



United Nations



Building
Our Future
Together

Dynamic Australian's contributing to the UN System



This initiative is proudly supported by our Patron, Her Excellency The Governor General Ms Sam Mostyn AC



United Nations
Association
of Australia



2ND EDITION
Dynamic Australians

Introduction

About the Project

Australians have made, and continue to make, a dynamic and significant contribution to the United Nations system, from grassroots aid operations and knowledge-building, to leading diplomatic missions and multilateral partnerships. Their impact spans generations and continents.

2025-and 2026-mark two profound milestones: the 80th anniversary of the United Nations, and the 80th anniversary of the United Nations Association of Australia. The Dynamic Australians project celebrates both, gathering 80 remarkable Australian stories in honour of these occasions, with the personal endorsement of the Governor-General, Her Excellency Sam Mostyn AC.

Our profiles span the full arc of Australia's engagement with the United Nations, from founding figures who helped shape the institution's earliest values, to leaders active and influential today. Through interviews, and through research for those no longer with us, we bring these stories to life.

What We Explore

In each profile, we focus our spotlight on five themes:

Motivations and path to the United Nations: what drew each person to international service, and how they found their way in.

Key achievements and impact: the projects, missions, and moments that made a lasting difference.

Meeting challenges as opportunities: how adversity shaped perspective, resilience, and innovation.

Influence: the networks built, the norms shifted, and the voices amplified.

Advice to future generations: the wisdom these leaders pass on to the next wave of Australians.

2ND EDITION
Dynamic Australians

Our Ambition

Our ambition is that this collection, and those that follow, will engage our fellow Australians, build pride in the extraordinary contribution Australians have made and continue to make, and inspire the next generation to create their own impact through the UN system on the great challenges of our time.

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United Nations Association of Australia

Jessie Street

1889 to 1970



Jessie Street was the only female advisor of the Australian delegation to the United Nations conference in San Francisco in 1945. She played a crucial role in ensuring the inclusion of 'sex' in the anti-discrimination clause of the UN Charter.

Born in Ranchi, India, in 1889, Jessie's family moved to Yulgilbar station in New South Wales when she was seven. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Sydney in 1911. It was here she met her future husband, Lord Kenneth Street, with whom she enjoyed a lifetime of companionship shared with four children.

At the UN, Jessie worked alongside other prominent figures, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, to advocate for gender equality. Her efforts were instrumental in promoting women's rights on the international stage.

After witnessing the devastation of Hiroshima in 1948, Jessie became a staunch anti-nuclear activist.

Jessie Street used her platform at the UN to campaign for gender equality on the Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) and for peace and disarmament.

Jessie Street

A life defined not by convention, but by courage, equality, and justice for humanity.

Motivation | Steps to the UN

Jessie Street was inspired by her commitment to social justice, equality, and peace. Her journey began with her active involvement in various women's rights organisations and her role in the Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace. Her dedication to these causes led her to become the only female advisor on the Australian delegation to the United Nations conference in San Francisco in 1945.

Key Achievements | Impact

One of Jessie's significant contributions at the UN was her role in securing the inclusion of 'sex' in the anti-discrimination clause of the UN Charter. This was a crucial step towards gender equality on an international level and had a lasting impact on the rights of women worldwide.

Meeting challenges as opportunities

Jessie's proudest moment likely came from her successful advocacy for the inclusion of gender equality in the UN Charter. Additionally, her ongoing efforts in anti-nuclear activism and her work towards peace and disarmament were significant achievements that she would have been proud of.

Influence

The role of Australian women within the UN is expected to continue evolving positively. Jessie Street's legacy of advocating for gender equality and women's rights has paved the way for future generations. Australian women are likely to take on more leadership roles and influence key policies and initiatives within the UN. Their involvement in areas such as peace and security, economic empowerment, and ending violence against women will continue to grow, reflecting Australia's strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.



Advice to future generations

To young Australian women aspiring to work with the UN, it is essential to pursue relevant education in fields.

Such as international relations or law, and to gain experience through internships or volunteer work with NGOs.

Developing key skills such as diplomacy, communication, and cultural sensitivity is crucial.

Ronnie Wilson

1914 to 2016



Ronnie Wilson was one of the first Australian women to work for the United Nations. Her work in humanitarian and peacekeeping missions in China, Indonesia and Kenya fostered reconciliation, helped provide security guarantees and supported political transitions.

From humble beginnings living on a farm in Armadale Melbourne, Ronnie commenced employment in a legal firm, as an administrator. Later she volunteered in the Clothing Collection relief agency during the early 1940's. Here she met Dr Sutch who worked for the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), an initiative of the Foreign Minister, Dr Herbert Evatt.

Ronnie was renowned for her rapport building and collegiality with local workers. She received a letter from Deputy Director General of the Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, Mr C. N. Li on 31st December 1947 recognising her contributions:

I do not want you to leave UNRRA without my having the opportunity to tell you how much we have enjoyed having you work with us. You have been in the Secretariat for a long time, 18 months, and I have heard nothing but praise for your work and for your cooperativeness with your colleagues. I am sure that Dr Tsiang would like to join me in this letter because of the special work that you did for him.

Ronnie Wilson

A life defined not by recognition, but by cooperation, resilience, and service to humanity.

Motivation | Steps to the UN

Ronnie Wilson was inspired by her commitment to international peace and security. Her journey began with her involvement in various humanitarian efforts and her dedication to promoting global cooperation. She was one of the first Australian women to work for the United Nations, which marked the beginning of her impactful career.

Key Achievements | Impact

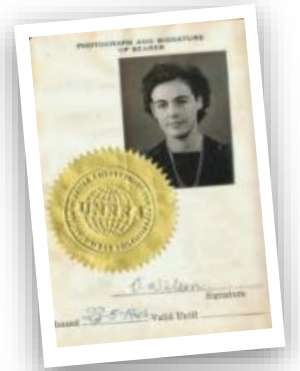
One of Ronnie Wilson's significant contributions was her involvement in peacekeeping missions. These missions aimed to end conflicts and foster reconciliation in war-torn regions. Her work helped provide security guarantees and supported political transitions, contributing to the stabilisation and development of affected countries.

Meeting challenges as opportunities

Ronnie Wilson's proudest moment likely came from her successful efforts in peacekeeping and her role in promoting international cooperation. Her dedication to peace and security left a lasting impact on the regions she served and on the UN's mission as a whole.

Influence

Ronnie Wilson's life and experiences exemplify the evolving role of Australian women within the UN. Her journey, marked by resilience and dedication, highlights the increasing influence of women in global governance. As Australian women continue to break barriers and take on leadership roles, their contributions will shape policies and initiatives that promote gender equality, sustainability, and human rights. Ronnie's legacy serves as an inspiration, demonstrating how persistence and a commitment to making a difference can lead to significant achievements on the world stage.



Advice for future generations

Ronnie would probably say, never give up! Persistence may win the day over a splash of brilliance, but even better if people work together for a common goal.

Narelle Townsend

1927 to 2022



Narelle served 40 years for the United Nations, at the UNDP and UNHabitat.

Narelle was the eldest of nine children born to Mother Rae, and father, union organiser on the Sydney docks. Rae inspired all her children to have formal education and saved her pennies and ration coupons so that all nine would have a better life.

At fourteen, Narelle worked to bring home income and studied at night school. She soon progressed to Sydney Technical College, now the UNSW. She dearly wanted to be an architect despite her father forbidding it.

At 30 after WW2, she was awarded top student in Architecture along with another UN Habitat colleague. She won a scholarship to Spain to learn environmental techniques for arid cities, where she resided in a convent and graduated with honours. Narelle was employed by an English company who delivered housing and services to resettle 5 million displaced people during the building of the Suez Canal.

Advice for future generations

Narelle believed in the value of a non-linear career path, emphasizing persistence and doing one's best for the right reasons.

Her legacy includes scholarships for women in the built environment and functional monuments. Narelle's impact endures through the lives she touched.

Narelle Townsend

A life defined not by boundaries, but by imagination, inclusion, and building futures for humanity.

Motivation | Steps to the UN

Narelle, inspired by her mother Rae, pursued education despite financial challenges. She studied architecture at the University of Sydney and excelled, earning a scholarship to Spain. Her career included significant contributions to housing and resettlement projects, particularly during the Suez Canal construction. She held leadership roles with UN agencies, focusing on urban development and sustainability. Narelle chaired the UN Habitat NGO groups and the Global Housing Foundation, dedicating her life to improving human settlements and adopting many families.

Key Achievements | Impact

Narelle's influence led to the establishment of the UN Office for Youth in 2023. Narelle championed youth involvement in urban planning, advocating for their voices in design stages and UN reforms. She supported internships and scholarships in planning and environmental fields. A trailblazer for women in male-dominated professions, Narelle's inclusive co-design approach is studied globally. She won international awards for her designs, art, and poetry. UN Habitat, unique in its direct connection with local governments, benefits from her legacy of fostering sustainable communities with youth engagement.

Meeting challenges as opportunities

Narelle's proudest moment was speaking at the UN General Assembly, where her bold recommendations were adopted by 56 Commonwealth countries. Alongside Zena Daysh, she influenced significant reforms at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. Her achievements include recognition from diverse partners and winning an art prize at Columbia University for her Arabic poetry at age 87. Narelle's lifelong dedication to learning and service left a lasting impact on sustainable communities.

Influence

Narelle inspired many women. She envisioned the UN complex in Gigeri, Kenya, as a sanctuary for learning about Africa's diverse countries. This complex now supports several UN programs and remains safe for women. Narelle's efforts led to significant female participation in UN Habitat, with Dr. Anna Tibaijuka becoming the first female Executive Director in 2001. After Kenya, Narelle contributed to UN projects globally, including designing three UN buildings in New York. Her greatest achievement was fostering collaboration among multidisciplinary teams.

Jennifer Ashton

A Life of Service and Continuing Commitment

Jennifer Ashton's lifelong commitment to peace and social justice stems from her Quaker upbringing; a community known for its deep moral conviction and dedication to humanitarian values.

In the mid-1980s, a life-changing trip to Cambodia ignited Jennifer's determination to serve. She returned soon after to coordinate Australian NGOs providing aid in a country still recovering from decades of conflict. Few from the West were living there at the time, fewer still with families.

When the United Nations launched the Cambodian peace accords in 1992, UNHCR sought a candidate with a rare combination of experience: a social worker, fluent in French, and with Phnom Penh experience. Jennifer was the only one who met all three. What began as a three-month contract evolved into a career that would span continents and decades, grounded in empathy, pragmatism, and an unwavering belief in people's resilience.

Jennifer recalls that the first posting after Cambodia, in Nepal, marked the true beginning of her UN career, a place where she learned that international work is as much about listening as it is about leadership.

"I wanted to be where I could listen, act, and make a tangible difference, and I still do."



Advice for future generations

Learn a second language!

At the UN, it's not just an advantage; it's a requirement.

Every applicant is expected to speak at least two UN languages, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, or Arabic.

In Australia, we often overlook this because we're not surrounded by borders the way Europe is.

But language is more than communication, it's connection, empathy, and opportunity.

I'd sometimes see hundreds of applications for one position, and before we even looked at experience or skill, those without a second language were immediately set aside.

If you want to serve globally, start by learning to listen in another tongue."

Jennifer Ashton

A life defined not by titles, but by compassion, courage, and enduring commitment to humanity.

Throughout her UNHCR career, Jennifer worked across Asia and Central Asia, supporting communities displaced by war, statelessness, and loss.

Her final posting, as Deputy Regional Representative in Kazakhstan, oversaw five countries emerging from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Statelessness was one of the region's most complex challenges: generations of people had no citizenship or documentation.

Under her leadership, UNHCR's regional initiative helped more than 250,000 people gain citizenship, opening access to healthcare, education, employment and, most importantly, a sense of belonging.

Earlier, in Malaysia, Jennifer coordinated a program that provided identity and protection for 20,000 Rohingya refugees, achieved through collaboration with local Muslim NGOs. The initiative offered hope to families who had lived without recognition or rights, a rare success built on trust and cultural understanding.

Jennifer describes Australian women in the UN as **“pragmatic, fair, and driven to get things done.”** She hopes more will follow this path and encourages organisations like UNAA to champion mentoring and pathways into international service. Her advice to aspiring global citizens: **“*Learn another language, it opens the world.*”**

Today, Jennifer continues her mission through Companion House in Canberra, supporting refugees who have experienced trauma and displacement. Her life's work reflects a profound truth: service does not end with retirement, it transforms into mentorship, advocacy, and care. It is thanks to Jennifer's insight, humility, and enduring commitment that this project (***Dynamic Australian Women, contributing to the UN system***) was ignited, inspiring others to continue the work of compassion and connection she embodies.



Leanne Smith

Working for all humanity, guided by justice and integrity

Leanne's journey to the United Nations was shaped early by a deep awareness of injustice and a commitment to human rights. As a young girl, the film *The Killing Fields* exposed her to the realities of mass atrocities and ignited a determination to help prevent such suffering. This conviction translated into early action, including joining Amnesty International at high school, participating in Model United Nations at university, and pursuing studies in international law and human rights.

Leanne first encountered the United Nations in practice in the Balkans following the war, where she served as an Australian diplomat. There, she witnessed the UN's multifaceted work supporting peace, reconciliation, development, security, justice, and democratic institutions, and developed a deep respect for the professionalism and diversity of its civil servants. Drawn by the opportunity to work for all humanity rather than a single national interest, Leanne began her UN career as a Human Rights Field Officer with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the beginning of a lifelong commitment to multilateral service.



Leanne's work as a human rights officer in Afghanistan was among the most formative of her career. She learned deeply from her Afghan colleagues and the communities she served, their generosity, resilience, humour, and grace in the face of hardship. She drew enduring hope from the strength of Afghan women and remains convinced that the country's future lies with its young women.

Working as a foreign woman was often challenging. Being ignored, dismissed, or excluded was Leanne's first visceral experience of sex discrimination. Rather than allowing frustration to define her work, she redirected that energy into ensuring women's voices were heard.

Instead of seeking entry into all-male village shuras, Leanne chose to sit with women at the well, listening as they worked and shared their stories. Through respectful listening, women's experiences were reflected in UN human rights reporting. From this, Leanne learned that influence often emerges not from formal power, but from trust, listening, and relationship.

Leanne Smith

A life defined not by authority, but by integrity, justice, and service to humanity.



Australians are at their best in moments of crisis, and this is precisely the moment the United Nations faces as it approaches its 80th anniversary. Australia has a unique opportunity to play a principled and pragmatic leadership role in strengthening the UN and renewing its global impact.

Initiatives such as this one bring together the deep experience of Australians who have served across the UN system. This collective knowledge is a treasure that must be shared with the next generation. Echoing Dr H.V. Evatt's vision in 1948, Leanne advocates for providing every Australian schoolchild with a copy of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reinforcing understanding of both the UN's importance and Australia's foundational role.

Leanne remains hopeful that Australia will step into emerging leadership vacuums and help guide the UN back to its founding principles of peace, justice, equality, and shared humanity

Today, Leanne serves as Chief Executive of the Australian Human Rights Commission, continuing a career spanning UN human rights fieldwork, diplomacy, and national leadership. Her work reflects an enduring commitment to justice, equality, and human dignity, in Australia and beyond.

Advice for future generations

Don't give up. There are many pathways into the United Nations. If you can, **learn a UN language.** **Study the world.** Travel as much as you are able. **Be curious** about others and **open to different ways of seeing, being, and doing.**

Join your local **UNAA** chapter. **Volunteer** with organisations that **embody UN values.** Seek **field experience** overseas while you are **young and mobile.** **Connect with people** who have worked, or are working, in the **UN system** and **learn from their journeys.**

The UN needs all kinds of skills: lawyers and engineers, nurses and gender advisers. But above all, **it needs people with a passion for justice, peace, and equality, and the determination to persist.**



Brian Gleeson

Working for humanity, building institutions that serve people



Brian Gleeson's path to the United Nations followed more than three decades of service in the Australian Public Service, where he built deep expertise in public administration, human resources, and institutional reform. His transition to the UN began unexpectedly when he was invited to present at a UN conference in Salzburg on career management. That presentation led to an invitation to join an international expert panel in New York to develop a new UN career system. This work caught the attention of then Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who invited Brian to join his team leading UN management reform following his election. Brian subsequently left the APS and embarked on a distinguished UN career, serving in senior leadership roles across multiple UN agencies and countries.

One of Brian's most significant contributions was during his time at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), where he led a major global restructuring of more than 135 country offices. The reform achieved a 20 per cent budget reduction, shifted UNDP's business model from project delivery to upstream policy influence, reduced staffing by approximately 1,000 positions, strengthened the organisation's brand and visibility, and improved relationships with Member States.

Brian travelled to more than 100 developing countries to train and support change management teams through the process. Notably, the restructuring was completed without a single appeal or legal complaint, a rare achievement in an organisation of UNDP's size and complexity.

Among Brian's many proud moments at the UN, one stands out in particular. With the support of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Brian was asked by the UN Deputy Secretary-General to join a three-person transition team tasked with establishing UN Women. He subsequently led the recruitment process to select the organisation's inaugural senior leadership team, laying the foundations for what would become a globally influential UN entity advancing gender equality. Another deeply personal moment occurred during an HIV/AIDS awareness session in Zimbabwe. Brian publicly hugged a woman living with HIV, helping to challenge entrenched stigma and misconceptions among more than 300 community members. The act transformed local understanding of HIV transmission and catalysed a shift from fear to compassion, an impact that rippled throughout surrounding villages.

Brian Gleeson

A life defined not by position, but by principled leadership, compassion, and services to humanity.

Brian believes Australians continue to hold strong credibility and respect within the United Nations system. Australians occupy senior roles across UN agencies, and their perspectives are valued for their pragmatism, integrity, and effectiveness.

With Australia seeking election to the UN Security Council and hosting COP31, Brian sees opportunities for the Australian Government to further strengthen multilateral engagement. As a trusted development partner in the Indo-Pacific, Australia is well positioned to leverage UN relationships to support regional development priorities and advance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, Brian continues to contribute his deep expertise in public sector reform, institutional leadership, and human-centered change, drawing on decades of service across the Australian Public Service and the United Nations. His career reflects a defining truth of multilateral service: that lasting impact is achieved not only through policy and systems, but through leadership grounded in empathy, courage, and respect for human dignity. Through his work, from global organisational reform to moments of quiet human connection, Brian's legacy is one of building institutions that serve people, and people who believe in institutions.

Advice for future generations

Brian emphasises that a career with the United Nations is **deeply rewarding**, offering the opportunity to **contribute to solutions for global challenges that only multilateral cooperation can address**. He notes that entry into international professional roles typically requires a **postgraduate qualification, alongside strong practical experience**.

He encourages aspiring UN professionals to align their skills with specific UN agencies, **gain hands-on experience** through internships, volunteering, research, and fieldwork, and **actively build professional networks**. Staying **informed on global affairs**, preparing rigorously for competency-based interviews, and seeking mentors, particularly those with UN experience are, in Brian's view, **essential steps for success**.



Rod Henderson

Soldier. Peacekeeper. Humanitarian



Rod with his parents, Phil and Val Henderson, at Kapooka in 1995.

Rod Henderson joined the Australian Regular Army in 1995 and spent the next 22 years serving Australia during one of its busiest operational periods, first as a paratrooper in the infantry, then as a helicopter crewman on Black Hawk and Chinook aircraft. Deployed across some of the world's most demanding environments, Rod's path led him from Afghanistan and earthquake-struck Pakistan to three peacekeeping deployments in Timor-Leste. His journey is shaped not just by conflict, but by a quiet, persistent conviction that peace is worth fighting for.

From Soldier to Peacekeeper

As a UN Peacekeeper, Rod worked alongside military, specialist police, and civilian peacekeepers, together helping fragile communities rebuild peace from the ground up. Basic healthcare, education, and justice: things most people take for granted, but which take years of patient work to establish after conflict.

In Pakistan, Rod worked with communities where 80,000 people had been killed as a result of an earthquake in 2005. In Afghanistan, he witnessed the grinding complexity of the 'War on Terror'. Across every deployment, his mission was the same: to help those who were unable to help themselves.

The Meaning of the Blue Helmet

The decision to become a UN Peacekeeper to wear the respected blue beret in East Timor stands as one of Rod's defining choices. It was a commitment to optimism over cynicism; to building rather than breaking.

But it was fatherhood that transformed Rod most profoundly. When his three sons arrived, he understood, truly understood, compassion, and empathy. He became a man who listens before he acts, who considers every angle before taking any step. "My time in the infantry did not teach the gentle approach," he reflects. "Fatherhood did."



Taking the locals for a ride in Nefotele.



Filling sandbags with the locals whilst digging pits at Bobonaro.

Rod Henderson

A life shaped not by rank, but by resilience, empathy, and service in the name of peace.

Women, Children & A Different Kind of Role Model

One of the things that troubles Rod most is witnessing cruelty toward the vulnerable, particularly where cultural or religious systems permit physical force as a means of control against women and children. Peacekeepers offer these people an alternative vision of strength: not loud, not forceful, not armed.

Rod is a firm advocate for women in peacekeeping; their perspectives often provide unique insights all while they can frequently face the greatest personal risks.

Australia's Opportunity

Rod believes Australia has a real opportunity to invest in long-term peacemaking, proactive but patient, trusted rather than feared. Some places may need twenty years of steady engagement before a new generation can feel genuine hope. Although this would require long term strategic government thinking and funding.

Advice for future generations

Rod's message to young Australians: I would say: truly listen to what people are saying, rather than planning your response while they speak.

Be open-minded — don't assume you know what is best for someone just because you have deployed to their country.

If you have the opportunity, sit with people. Share their circumstances. Ask what they truly want to help them in their time of need.

Rod Henderson is CEO of the Australian Peacekeepers and Peacemakers Veterans' Association and author of his memoir ***Stop Screaming I Am Scared Too***. He lives near Canberra with his wife, three young boys, and an unwavering belief that ordinary people can do extraordinary things for peace.



Rod Henderson on the ramp of a Chinook at Zabul in Afghanistan. Photo: John Hunter Farrell



Playing cricket at a displaced persons camp at Maira, north west of the city Abbottabad in Pakistan.

Dr Donnell Davis

Builder of futures. Champion of communities. Architect of sustainable change.



Dr Donnell Davis's path to the United Nations was not a straight line, it was forged through adversity, determination, and an unwavering belief that good policy can change lives. Beginning her career in the Queensland public service in 1976, studying by night and correspondence while living rurally, she built expertise across audit, program evaluation, international law, and coastal governance. She escaped a violent marriage with young children, rebuilt her life in a distant city, rising steadily through the ranks, carrying the UN's values into every role she held.



From Public Servant to Policy Architect

Donnell's early career in Queensland government gave her a remarkable grounding. As a Programme evaluator, she used international law, World Bank indicators and COAG methodologies to benchmark Australia against the world, ensuring no state was left behind.

Her work on UNCLOS (the law of the sea) transformed maritime enforcement for the Great Barrier Reef, reversing a 95% case-loss record to a 95%-win rate through evidence and satellite technology, and introducing four new pieces of legislation.

In 1998, she led the complex amalgamation of six government departments across 76 locations, without losing a single staff member.

A New Chapter: UN Habitat and Global Impact

Retiring early, energised rather than exhausted, Donnell founded Envirobusiness and Greening the Boardroom, registering international patents and travelling widely.

When UN Habitat split from UNEP in 2001, she became an Australian Representative to UN Habitat, a role she held until 2014. A defining moment came when NGO delegates from across the world voted her to deliver closing remarks at the UN Habitat Governing Council 22 in Kenya.

She also presented at the UNODC in Vienna on Urban Design to Prevent Femicide, with toolkits spanning five scales of impact. She delivered that address during cancer treatment. "As one does," she notes with characteristic pragmatism.

Dr Donnell Davis

A life defined not by circumstance, but by courage, curiosity, and commitment to humanity

Community, the SDGs, and a Voice for 707 Groups

Donnell's proudest domestic achievement was co-founding Friends of South-East Queensland (FOSEQ), uniting 707 community groups under one voice. Using the UN Earth Charter and UN Habitat benchmarking, FOSEQ shaped a regional plan with sustainability policies and measurable outcomes. For nearly 14 years, community voices shaped development before political change stripped that participation back.

Shaping the Next Generation

As UNAA Queensland President (2016–2020), Donnell built a community spanning 3-year-olds to 103-year-olds, introducing SDG Awards, lectures, and pathways for young professionals and returning UN workers unrecognised at home. Since 2020, as Programme Director across 13 Asia-Pacific countries, her federation's work reached 88,287 women and girls in 2025 alone.



Advice for future generations

"You don't have to work as a bureaucrat at the UN, there are at least eight ways to work within and alongside the system to make the world a better place."

Go explore. Go volunteer. Do a scholarship in another country. Learn new things every day.

One act of kindness and understanding can change an attitude, show another pathway, or leave a lifetime legacy.

"Go and live a little and walk in someone else's shoes for a while. It's enriching."

Today, Dr Donnell Davis serves as National President of the UNAA and Programme Director for Soroptimist International across South-East Asia and the Pacific. Her Doctorate in Urban Climate Governance, adopted in the Netherlands and UK, reflects a career spent translating global values into local action.





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Narelle Townsend profile prepared by Dr Donnell Davis

Jennifer Ashston profile collated from an online interview on 27 February 2025 (her birthday), photo sources include <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C958158>

Leanne Smith profile collated from inwriting interview in January 2026, photos supplied by Leanne herself.

Brian Gleeson profile collated from inwriting interview in December 2025, photos supplied by Brian himself.

Rod Henderson profile collated from interview in person and inwriting in Dec 2025 / Mar 26, photos supplied by Rod himself.

Dr Donnell Davis profile collated from inwriting interview in March 2026, photos supplied by Donnell herself.



Thank you for reading this selection of profiles of dynamic Australians who have made and continue to make significant contributions to the United Nations System.

Please let us know what inspired you so we can develop this collection over time.

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UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
CELEBRATES



**United
Nations**



Building
Our Future
Together

