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Fiona Watson Memorial Fund Award 2017
End of Internship Report
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Introduction

Fiona Watson, Political Adviser to the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Sergio Viera de Mello, was one of the 22 peacekeepers who were tragically killed in the terrorist attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad 2003. Fiona, a First Class Honours graduate from Heriot-Watt University was an inspirational woman who dedicated her life to helping others. In order to perpetuate her memory, her family and Heriot-Watt University established the Fiona Watson Memorial Fund which grants one exceptional fourth year student the opportunity to undertake an internship at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. I am honoured to have been selected as the 14th recipient of the prestigious award.

My United Nations Experience

My internship commenced on a scorching Monday 11th September 2017 one week prior to the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly (GA) where 193 UN member states gather to discuss an array of international issues such as peace and security, human rights and international law, amongst others. Unfortunately, I didn't plan my commute to work very well on the first day of the GA as I seemed to arrive at exactly the same time as Donald Trump. I arrived at the UN spot on 9am yet was confronted by a queue of fellow UN colleagues which meandered all the way down two blocks. After forty minutes screening to get into the building where I worked, Trump and his convoy consisting of around 30 NYPD and secret service cars, trucks and motorbikes sped onto 1st Ave and entered the front entrance of the Secretariat Building. The UN was basically on 'lockdown' when Trump was in the building, it was difficult to come and go and there was a crazy buzz around the grounds.

Having entered the 22nd floor of the Secretariat building at an extremely busy time it was not long before I was sitting in front of a mountain of files to digest. My peacekeeping knowledge was very limited before my internship therefore I dedicated this busy time to intense background reading regarding how the different groups within the department contribute to the peacekeeping arena.
As Political Affairs Intern, you are assigned to the Policy and Best Practices Service (PBPS) which comes under the umbrella departments of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Field Support (DFS). To complicate matters more, these two departments are directed by the Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET). These bureaucratic entities still baffle me today yet fortunately I was able to attend a PBPS training workshop which explained the several work paradigms and the nature of peacekeeping operations in general. Nonetheless, the UN have a special language, they speak in acronyms, and my goodness, never have I ever come across such a myriad of acronyms in my life. As a piece of advice to future award winners, print off the list of UN acronyms and stick them to the partition in your office space, that way when a colleague seems like they are speaking a different language to you, you can quickly refer to what they mean beside you.

After my initial unexpected arrival in the department, my colleagues were quick to try to incorporate me into their teams and I was not short of work. The first team I worked with was the Policy Planning Team (PPT). At first, I was given slightly menial tasks such as designated note-taker in meetings and GA side events yet as I progressed in this team demonstrating my diligence and professionalism, I was assigned more meaningful tasks such as creating a document which highlighted emphasis from Troop Contributing and Police Contributing Countries (TCCs/PCCs) on peacekeeping which was circulated around the department. Having joined the PPT at prime GA time, I was fortunate to have been involved in the organisation of their workshop on 'Civil Wars: Violence and International Relations' in which high-level candidates attended. Approaching the end of my month working closely with the PPT I was given a substantial project consisting of four articles which turned into working papers for the High-Level Committee Programmes (HLCP) and were given to the Under-Secretary General for his presentation in Geneva. These papers acted as a horizon-scanning of the future risks for peacekeeping and how to mitigate these threats. Themes covered, yet were not limited to, the use of Artificial Intelligence and Biotechnology. This proved extremely useful for me to learn about the future threats against peacekeeping mandates whilst also proving exceptionally useful for the PPT to improve and adjust current conflict resolutions in order to be prepared and respond to these threatening risks in advance.

I swiftly transitioned to the Child Protection Team (CPT) after finishing up with the PPT. This took place towards the end of October/start of November which was a very exciting time to join this group as they were about to commence their Biennial Workshop for Child Protection Advisors (CPAs). In the run-up to the workshop I was requested to create a lengthy article documenting the changes, if any, to child protection language present in the Security Council
Mission Resolutions. Although this was a lengthy task involving a cross analysis of fifteen peacekeeping missions in which CPAs are present, it proved exceedingly useful for the CPT when editing the Child Protection handbook for all peacekeeping personnel in the field and bringing issues to light in the Security Council.

Additionally, the Biennial Child Protection Workshop took place on the Monday 6th - Friday 10th November 2017. Eleven participants from six peacekeeping and four special political missions arrived in New York for the seventh biennial Child Protection Adviser (CPA) Workshop. The workshop was organized by the CPT of DPKO’s PBPS, jointly with the Office of the SRSG on Children in Armed Conflict (OSRSG-CAAC) and key partners—including the Department of Political Affairs and UNICEF. Field missions with a Child Protection mandate are Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Somalia and South Sudan. This year’s Workshop focused on showcasing best practices and the impact of Child Protection, and identifying next steps to implement the DPKO/DPA Child Protection Policy mission-wide. Representatives from various UN Headquarters Offices were featured throughout, including the Office of Military Affairs and the UN Police, underscoring the important role of uniformed components in protecting children in conflict situations.

The workshop consisted of an intense schedule and by the end of the week I was exhausted. My designated role was facilitator and repertoire for the event therefore I signed in participants, assigned them to their seats, gave an overview of the day’s events and then orchestrated the numerous speakers throughout the day. In addition, I had to note-take for all CPA presentations where they outlined the successes, challenges and opportunities for child protection unique to
their missions. My notes were incorporated into the Child Protection Report 2017. I found the workshop so interesting and CPAs described the workshop as “energizing.” Going forward, CPAs will have additional tools to assist their missions in strengthening the protection of children, who are the most vulnerable in conflicts.

Finally, I worked closely with the Conflict Related Sexual Violence Team (CRSV) in the final weeks of my internship. Motivated by political, military or psychological objectives to control territory, population or resources, CRSV is frequently and deliberately used to target vulnerable populations, inflicting psychological trauma, humiliation, displacement, amongst other issues. Although my time with this team was short-lived I helped expand the Handbook on Prevention and Response to CRSV. The topics dealt with in this team are extremely sensitive thus I greatly admire UN peacekeepers both on the ground and in Headquarters for their efforts in reducing such events.

Although having worked closely with the aforementioned teams in the PBPS, several other teams approached me on a few separate occasions and requested me to attend meetings and take notes to provide summaries to the teams. Liaising with several teams within the department exposed me to the tireless effort peacekeepers undertake at HQ to ensure that the situation on the ground remains stable.

Making the most of my UN experience

Whilst I worked diligently with the teams in PBPS, I also managed to attend several side events and conferences which opened my eyes to the topics I was dealing with. My advice to future award winners is to keep up-to-date with the UN intranet called 'iSeek' where they post all relevant information and events in the UN. The first event I was fortunate to attend was titled 'HeForShe Impact 10×10×10 Parity Report Launch' which was hosted in the beautiful building of Cipriani on 42nd Street. HeForShe is a UN Women body which invites people from all over the world to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. Their values recognise that gender equality isn't just a women's issue but an issue of human rights. The Impact 10×10×10 targets leaders to take actions in their countries, organisations and beyond. Each leader shared tangible solutions towards achieving gender equality. Thirty Impact Champions, including Heads of State such as Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan and Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi; CEOs such as Jes Staley, CEO of Barclays and Andrew Wilson, CEO of Electronic Arts; and Universities including John J. DeGioia, President of Georgetown University, all shared ground-breaking solutions and tangible toolkits towards the achievement of gender equality in our lifetime. I also was lucky to get a front row seat (refer to pictures)!
Amongst other events, I attended several conferences which helped me immensely with my projects, especially for the articles to prepare for the HLCP. Firstly, I attended the conference on ‘Countering the Threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)’. My knowledge of IEDs was relatively scarce beforehand but having listened to presentations and a conference call with Middle Eastern UN ambassadors I am now aware of the serious threat these mechanisms pose to the peacekeeping landscape, both to peacekeepers and civilians on the ground. Likewise, it was equally shocking that children as young as six in countries like Iraq are being recruited by militant groups to trigger the bombs. This confirmed the significance of the work undertaken at HQ and the urgency of measures that need to be taken to reduce the use of these vicious devices.

Additionally, I attended a conference based on 'The Ideology of Failed States: Why Intervention Fails' which is the title of a book written by Susan Woodward. Mrs Woodward moderated this special event and presented a critical analysis of the concept of state failure, international responses and the impacts on global security in the post-Cold War era. She also examined how international interventions based on perceptions and construct of “state failure” created conditions which conformed to their understanding of failed states. This was interesting to hear the perspective of an academic individual from outside the UN on the matters we are working with on the inside and opened up my mind to new issues to consider. Likewise, another conference which covered similar topics discussed in the previous event was 'Emerging Terrorists Threats'. The open meeting led by the Counter-Terrorism Committee focused on three main topics: the implementation of Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) in the context of the challenge of returning and relocating foreign terrorist fighters, national practices on countering violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, and finally, the protection of civilian (“soft”) targets.
Lastly, I was fortunate to attend a special event on 'Fashion & Sustainability: Look good, Feel good, Do good'. Since fashion has always been of great interest to me this event offered me a fantastic opportunity to network and speak to other like-minded people. A panel of experts and change-makers representing non-profit organizations spoke about their respective missions to raise awareness on environmental sustainability, material and manufacturing transparency, and human rights. Panel moderator Patrick Duffy, founder of Global Fashion Exchange (GFX), cited the harmful relationship between manufacturers of fast-fashion and demanding consumers as expediting the negative impact of the fundamental problems for the fashion industry: water consumption, discharge of hazardous chemicals, violation of human rights, labour standards, greenhouse gas emissions and waste production. Several shocking facts were revealed by the panellists who each ran their own sustainable fashion initiative. Lillian Liu, manager of Partnerships and UN Relations at the United Nations Global Compact, noted that that it takes 913 gallons of water to make just 1 cotton t-shirt which is the equivalent to the amount of drinking water used by 1 person for 900 days. To encourage more mindful consumption, Ms. Liu has enlisted over 9000 companies including Burberry, Gap, ASOS, Inditex, Kering, Lacoste, and Mango to join the “Apparel Supply Chain Initiative” in an effort to “mobilize a movement of sustainable companies and stakeholders to create the world we want.” The event concluded with a fashion show featuring collections by designers whose work supports these initiatives.

Voluntary Work

Pursuing my fashion interests further, I volunteered for PeaceBoat US, a NGO which strives to promote peace, human rights, equitable and sustainable development, and respect for the environment throughout the United States and the world. I volunteered at an exciting time as they were in the process of organising for their biggest event of the year, 'Floating Festival for
Sustainability'. My duties in the run-up to the event included writing the press release and contacting UN mission ambassadors to RSVP. The special evening was held on board the ship docked in Manhattan, Pier 90 on October 15, 2017. It included presentations, music, exhibitions, cultural performances and more, focused on the UN Sustainable Development Goals – in particular oceans and climate change. During the event, Peace Boat introduced its Ecoship, the world’s most sustainable cruise ship planned to sail in 2020 as a flagship for climate action.

Although the festival didn’t commence until the evening, as volunteer I was required to be on board the ship at 9am to help with all the preparatory work. When finally, the attendees boarded I took this as an excellent opportunity to network in the reception whilst also raising awareness about Peace Boat values and their dedication to the SDGs. Additionally, there was an Eco-Fashion Show in the latter part of the evening where I was also asked to take part in. Although it was extremely daunting modelling in front of 1,500 guests, it was a really exciting time and I was very impressed by the detail and handiwork which the designers had incorporated into the garments in a sustainable way. Of course this voluntary experience was not “all work and no play” as when the presentations and speeches finished, we were permitted to join the party on the boat where food and drink were served and there was a DJ and dancing until the early hours of the morning. As this was a Sunday, I rolled into the UN on Monday feeling slightly fatigued!

UN Extra-Curricular Activities

Aside from the work I contributed to DPKO, there are several other opportunities that this organisation offers. Firstly, a note of advice to future award winners, always be on the lookout for member state ‘receptions’. This always involves free food and beverage and the occasional jig in the entrance of the visitor centre. After a long’s day work you will often find a gang of UN interns eager to take advantage of free hospitality.

Likewise, every Friday several interns attend the Delegates Lounge which offers impressive views of East River and Long Island City. N.B. Interns should be on their best behaviour since you will be socialising with UN delegates where a level of professionalism should be maintained, even after a few beers!
Additionally, I would recommend joining all UN intern Facebook and WhatsApp groups to stay up to date with social events. Nevertheless, warning in advance- there are over 250 members in the WhatsApp group so you may want to permanently keep the group on mute to avoid your phone buzzing every five minutes. There are always high-level events and conferences who seek interns to volunteer to help with the organisational side of things, this can be fun to meet other people and participate in exciting times like during the GA.

Lastly, every Thursday all interns are invited to Calico Jack's, a smelly Mexican bar close to the UN. There are always a few interns who win an open bar (dangerous) and whoever says their name at the door is permitted half price drinks during happy hour. Although there are the odd few regulars who go every week, I would advise going once or twice to meet different people and establish yourself a small group of acquaintances and from there you can explore different socialising and events after work for a change of scenery.

Life Outside UN

Arriving alone in the Big Apple was daunting but fortunately I arrived one week prior to the start of my internship therefore I afforded myself some time to get my bearings. Finding accommodation for my specific dates (September-December) proved difficult as the majority of landlords request the signing of a one-year lease. Nonetheless, thankfully I secured a room 2 weeks before I jetted off. I stayed in Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn which despite its scary reputation, I became quite fond of. Living in the heart of Brooklyn allowed me to experience the 'true New York' whilst working in midtown Manhattan presented the busy working lifestyle.
I was so fortunate to live with an American couple my age who welcomed me from day one and I was truly sad to say farewell to them. We spent the majority of our weekends in Brooklyn since we lived so far from Manhattan but there was always something exciting in the area, whether it was a food market on a Sunday or a vintage jumble-sale on a Saturday, no weekend was the same. Furthermore, I tried out a few churches in Brooklyn and Manhattan before settling with one which I attended every Sunday evening. This wasn't like any normal church as it was hosted in a warehouse and the location changed each week, making it extra special. They often had famous guest pastors and I always came away feeling so inspired and enriched with happiness. The community was so friendly and open to newcomers no matter where they were from and this is something which really helped me to settle into NYC at times when I felt far from home comforts.

Furthermore, I also managed to squeeze in two long weekends away. Firstly, I visited Washington DC in late November. It was so easy to get to as there was a direct bus from NYC which took 4 hours. There are several parts of the town which are magnificent and definitely the place to go if you like visiting museums. I visited the Holocaust Museum which was highly worthwhile. The following weekend was Thanksgiving which is regarded as the most important holiday for Americans, even more so than Christmas! All organisations are off work this day and this year it fell on Thursday 23 November therefore we were allowed a long weekend. I was so fortunate to have made a lovely group of friends with an Irish bunch who had moved over to NYC to work for a few years and one of them had organised a huge thanksgiving hosting 30 people in her apartment in Bushwick, the neighbourhood adjacent to mine. Lots of wine was consumed and everyone brought a different dish therefore there was no shortage of food to say the least! Finally, a few days before my departure from the Big Apple, I treated myself to a few days rest and sun in Miami Beach.

Advice for Future Award Winners

With regard to life in New York, allow a week or more to settle into your new home. It can be really overwhelming at first as you are having to adapt to new climate, time change, travel and new surroundings. Make sure you get lots of sleep before starting work as your first week will have you returning home like a zombie.

New York City has so many amazing attractions but unfortunately it is impossible to visit all of them so maybe create a 'NYC Bucket List' to spread out the main spots you’d like to see before departing home for Scotland after internship is completed. Personally, my favourite areas have been the hipster bars and shops in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Little Italy in Lower
Manhattan and taking the cable car over to Roosevelt Island which offers some amazing views of Manhattan. Also, I had an exhilarating day hiking in the mountains of Upper State New York in late September. We really do take for granted the pure luxury of fresh air and nature that we have in abundance in Scotland!

Definitely dedicate some time to researching what an area is like before committing to living there. It really depends on what kind of thing you are looking for. Most interns live in Manhattan so if you are a social butterfly and want to meet up with colleagues after work then it would be advisable to live nearby work. Yet, if you enjoy both the social environment and exploring different and exciting areas then I would recommend Brooklyn. Although it is further away, you will never be deprived of a social life there either.

Times may get stressful at work and with the fast-paced life of NYC in general so don't forget to stay in touch with family and close friends back home. They are only at the other end of the line and despite the time difference, they are your best bet for comfort.

As for life at the UN, there are so many projects and varied pieces of work and many people will approach you asking for help. Don't feel as though you are pressured into accepting menial admin tasks as this is not what you are there to do. If you really want to undertake meaningful work then proactively seek opportunities for yourself. Speak to everyone in department, don't just stick to your supervisor or the first team you are placed with. If at times you find yourself with too much or not enough work then don't feel afraid to inform your supervisor. I worked closely with mine, Ursula Fraser, who was always very understanding and I'm truly grateful to have met her and to have had her support.

Lastly, take every opportunity to make connections, you never know when they could come in useful later in life.
My contact details are available through the Heriot-Watt Development and Alumni Office. Please don’t hesitate to contact me, I would be more than willing to answer any questions future successful candidates have.

Reflecting on This Experience

Reflecting on these 4 months working at the UN and living in New York, I have certainly grown both personally and professionally. I have developed a tougher skin and feel confident to work in such a diverse and intense organisation like the UN. I have also built on previous experience working and living in Spain for a year and have no fear of entering a new environment anywhere in the world.

I am proud of myself that I pro-actively sourced out my own projects and work contribution to the PBPS and this afforded me the opportunity to make a wide array of relationships with a diverse group of people, with whom I hope I stay in contact with. It also has whetted my appetite to consider further studies in the form of a Masters degree, and this is something I will consider moving forward.

I am truly honoured to carry on the relentless work of Fiona Watson as not only did I get an unique insight into the everyday life of a UN Peacekeeper, I learnt that no matter who you are or where you come from you’re able to make a difference, be it big or small, to someone’s life.
A Few Words from PBPS

"The Division of Policy Evaluation and Training of the UN Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support is honoured to host the Fiona Watson Memorial Intern each year. The Policy and Best Practices Service has been very fortunate to receive the hardworking and ambitious interns since 2004. This year it has been a pleasure to host Abigail who has been extremely enthusiastic and resourceful, contributing to the work of several teams within the department, such as Child Protection, Policy Planning and the Management Front Office. Her ability to quickly learn about and absorb complex issues has been most professional and she has been a joy to work with. I look forward to seeing what lies ahead for Abigail."

Ursula Fraser
Coordination Officer
Policy and Best Practices Service

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people to whom I owe my sincere gratitude as without them my experience in New York and at UN would be totally different. Firstly, to Lynsey Cockburn at Heriot-Watt University for her help and advice about the facilitation of this internship, and in
particular for organising such a special graduation for me and my family with the Watson Family. To my family in Scotland for their constant support and encouragement in all I do. I wish to thank my two flatmates in Brooklyn who have been the most welcoming and warm-hearted individuals and who I will miss greatly. To my colleagues at PBPS, I am grateful for all your advice and wisdom you have shared with me and I will ensure to carry these aspects with me as I commence the next stage in my career. I am eternally grateful to the Watson family and the many fund donors who have granted me this once in a life time opportunity. Thank you for your generosity and strength in allowing me to carry on fighting for Fiona Watson's peacekeeping legacy. To all those mentioned above, I am truly thankful.