, as showing little regard for the legitimate concerns of others. We are none of those things, and never have been, as is well evidenced by the fact that we fought alongside the United States in every war of the twentieth century, including Vietnam, and, into the twenty-first century, in Afghanistan.

But New Zealand still sees itself as far from much that tears and tramples at the rest of the world, and is understandably conditioned by the fact that it is one of very few countries that has never been attacked (although Māori might take a different view on that).

What, then, of the great issues of the day? Are there differences there as well? What about the Middle East Peace Process? What about Syria, whose president still kills his own people? What about Iran and its nuclear program or its threats to close the Strait of Hormuz? What about North Korea?

In the Middle East, like the United States, New Zealand supports the “Two-State Solution” – with two states living side-by-side in peace and security – and wants to see that achieved by a settlement negotiated by the Israelis and the Palestinians. The rapidly changing regional dynamics of the Arab Spring make the need for such agreement even more pressing. We also need to see progress now to ensure that constructive Palestinian voices of moderation prevail. Agreeing to that Two-State Solution will only be achieved by getting the two parties into direct talks.

And, if any such settlement is to endure, we also need stable regional players, committed to that settlement, lest the unrest in neighboring countries provide cover for continued violence. Even with its own internal issues, Egypt is playing a crucial role in mending the fracture between Gaza and the West Bank, and in negotiations between Israel and the OPT. It is important that the new government in Egypt is able to maintain those brokering roles.

We have good relationships with both Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We are one of a small number of countries trusted by both sides. That is a deliberate position. We pride ourselves on being

fair-minded and even-handed. That is the character of New Zealand, and it is the character of our voting record in multilateral institutions.

On the Palestinian side, we are providing support for the state-building efforts of Prime Minister Fayyad. We are formalizing regular, Foreign Ministry dialogue with the Palestinian Authority. We are assuming a leadership role in a de-mining program with the United Nations' Mine Action Service, which should free up much West Bank land with agricultural potential.

On the Israeli side, our conscious effort to rebalance the relationship has seen a reopening of their Embassy in Wellington, after an eight-year absence. Israel knows that we understand its need for a guarantee of security as part of any settlement, and it knows we understand the need for a firm, international position on Iran's nuclear ambitions as part of that improved regional security environment.

So, we enjoy good, constructive relations with both parties. In that context, we have directly urged representatives of both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to find their own basis for direct discussions to establish the ground rules for two states to co-exist peacefully, side-by-side.

Like many others, we are deeply frustrated by the current situation. The most frustrating aspect is that, broadly speaking, the parties do not seem that far apart. When I accompanied my Minister of Foreign Affairs on visits to Egypt, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and Israel, the various actors were talking in almost identical terms, about settling on the 1967 borders, plus or minus land-swaps of four, five, or six percent, with appropriate buffer zones. The very clear impression was that, if we can get the parties to the table, we should be able to get a deal. New Zealand will support a negotiated process where we can. It is likely that maintaining a security zone would be a pre-condition of any settlement that is acceptable to Israel.

New Zealand has supported the peace between Israel and Egypt through our involvement, since its inception, with the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) – the independent entity responsible for peacekeeping in the Sinai. In fact, a New Zealand General currently commands the MFO force (the second to do so). Consistent with that involvement, we have made a firm offer to support any operation that, as part of a negotiated settlement, might maintain a buffer zone between Israel and Palestine, and both sides have made it clear that they would want us to be there.

Meanwhile, the situation in the OPT is a fuse capable of igniting an entire regional conflagration and we cannot afford to let developments in the wider region divert attention away from the urgent need to resume meaningful negotiations. We can only watch, wait, and see whether the most recent discussions, brokered by Jordan and the Quartet in Amman, will yield any progress.

Like the United States, we have concerns about Iran's nuclear activities, and we continue to monitor events and make our views known to Iran through its embassy in Wellington and ours in Tehran.

Although we maintain diplomatic relations with North Korea, our position on all Korean peninsula issues remains similar to that of the United States' condemnation of the bombardment of Yeonpyeong and the North Korean link to the Cheonan sinking.

#### SMALL STATES AT THE UNITED NATIONS

However, there is much more to any consideration of the role of small states than just a comparison between two like-minded countries. After all, over one hundred small states (those with populations under ten million) are members of the United Nations. In the UN General Assembly (or GA), the vote of the very smallest, Nauru (with just 9,322 people) carries the same weight as that of China (with 1.3 billion). One shouldn't assume that Nauru's influence begins and ends with that single vote; it currently heads the thirty-nine member Alliance of Small Island States, which is comprised of low-lying countries that play a key role in many negotiations such as those on climate change.

While the Great Powers of 1945 still dominate the Security Council of 2012, in the GA all 193 countries are equal. Only the Security Council can make binding decisions on matters of international peace and security, but the GA elects the non-permanent members of the Security Council and is still the UN's principal body for considering its full range of work, from peace and security to human rights and development. While its resolutions are not binding, they still carry significant moral weight.

One of the General Assembly's earliest achievements was the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Small countries (not least, New Zealand) left their marks on that Declaration, resulting in a document that addressed socio-economic rights and condemned discrimination. The explicit application of those rights to those under colonial rule was crucial to the process of decolonization that followed in the 1950s and beyond.

There are many other examples of small states playing important roles at the UN and beyond. In 2009, the Pacific Small Island Developing States, led by the ubiquitous Nauru, proposed a General Assembly resolution on the security implications of climate change, which is a real issue for countries that could be inundated by even modest sea level rises. A resolution passed by consensus, co-sponsored by 101 states, including, in a first for climate change resolutions, the United States.

For the Pacific, climate change is a real and present threat to livelihoods, security, and well-being. The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, experienced those challenges first-hand when he visited several Pacific states in last September, including Kiribati, whose people know, on a daily basis, the dangers of rising oceans. He experienced real "vulnerability" when his hotel room, in addition to the towels and the telephone, was equipped with a lifejacket. He saw the impact of rising oceans on viability and survival when his plane had to be "wheels up" from the airport before the tide came in. Many small states face such problems and they can't be ignored. If they are, whole populations will be on the move,



here and in other regions as well, with obvious implications for regional and international stability and security.

In that same context, New Zealand has also initiated a Global Research Alliance on Agricultural Greenhouse Gases. Involving over thirty countries, it seeks to ensure that reducing agricultural emissions does not compromise global food security. Increased agricultural productivity – the ability of many countries’ people to feed themselves - is one of the great achievements of recent decades. It cannot, must not, and will not be reversed. Constraining agricultural production would put much of the world’s population at risk and, quite simply, no country will do that. The Alliance is all about maintaining agricultural research to ensure productivity and efficiency gains, but with fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

In other examples of small state activism, Norway drove the convention banning the production, sale, and use of landmines. Malta, Singapore, and New Zealand all played key roles in drafting the Law of the Sea convention, which also, incidentally, resulted in them becoming significant maritime states. Liechtenstein, one of the very smallest countries, co-chaired a review of the Human Rights Council – the UN’s principal human rights body.

However, none of that small state activity hides the fact that only the UN Security Council can make binding decisions; it, unquestionably, is the “high-table” of international relations. The Council’s structure dates back to 1945, when the Great Powers (the US, UK, France, USSR and China) were accorded permanent membership, as the P5, with the right to veto Council decisions. The 1945 Council also had six (later, ten) non-permanent members who were elected by the GA for two-year terms. Despite now having twice as many non-permanent members, for most purposes, the Council is dominated by the P5.

Sixty-seven years later, that structure ignores today's geopolitical realities, and the Council’s work methods remain opaque. The UN needs a strong, nimble, effective Security Council to deal with crucial issues of international peace and security. Such a Council must reflect geopolitical realities that have changed since 1945. Today, other major, emerging powers might credibly seek a fuller, longer-term Council role. New Zealand has supported change that acknowledges those realities.

But most UN members are not major or emerging powers; they are small states. They, too, are crucial to the UN’s credibility, universality, and legitimacy. They, too, must contribute at the Council table. If we reform the Council to provide a longer-term role for emerging powers, we must also ensure a role for small states.

The over-one-hundred small states are the United Nations. There are real risks if we can’t achieve real Security Council reform. Emerging powers will be denied roles consistent with their global significance and small states will be squeezed out of positions of responsibility. It is in everyone’s

interests that the Security Council be more representative.

As I pointed out when I last spoke in this hall, if the Great Powers had been allowed their way, the United Nations Charter would have been materially different from the document we have today. I won't rehearse the detail, but their original draft was deeply disappointing, particularly to those of us who had been there from the very beginning in September 1939, had held fast in the dark days of 1940 and 1941, had paid a full price in blood and treasure, and were still there when Japan surrendered in 1945. It was not just the Great Powers who had committed blood and treasure to the defeat of fascism; it was us and others like us. We hadn't just fought for a seat at the back of the bus.

And so it was that, at the 1945 San Francisco conference that finally agreed to the Charter, even at their moment of triumph, the Great Powers were challenged by their smaller friends and allies. We pushed for more emphasis on human rights and for self-determination for indigenous people. Less successfully, we opposed the Security Council veto. That example of small countries standing up to the Great Powers has been repeated throughout post-war history.

Through almost seven decades of conflict and catastrophe, peace and prosperity, small states have pushed to ensure the Great Powers don't monopolize the UN and other global institutions. History has shown that it is in the interests of the international community that small states be represented and heard. They can be influential. They can make a difference.

## THE ISSUES YET TO COME

Interestingly, events in Africa will still occupy two-thirds of the Security Council's time and agenda, but much of the global focus will be on the Middle East. I've already spoken of that which swirls around the Israelis and the Palestinians; suffice to say, it all has significant global implications.

Then we come to the Arab Spring. People of that region have displayed extraordinary courage in claiming their rights and freedoms. The transition from dictatorship to democracy won't be easy; it won't be quick, but it must be achieved.

What will happen in Tunisia or Libya? Perhaps more importantly, what will happen in Egypt? What is the flow-on effect to the monarchies of Morocco and Jordan? Above all, what does this mean for Israel? Does it, at the very least, face unhelpful policy changes, in countries that have helped secure its peace over the past thirty-three years? In that same context, what, if anything, are we to make of last week's warning from the Russian Foreign Minister that outside encouragement of Middle Eastern and North African anti-government uprisings could lead to a very big war? Are we finally seeing the long-promised transition in Yemen? Can Saudi leadership maintain stability in the Gulf region?

Will President al-Assad continue killing his own people, until his regime finally collapses? What will Syria's increasingly worried neighbors, the Arab League, and, possibly Turkey do about it? What

happens when al-Assad finally departs? Would any successor regime be able to hold it all together or would Syria revert to the sectarian and inter-tribal chaos that preceded al-Assad Senior's seizure of power in 1970?

With the US military withdrawal now complete, what are the prospects for stability in Iraq in the short, medium, or long-term?

What about Iran? How close is it to a deliverable nuclear weapon? If that red line is crossed, what will others do about it? What are we to make of saber-rattling threats to close the Strait of Hormuz? Markets already make their judgments on this; oil futures rise and fall according to the fluctuating possibilities of sanctions and constrained supply.

Away from the Middle East, other issues demand our attention. The Eurozone crisis and the possibility of a second economic downturn exist. New Zealand, for one, does not relish the prospect of being dragged into another recession that is not of our making.

What are the implications of the North Korean transition? What, if anything, will the new leadership do to assert its primacy? What are the implications of the unwind from Afghanistan? How does that flow through to Pakistan? What happens if China's economy falters? How will the Russian leadership deal with domestic unrest?

New Zealand and its Pacific and Asian neighbors have our own regional and sub-regional concerns, including the 2012 transition in Timor-Leste and what could happen in Fiji while still controlled by a military dictatorship.

Any one of those issues could require full-time attention. Collectively, they will put the world's leaders to the test on levels that we have not been tested on since the end of the Cold War.

If we are put to that test, we can't be found wanting. With the wisdom of hindsight, we now know that we did not fully appreciate the implications the Soviet collapse, the end of the Cold War, and the flow-on effect into countries and regions, in some cases, far beyond the obvious theatres.

Take, for example, the break-up of Yugoslavia and all that followed, or the diminution of support mechanisms for many parts of Africa. The Rwandan genocide and the Srebrenica massacre both occurred in a post-Cold War context, when some regimes were struggling for legitimacy, and when the disintegration of states, blocs, even regions, were all consequences of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The international community celebrated what it saw as the "end of history," but only when the machetes came out in Rwanda, and hillside towns burned in Srebrenica, did we really focus on the consequences of the political, economic, social, and cultural declines that came with the end of the Cold War. For those who suffered, it is small consolation to see perpetrators finally brought to justice; but at least putting Karadžić, Mladić, Taylor, and others on trial tells other potential perpetrators that the international community will no longer tolerate such atrocities and will pursue, arrest, try, and punish those responsible.

But if, as some believe, these things happen in about twenty-year cycles, it would be far better if this time round, when it is happening, we really understood what is happening, why it is happening, and what it means. In short, we need to learn and apply the lessons of history.

## BACK TO THE UN

Let me, if I can, return to the United Nations. Why was I willing to give up a comfortable commercial life and go to New York?

New Zealand, a small state (at that time, a really small state), sat at the San Francisco table that created the UN – an organization whose primary purpose was, as Douglas MacArthur put it at the surrender ceremony on the deck of the battleship *Missouri*, “that peace be now restored to the world.” Some would define peace simply as the “absence of war,” but we know that real peace is much more than that. Real peace includes freedom from tyranny, fear, poverty, and preventable disease. It includes the freedom to learn and to choose political leaders. Those challenges still confront the UN and are made all the more acute, more pressing, and more urgent, by Middle East issues, the Arab Spring, the Global Financial Crisis, and what happens in North Korea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and Russia.

One often encounters skepticism about the readiness, willingness, and ability of the United Nations to deal with such issues. But those skeptics should be reminded that the UN was established to meet challenges that were so overwhelming that some only saw solutions in autarkic, inward-looking economic responses, or in war, destruction, or even genocide. Dealing with such issues by other, better, more peaceful means was never going to be easy, but whatever the UN’s shortcomings, it should not be deterred from that task.

I had to think about all this when a nine-year-old, preparing for a class speech, asked me, “What was the best thing about being appointed as New Zealand’s Ambassador to the United Nations?” I briefly outlined the history of the UN, adding, “Its purpose was to ensure peace for everyone. It hasn’t been perfect,” I said, “but it’s done a lot of good and it’s meant that I, and others like me, didn’t have to do, as our fathers and uncles did, and fight in another world war.”

It is not solely the United Nations that has delivered that period of global peace (the longest since the Congress of Vienna in 1815). European unity, for example, has avoided most conflict on that continent, but the UN has played a critical, central role.

I began this address with a Māori greeting; I’ve always held in awe the ability of Māori orators to capture whole ideas in a single, usually metaphoric phrase. Māori have a saying, “*He nui maunga e kore e taea te whakaneke, he nui ngaru moana ma te ihu o te waka e wahi*”: A great mountain can’t be moved, but a giant wave can be broken by the canoe’s prow. Although the challenges might seem

overwhelming, they can be addressed and overcome. Even the giant wave of the world's many problems can be broken by the canoe's prow.

NOTES:

1. David Hackett Fischer, *Fairness and Freedom: A History of Two Open Societies: New Zealand and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).