

THEY CALLED IT UNITED NATIONS DAY

*By Frank B. Frederick, a Unitarian Lawyer
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In October 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations by unanimous vote established October 24th as an international day of observance to fortify a lasting peace, and they called it UNITED NATIONS DAY. October 24 was chosen for this observance because this was the day the Charter of the United Nations came into effect. It is the only International Day observed in the world. [There are now 55.] I have been called the Founder of United Nations Day, which developed from an idea, which came to me in 1934 and from which United Nations Day evolved. Many people helped me, as you will see as this story unfolds.

In 1928, a unique and exciting treaty, which all nations were invited to accept, outlawed war as an instrument of national policy. The treaty, known as the Paris Peace Pact, was designed to supplement the diminishing effectiveness of the League of Nations. Our Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg, played the leading role in formulating the Treaty, which often has also been called the Kellogg Peace Pact. By 1935 all but five of the sovereign nations of the world had signed the Pact.

The Treaty consisted of only two short paragraphs. Its genius and appeal was its simplicity. Every signatory nation solemnly agreed not to resort to war but to solve and settle all disputes by peaceable means only. What gave this treaty its enormous potential was that great multitudes of ordinary people throughout the world clearly and easily understood what the Treaty's promise was and, because they did understand, they believed that by reason of the Treaty there might never again be war. By the special ceremony and pomp and circumstance surrounding the execution of the Treaty a new faith was instilled in mankind. Especially the younger generation, my generation, had such faith. Probably

for some period, however short, war in the world was impossible, because this time the ordinary people of the world had, in effect, joined with presidents, rulers and kings in a simple solemn promise that none would dare or want to ignore.

But alas, in 1934, Italy and Ethiopia, both signatories to the Kellogg Peace Pact, were openly threatening to resort to war. China and Japan were in conflict. Yet no one, so far as I could discover, was invoking the Kellogg Pact and demanding adherence to it; no great newspaper was censuring these nations for backsliding, nor chiding our State Department for its failure to do anything but sit by and watch.

In reflecting on these circumstances and the apathy that had arisen in the short span of six years, an idea was born. Suppose on each anniversary of the signing of the Kellogg Peace Pact, the pageantry were reenacted, accompanied perhaps by even more pomp and grandeur than in 1928; each such reenactment could present at least one important aspect of the enacting ceremony in every city, village and town throughout the world, and with special emphasis in any nation that seemed to be ready to ignore the Treaty's promise not to resort to war. Above all, so arrange these ceremonies that the people of each and every nation would be speaking to each other across all boundaries of territory, race, color and creed, to reaffirm the integrity of the Kellogg Peace Pact and to invoke the magic faith engendered by the original wholehearted acceptance of this treaty. After all, every war finally ends with a treaty; but now at last a final treaty to end all war was in effect.

*Every signatory nation solemnly
agreed not to resort to war*

The possibilities of some such plan grew in discussions with my wife, the minister of my church, and a small circle of friends. The conclusion was that had there been such observances each year between 1928 and 1934, the then existing threats of war could well have been averted. It was easy to believe and dream that indeed this would have been.

I decided to present such a proposal to Mr. Cordell Hull who was then Secretary of State.

At this time I was twenty-nine years old. I had been practicing law only five years. I had no experience at all in politics or in organizing public opinion. I had never even been to Washington.

I decided that a letter describing our proposal would not suffice. Instead I telegraphed Mr. Hull as follows: "Will it be possible for me, an attorney in Boston, to meet with you on a matter of State which I believe can only adequately be presented in a personal interview. I truly believe that time is of the essence." And I did truly so believe. It was not just Italy and Ethiopia. China and Japan were threatening war, and Hitler was laying plans for the militarization of the Rhineland.

The response was a letter from the State Department asking, "What is the nature of the matter which you wish to present?" Obviously this was a reasonable inquiry. Still I mistrusted the effectiveness of presenting our proposal in any other way than a face to face meeting. I was incredibly naive, but I replied by telegram saying only: "My concern is the Kellogg Peace Pact. I give my assurance that I represent no committee or organization. I do have a plan which I believe has present possibilities." Mr. Hull's office promptly replied, making an appointment to see me in one week.

There was hardly time enough while I reduced our proposal to writing, setting forth the essence of the plan for annual observances of the Kellogg Pact. In this brief, we called this annual observance: Peace Day in the World.

I made the trip to Washington. I had an interview with Mr. Hull lasting more than one half hour. He not only listened, but

discussed our plan in detail. During my conference there was no sense of impatience on his part. Mr. Hull was a great Southern gentleman, extending to me, a callow Yankee lawyer, every courtesy due an important and seasoned diplomat. His treatment was not a sham or political gimmick. Mr. Hull was truly a great and exceptional man. More than this, his genuine interest in our proposal was unmistakable. He received our written statement and promised to give the proposal his personal study and to have his colleagues give like consideration.

Three months later Assistant Secretary of State Francis Sayre (a son-in-law of President Woodrow Wilson) wrote to advise me that the proposal had received very careful consideration, that the basic idea had merit but that in the opinion of the Department of State the proposal had come too late. The problem, said Mr. Sayre, was that in 1934 to propose such a far flung recommitment to the Kellogg Peace Pact would be seized upon by those nations choosing to ignore the treaty as an interference in their sovereign affairs. The proposal, said Mr. Sayre, would be rejected by such nations out of hand.

This was a crushing blow. To be told officially that our plan had merit but had come too late was an insufferable end of a great dream.

In 1944, ten years later, it was obvious that World War II would be won by England, the United States, and their allies. Once again it was obvious that soon there would be another treaty for, as already pointed out, there is no other way, short of annihilation, to end a war. And once again, by way of still another treaty there would be a new organization brought forth in the world to keep the peace. And indeed this was exactly what came to pass. A United Nations Organization was proposed, and as its shape and dimension evolved, people all over the world saw again the possibility that if the rules laid down in the charter of this new international organization were carried out and the spirit of these rules were observed, then there would be a great possibility of a lasting peace. As was true when the League of Nations was created

and when the Kellogg Peace Pact was established, men and women all over the world, in great multitudes, were again fired with the resolve that this time this new United Nations Organization would succeed in keeping the peace. The mood was especially like the mood that was engendered by the Kellogg Peace Pact.

Our tiny group perhaps was the only one that in any way related the Kellogg Peace Pact and the United Nations. We remembered that Mr. Hull's State Department had pronounced our plan for annual ceremonies as worthy. We remembered that in 1934 we had been too late. We determined to revive the plan presented to Mr. Hull, and to present it again to those who were founding the brand new United Nations Organization.

*... our plan had merit but
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The time had come to find help. My wife and I and the small 1934 coterie of friends needed backing and money and influence in high places. We turned to the Laymen's League in the Unitarian denomination. We did not have to persuade them that our plan had merit. We had Mr. Hull's word for it. The Laymen's League agreed to support an effort to have the plan for an annual Peace Day written into the Charter of the new United Nations Organization and to provide money and advisory manpower. The American Unitarian Association did likewise. A committee was formed and I was its chairman. Mr. Dwight Strong, an officer of the Laymen's League and Executive Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Union of Boston, was chosen as Secretary of the Committee and given a leave of absence so that he could devote most of his time without charge to our effort. Among others, we were assisted by Dr. Aurelia H. Reinhardt, President of Mills College, who was serving in an advisory capacity at the United Nations conferences at Dumbarton Oaks.

Throughout our entire effort, the contributions by the

Laymen's League and the American Unitarian Association in money, advice and prestige were invaluable. I also salute my own law firm, which allowed its youngest lawyer to take innumerable hours over a period of years to head up the founding of United Nations Day.

To Dumbarton Oaks, we sent a copy of our 1934 Hull presentation, and pointed out in detail how it could be adapted to the United Nations Charter. We described the desperate need to harness and use in the ongoing years the will and determination of ordinary people all over the world so that this time their voices would continue to be heard and heeded; so that this time the kind of apathy that contributed to the failure of the Kellogg Peace Pact would not again occur.

Our committee proposed that the preamble to the United Nations Charter begin with the words: "We the Peoples of the United Nations," instead of with the usual cold and formal words: "We the High Contracting Parties." This proposal was adopted and the preamble was worded accordingly.

We did not succeed in having provision for an annual Peace Day written into the charter. I still believe this should have been done.

However, we soon learned that our plan had been circulated by Dr. Reinhardt among the official consultants and had been discussed with many of the United Nations delegates from all over the world and had received significant affirmative reaction. Particularly, they were impressed by our point that to start and sustain a war, a government must be able to marshal public opinion in favor of war; but that likewise, to insure peace, there must be a continuing and sustained marshaling of public opinion and insistence on the part of all ordinary people that war shall be avoided. At the time of completing the United Nations Charter there was such a will and desire on the part of ordinary men and women. Somehow this vital purpose had to become and remain a viable and powerful instrument for peace.

After the Charter was signed and in effect, as a result of our efforts, Francis Russell of the State Department wrote us

that the State Department encouraged us to continue our efforts.

... begin with the words: "We the Peoples of the United Nations,"

With this welcome message we set about to obtain signatures on petitions asking our Secretary of State to present a resolution, at the first meeting of the United Nations, for the establishment of an international holiday to be known as Peace Day in the United Nations. Later the name was changed to United Nations Day.

Then began the third phase of promoting and putting into effect the basic concept which had been blessed by Mr. Hull in 1934.

We prepared a form of petition addressed to Secretary of State James Byrnes, briefly describing our project and asking him personally to propose, at the first meeting of the delegates, that the United Nations establish a United Nations Day.

Then we set about getting what we hoped would be an impressive number of signatures. We realized they should come from all over the United States, but we had no organization and no army of workers. We could and did send forms to Unitarian churches throughout the United States, but we knew we should not limit petitioners to those who were Unitarian. Mr. Strong had the happy idea of making petitions available in the Young Men's Christian Union where hundreds of service men from all over the United States were stopping by on their way to war. A great many of these men very willingly paused long enough on their way to perform an act for peace and signed the petition.

One day William Roger Greeley, a noted Boston architect, father of Reverend Dana McLean Greeley, later [the last] president of the American Unitarian Association, suggested that he and I try to get support from the Christian Science Monitor. We walked in off the street with no

appointment and were able to present the plan to Mr. Paul S. Deland, the editor of the Monitor. At the end of an hour, he seized our hands in congratulation and promised every possible cooperation. He kept this promise magnificently. He immediately printed a front page story about what United Nations Day was all about and urged everyone and all organizations to sign one of our petitions and to support the effort. The impressive coverage of this great international newspaper continued throughout all our endeavors. This cooperation was a tremendous impetus.

Petitions began to pour in. At this time, Major George Fielding Eliot was a war correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune and the Columbia Broadcasting System. His principal task during World War II was to interpret strategies of war and to stimulate and preserve the will of all men and women to win the war. Such work, of course, was an understandable and a necessary activity. But on December 26, 1945, his syndicated column was on quite a different theme.

The column began: "I found it in my Christmas mail. Among kind remembrances from my friends, and it seemed fitting that it should come in the Christmas season. It came from Boston from a group of noble hearted men and women who had begun an enterprise which may and should extend around the world and find support in every land and among all peoples." Major Eliot went on to describe the essence of our project in ringing terms, and ended with an appeal for support and for signatures to our petition. His column ended with these words: "An international Peace Day is a concept to fire the heart."

Major Eliot's article was widely circulated and copied by other papers, and broadcast by many radio stations. The effect was tremendous.

Our Committee was now well on its way. Support came not only from all over the United States and Canada but from persons and organizations in foreign lands as well.

In the meantime I started getting commitments of support from United States Senators and Representatives. I made a great many trips to Washington, stopping first to see

Senator Harold H. Burton of Ohio (later a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States) and Senator Leverett Saltonstall of Massachusetts. In the course of these trips and interviews I was able to confer with President Roosevelt in the Oval Room, and later with President Truman.

The first gathering of the United Nations General Assembly was divided into two sessions held in January and September 1946. By prearrangement no business was conducted until the September session.

Signed petitions continued to pour in. A host of national organizations and individuals from all walks of life supported the project. Secretary of State Byrnes agreed that the United States delegation would submit a resolution to the United Nations calling upon it to establish a United Nations Day.

As September 1946 approached, I met with Senator Tom Connally of Texas, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who agreed personally to present the resolution. Five days before the second session of the General Assembly was to convene, Senator Connally's office telephoned. The message was: The Senator's crowded schedule leaves him no time to prepare his United Nations Day speech and the Resolution. Would I write it for him?

As far as know-how and experience were concerned, I certainly had come a long way since I had met in 1934 with the Honorable Cordell Hull.

My wife and I worked far into each night to prepare Senator Connally's speech and the text of the critical resolution. It was an exciting and fascinating assignment.

My wife and I worked far into each night

The second session of the General Assembly convened. When there had been only a few days of plenary meetings, a disruption arose on some critical issue, and to avoid decisive and perhaps losing confrontation in the first year of United Nations operations, the leaders of the General Assembly on a Saturday morning, summarily called for and obtained an adjournment for another.

The Senator's speech and resolution were necessarily put aside. Our great plans and hopes were dead. We were forced in the next few weeks to conclude that the support so carefully assembled would be largely dissipated and ineffective by the time the next General Assembly in October 1947 rolled around. We had received another crushing defeat. We could see no effective way to proceed.

Obviously, however, there is more to the story.

In early 1947, Benjamin Cohen of Chile, Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, attended a cocktail party in New York City. A lawyer was there who had worked with me in Washington. This lawyer told Mr. Cohen about United Nations Day.

Mr. Cohen invited me to confer with him at the Headquarters of the United Nations, then located at Lake Success in New York.

An official United Nations limousine picked me up at the Grand Central Station and drove me to Lake Success. At the Headquarters, we went up a long driveway, from the sides of which fluttered the flags of all the member countries.

Mr. Cohen had read our literature, and he plunged at once into a discussion of how a presentation of our plan still could be made to the General Assembly at its next meeting in the Fall of 1947. I told him of our concern that our past endorsements would be stale and probably ineffective, but I added: "If this next time the proposal can be submitted to the General Assembly, not by the United States but by the United Nations Secretariat, then our Committee could and would undertake to update present endorsements and get much more new support, provided our Committee could state that it was now asking for endorsements and support with the approval of and in the name of the United Nations Secretariat."

Mr. Cohen without hesitation replied: "I accept that proposition. What you have suggested may be done." The big black car carried me to the airport from which I flew home to begin the final effort to found a United Nations Day. I need not have taken the plane – I could have walked on air the

whole way.

The final phase was simple to lay out. There would be no more frustrations to put down. However, the amount of detail was prodigious and to this day I do not know how so few people accomplished so very much.

We opened a Boston office with a paid secretary, and I had desk space in an office within the State Department in Washington. Money for travel, rent, telephone, and the like was furnished by the American Unitarian Association. Incidentally, in the entire effort we expended no more than about \$10,000.

In the new effort we obtained more than 50,000 individual endorsements of which 32,142 were in the form of personal letters. The others were signed petitions. Fifty-one United States Senators, five United States Representatives, including the Speaker of the House, twenty-four Governors, twenty-two leading educators and thirteen newspaper editors and radio commentators endorsed the plan for United Nations Day. Many of them took active parts in promoting its establishment. Countless organizations and churches supported the effort, and their memberships involved thousands upon thousands of people.

Our Committee prepared a printed report for the United Nations Secretariat. I end the story as it began: In October 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations by unanimous vote established October 24th as an international day to fortify a lasting peace **and they called it UNITED NATIONS DAY!**

Frank B. Frederick, a Unitarian lawyer, served as General Counsel and Treasurer of the AUA from 1945-1961 and then as General Counsel of the UUA, a position he held during the legal battles surrounding the publication of *The Pentagon Papers* by Beacon Press in the 1970s.

As a member of The National Citizens Committee for United Nations Day, he and other Committee members were received by President Harry Truman on September 15, 1949. And then on September 12, 1951, Frank and other members accompanied Committee Chair William Waymack, who presented Truman with a six-candle cake made from Bess Truman's recipe included in the UN Cookbook, a project of the Committee. They also presented the President with the first copy of the book for Bess.

The National Citizens Committee for United Nations Day ultimately led to the US Committee for the UN, which merged with the American Association for the United Nations to become UNA-USA, which continues to promote the observance of United Nations Day. The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA), inspired by "We the Peoples" and established in 1946, is a global network of local UNAs, the only national level organizations permitted to use the UN emblem.

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