ANGLICAN LINK TO BLUE CELEBRATION

Mon 2 November 2015

When 150 iconic buildings around the world went blue last Saturday, there was a connection to St John's Canberra that many may not realise. Old Parliament House, the Sydney Opera House, the Eiffel Tower, the leaning Tower of Pisa, the Pyramids and many other buildings were bathed in blue light to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.

The UN headquarters, New York City.

The connection to St John's is that fifty years ago next month it was the focus for a state funeral for one of the UN's founding fathers, H.V (Doc) Evatt. A large plaque hangs at the rear of St John's commemorating the contribution of Doc Evatt to the foundation of the UN. Evatt was a practicing Anglican.

A former Chief Justice of NSW, Evatt was Attorney-General and Minister for External Affairs through the 1940s and helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and became President of the UN General Assembly in 1948-49.

Photo: Dr H.V. Evatt, former high court justice, president of the UN General Assembly and leader of the Australian Labor Party.

Australians from all walks of life have an instinctive respect for the United Nations and many have served as peace keepers or worked on the staff of the UN or one of its many agencies. Another well respected Canberran, the late Professor Frank Fenner chaired the UN Committee that rid the world of dreaded smallpox disease.

Australia is a founding member of the UN and currently is the 12th largest contributor to its regular and peacekeeping budgets. Since the UN's inception, nearly 65,000 Australians have been engaged in more than 50 international peace and security operations.

While often the target of criticism, the achievement of the UN are truly remarkable. Established " to save succeeding generation from the scourge of war" and "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights", the UN has contributed to the absence of global conflict for the past 70 years and is currently providing 120,000 peace keepers to help resolve conflict in 16 hotspots.

The power of the UN to negotiate international treaties has been critical to "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". The universally signed Montreal Protocol is considered one of the world's most successful environmental protection agreement and succeeded in protecting the Ozone Layer from the destruction of man-made chemical gases. Similarly the UN has made the world a safer place through agreement to outlaw chemical weapons.

UN bodies such as UNICEF, the World Food Program and the World Health Organization have done much to improve women and children's lives, improve health, increase education, and protect our heritage and environment. The Millennium Development Goals adopted at the UN in 2000 have helped halve world poverty and the unfinished business will be continued under the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals.

As former Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans pointed out in an article in The Age last week, most people don't realize how little all this costs. The core function of the UN and all its offices around the world with 41,000 staff costs $3.75 billion a year, a fraction of the $78 billion budget to run New York City that is home to the UN. If you add these core functions, all the costs of the UN agencies including the costs for the UN Refugee agency and the peacekeeping operations, the total cost of the UN system is about US$30 billion – a third of what the US military has spent each year for too many years on the conflict in Afghanistan.

As the Christmas season approaches and the message of Peace on Earth is shared around the world, we Christians should give thanks for the United Nations and all who work to make the world a safer and better place. In particular, we must give thanks for the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) as it struggles to respond to the largest number of refugee and displaced people (more than 50 million) since World War II.

By **Russell Rollason**