

Asialink – Weary Dunlop address

October 26, 2012

*** CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY ***

Australians of the early and mid-twentieth century loved inventing nick-names, the quirkier the better.

“Weary” is a marvellous example of the genre.

In the 1920s and 30s, Dunlop Tyres advertised under the slogan ‘Never Tire’.

So what could be more natural than that the mates of Ernest Edward Dunlop at Ormond College at the University of Melbourne should dub him ‘Weary’?

The nick-name stuck, partly because he didn’t much like his given names, but also because it was so splendidly inappropriate for a man of his drive and stamina.

So ‘Weary’ it was and always will be.

To understand why we honour Weary Dunlop today, let me give just one quote from his diaries.

It is dated August 16, 1945 – the day after the Japanese surrender; and he wrote about his fellow survivors among P.O.W.s

There will be strenuous and exciting days working to get the last of these maimed and damaged men on their way home. I have resolved to make their care and welfare a life-long mission.

He fulfilled that pledge, and more.

He expanded it to renew his links with the people of Asia, forged so brutally in war.

He came to include our war-time enemies in his quest for understanding and ultimately, reconciliation.

We are still at the stage of our history when a single life can be seen to embrace the major themes shaping our place in the world. Weary Dunlop’s is one such life.

His life and work reflected the pre-dominant relationships of Australia’s 20th Century – the British Empire and the Commonwealth; the American Alliance; and our growing involvement with Asia.

These great themes overlap and interlock.

As they did so vividly in Weary Dunlop's life

- From his medical training in London, for many young Australians the heart of an Empire still very much a going concern
- His work with his friend Richard Casey, one of the most distinguished of our foreign ministers, in designing and implementing the Colombo Plan
- Through to his service as a leader of the Australian Surgical Team in Vietnam in 1969.

We can see these, and the other highlights of Weary's career, in two ways.

We can see that they are part of a story of immense change.

But, looking deeper, we can see the underlying continuity in the story

- what I might call "the connectedness of things".

That is certainly true of Weary Dunlop's life.

And it is true for Australia's engagement with our region and the world.

Since 1945, we have had another source of continuity –

our membership of the United Nations.

And today, under the auspices of Asialink, I give three examples which illustrate Australia's commitment to international peace and security through the United Nations – Indonesia in 1947, Cambodia in 1992 and Timor Leste in 1999.

And they express something that was central to Weary Dunlop's own values – his belief that Australia and Australians can make a difference.

Indonesia 1947

In 1947, at the dawn of the United Nations, Australia's foreign minister, Dr Evatt, established Australia's commitment to an active, independent role in our region.

Serious conflict threatened, arising from Indonesia's struggle for independence.

Pre-occupied with the emerging Cold War in Europe, Washington held to a strategy of non-intervention.

At a time when we identified almost entirely with Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia – and the newly independent India – successfully urged the United Nations to intervene.

The UN mandated a ceasefire, followed by a process of political settlement.

Australia contributed military observers to what would be the UN's first peacekeeping mission.

Reflecting how strongly the Australian initiative was supported by Indonesia itself, the new Republic nominated Australia to represent its interests on the UN committee established to reach an agreement.

Cambodia, 1992

Fast forward to Cambodia in 1992.

When United Nations peace keepers arrived in Phnom Penh to supervise the Cambodian ceasefire in March 1992, they were led by an Australian, Lieutenant General John Sanderson.

The 16,000-strong United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia arrived at a critical time.

In just four years between 1975 and 1979, more than two million people had died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge - somewhere between a quarter and a third of the entire population.

In 1979, the Vietnamese intervention ended the Khmer Rouge holocaust, driving Pol Pot from power.

Vietnam withdrew its forces in 1989.

But conflict and violence continued across Cambodia.

A ceasefire was established in 1991, but it was fragile.

So when the Security Council sent UN peace keepers to Phnom Penh, John Sanderson's mission was a tough one.

Drawing on thousands of military and civilian personnel from 34 different countries, he had to supervise the ceasefire and disarm combatants.

As Sanderson has written¹, there were some 250,000 combatants, over 400,000 weapons, in a country in which up to 10 million mines had been laid.

The country lacked any communications infrastructure.

The warring factions had only loose control over their forces.

¹ John Sanderson, "Command in Cambodia", in *Australian Peacekeeping: Sixty Years in the Field*, edited by David Horner, Peter Londey and Jean Bou.

The UN wanted the task finished by June 1992, ahead of the peak of the rainy season – only three months away.

In Sanderson's words, his task was to enact the "hitherto impossible idea of the United Nations acting as a transitional authority, guiding Cambodia through a process that would result in an elected government".

The task might have been impossible, but with the determination of the Cambodian people to reach for a better life, with a legitimate international mandate and strong regional support, Sanderson's mission was successful.

UNTAC assumed control of Cambodia's key administrative functions.

It created a stable environment during which national elections could be held.

It gave the UN High Commissioner for Refugees space to repatriate or resettle 360,000 refugees.

During this 'mission impossible', Australia worked closely with Indonesia.

Under Gareth Evans' direction, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade developed the Red Book – which would give form and substance to Sanderson's "hitherto impossible idea".

It set out the structure of a transitional government with civil, administrative and electoral functions.

It set the scope for how security might be achieved, a framework negotiating text, and even a draft UN mandate.

At the urging of Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Ali Alatas, Gareth Evans took Australia's plans to Jakarta in 1990 in an attempt to get the warring factions talking.

Ultimately, that work formed the basis of the comprehensive settlement between the Cambodian parties.

Here was Australia, working bilaterally with Indonesia, multilaterally through the United Nations, helping to build regional security.

Timor Leste, 1999

For decades, our region was challenged by the unresolved question of the aspiration of the people of Timor Leste for self-determination.

In the mid-1970s, Cold War perceptions, sharpened by regional fears of instability in the wake of the American withdrawal from Vietnam, led to the oppression of those legitimate aspirations.

By 1999, a new situation developed.

And a new opportunity.

I acknowledge here the distinguished presence of another predecessor, Alexander Downer.

(I note that Alexander, in his wisdom, has turned down the chance to “do a Carr” in reverse – and go from Foreign Minister to State Premier.)

Following the resignation of President Soeharto and the beginning of Indonesia’s transition to democracy under President Habibie, Indonesia invited the UN to administer a popular consultation on the status of the territory.

Australia’s role was crucial

- in Jakarta, in Washington and in New York.

So it was fitting that Australia should take leadership of the UN-sanctioned peacekeeping force that entered Timor Leste in 1999 to quell the post-referendum violence.

Thus Australia helped secure the creation of a new nation in our region in a way almost inconceivable in the previous two decades.

In these three examples, we see Australia playing an active role in helping to maintain global security.

We believe in doing that with our partners – Southeast Asian partners like Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, traditional partners like Britain and New Zealand, emerging powers like India, Brazil, Mexico, Russia and Turkey, and global powers like the United States and China.

That is why we have run for – and successfully obtained – a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

In 2013-14, Australia is again ready to play our part in helping to work towards international security.

It’s why Australia took an active role – through the UN – in support of ending of hostilities in Libya.

And why we are determined to find a way to end the bloody sectarian violence in Syria.

Why we’ve been actively engaged the re-emergence of Myanmar in the community of nations.

Yesterday I welcomed the Myanmar foreign minister to Australia.

It was the fourth ministerial visit between our two countries in six months.

Before that, we had only four ministerial visits - in both directions - in 28 years.

Building better relations with our neighbours – including through those political level interactions – is a vital part of helping make our region more secure.

Security challenges remain

Our world is one in which conflict remains as a perpetual risk.

We are a crowded planet of 7 billion people – with different perspectives on what matters most to each of us, on where our interests, or those of our communities, lie.

Poverty and inequality remain major challenges and potential sources of conflict – as *The Economist* detailed last week.

As regional economic prosperity has grown, so have the stakes.

Our region is a maritime domain whose challenges stretch well beyond land borders.

Shipping across the Indian Ocean carries one third of the world's bulk cargo and two thirds of world oil shipments.

Safety and security of communications across the Indian Ocean is vital to Australia, to all the Indian Ocean rim countries and our major trading partners from Japan to India.

The South China Sea is an ever-present reminder of the potential for conflict in our region.

Environmental threats, transnational crime, natural disasters, territorial disputes, resource and food security – the big challenges of our time lie beyond the resolution of one or two states.

The unique pace of change in our region this century – the Asian Century – is itself a challenge.

A great positive about our region today, in contrast to the Cold War era, is that Asia is marked by a convergence of interests.

Every nation in our region has a profound interest in ensuring that their mature relations stay their present constructive course.

And that's overwhelmingly true about the relations between China and the United States.

Nothing is more important for Australia, the region and the world.

The importance of the Security Council

In our world, the UN Security Council is the place in which the global community comes together to tackle the most difficult threats to security we face.

It is the apex of the global security order – the only institution that can authorise the use of force.

We have been absent from the Security Council for 27 years – so this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Australia to play its part in decision-making that affects global peace and security.

As a country firmly rooted in the dynamic Asia-Pacific region, we come to the Council with a unique perspective.

We will work closely with China, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan to bring an Asia-Pacific perspective to the Council.

We will ensure that the views and needs of our Pacific island neighbours are taken into account.

Afghanistan must be a priority, with the Council set to make decisions over the course of our two-year term on the military drawdown and on a future role for the UN in Afghanistan.

The Council will also be engaged in completing the transition in East Timor as the UN Integrated Mission in East Timor withdraws.

As an engaged middle power with global interests, we believe we can make a significant contribution to the Council's work across its broad agenda.

With UN peace keeping operations at their highest level ever, we will bring considerable expertise to the Council's peace building agenda in Africa, drawn from our experience in Cambodia, Bougainville, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste and Afghanistan.

The Security Council campaign was tough.

Serving on the Council will be just as demanding, but I believe we can and will do it well.

Public diplomacy

Your chairman has invited me to launch the Asialink Index for 2012.

Asialink's mission is to deepen Australia's engagement with Asia.

For over twenty years, Asialink has been promoting understanding between Australia and its Asian neighbours, through high quality programs in the broad field of public diplomacy.

Asialink has been particularly strong in building links with Southeast Asia – a critical task for Australia.

Your index picks up some of the statistical measures of our relationship with Asia:

- Trade has grown from \$82 billion in 1990 to \$320 billion² today
- Investment is up five-fold
- Education enrolments have risen six times – more than half million people a year
- Tourism in our region has quadrupled

But it can't measure some of the intangibles of our involvement with Asia.

The personal connections between people.

On the government level – that's one of the areas we will work on through our term on the Security Council, to strengthen our political links.

And our understanding of one another – fundamental to building closer political, economic and strategic ties.

In this, my Department and Asialink are natural partners.

This is a point which will come out strongly in the White Paper on the Asian Century, to be launched on Sunday.

Asialink is doing this work in a range of ways, but building personal connections – through scholarships, cultural programs and other exchanges – is an area we will have to work ever harder at as we go forward together into the Asian Century.

² 2008-09 dollars