

# MIDDLEGROUND

ISSUE 1 FEBRUARY 2021

SAFEGROUND INC



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Payment to SafeGround can be made by online transfer or cheque. We are offering our book In Search of SafeGround ERW in the Pacific sent to you with every donation over \$40 For online transfers please include “Pacific 2020” in the description and email us the address where you would like us to send the book ([info@safeground.org.au](mailto:info@safeground.org.au))

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Thank you for your support.

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# A FRESH START FOR MIDDLEGROUND

Regeneration should be a part of all our lives. We live and work in a certain way but eventually most things lose their momentum and should be either changed or ended.

At SafeGround, we have faced regeneration many times since our inception in 1992. As I type that date it drives home the huge amount of work that has been done by this small organization over almost 30 years.

Our first face under Sister Patricia Pak Poy was the Australian Network to Ban Landmines. This title brought us together to achieve the goal of an International Ban on Anti Personnel Landmines in 1997. At that point we could have ceased to exist as our job was done. The organization had a rethink and a reshuffle and we continued on to take on the issue of Cluster Munitions resulting in the treaty banning them in 2008.

Harnessing some of our strengths, we began detailed field research looking into communities at risk from ERW (explosive remnants of war) resulting in a book on the dangerous legacy of cluster munitions in the east of Cambodia. This book was entitled 'In Search of Safe Ground'. As we had achieved our two main goals of a landmine ban and a cluster munition ban we needed to re focus and we became 'SafeGround'. This strong but more neutral name gave us the banner to branch out a bit and take on a variety of topics that relate to human security and legacy weapons. We worked on

the Nuclear Arms Treaty and now are working on a treaty to restrict Lethal Autonomous Weapons, Killer Robots.

The regeneration undertaken by the organization has been essential to stay relevant and attract supporters and members to continue the important work that draws our attention and efforts.

Our key tool to communicate with our supporters has been the Memorandum. This newsletter has been the conduit that informs our supporters of the work underway. We felt it was time for an overhaul and the Memorandum will now be the newsletter 'MiddleGround'.

We are pleased to announce our MiddleGround team which consists of Isabella Porras, Margot Stewart and Rhett Kleine. These three have taken the reigns and will inject a new level of energy into its pages. We aim to have an overview of international affairs and events that reflect our work and interests and report on the work we do within SafeGround.

SafeGround continues to work hard across a variety of issues and has never been more relevant and needed. With our new newsletter MiddleGround we aim to keep our supporters informed and engaged as we strive to simply make the world a better place.

Thank you all for your ongoing support and we hope you enjoy the content and new format of MiddleGround.

John Rodsted, February 20th 2021

# MIDDLEGROUND: FROM THE EDITOR

Currently in India, farmers have marched on capital cities in force to protest the introduction of new laws that will tip the scales of the nation's agricultural industry, against small farmers, in favour of massive corporations that promise to absorb the smaller, traditional producers, upon which millions of livelihoods depend on.

A contributing writer, Himanshi Dahiya, was covering this story from New Delhi. The epicentre of one of India's and the world's largest protests. Himanshi has been there from the very start, in the thick of their camps and blockades.

On Republic Day, India's celebration of their independence, the farmers took their chance to make their plight known. As a military parade marched before Prime Minister Narendra Modi, marking the first time the nation's constitution came into effect in 1950, farmers and their supporters stormed The Red Fort, one of the more popular cultural icons in the nation's capital. After clashes with police the protestors raised a Sikh community flag over the once all-powerful Mughal stronghold.

Disputes have raged over the more violent aspects of the protest, with many of the community leaders protesting the law, decrying the violence and the storming of the fort. Since then however, Internet bans have been put in place around

the capital. Because of this, Himanshi has not yet been able to send us her story, and thus the executive has impeded the work of the media. The estates of democracy have come into conflict, not for the first time in India (nor the world). The concern however is that this is a growing trend.

It is here that we find the need for MiddleGround, an independent, non-partisan, quarterly publication. Run by volunteers, working as an offshoot of SafeGround, we are not hindered by the economic and political squabbling that have become a staple of contemporary media. We promise to do what journalism was always meant to do, inform and keep power to account.

This first edition is a small step on the journey we hope MiddleGround will take over the years. Our small team is passionate, driven and invested in what journalism should be. We hope you find yourself enjoying this first edition and finding yourself coming back for more once you're done.

Thank you for being here, and welcome to MiddleGround.

In hope,  
Rhett Kleine  
Managing Editor.

# OUR WORK

SafeGround has continued to work on our different project areas, although with COVID 19, where we placed our focus did adapt. We continued projects and took time to develop our governance.

## Work in the Pacific and grant application with ICBL-CMC

Due to COVID 19, SafeGround has reflected on what further work we would like to do in the Pacific to build-off In Search of SafeGround.

SafeGround has applied for a small grant scheme from ICBL-CMC called “Investing in Action.” The grant is to encourage and enable local campaigning for the universalisation and implementation of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions and the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty. There is great scope for promoting the universalisation of the Convention on Cluster Munitions throughout the Pacific. This grant would enable SafeGround to maintain our work with the Pacific throughout 2021 and COVID, launch activities central to SafeGround’s historic core business, reconnect SafeGround to ICBL-CMC and bring in funding to use for our work.

Currently there are no active national campaigns in the Pacific Island Nations.

With several Pacific nations affected by WW2 Explosive Remnants of War & an unknown number of casualties we see there is a need for action. Systematic clearance has only taken place in Palau.

## Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

We have advanced our activities in developing this campaign, engaging other organisations, academics and politicians. SafeGround is presenting to a high-level roundtable at the Australian National University with academics, officials and industry. While this event was postponed due to the Victoria lockdown and state and territory border restrictions, it is expected to take place in March.

## Support Survivors

We have developed our new project focusing on those affected by war and conflict living in Australia. We have had several applications for internships, and 3 students from RMIT are in the process of commencing research

with SafeGround. Their work will help create a picture of the different groups who are affected by war, and the services available. We are also noting an interest from a number of parliamentarians and expect to have talks while in Canberra next time.

## Behind the scenes

COVID 19 gave a great opportunity to turn our attention to other parts of SafeGround’s operations. The website is in a transition phase, to a better, more dynamic site, that reflects our organisation’s current work. Further, we have applied for a new registration under the “ACNC” which would greatly benefit the organisation at a governance level. This process has been long and intensive. In a similar vein SafeGround has changed its banking set up, in order to better support the financial activity needed for our current work.

## Survivors of War in Australia



### Position Description; Research Intern – Survivors of War Victims (Australia)

SafeGround is an Australian research, education and advocacy not-for-profit organisation. We have worked with victims from war and conflicts all over the world for over 30 years. In 2020, we are commencing research on the status of war victims in Australia. Many residents of Australia have lived and worked in conflict areas either as civilians, refugees, humanitarian aid workers, journalists, peace-keepers, defence personnel or in other capacities. We want to determine how war has affected their lives in Australia.

You will be part of a team with members of the SafeGround Committee and possibly other interns engaged from different faculties and universities. Within the team you will choose a demographic to research; identify, extract, organise, evaluate and present information on your part of the project.

- The Role :
- Identify and choose strategies for your research
  - Conduct a preliminary search of existing academic research
  - Conduct research from various sources
  - Research and liaise with service providers
  - Formulate information gathered into a report
  - Assist in developing strategies and materials for engaging with general public
  - Produce communication materials for various public audiences

Under the guidance of their supervisor, Project Coordinator Mette Eliseussen and her team members, the intern will undertake a project to research and write a report on war victims in Australia by drawing together existing knowledge on war victim experiences and needs. The report will focus on how war has affected the lives of war victims, their families and the communities they live in. The focus is on what needs they have and if and how their needs are met, and who their service providers are.

SafeGround may facilitate contact between the intern and international organisations that assist war victims. Based on findings from this report you will take part in writing recommendations of steps forward.

The internship is ideal for students interested in health and humanitarian issues. Depending on COVID restrictions the work will be mainly through remote meetings, sessions in a collaborative space and independent work. We are looking for someone with the following qualities: Initiative, problem solver, curiosity, research skills and clear and concise writing skills.

This internship is unpaid however we will have flexible arrangements for the successful candidate, provided they work a minimum 3 days a week, for 13-15 weeks and we will work with you to ensure you achieve course credit. Interested applicants should email their CV with a covering letter to [mettesofie@gmail.com](mailto:mettesofie@gmail.com)

## SafeGround Internship

SafeGround is offering several internships for students and others who might be interested. We appreciate if you apply or you share this with anyone you know would benefit from such an opportunity.

# SAFEGROUND CALLS FOR **RED LINES** AMID AUSTRALIA'S AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

**By Matilda Byrne**

In 2021, we need urgent action to ensure meaningful human control over the deployment of lethal force, specifically in the selecting of targets (humans) and decision as to whether or not to attack. A clear, legal standard is needed which will prohibit the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in weapons which autonomously select and fire, dehumanising killing and crossing a moral red line.

In 2020, despite the unprecedented nature of the year, internationally and in Australia efforts to realise such a treaty remained strong. To begin last year's campaigning SafeGround led an action at Parliament House in Canberra urging our MPs and Senators to join the calls for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). We had a concurrent mailing initiative and individual briefings with politicians.





SafeGround returns to Parliament in March to draw attention to this issue, which is needed more than ever, in light of the continued Australian advancements in weaponising AI. The Department of Defence, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) have all shown a consistent and repeated avoidance of faithful engagement with this issue.

In early January 2020, the Royal Australian Air Force [announced their new 'Loyal Wingman' project](#), allotted \$40million, to develop three autonomous combat aircraft prototypes. This is of concern as Australia strives towards advancement without limits or commitments to human control.

A workshop series for CSIRO's 'The Robotics Roadmap for Australia V2' included a ['Defence Sector' session](#) which illuminated new insights. Army Lieutenant Robin Smith cited many concerns such as cyber risks, questions of 'trust' in machines and "ethical issues associated with autonomy and what we will or will not automate." Yet, there was no mention

of demarcating what is or is not acceptable. Royal Australian Navy Commander and Lead for Autonomous Warfare Systems Paul Hornsby said in assessing an autonomous platform

"there were times when things are so busy that it is beyond human endurance or human response time, and you really want to crank up the robotics and crank up the AI and there are other times where you would draw it back."

This ambiguity was also heard in the 2019 Senate Estimates during questions on this issue and is troubling given the development that is taking place in Australia.



[The 2020 Defence Strategic Update](#) also highlighted investment in autonomous capabilities. It stated that in Australia's changing strategic environment, "emerging and disruptive technologies will be rapidly translated into weapons systems, including autonomous systems...reducing decision times and improving weapon precision and lethality."

The update identifies a range of autonomous systems which will be developed as part of Australia's capabilities; auto-

*Loyal Wingman prototype  
supplied by Boeing Australia*

*Far left. Photo©Cat Sparks*

mous air vehicles and aerial systems, un-crewed surface and underwater systems and autonomous land vehicles with a “coordination office for the implementation of robotics and autonomous systems across the land force.” The air domain is the other key area, where “new and existing aircraft will combine with remotely piloted and autonomous systems to provide increased lethality and survivability.”

Amid these advancements, a clear policy requiring human control over critical functions of weapons is essential to ensure morally responsible and legal development. Defence has been conducting work on how to use AI ethically. Whilst this is a welcome endeavour, the output falls drastically short. Ethical guidelines were outlined in a new paper published this week by DSTG: “[A Method for Ethical AI in Defence](#)”. It fails to acknowledge that removing human control from the critical functions is fundamentally unethical, instead reiterating that “the point of interface through which control is achieved will vary.”

In November 2020, *The Concept for Robotics and Autonomous Systems in Defence* was published. Its approach to human control is divorced from the global understanding that is being formed and would fail to ensure true moral and legal conduct. Rather, it works to justify autonomous targeting and deployment of force in absence of meaningful human control. At the same time, [research](#) conducted at the UNSW Canberra showed ADF trainees were uncomfortable with operations alongside autonomous systems.

As for the diplomatic process, currently the progress is uncertain with a lack of clarity around the timing of relevant meetings on this issue throughout 2021. The Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) is the dedicated UN meeting forum, within the apparatus of the Convention on Certain Convention-

al Weapons (CCW). In 2020, of the two scheduled 5 day sessions only one took place. The GGE convened on 21-25 September with discussions on international humanitarian law, characterising LAWS, the human element and possible options forward.



Australia’s disingenuous contribution to the talks mirrored their submission prior to the meeting, which detailed a complex “System of Control” whilst avoiding the crux of the issue. In the meetings, they were quick to restate their position that in light of the absence of a common definition, the discussion concerning a treaty is premature. Australia spoke in fewer than half of the discussion areas but continued to emphasise the fallible notion of control ‘over the entire life-cycle of the weapon’. They drew attention to the importance of compliance with international law, and asserted that this could be done through doctrines or manuals within rules

of engagement, targeting directives and standard operating procedures. This would be a great way to implement a commitment to maintaining meaningful human control, without which weapons use is 'unlawful' [as explained by the ICRC](#) and others.

The Australian Government agrees that the eleven guiding principles which were adopted by countries at earlier talks, are not an end in themselves and are committed to advancing discussions, build on common understanding and reduce gaps in the divergence of views within the CCW. However, this falls short of needed action. Whilst the majority of countries are forwarding their views and calling for negotiations, Australia is deliberately stalling in place.

With COVID 19 stalling the diplomatic talks, it is even more important that civil society highlight the imperative to act in this area. SafeGround has continued to lead the efforts in Australia with the support of many other organisations and individuals.

SafeGround set out to capture the Australian context, through multiple sectors and dimensions in its report launched in September via a webinar. [Australia Out of the Loop: why we must not delegate decision making from man to machine](#) has been well received and was a critical addition to the landscape in Australia. SafeGround also launched a podcast series [Stay in Command](#) with episodes highlighting various experts and perspectives on the issues. They include Australian voices as well as international perspectives, and others from the global coalition of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

SafeGround in 2020 was represented at the global meeting of the campaign in February prior to COVID. In this time an event was also held at ThinLab at the University of Adelaide for both staff and students. Our engagement with the university sector was developed in 2020, with the work of Yennie

Sayle, who completed an internship with SafeGround working on the campaign's youth engagement. A new [webpage](#) was launched, an [InstaLive Q&A](#) session, a survey conducted, and actions outlined for students. Yennie also represented Australia at the [Virtual Global Youth Conference](#) on this issue and you can watch the highlights video.



We look forward to having more events both online and in person throughout 2021, for students, organisations and the general public. If you or your organisation/group, community or members are interested in engaging with this issue, please get in touch. In 2021 we must keep the pressure building to ensure meaningful human control over weapons use, bring about an international treaty and prohibit lethal autonomous weapons which would see humanity cross moral, ethical and legal red lines.

*Photo©Aleesha Paul*

# CONTROLS ON WAR

John Rodsted interviewed Paul Barratt last year about his views on lethal autonomous weapons. Paul Barratt has had a long career in Australia's Public Service since 1966, but what distinguishes him from many others within government and the public sector is his strong conscience. He has held many senior roles within government, notably within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Industry, Science, Energy and Resources as well the Business Council of Australia. He was Secretary of the Department of Defence from 1998 to 1999. It was his senior role in the Department of Defence that put him at odds with government positions and policy. This led him to leave the Public Service. Since then, he has been very vocal on how and why Australia goes to war and that a few have the power to commit Australia to war. He is also one of the founders and current President of Australians for War Power Reform.

## **An Insider To Policy And Decision Making**

*John Rodsted: When you entered the Department of Defence in '66, it was in the early days of Australia entering the Vietnam war. You were in the Department of Defence during the war. How were Australia's policies and actions shaped then, and by whom?*

The policy to go into Vietnam was shaped very much by the Prime Minister, Menzies, himself. I was in the fortunate position of being just one year too old to be called up in the first draft for Vietnam, but some of my university friends were

conscripted and sent off to fight in a war in which we should never have participated.

*John Rodsted: As a Public Service insider, you became privy to how decisions were made. This was not always a fair and honourable process. What kind of policy was Australia driven toward?*

Paul Barratt: If we stick to the Defence domain, quite often the real discussion wasn't around whether or not we should be involved in a war, but how we would get involved. The Prime Minister would make a decision that Australia should fight alongside our American allies. Then the first thing that would come to Cabinet would be, what form will this assistance take? There is too much power and too few hands at the beginning.

*John Rodsted: Would it come down to the US effectively insisting that we entered a war supporting them; and as long as the Prime Minister agreed to that, then, we were committed?*

Paul Barratt: Actually, it's worse than that John. More often our Government would insist on participating in a war to which Australia was not invited. That was very much the case with Vietnam. Our Government persuaded the US that Australia should be involved. The US military was not particularly enthusiastic because they find it easier to fight alone and feel that they have the capability to do so. That turned out to be wrong in most cases, but they feel they can do it. The American political system likes to have some extra flags on the poles to show they are involved in a major coalition. The same thing happened with Iraq and Afghanistan. John Howard volunteered Australia into those wars. The Americans didn't ask us.

*John Rodsted: So with any dissent that may be either within government or within Parliament, how are those voices then heard?*

Paul Barratt: With great difficulty. There is unlikely to be dissent within the government when the threshold decision has already been made. Backbenchers feel that if Australia is going to war, their job is to support the government and support the troops in the field. When the first contingents went off to Iraq, Opposition leader Simon Crean, whose party was opposed to the war, took great care to distinguish between being opposed to the war and wishing the troops well. In other words: We support our troops in harm's way, but we don't think we ought to be there. That's a pretty difficult thing to navigate.

As for Parliament, that depends on whether the government permits the matter to be debated at all. We committed ourselves to Afghanistan in 2001, and the very first parliamentary debate on the war was in Julia Gillard's time.

## The Australians For War Powers Reform

*John Rodsted: You are a strong advocate for changes on how we go to war. You helped form and chair the Australians for War Powers Reform. What do you want to see change?*

Paul Barratt: The organization had its origins in the 2012 Campaign for an inquiry into the Iraq war. Our first ob-

jective was to get something like the Chilcot inquiry going (named after Sir John Chilcot who was the chairman of the UK inquiry); to find out how decisions [to go to war] were made and what could be learned from that process. But the real aim was to use this as a case study on why the power to deploy the ADF into international armed conflict ought to be relocated in the Parliament. We knew a lot about how the decisions had been made and were able to infer more by research. By putting various bits and pieces together, we hoped to achieve an open public inquiry, which would demonstrate that our decision-making processes were flawed and that it was too dangerous to leave it in the hands of a small number of people.

What we want is the power to send Australian troops into armed conflict to be located in the Parliament. It should be a decision only taken when the Parliament and preferably both Houses, have given consent.

*John Rodsted: If you take the decision away from the Prime Minister, remove the so-called captain's call, wouldn't it take too long to respond to any threats in a real timeframe?*

Paul Barratt: No, that's a great misapprehension. Most of the Australian Defence Force quite rightly is held in a relatively low state of readiness. Troops have been training and doing practice manoeuvres, but to get your equipment into a fighting state requires a lot of preparation. For example, when we went to Timor, Admiral Barry and I advised the National Security Committee of Cabinet, in February 1999, that we ought to get ready to deploy to Timor. The plebiscite was looming, and we could see there might be a breakdown in the situation there. They were finally ready to deploy in September. It took seven months and the expenditure of almost \$300

million to get everything operational and to get Commanders ready for operations in the field. We have a ready reaction force in Townsville, which is basically a battalion and associated elements. I would be quite happy to have a framework in which anything that the ready reaction force could handle could be done without the decision of the government because that would be an emergency type situation. But anything that required a larger deployment, ought to be debated and authorized in Parliament.

*John Rodsted: If the decision had to go through Parliament, couldn't it get held up by minor parties or in the Senate, just people being divisive because they can, playing politics with the decision?*

Paul Barratt: That's an argument we often hear. If there was a genuine threat and the major opposition party agreed with the government, the minor parties would have no role at all. So that concern is just that it might make it difficult for the government to engage in wars of choice. And of course, that is the whole point.

*John Rodsted: And I suppose that separates it perfectly between threat and adventure. One: the Parliament is going to respond for a real threat against Australia and Australia's interests. The other is getting involved in an adventure that has nothing to do with us. That would be the difference.*

Paul Barratt: To put it brutally, I would say to whoever is in government, if you can't persuade the opposition that our national security is threatened, we ought not to go.

*John Rodsted: If the party that was in power at the time had*

*access to secret intelligence that they could not talk about, how would they deal with this?*

Paul Barratt: There are a couple of ways you could deal with that. It is an argument we often hear and sometimes it's a bit hard to keep a straight face. When we reflect on the 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' issue in Iraq, it turns out they did not exist. Everybody knew they did not exist. Hans Blix, United Nations weapons inspector, certainly knew they did not exist.

But let's take your question at face value. There are a couple of things you could do. In any national security situation, the Government will brief the leader of the Opposition, in private, and in secret. That happened in relation to operations in Syria. Additionally, there could be a proper national security intelligence committee in the Parliament, in which members of the committee were security cleared to receive all the information available. That way all parties are involved in looking at the available evidence. They could go into the Parliament and say: We have seen the intelligence and we are convinced.

It's rare that secret intelligence is the only thing you have. Very often there is information in the public domain as well. In fact, I think most intelligence agencies should devote more effort to analysing what is in the public domain because you can learn a lot from that. An option always available to the Government would be to say: "Here is what you're seeing in the public domain, our secret intelligence bears out what we've concluded from the open-source material. If there is a will you can certainly find a way to navigate through that real difficulty of how to handle secret intelligence.

*John Rodsted: The secret intelligence effectively just becomes a confirmation of what is a greater information stream.*

*What kind of support have you had for your organization's aims and ideals and where should it go from here?*

Paul Barratt: We've had support from various members of political parties and a lot of public support. The most tangible support we've had from a political party is a resolution passed on the floor of the ALPs national Congress in 2018, in Adelaide, that an incoming Labor government would establish an open public parliamentary inquiry into how we go to war. I think that was a very positive step. They are not pre-committing themselves to change the way we go to war, but they are committing themselves to establishing the facts. It would give those who are seeking a change, the opportunity to put their case. It would mean addressing the arguments we've just discussed and defending them in an open forum. So we would end up with a more honest debate.

Another argument used against us, is that it really would not make any difference because everyone would just vote on party lines. However, in such a parliamentary inquiry, I think being asked to take responsibility for something that would involve death and destruction on both sides; for putting the young men and women of the ADF in harm's way and for inevitably involving civilian casualties, you would end up with a conscience vote. I do not think you can assume that everybody would vote on party lines. If we have a parliamentary inquiry, we can tease all these arguments out.

I'd like to see that commitment part of the ALP platform, and I very much hope that any incoming Labor government would proceed along those lines. Our movement would like to persuade all major political parties that this is a desirable change.

*John Rodsted: You've had some pretty good support from some fairly major players within the Australian Government and former Australian Department of Defence. Can you talk a little about the opinions of some of the others who are involved in your organization and why they think it's a good idea to change the threshold for going to war and the captain's call?*

Paul Barratt: Well, I think we are unanimous in feeling that the responsibility for this order should rest with the Federal parliament and it ought to be debated and, fully thought through. One of the things that doesn't happen when it's just decided by Cabinet or by the Prime Minister is a proper analysis of the legality of going to war. What we would all like to see, before Parliament takes a decision, is that the Attorney General or Solicitor General tables a formal written opinion about the legality of this war. The best legal opinion we have about the Iraq war is that it was illegal. No one takes very seriously the reliance that we had on old UN security council resolutions that were passed for another purpose.

Apart from in our movement, we've had people, such as the former Chief of Army, saying that this move ought to take place.

## **An Artificial Intelligence Arms Race?**

*John Rodsted: Can we shift the discussion a little towards the new arms race that is starting: the development of killer robots? Just the talk of killer robots sounds like a bad dream, but*

*they are real, and governments worldwide are developing and investing in them. What do you understand these to be and how would they be deployed in the battlefield, or for that matter into urban environments?*

Paul Barratt: I think the word robots conjures up, in the public mind, things that might move along the ground and maybe have arms and legs. However, what we are really talking about is any kind of lethal autonomous weapon, that very often would be a more advanced form of an armed drone. Such a device would have its own decision making capability and would take human agency out of the decision to launch a lethal strike.

Now it becomes a little bit fuzzy. I was reading this morning, someone from the US army talking about the progress they are making with lethal autonomous weapons and that they will never take human agency out of making the decision. However, the way these drones (weapons) work, is they have a collection of sensors that will bring a lot of data together and then make a recommendation. That recommendation would include which weapon would be the best to use for a particular purpose and where it was located. This US army spokesperson was talking about reducing the decision-making time from information coming from the sensors to someone pressing a button, from twenty minutes to twenty seconds. Twenty seconds doesn't sound to me like a lot of time for someone to make a considered decision to launch a lethal attack. The word meaningful comes into it. You need meaningful human intervention, not just the fact that a human being is somewhere in this highly automated chain. The importance of humans having control is that some very important decisions need to be made: who is to be attacked; is this attack militarily necessary; is it proportionate



to what has happened, or what you think is about to happen? I would have no faith at all in the ability of people to program an autonomous weapon to make those decisions without the potential for great risk and tragedy.

*John Rodsted: I think you have hit on something very important there: reducing the response time from twenty minutes to twenty seconds would bring the decision down to an operator and would take it away from a Commander. It would take it away from someone in charge of a force and give it to someone sitting behind a console somewhere. It would also reduce the legal framework in the decision-making process. Would that be correct?*

Paul Barratt: It gets harder and harder to say who is responsible under international law for the fact that innocent people get killed. I think it illustrates the difficulty, both with the delegation of authority, and also with the ability to discriminate in the identification of targets.

I remember a case, it was probably 10 years ago in Afghanistan where a group of Afghans from a remote village in an area under surveillance were killed by an armed drone operated by someone with a joystick in Tampa, Florida. This group of Afghans was coming from a remote village to the nearest town. They left before dawn for what was a long journey. There were four or five guys in the back of a utility and someone driving. Halfway through the journey, a young man in Tampa blew them all away with an armed drone. They were just innocent visitors. One was going to visit the local doctor and one was going to get a prescription filled at the pharmacy. The drone operator was asked:

“Why did you press a button?”

“Because I could tell they were terrorists.”

“How did you know they were terrorists?”

“Because when the sun came up, they all got their prayer mats out of the back of the utility and faced Mecca and prayed. So therefore I knew they were terrorists.”

There are two things about that. Firstly, even with the considered human intervention, the human being made a catastrophic error of judgment because he didn't know enough about the local culture. Secondly, how would you program an autonomous weapon not to make that mistake? I just don't believe that it can be done.

We have seen many tragedies in places like Iraq and Afghanistan. Once a wedding party was blown away because people started firing their rifles in the air. It is customary, once a couple is united in holy matrimony, for the shout “Let's all fire our rifles in the air” and someone blows them away because they're firing rifles. The old saying in the IT industry about ‘garbage in, garbage out’. What these drones do, autonomously, will very much depend on the knowledge and skill of the people who are programming them.

*John Rodsted: I think that points to how they identify who is the so-called enemy on a battlefield? Because they cannot identify who the friendlies are. It is easy to put a marker on your own troops, so you could see your own layout of the battlefield. But all that does is say that everything else living there is the enemy. Civilians, combatants, livestock: I can't see how they would be able to separate them.*

Paul Barratt: Neither can I. What we all await is the Brereton report on Afghanistan. I think what you are seeing in Afghanistan is people who are weary after almost 20 years of fighting. There is a situation where people no longer know who the enemy is.

A farmer standing in his field may be a genuine farmer standing in his field. He may also have a rifle by his feet ready to shoot you; but, again, he may be an innocent person going about his normal business. You have to decide whether to kill him or leave him alone. I just cannot see that autonomous weapons are going to be an advantage in situations like this.

## An Algorithm Mess

*John Rodsted: There was an interview recently with Dr Lizzie Silver, an Artificial Intelligence developer. The one thing that she really pointed out was how messy and how incapable AI is, especially when AI starts competing against other AI. It can turn into an algorithm mess that comes up with no real functional solutions. Her point being, that by its very nature, unless you have a human ready to say: 'Hang on, this is turning into nonsense', the AI will go down a path where it's always trying to achieve its goal, but that goal might not be achievable. This brings us to the point of whether these things are hackable or not. What would be the consequence if somebody managed to hack into the system?*

Paul Barratt: Well, it would be a brave person who would insist that they had created something that was not hackable. Recent history is full of information that has been released via hacks. We know that all of the world's leading powers are looking at how to hack each other's IT systems. All you can ever do is say that we can't think of any way it can be hacked. It would be very complacent to say that you had produced something that was not hackable.

It seems that countries are starting to invest in the develop-

ment of military AI technology: what it's really going to do is start a new arms race. That would be expensive. And I could imagine a situation where governments are annually spending a lot of GDP buying upgrades and new weaponry. This would put a lot of stress on the Australian purse and leave less to spend on what should be the expenditure of the Australian Government: education, health, infrastructure and so on.

*John Rodsted: Have you got some comments about how Australia has become involved in arms races at our level?*

Paul Barrett: I don't think we've had a lot of experience of it. For most of the post-war period, our Defence Force operated at a higher technical level than our neighbours. That is not the case anymore. Whenever Australia puts an emphasis on self-reliant defence capability, we think we need to control the air and sea approaches to Australia. That puts us into an implicit arms race because as other countries' capability to reach Australia increases, we have to do more to maintain control. I think we are now certainly in an air combat arms race. We committed ourselves almost twenty years ago to the joint strike fighter, the F 35. People now tell me that the Russian sourced equipment used by neighbouring countries is more capable than that. So we might be in an arms race anyway.

## Picking Up The Tab

*John Rodsted: With the Prime Minister, having the sole responsibility at present to commit us to war, does that also put the sole responsibility on the cost of the war in the hands of the*

*Prime Minister? Is it only that person who decides that we are going to spend a lot of our national revenue on going to a war, or does that get checked by the Parliament?*

Paul Barratt: In practice, it puts it in the hands of the Prime Minister, because whilst the constitution provides that the Federal Government can't spend any money that hasn't been appropriated by the Parliament, it is difficult to envisage a situation in which the Prime Minister would commit us to combat and the Parliament would refuse to vote the money. Because that would leave the troops without resources. Once we are committed, the Parliament has to approve whatever funding executive government says it needs to sustain that combat.

*John Rodsted: The military, by its very nature, is always in the business of acquiring weapons that are going to give it the advantage. If we went down the path of building an arsenal of lethal autonomous weapons do you think, the very fact that we had them, would mean our threshold to be combative would be less, and I'm not talking from the Prime Minister's perspective. If you're a commander in the field and you have artificial intelligence drones at your disposal, would that make your decision to engage be at a lower threshold or a higher threshold?*

Paul Barratt: I think it would be a lower threshold. Once we have them in our inventory they would be used. It would be hard for anyone in the civilian space, even our political leaders to tell the Chief of the Defence Force, not to use weapons that in his military judgment, the troops need to achieve what they've been sent to achieve.

## Regulation

*John Rodsted: That brings us to the discussion about regulation and there are several benchmarks for proportionality in weapons. A couple off the top of my head: Poison gas, after WWI when we saw what a nightmare it created for people who were gassed, the convention was created in 1925; blinding laser weapons which had the ability to blind anybody on a battlefield. In 1992 that technology was beaten before it was ever deployed in war. Then there are the two pragmatic cases; the landmines treaty of 1997 and the cluster bombs treaty of 2008. We do have a history of looking back, or even looking forward, in the case of the blinding laser weapons, and choosing to either eliminate a functional weapon system or stop one before it was deployed.*

*To do this means having a Prime Minister, Ministers or decision-makers who do not just get seduced by the latest, greatest technology that is being offered. Today this would probably be autonomous weaponry.*

Paul Barratt: What you say is true, but the dilemma facing a government would be if these are not outlawed internationally and other countries are getting them; are we forced to respond? The nuclear non-proliferation treaty was drawn up to avoid that kind of situation. As these things spread, other countries feel obliged to equip themselves with similar weapons as a deterrent. The best option that I can see for an Australian Government, is to campaign very vigorously for these weapons to be outlawed. That would, no doubt,

cause friction with our allies in the United States, who by the way have not joined (ie) the cluster munitions treaty. The United States refuses to have anything outlawed as it applies to the United States. But nevertheless, I think we should be campaigning to have these weapons outlawed, and hence not equipping ourselves with them.

*John Rodsted: In the case of the use of lethal autonomous weapons, what would you imagine some of the scenarios of a failed strike could look like? If someone deployed these where could that go wrong?*

Paul Barratt: It could go wrong in almost any conceivable way. There is a possibility that the algorithm goes wrong. You attack people who ought not to be attacked, including friendly forces. There is also the chance of the weapon being hacked and turned back on Australian troops. Or it may just fail to complete the task. It is possible to proceed, on the assumption, that this complex and sophisticated piece of equipment will work perfectly. Imperfection could lead to all sorts of failures, including, damage to your own side.

*John Rodsted: That raises the question of arms manufacturers who may love to have the manufacturing of lethal autonomous weapons legal because it will provide them with a continual stream of investment. Especially if every year the technology needs to be upgraded or replaced. From a share market perspective and from a corporate perspective, that would be quite attractive. But it would not be terribly attractive on the ground.*

Paul Barratt: No, and I don't think either our national or the international approach to weapon systems ought to be driven by the interest of the arms manufacturers. I think we should

put the national and public interest first and ensure the interest of arms manufacturers are subordinate to that.

## Universities & AI

*John Rodsted: You originally studied physics at university and universities are always looking to solve technological problems. Part of the greatness of universities is that they encourage brilliant young minds to solve problems and create a function out of the ether, really extraordinary stuff. Should the universities be looking at limiting what they do with lethal autonomous weapons or at least with the various platforms that would be employed in this technology?*

Paul Barratt: I think so. We don't expect our universities to be doing research on biological or chemical weapons, except possibly, for strictly defensive purposes. I can see a role for universities to examine how to defend your country against these things. People in the discipline of arms control in universities need to be thinking about how to establish an effective regime that outlaws such weapons. But, to have our universities go into developing these weapons or even some aspect of them, I think can be a very bad idea.

*John Rodsted: There really are two spaces. One is about technological development, producing and testing software and then working out the appropriate platforms. The other is the ethical side. The ethical investment should override technological investment.*

Paul Barratt: Yes, greater effort should be directed to the eth-

ical side of this issue, not just the technical side. That should be only to the extent that we need to understand the technology in order to defend ourselves from it.

*John Rodsted: Do you think AI weapons are a step too far, or there is a space somewhere within the defence landscape for them?*

Paul Barratt: I think they are a step too far. When it comes to killing people, you need to have people, not only in theoretical control but effective control and accountable for the decisions they make.

*John Rodsted: Trusting the Prime Minister in the past or the present or the future to make the right call going to war. Do you think they have had that power in the past or they would in the future? Is that a process that is trustworthy or should there be something else?*

Paul Barratt: We have seen the Prime Minister of the day make the wrong decision in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. We also saw Tony Abbott decide to extend our operations in Northern Iraq, against ISIL, into Syria. He contemplated putting a battalion into Ukraine for God's sake, to secure the site of the crashed aircraft. I don't think you can rely on Prime Ministerial decision making at all. I should mention that Malcolm Fraser, while he was alive, was the patron of our organization. He argued that a Prime Minister would always get his way in Cabinet if there was something he really wanted. It is too easy for a small group like Cabinet to get so involved they do not think the issue right through. It can be: 'We've had a busy morning and it's lunchtime. Let's make this decision and get out of here.' Or simply listen to what

the Prime Minister has to say and reply, 'Yes, Prime Minister, that's fine'. They do not really unpick it. No! I would not trust any Prime Minister to make the right call.

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*John really appreciated the perspectives from Paul about decisions to go to war and lethal autonomous weapons. Policy in these areas must be moved forward with greater regulation established. This interview is part of SafeGround's [Stay in Command](#) podcast series available online.*

*If you would like to know more about Paul Barrett's work with Australians for War Powers Reform, please visit their website. <https://warpowersreform.org.au>*

# TREATY ON THE PROHIBITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS ENTERED INTO FORCE

**By Lorel Thomas**

On 7 July 2017 the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was formally adopted by the UN General Assembly by an overwhelming majority of the world's governments. This was a testament to the years of advocacy by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and its partners and was formal international recognition of the catastrophic and long lasting effects of nuclear weapons.

The Australian Government has not joined the treaty and remains resistant to doing so. When ICAN, which was started by a small group of committed people in Melbourne, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017, the Australian Government declined to recognise or congratulate this achievement.

By contrast, the Governor of Victoria, held a reception for ICAN in July 2018, serving to highlight the disregard of the Australian Government and its unwillingness to engage in genuine, productive moves to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The Government wishes to remain under the nuclear umbrella of the United States, fondly (and erroneously in my view) believing that they would come to our aid with nuclear weapons if called upon, while simultaneously saying that they are committed to a world free of nuclear weapons. That could be called “wanting to have your cake and eat it too”, and is far from a convincing argument of a strong anti-nuclear position.

Today, the Doomsday Clock stands at 100 minutes to

midnight, closer than ever before and highlighting the extreme danger of a nuclear war. Nine countries - China, North Korea, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States – currently possess a total of nearly 14,000 nuclear weapons. Russia and the United States possess roughly 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons, with over 6,000 weapons each. You can read more detail about this at: [https://www.icanw.org/nuclear\\_arsenals](https://www.icanw.org/nuclear_arsenals)

This is why the Nuclear Weapons treaty is vitally important and why the Australian Government should sign and ratify immediately.

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After adoption by the UN, the treaty needed 50 countries to ratify it, before it would enter into force, that is, be legally binding international law for all states parties. That milestone has now been achieved and on 22 January 2021, the treaty entered into force. The chemical weapons, landmine and cluster bomb treaties have all proved that international stigmatisation of a weapon can change the behaviour of even countries which have not joined the treaty.

Australia is now out of step with international law. The government should sign and ratify the treaty and urge its allies, notably the US to do the same. The Leader of the Opposition, Anthony Albanese MP, and Shadow Foreign Minister, Senator Penny Wong, issued a press release on Sunday 25th October, welcoming the 50th ratification and reaffirming Labor’s commitment to joining the treaty in government. For more on the TPNW and events around the Entry into Force see <https://icanw.org.au>.



# LEOPARDS, WOLVES AND OTHER FOUL THINGS

By Rhett Kleine



*Immediate right this page: A mountain range of the Himalaya in the Indian state of Ladakh*

*Far right this page: A Changpa shepherd leads her flock out of camp for the day*

The Tibetan Plateau is often referred to as the roof of the world. One can't quite grasp the accuracy of this name until they see the snow-capped Himalayas disappearing amongst swathes of stark white clouds. The Changpa Nomads have called this dusty plateau home for over a millennium.



These nomads' lives revolve around their goats and yaks. The yaks they keep for wool, milk and occasionally meat, but their pashmina goats' fur is what keeps the nomads in such an unyieldingly brutal environment. The fur makes pashmina, a material well sought after in the neighbouring Kashmir



Valley. There it is made into the shawls, scarves and rugs for which the region is renowned. Since the nomads began raising their herds the only adversity facing the Changpa had been the wolves and snow leopards that stalk through the hills and mountain gullies. Striking at night, they would sometimes take up to five goats at a time. However, a new threat is looming, one that doesn't threaten only a handful of goats at a time, nor one that can be deterred by the watchful eye of Tibetan Mastiffs.



The Changpa make their home above 4,500m, where water is scarce. For them the streams and springs that flow down from the glaciers as they melt have been the very lifeblood of their way of life. The Himalayan Glaciers that provide their water, year by year have begun to disappear. Without the Glaciers, this would mean the end for the Changpa.

Tsering Lhoma barely stands over 5 foot, she is 72, has 6

children and 100 goats. Like her parents before her she too is a nomad. She moves with the seasons, as it warms, she heads higher into the mountains. As it grows colder, she moves further down to wait out the winter snow.

Her day is spent leading her goats, by herding them up into the mountains, she keeps them healthy and allows them to feed from greener pastures.

### Tsering Lhoma



The Changpa are staunch Buddhist practitioners, as Tsering walks she threads her prayer beads through her leathery hands. While traversing the sullen slopes, watching her footing upon the thick sheet of slate that covers her path, she chants "Om mane padme hum" a popular Buddhist mantra. Usually it is repeated in a monotone, tone deaf flow. Practi-

*Left: Tsering looking back over the slopes from which she came*

*Far left: The glacial spring that provides water to the Changpa camp. The glaciers reflected in the glacial spring*

tioners try to chant it as many times as they can, believing each recital brings good karma.

Tsering however sings it without rush or hurry. It's quiet, not for performance or praise but for herself and her goats. As the day moves on, she will stop and sit, resting while the goats continue on. Taking the same path through the hills everyday they now naturally know where to go. Tsering looks back on the nomad settlement, their tents now tiny black and white specks in the distance.



*Immediate right: Tsering Loma, a lifelong nomad*

*Far right: The dry irrigation channels through which, the Changpa once gave life to their crops*

Back around the nomad camp, the crisp mountain air is humming with chants being played over speakers that stand outside a small brick building. A puja is being held, for Buddhists it is a time for worship and devotional attention. It is during the Puja that monks come to deliver teachings

to the nomads, who in their isolation are bereft of access to monks to cultivate and reinforce their faith. As they sit and chant, butter tea is brought around for worshippers, the creamy brew warming the frost-bitten lips of those in prayer.



It is here that Rapgol Tsultim, born in Tibet before later moving to India to escape persecution, voiced his concerns for the future of the Changpa. Rapgol, like many of his fellow nomads, was born into the nomad life. He is a nomad because his father and his fathers' father were nomads before him. He has led his flocks around the mountains of Ladakh for over fifty years.

“With the glacier there is big change, thirty years ago the glaciers would melt very slowly. Now they melt very fast.” Each year the glaciers reform smaller and smaller. If the



*High left: Jigmet Ladoe, Changpa elder & Sonam Wangchuk, Changpa elder*

*Low left: Rapgol Tsultim, Changpa Elder & Pema Tsering, Changpa elder*

streams and springs that run down from the glaciers are the lifeblood of the Changpa, then the glaciers are the beating heart of their epoch-enduring way of life.

“Our drinking water and spring water is from the glacier, as the glaciers get smaller and smaller, we have water shortages. Our main source of water is from the glaciers.”

Rapgol wasn't the only Changpa to be aware of what the shrinking glaciers foreshadowed, Sonam Wangchuk, Jigmet Lodoe and Pema Tsering have all watched as the glaciers, year by year have slowly begun to disappear.

For the nomads they have already seen fundamental parts of their lifestyle disappear due to the shortage of water. Rapgol explained how they are no longer able to grow crops as they once did.

“Before 20 years ago we used to farm barley and vegetables, back then we had plenty of water for irrigation. These days the farm is not possible.”

The empty irrigation ducts, like a skeleton, lay unused

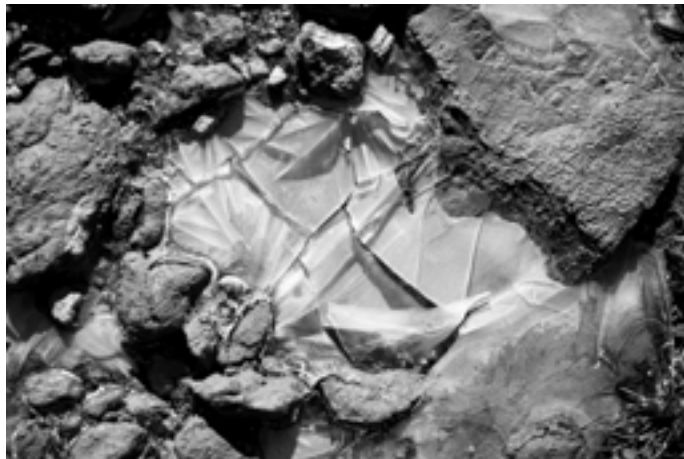
across the dust-strewn plain. The fields that they encompass, once green and full of life are now dead and empty. Only the remains of goats that didn't make it back before sunset fill the empty space.

Sparked by the Anthropocene, our effect on our planet has already begun to affect those who are most reliant on the land, the indigenous peoples of the world, who have for millennia lived in harmony with their environment. As the seas rise and glaciers fall, they are and will continue to be the early casualties before the greater onslaught. The way of living we all need to learn from to reverse the climate crisis is slowly slipping away. The greatest fear now is that we won't recognise how vital the knowledge of people like the Changpa is before it disappears.

For now, the Changpa have little option but to rise each day and hope that when they lead their goats into the hills that the springs and streams are still flowing. When the glaciers finally disappear, the hills and mountains of the Himalaya will silently mourn the empty air, bereft of Tsering's song.

*Right: A glacial stream frozen from the morning chills*

*Far right: A goat's skull, not far from the Changpa camp*





# QUARRYING A SLIPPERY LAND IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

By Siddhant Vashistha

IMAGE

*Frequent landslides have made it clear that Kerala, India needs to control the business of quarrying.*

On the seventh of August heavy rains were followed by a massive landslide in Kerala's Idukki district. The landslide occurred at Pettimudi, a region that is a part of the tea estates which also join the fringes of the Eravikulam National Park. The estimated death toll reached 65 a few days back, with others still missing. During a night of heavy rain, the landslide swept away the houses of several tea estate workers while they slept. The disaster was another in a string of mishaps in the state during the monsoon season.

Over 500 people have died in Kerala due to natural disas-

ters since 2018. With such natural disasters becoming commonplace in Kerala, this article tries to take a look at how quarrying contributes to the problem and why it is so hard to eliminate.

Kerala is the state that rings in the monsoon season in India, but in the past few years, the state has received unusually heavy amounts of rainfall. The Idukki disaster and several others are man-made. A string of human factors such as quarrying, deforestation, unscientific road construction, slope modification, sand-mining, construction on streams, and narrowing and blocking of drainage channels contribute to the frequent catastrophes.

The picture above is a map of the geology of Kerala. The tiny strip of highlighted land was not historically fragile to landslides and floods, but human activity has made it so.

## Quarry Worry

Quarrying is a lucrative business in resource rich Kerala. Quarrying comes with heavy environmental damage, as not only does it destroy the local ecosystem, it also shakes and loosens the earth many kilometers away. The State Government of Kerala has time and again allowed quarrying in ecologically sensitive zones, overlooking the scientific aspects and the risks of mining.

One of the most important reports regarding these dangers is by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), known as the Gadgil report.

The study, headed by scientist Madhav Gadgil, classified the whole of the Western Ghats region as an ecologically sensitive zone (ESZ), with categories of ESZ1, ESZ2, and ESZ3 being created, depending upon the sensitivity of the region. It recommended strict regulation on activities such as mining, road construction, railway lines, etc.

However, the government has rejected the report, as evidenced by permits given for mining and quarrying.

The High-Level Working Group (HLWG)'s report, which is a watered-down version of the Gadgil Committee's report had demarcated 123 villages, or 13,108 sq. km as eco-sensitive areas (ESA) and had recommended a complete ban on quarrying and mining, but the Kerala government refused to implement this either.

According to a study by TV Sajeer, a principal scientist at the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), there are around 803 quarries located near these 25 ESZs (of the Gadgil report), which had witnessed landslides.

Dilutions in environmental norms for mining

What is even more preposterous is the dilution in environmental norms under the Pinarayi Vijayan led LDF government in Kerala.

In 2017 the government brought in a big change in quarrying operations, through an amendment in the Kerala Minor Mineral Concession (KMMC) Rules, 2015. The amendment makes no distinction between mining done with explosives and without explosives. It also reduced the minimum lowered distance limit between a quarry and structures such as rivers, canals, tanks, reservoirs and other public works, from 100 to 50 meters.

Another major amendment brought in 2018 to KMMC Rules removed the necessity of acquiring the No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the District Collector for the mining of sand and clay, in turn relaxing the norms for procuring licenses.

The dilutions come at a time when Kerala registered a sum of 20,821 illegal mining cases in the period of 2011-16, such is the disregard of and ignorance towards environmental issues.

## Unheard protests

Saying a mass people's movement should be taken up to defeat the lobbies of mining and vested interest groups against the conservation of ecologically sensitive zones, would be misplaced, as such movements and protests are already underway. The interesting bit is that the government and bureaucrats deliberately side with quarry owners against the protesters.

Elected representatives have also been accused of corruption and both the quarry owners and the government are virtually complicit in the crimes meted out against the environment. In fact, the quarry lobby is so strong that flouting not one but several norms and stopping protesters through police action came easily. This was accompanied by a weakened Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), in villages such as Manjumala, Pathanpara.

## **A class problem?**

The landslides and other natural disasters caused directly or indirectly by activities such as quarrying are, in effect, class problems too.

I will take the examples of the loss of lives of the tea estate workers in Pettimudi, Idukki, and the unheard protests of Pathanpura to be cases in point.

At the root of such manmade disasters and loss of lives is a class divide and the people in the lower sections, the marginalized and the poor, suffer the most. When we look at quarrying, it too serves the interests of the upper class, for whose houses, the land is dug. This can also be looked at in the context of climate change, where coastal communities with negative carbon footprints are the worst affected.

## **At the core is politics**

By now, it is evident that the Kerala state government has not taken this issue seriously, and apart from the relief packages

there has not been a sincere attempt to counter the hazards.

Several studies and reports have been submitted to the Kerala government in the past few years and yet the action taken has not been substantial. The rot runs so deep that both the ruling party and the Opposition were against the protests. Thus, even a political emancipation, with conservation of nature or bare survival on a fractured land looks like a far cry.

The state's future is inextricably linked to how it preserves and manages its natural environment while minimizing harm. For Kerala to have a future, consumption has to be reduced, and ecologists like Gadgil need to be heard, otherwise a grim reality of destruction is on the cards.





# DEEBING CREEK



*Shale Thompson walks back  
towards the Deebing Creek camp*

## By Margot Stewart

“If this goes there’s nothing else left.”

Stepping through the gate onto the old Deebing Creek mission site, I’m met with an overwhelming sense of peace. The bushland remains untouched, the wildlife flourishing overhead and the carefully erected camps work within the landscape, rather than against it.

But the peacefulness ends at the visual level of experience – this is a hotly debated site, caught between property developers and the Yuggera-Ugarapul people, the traditional owners of the land, who continue to, live, work and share, they have always done, on this meaningful site. This land faces the very real threat of development – unmarked graves and pristine bushland are set to be demolished and replaced by newly developed supermarkets, schools and over 2000 houses.

As we sit around a small, late afternoon fire that occasionally blows a waft of sweet-smelling smoke into our faces, activist and Yuggera-Ugarapul woman Shale Thompson paints a picture of the rich history of the land, often at odds with its peaceful appearance. As we sit amongst the rustling of insects and the soft breeze blowing in the shade, Shale, accompanied by her mother and daughter, recount to me the backstory of



*The Deebing Creek mission sign  
at the entry of the camp*



the Deebing Creek mission. Established in 1885, when the central Ipswich Queen's Park mission was deemed too close to the town, the Presbyterian church moved the camp further out to Deebing Creek, aptly named so after 'dibing,' the Indigenous word for mosquito.

The church sent the people within the mission to work, taking their money and instead providing them rations. When Deebing Creek was deemed once again to be too close to the center of the expanding town, it was moved to Purga in 1915. The same year, they closed the Deebing Creek mission, and the Presbyterian church handed the land back to the government who converted it into Crown land – which was then sold to international developers in 2015. There is written proof that the land at Deebing Creek and neighboring Ripley was purchased by Indigenous occupants of the mission, in exchange for their blood, sweat and tears generated whilst working the land. Regardless of ownership, this land has been

*Property development sign on  
the border of the Deebing Creek  
Mission land*

and continues to be a sacred place within which the Yuggera-Ugarapul people practise culture, and operates within the larger reality that, within Australia, Indigenous sovereignty has never been ceded.

Despite the mission history of the land, the site also contains a rich spiritual connection and ancestral history – Shale recounts to me “People don't understand how spiritual this place is. What we experienced with our old people here, our old people come to us. We see them sitting around the fire at night, sometimes. That's how spiritual it is! They're still here today.”

As we sit on two fallen logs, Shale and her mother, Roberta, point out to me every notable landmark within seeing distance of our seating arrangements – which includes an old well, a sky-scraping ancient bunya nut pine and her own grandfather's tin hut, which he occupied until the late 1960's. She tells me of the marked cemetery just down the road and



laments the graves underfoot which remain unmarked and unseen, scattered across the entirety of the site. Because of these burials and the customs of the ancient tribes that once inhabited the land, there are significant parts of the site in

which she, her mother and her daughters cannot step foot on – it is sacred land reserved for men’s business, and any unwanted visitor of the opposite sex is outcast through violent physical reactions.

*Shale Thompson walks me through the Deebing Creek site, showcasing the expanse of the land*



*An ancient Bunya nut tree landmark stands on the Deebing Creek site, towering over the camp*

This occupation by activists isn't the first resistance to occur at the site – in the 1980's a camp was established to protest a proposed golf course, and after a week, protesters were successful in their efforts. Deebing Creek was purchased by Frasers Property in 2015, and it was only made known to the Indigenous population of Ipswich in early 2019 that this was in fact the old mission site - when the developers announced their intention to build on the land, they titled the site "Grampian Drive," making no mention of its history. When Shale and other activists became aware of what site was actually slated for development, they immediately set up camp, and so continued Deebing Creek's legacy of resistance, in honor of the land and the ancestors who came before.

"It's our identity you know... as Aboriginal people, we're tribal people here. This is our land; this is our identity here and this is the only piece of land we have left. The rest is all, even Ripley, is all sold up and developed. We want to hang onto this as much as we can, we want it back, we want it all back. The whole lot."

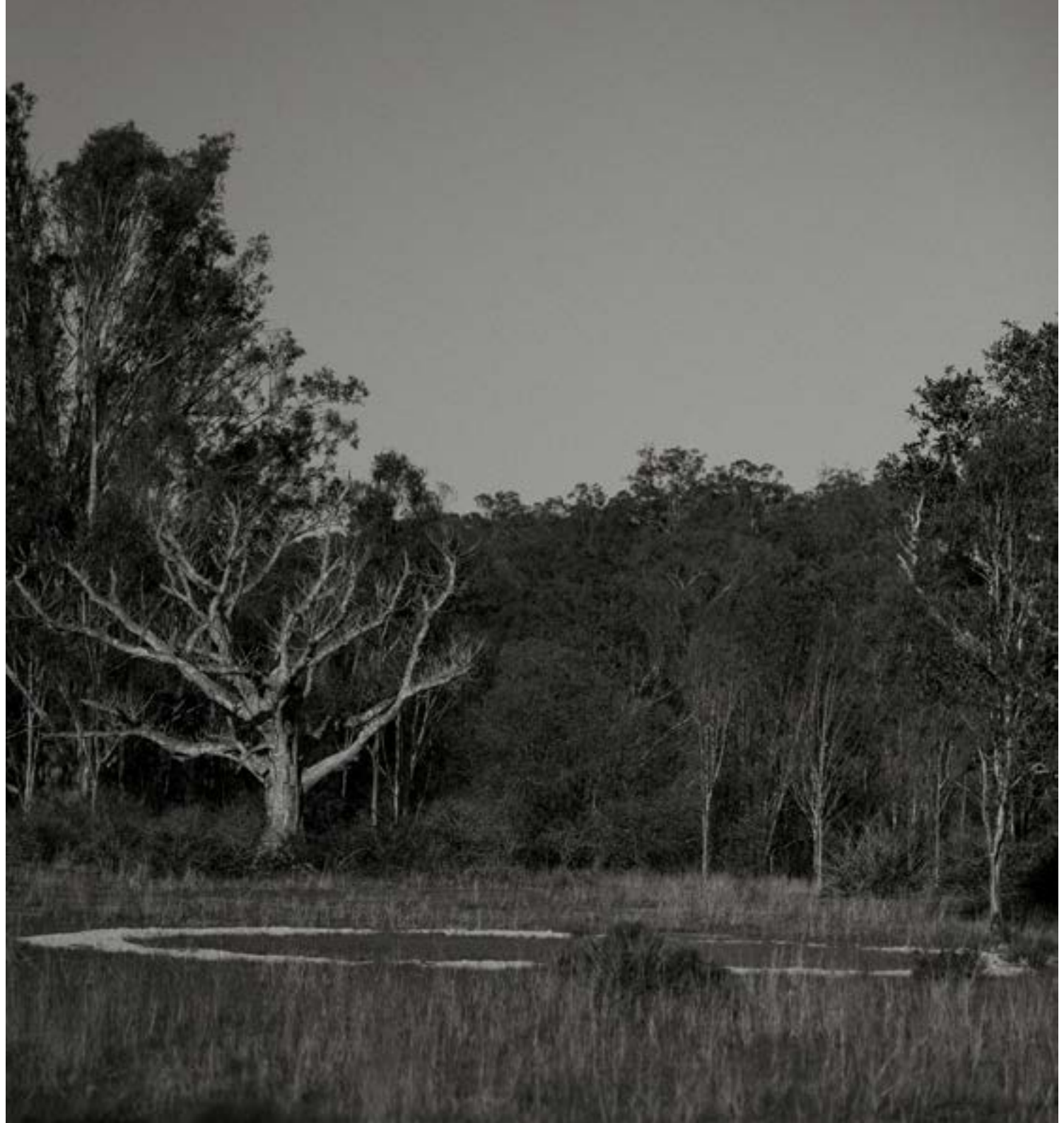
"This is where they lived. They camped here. Our people." The Deebing Creek resistance has adapted the historical and generational traditions of their families and ancestors to create a new resistance, one that carries, is buoyed by and comes from a place of familial significance. They have returned with their families to the land, which once housed their parents, grandparents, great grandparents and beyond, to resist, using historical methods of occupation which mirrors and is made strong by their lineage and the way they utilized the land.

In early 2019, police attempted to remove the campers from the site, demolishing their structures and preventing them from returning to the land. Alongside the campers, the public showed up en-masse to lend their support and success-



*A Grampian Drive street sign  
surrounded by untouched bush-  
land on route to Deebing Creek  
Mission, a misleading name given  
to an ancient site*

*A Corroboree Circle on the  
Deebing Creek site, where some  
cultural practices take place on  
the land*







fully negotiated a return to the land – where they have been 24/7 ever since.

This isn't a closed protest – whilst Shale and her family constantly occupy the land, the public is actively encouraged to be involved and the nearby residents of Deebing Heights housing estate support the protest. Local resident Alexandria Walker tells me how “the untouched bushland isn't just a refreshing change from the urban development of inner-Ips-

wich, it's also home to hundreds of native animals that the whole suburb cherishes. We desperately want to protect their habitat and our own community from the destruction any development would cause. The Indigenous people have treated this land and its animals with respect since long before we arrived, and I support their protest of Fraser Property's housing plan. Their connection to the land is something that we cannot erase, that we shouldn't disrespect, and whereas

*A family portrait of Shale Thompson, her daughter Lekina and Shale's mother Roberta Graham*

*A tree stands shrouded in foliage at the entrance to the site showcasing a CCTV warning sign*



*A portrait of the landscape, capturing an ant mound and Shale's grandfathers shack, with it's last occupant dating back to the 1980's*

*A sign; 'Protect the land! Save Deebing Creek!'*

houses can be built elsewhere, their history with the Deebing Creek mission and gravesite is deeper than a plot of land that might be convenient for a multinational corporation to make money.”

You can't paint a singular picture of modern resistance – that is part of its power. The ability to organise and adapt within any situation is what makes modern resistance so powerful – it does not have a singular form, leader or influence. Its power is in its multiplicity, diversity and inability to be



singularly defined.

At Deebing Creek camp, there is an undeniable generational bond, whether living or past, which binds and supports the ongoing protest. There is intergenerational and spiritual experience that carries through, far beyond any living relatives - this occupation is informed by thousands of years of history, resistance and resilience informed by ancestors and resistances past. There is an undeniable generational and spiritual power behind the protest, its occupants and the land



itself, further supported by the public.

The ultimate aim of this resistance is to urge the Queensland State Government to hand the land back to the Yuggera-Ugarapul people, so it will never face the threat of development again. The reality is this: however strong the resistance is, the Deebing Creek camp is faced with an immovable council who refuses to speak to them directly, and developers driven by Chinese investors who are determined to wait the campers out. Roberta solemnly relates to me the fact that the



Ipswich City Council has refused to speak to them on this topic, and have not responded to requests for meetings from their lawyer. When I asked if the activists get the feeling that the developers are trying to simply ‘wait them out,’ Roberta responded with a laugh “we’ve got a long time to wait. I don’t think they can handle our waiting, our patience.” Shale adds “they’re wasting money as we’re sitting here.”

Later, as I’m guided by Shale across the land, we take in the towering bunya nut tree and the various camps that un-

*An unoccupied chair and table sits at the camp, seemingly blending into the bushland*

expectedly pop up, nestled amongst the trees, washing hanging from low branches, almost as if they were as natural as the untouched bushland itself. Shale takes me to the notable landmarks, discussing each with a sense of pride. We walk past her grandfather's shack and onto the corroboree circle, where we part.

“If this goes there's nothing else left.”





*Shale Thompson's grandfather's shack, now unoccupied, stands on the land as a reminder of generations past*

# SOLOMON ISLANDS

## INTERVIEW WITH ANNIE KWAI

by Catherine Putz

Annie Kwai's book *Solomon Islanders in World War 2: An Indigenous Perspective*, brings indigenous wartime contributions and experiences to the forefront. It is the first book of its kind to be written by a Solomon Islander from their own perspective. Most historical books about the battle of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, have been written by Australians or Americans.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was the catalyst for the United States' entry into World War II. In the Pacific, the Solomon Islands — particularly Guadalcanal — became the centre of fierce fighting between the Japanese and the United States. The contributions that the Solomon Islanders, who served as coast waters, scouts and labourers made to the war effort are often forgotten in popular discussions.

Prior to WWII, the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) had put a coast-watching network in place in the Solomons, as an intelligence gathering platform that used civilians with radios to report any suspicious development in their assigned areas. The Coastwatchers' work was so significant in winning the Solomons Campaign that US Admiral William Halsey, commander of the South Pacific Area, said that, "the Coastwatchers saved Guadalcanal and Guadalcanal saved the Pacific."



1172. *American troops of the 160th Infantry Regiment rush ashore from a landing boat during amphibious training here. Guadalcanal, March 1, 1944. Preston. (Army)*

*Does the description of the Islanders as 'loyal' to the allied cause oversimplify Islanders' participation in the war?*

The success story of the Coastwatchers has been celebrated extensively. Numerous books have been written about how brave the Coastwatchers were and how significant their work was to the Allied victory in the Solomons Campaign. But details of the foundation of this success – the role played by local Solomon Islanders – have been under-reported and simplified. The 23 Coastwatchers in the Solomons archipelago (including Bougainville) relied heavily on the support of the local people. This widespread support is often referred to as simply “loyalty.”

When loyalty is highlighted this way, it raises the question, loyalty to whom, and why? The first part of the question is easy; Solomon Islanders were overwhelmingly loyal to the Coastwatchers and the Allies. Due to this loyalty, Coastwatchers were able to function effectively behind enemy lines, Allied soldiers were saved and the Allies won the campaign. But viewing Islander involvement through the Western lens of “loyalty” simplifies complex motivations. To an extent, the notion of loyalty implies that Islanders were unthinkingly submissive to their colonial “masters,” with a hierarchical connotation that is often racial in nature. But asking “why,” unlocks the complexities of the story that only Solomon Islanders can tell, and that is the side of the story that provides insight into the different motivations for islander involvement in the war.

*Can you describe some of the divergent motivations for Islanders to contribute to the war effort?*

Indigenous wartime involvement was inspired by various factors, some pushing through perceived duty or responsibility and some pulling through attraction. There was a sense of familiarity and obligation toward the longstanding British colonial administration, so despite Japanese propaganda casting themselves as anti-colonial liberators, when Japanese troops invaded the Solomons they were immediately regarded as outsiders and “enemies.” But the war was also a very new and exciting event that fuelled the curiosity of local men and prompted them to take part. The easy abundance of food in labour camps at Lunga and elsewhere was another draw, and the attraction of paid wages lured many men from their villages. There was also a sense of prestige attained from joining ranks with the Allied soldiers and sailors as fellow warriors.

But there were more coercive factors that drove local participation that shouldn't be ignored. Some Coastwatchers imposed harsh punishments upon mere suspicion of any sympathy for or collaboration with Japanese troops. This at times included casual behaviour by Islanders that was interpreted as suspicious. Punishments imposed by some Coastwatchers included severe beatings unrealistic for the “crime” committed. This was done with the intention to instil fear in the minds of locals, in order to deter contact of any sort with Japanese troops.



*How did the war impact post-war administration of the Islands? In what ways did the wartime experience contribute to the post-war anti-colonial movement?*

Prior to the war, the colonial government was headquartered on the small island of Tulagi. Upon the Japanese invasion it was moved out of harm's way, to Auki on Malaita. As soon as American forces landed on the island of Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942, the government moved to Lunga. Despite controversy, the post-war administration moved to Honiara (on Guadalcanal) where the capital city is currently located. This was to take advantage of war infrastructure, including Henderson Field (now the international airport), roads, and structures that were readily available. The placement of the capital on Guadalcanal planted the seeds for much of the problems that would eventually erupt into the "Tensions" of 1998-2002.

The war itself was an eyeopener for Islanders. It provided Islanders with the opportunity to interact with soldiers of different nationalities and race on a personal level that was not possible under the colonial administration. This made Islanders question their experiences and encounters with white members of the colonial government. For the first time Islanders were able to drive the same machines that white men drove, share the same food that white soldiers had, and feel a certain degree of empowerment. This exposure aggravated Islanders' grievances of inequality experienced under the colonial administration. So even during the war, Islanders

began to protest for an increase in their wages. From these feelings of inequality and injustice the famous socio-political movement Ma'asina Rule was formed. In the aftermath of the war, the fight for equality and recognition shifted to a fight for political autonomy from Great Britain, and 33 years after the war ended, the Solomon Islands finally gained independence (in 1978).

*In the Solomon Islands today, how is the war commemorated? What is the linkage between Islanders' war memorials and nation-building?*

War commemoration in the Solomon Islands has only recently shifted in focus to the remembrance of local participation in the war. Observances have always been the affair of the Americans or the Japanese, but recently the recognition of local involvement in the war was brought into annual commemorative events. This is because there is now more public awareness and education on the roles of Solomon Islanders during the war. Monument building is part of this awareness, and is a significant symbol of unity within a broader contemporary Solomon Islands society. This sense of unity was initiated by our ancestors during the difficult times of the war and grew throughout the journey to political independence. It is one of the pillars of our patriotism to our country. Islanders' war memorials, in this regard, are symbolic of a unified sense of nationhood, and gratitude to those who laid the foundation for Solomon Islands sovereignty.

# UXOs IN THE PACIFIC

by **Isabella Porras**

Hardly a three-hour flight from Brisbane lies the small island nation of the Solomon Islands. Known by very few Australians, the Solomon Islands played a crucial role in the Pacific fight in World War II. Now, years later, this small country still bears the scars of war - unexploded ordnances (UXOs) are left scattered throughout the Solomon Islands, including the bustling capital of Honiara.

Earlier in 2020 two people, Australian Trent Lee, 40, and British national Luke Atkinson, 57, were killed in a bomb blast in the Solomon Islands. Lee and Atkinson were working for Norwegian People's Aid, an organisation that operates in 19 countries to remove undetonated wartime explosives.

After WW2, the winning American forces were supposed to properly dispose of all unused munitions by dumping them deep in the ocean. This often didn't occur, and 76 years later these hidden killers remained close to shore and forgotten.

UXOs also pose a heavy threat to local villages in the Solomon Islands – the locals have adapted to the existence of UXOs and have developed methods of fishing with homemade munitions, sourced from the explosives. These UXOs are scattered around the hills of the capital Honiara, and fish-

ermen go in search of them to yield greater fish harvests. This proves detrimental to not only the fishermen that are killed by the unpredictable munitions and the homemade explosives, but to the environment surrounding the shores of the islands – coral reefs are damaged and often fish that are killed in the blast wash away before capture.

These resources dwindle as more and more fishermen source the piles of munitions, driving villagers dangerously further into the unmapped hills around Honiara to discover the explosives. Children looking for fun and adventure have also been caught up in the danger of the explosives, as the unmarked hills and forests conceal these UXO's. Local timber cutters now live in fear of venturing into the hills, lest they come upon or disturb a UXO, affecting their jobs and income.

Australian technical consultant Nik West expressed shock at the level of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) contamination when he started working with the Solomon Islands Electricity Authority. He quickly realized that everyone in Honiara considered running a metal detector over the area before digging to be normal. "We often unearth old bombs, both large and small, in this work. This area surrounding Honiara was hit by everything during the war... The end result is

there is a very large degree of ERW in this land. We are always using detectors, but despite that, one of my staff hit a large bomb once with a backhoe and unearthed it. The bomb did not explode, but it terrified the backhoe operator and he ran away home and was scared to come back to work.”

In total, an estimated 59 countries around the world have some level of landmine contamination and tens of millions of the deadly devices remain in the ground and active. The is-

lands in the Pacific most affected by unexploded and dumped munitions are Papua New Guinea, Palau and the Solomon Islands. Even other islands such as Vanuatu, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Tuvalu, Nauru and Kiribati are affected to some degree.

This dangerous legacy of WW2 has continued to impact Pacific communities making it difficult for villages to expand without the risk of running across a stray UXO.



*A fish bomber on Tulagi in the Solomon Islands lost his arm after using material from unexploded World War II munitions in a homemade bomb  
© John Rodsted*

# KAKUMA & COVID-19

By Kasun Ubayasiri and Rwango Kadafi

APRIL, 2020: At the onset of Africa's COVID outbreak, residents of the Kakuma refugee camp, one of the largest in the world, live in fear of infection as they struggle to access the most basic protections like soap and clean water. Their situation is exacerbated by the cramped living conditions which make social distancing all but impossible.

The Kakuma camp and Kalobeyi Integrated Settlement were first established in Kenya's remote northwest Turkana county in 1992, primarily as a place to house the 'Lost Boys' of Sudan – thousands of Nuer and Dinka boys, mostly orphans, who trekked thousands of kilometres across Sudan and Ethiopia fleeing war and famine. It is now home to 196,050 registered refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries including Congo, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.

While the Western world grapples with lockdowns and squabbles over mask wearing, the Kakuma families who have

already overcome war, famine and brutality, fear the pandemic is their biggest foe yet.

The following images are a collaboration between Brisbane based photo-journalist Kasun Ubayasiri and Kakuma based journalist Rwango Kadafi. They are an experimental trans-national collection of images crafted using limited resources at a time when overseas travel has virtually ceased.

Among other elements, the images pair textured over and underlays of our own concepts of home and health, with projected stills from videos filmed on a mobile phone to show family units in Kakuma frozen and captured with a feel reminiscent of old home movies or historical footage.

\*\*\*

Marie Mahoromez Africa(48) and her husband Rwabuzisoni Samuel (53) have lived in Kenya's Kakuma refugee settlement for more than 12 years. They left their village in the Kamonyi district in Rwanda's war torn Southern-province, due to persecution and threats to their lives.

*Image by Kasun Ubayasiri and  
Rwango Kadafi*

Marie Africa dreams of a life outside the refugee camp for her and her five children. With her life disrupted by war she is no stranger to crisis, but an unseen virus in her cramped neighborhood is an enemy she is not familiar with.



2020 COVID

Marie Africa has lived at the Katuma refugee camp with her husband and five children, since leaving their home in Southern Rwanda....



2020 COVID

Marie, her two sons Barikiwa Hyanic Bavon(18) and Mystere Irera Niyitegeka(9) and three daughters Ariel Perceverance Metra (12) Yesarahari Ebeneza Gloria (11) and Irakiranuka Jackine Promesse (6) say they are worried about the potential spread of COVID-19 in their overcrowded camp community.

“The poor sanitation makes us very vulnerable to coronavirus and other opportunistic disease. We have no water, no soap, and no health facilities,” she says. After 12 years in a refugee camp, Marie says what they need is “freedom from encampment.”

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*Image by Kasun Ubayasiri and  
Rwango Kadaf*

War widow ‘Mama Joy’ Nshimiyimana Beatrice (40) has lived in Kenya’s Kakuma refugee settlement with her daugh-

ter Joyce Furaha (12) and son Munguyiko Tegera (9) since fleeing her war-torn home in Northern Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She and the children fled their home after her husband was killed by rebel forces.

She now fears her family might starve in the coming months. “We are worried because we have no food security,” Mama Joy says explain.ing she and her two children are struggling to find food during the lockdown. “There’s no movement of people (and) we are starving because of coronavirus...” Mama Joy says,

“if someone can help me to sustain my family, I will definitely thank God.”

\*\*\*

Mama Joy and her two children fear they could starve as the novel coronavirus tightens its grip on the already impoverished refugee camp...



... the lock-down, affecting the poorest in the world, is felt even more acutely among refugee populations.

COVID



Musavimana Beatrice fear the virus will take her children, the only family she has left in the world. Beatrice is among nearly 200,000 refugees living a precarious existence in an overcrowded refugee camp that has become their home....

Musavimana Beatrice(40) fled her home in Giteranyi commune in Burundi's north-eastern province of Muyinga, afraid for her life.

"I fled because of racism - they wanted to kill me," she says. "I don't have any family members left in my country, all were killed. The only family I have now is my children, and now I don't have anything to support my life and family."

She has lived in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya since 2014 with her seven daughters Uwaysenga Joselyne (19) Nishimwe Emelyne(17) Umutoni Acilla(15) Adrina Veronica Mahoro (13) Masengesho Demantine (12) and Ndayizigiye Shang Celine(10); and her two sons Kwizera Amos (7) and Jacob Geofrery Munguiko (6).

For Beatrice, the spread of the pandemic in Kenya is a terrifying thought because she knows it could wipe her family out completely.

"Life is very difficult if Coronavirus comes in our family" she says. "We don't have (the) capacity to fight it, because we are not equipped with preventive materials... we don't have soap or enough water in our community."

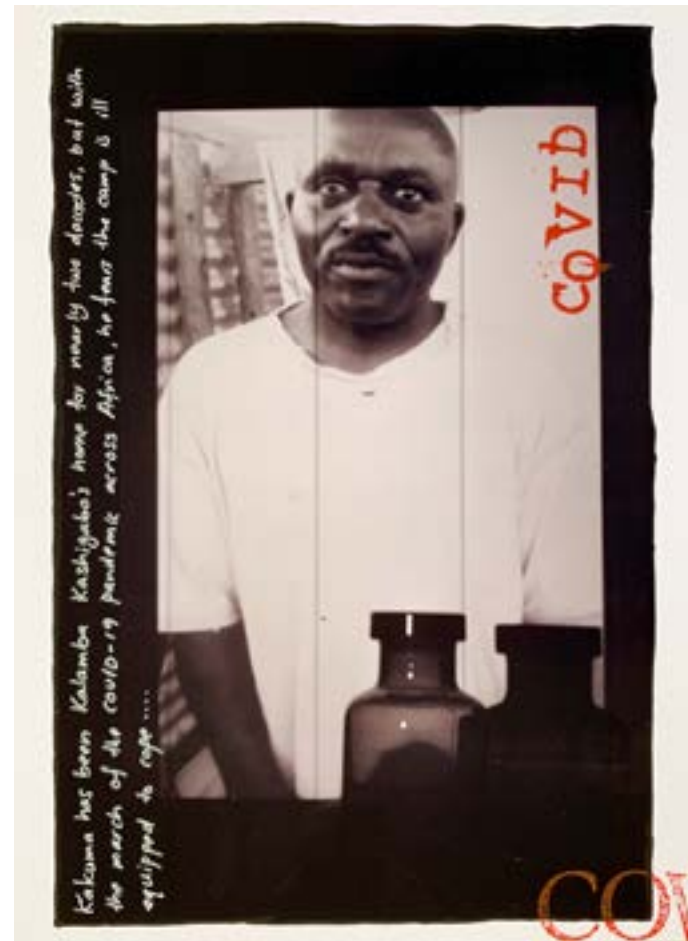
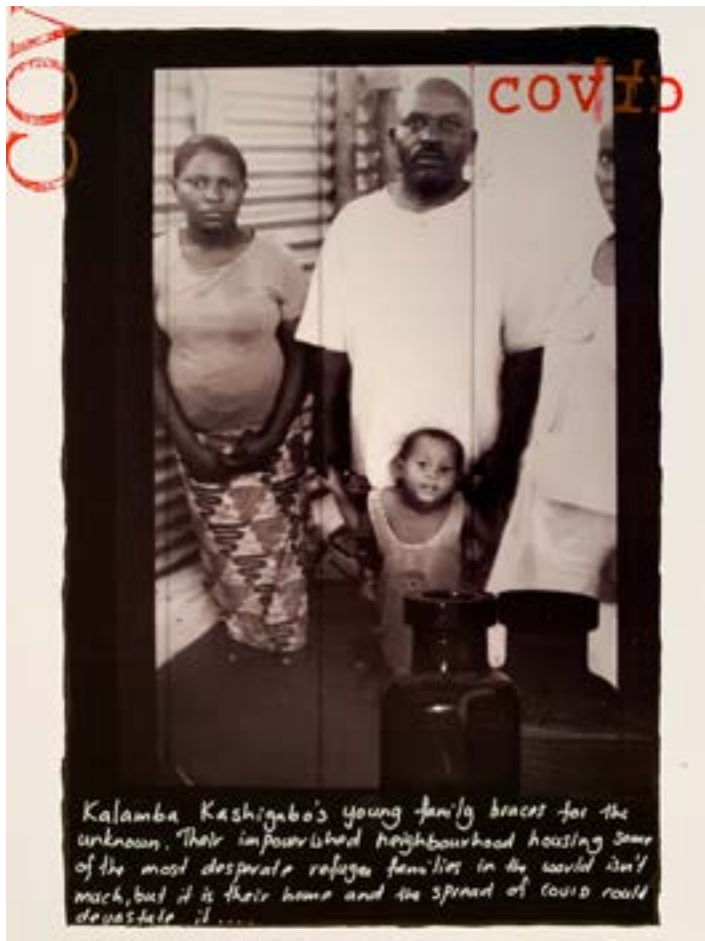
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Biamungu Kalamba Kashigabo (55) and his wife Jolie Bafunyembaka Furaini (21) have lived in the Kakuma refugee camp since 2001, after Kalamba fled his home in the Southern-Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. They live with their four-year old daughter Baraka

Gloria and mother-in-law Faida M'Rwagaza, 47).

“We have no water in this community and people shit everywhere. In a community with poor excreta disposal, sanitation is poor,” Kashigabo says. “We are worried covid-19 will finish us.”



Images by Kasun Ubayasiri and  
Rwango Kadafi

# EXILED PAIN

By Isabella Porras

Like many countries in South and Central America, peace is often fluctuating in and out of reach. Nicaragua is one such country; no stranger to revolution and uprising. For forty-three years, from 1936 to 1979, the country was ruled by the Somoza family. The Nicaraguan Revolution (1960's to 1970's) began as a result of the opposition to the Somoza dictatorship.

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) led the campaign with the intention of overthrowing the dictatorship. The violent civil unrest garnered much international attention which revealed the country to be one of the major 'proxy war' battlegrounds of the Cold War.

The overthrow of the Somoza regime, in 1978-79, was a bloody affair as the Sandinistas forcefully took power in July 1979. This was closely followed by the Contra War of the 1980's. The opposing parties: the FSLN (backed by the

*Streets of Managua, Nicaragua  
in 2017 weeks before civil unrest  
broke out again.  
Photo©Isabella Porras*



Soviets) and the Contras (backed by the USA) fought a bloody war for Nicaragua.

In 2018, as usually happens with a country constantly balancing on the scales of peace and war, unrest broke out against the former rebel liberators; the Sandinistas, as they found themselves becoming what they swore to destroy. Daniel Ortega, who has been the president since 2007, implemented social security reforms that saw a 5% tax increase to old-age and disabili-



ty pensions and increased the contributions paid by both employees and employers. The taxes were implemented to restock the country's social security accounts after Ortega allegedly ran them dry. A band aid solution for a larger corrupt problem.

The government was accused of using the National Social Security Institute (INSS) as a source of “petty cash”, which left many Nicaraguans’ feeling that pensioners and workers were now being forced to pay the price for government mismanagement.

After five days of unrest in 2018, in which nearly thirty people were killed, Ortega announced the cancellation of the reforms. However the opposition has grown to denounce Ortega, and demand his resignation, becoming one of the largest protests in his government's history and the deadliest civil conflict since the end of the Nicaraguan Revolution. On 29 September 2018, political demonstrations were declared illegal by President Ortega. Even in 2021 the country continues to exist in a state of unrest with ongoing disappearances and army and police violence.

Luciano Garcia is one of the many Nicaraguans who have experienced the political effects of the recent revolution. Garcia was the executive president of Hagamos Democracia, an organisation that aimed to “create a single voice of Nicaraguan exiles” and strengthen the

*Molotov Man*

*Photo©Susan Meiselas, 1979*

demands of opposition in Nicaragua. In 2018 the Ortega regime illegally cancelled its legal status.

Garcia was forced to leave Nicaragua after being informed that the Ortega regime had planned to launch an accusation against him, and look for an excuse to possibly murder him. He was forced to hide in a secure location while a formal accusation was published in the media by the regime. This painted him as a political dissident. After realising the situation would not improve, Garcia fled the country through

the mountains, arriving in a small town in Honduras where friends waited to help him into Costa Rica.

In his own words Garcia says: “The transition from having a normal life and suddenly having to flee and become a refugee is like going from day to night as my family and home were removed, and I had to leave to a new country where the customs are not my own. It’s an emotionally complex situation. I also feel like a prisoner because as a refugee you do not have the right or freedom to leave the host country without

permissions or fear of retribution from the government at home.”

The state of persecution and threats through social media and news outlets in Nicaragua continue against Garcia and other political refugees, making the likelihood of a return to his home country a complicated and unrealistic goal. For Garcia it would only be possible to return to Nicaragua if the current government could guarantee that those wrongly accused of crimes would not be accused again while under a sense of false amnesty. He also says: “The government would have to provide a guarantee that they will not attempt to murder me, and they will respect all my legal and human rights. Yet, under the current



*Streets of Managua, Nicaragua  
in 2017 weeks before civil unrest  
broke out again.  
Photo©Isabella Porras*

regime I see the conditions of my secure return very difficult to guarantee”

The future of Nicaragua is uncertain as violence continues against those fighting for a better society. Yet many, like Garcia continue to work towards this goal: “For me, peace means to live in a society where citizens’ rights are respected, social justice is promoted and where there exists a real State of Rights untarnished by dictatorship”.



## Personal Testimony

By Luciano Garcia

April 18, 2018 marked the beginning of a change that many of us expected, but it began the worst chapter of repression in the history of Nicaragua. Not even in Somoza’s regime had anything like it been seen before.

From the beginning of April until my departure to Honduras on July 25th, 2018, I was witness to the atrocities against unarmed people. Persecution, torture, assassinations by hitmen, disappearances, imprisonment of innocents, mass exiles of young people and families... in short, something terrifying for thousands of Nicaraguans. On the 25th of July 2020, I completed two years of exile and I still haven’t recovered from the pain and loneliness of living in a country where the customs are different from yours. Where protesting for your country is not the same, where you see people without decent work, hungry and

sleeping on the floor and in parks suffering from the cold. It only makes you think that all this pain is not fair.

I have never promoted nor will I promote any war or exits from power that are not within the framework of legality - and so I will always promote that the departure of the current dictator Ortega is a right that Nicaraguans have to demand. To ask for elections that come with electoral reforms that guarantee the transparency of the process is a legitimate right in the face of so many injustices and repression. We are a failed state. That is our pain to bear, as exiles who demand the prompt and orderly departure of Ortega. We cannot and must not continue with this pain once again. Once again Nicaraguan families are divided, and today more than ever our country needs the help of international communities. They are the only ones who can advocate awareness for the suffering of our repressed and persecuted Nicaraguan people. We are obliged to rebuild the rule of law as the only available weapon against this dictator.

*Luciano Garcia*



## **Minsk**

*A woman waves a red and white flag, adopted by the Belarusian opposition, from the window of an apartment block high above massed crowds of demonstrators who have come onto the streets to voice their opposition to the 2020 presidential election result, the Belarusian government, and above all President Alexander Lukashenko.*

# AWAKENING OF BELARUS

By Iva Zimova

The first time I visited Belarus was in 2007. I was photographing activists and dissidents for the Czech non-profit organization People in Need. Even then, thousands of people, mostly students, were protesting against the Lukashenko regime that had taken power in what many Western governments believed was a rigged election in March, 2006.

Then I forgot about Belarus. As the 2020 presidential election was approaching, I had the feeling that this time Lukashenko, who had been in power for 26 years, would not be able to continue to be the sixth President of Belarus.

I applied for press accreditation at the beginning of June. Like all journalists who applied for short-term accreditation, I was not successful, despite constant calls to the commission that decides on accreditation.

On August 9, I observed the presidential election in front of the Belarusian embassy in Prague, where over 500 Belarusians who live in the Czech Republic came to elect their president. The queue was very long, the Summer temperature was in the 30s, and the line moved slowly – people were waiting between five and seven hours to cast their vote. Out of 500 people, only 200 managed to vote.

In the votes from the Czech Republic, the opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya won. Tikhanovskaya took up the candidacy when opposition candidates, including her husband Sergei Tikhanovsky, a blogger, were jailed or forced into exile ahead of the elections.

The Belarus Central Election Commission declared the incumbent president Aleksandr Lukashenko the winner of the election, with 80.08% of the vote. Svetlana Tikhanovskaya received 10.09%. It was clear that the elections were falsified. People took to the streets of Belarus to protest, as they had in preceding elections. Riot police, known as OMON, also took to the streets, trying to stop demonstrations by brutal violence.

Somewhat naively, I still hoped that I would get press accreditation. After weeks of waiting, I decided that even without accreditation, I would fly to Minsk, the capital of Belarus. The day before my departure, 22 non-accredited journalists were not allowed to enter Belarus. I decided to try my luck anyway.

I arrived the day before the second Sunday demonstration against the elections, which brought together over 200,000 Belarusians, demanding free and fair elections and that Belarus be free of the last dictator in Europe.



## Minsk

*An activist holds a sign that reads: Leave (ukhadi) during a rally on Independence Square. More than 100,000 protesters hold mass rally in Minsk demanding the resignation of Belarus' authoritarian president Alexander Lukashenko.*





## Minsk

*A protestor holds a photo of the bruised bodies of demonstrators who were detained and repeatedly beaten by the police in their crackdown on post-election anti-Lukashenko protests.*



## Maladzyechna

*People carry the coffin of Nikita Krivco. Nikita waved a red and white flag, adopted by the Belarusian opposition, in front of Security forces during protests that erupted following the presidential election that was widely perceived as rigged in favour of Alexander Lukashenko. Then Nikita disappeared. His badly beaten body was found hanging in a forest park on Parnikovaya Street ten days later, on 22 August 2020.*



## Maladzyechna

*The mother of Nikita Krivcov weeps over his flag-draped coffin at his funeral. Krivtsov disappeared after the 12 August 2020 protests that erupted following the presidential election that was widely perceived as rigged in favour of Alexander Lukashenko. His badly beaten body was found hanging in a forest park on Parnikovaya Street ten days later, on 22 August 2020.*

*The mother and Nikita's friends do not believe that Nikita committed suicide.*



## Minsk

*White flowers, placed in a sculpture's arm, symbolize the earlier women's march against police brutality.*



## Minsk

Svetlana Alexievich surrounded by journalists as she prepares to attend a Committee of Inquiry where she had been summoned for questioning. Svetlana Alexievich is a member of the Presidium - the 'Coordination Council' that was formed by the Opposition to oversee a peaceful transition of power following the presidential elections that were generally considered as rigged in favour of Alexander Lukashenko.



## **Minsk**

*Security forces in riot gear block a road into the city centre to stop democracy activists opposing the Lukashenko government gathering for a protest.*



## Minsk

*More than 100,000 protesters were involved in the rally in central Minsk, demanding the resignation of the authoritarian president Alexander Lukashenko and the implementation of a multi-party political system.*



## **Minsk**

*A woman protestor holds a photo of Lukashenko displaying the year he became president and the year when she thinks he should step down.*



# AUTHORS & STORY SUMMARIES

“Awakening of Belarus” by Iva Zimova -

Photojournalist Iva Zimova documents the demonstrations in response to the recent Belarus election, investigating the demands of Belarusians against the allegedly falsified election and the responding police violence against protestors.

Zimova lives for her photography and uses her manifested talent in the service of the persecuted and the forgotten - born in former Czechoslovakia, Iva graduated from the School of Industrial Art in Jablonec nad Nisou. In 1982 she emigrated to Canada where she studied at the Dawson College Institute of Photography, and then continued her study at Concordia University.

“Deebing Creek” by Margot Stewart

“Deebing Creek” explores the spiritual and generational protest by Indigenous activists against international housing development plans on a sacred Indigenous mission site in the suburb of Deebing Heights.

Margot Stewart is a fourth-year Bachelor of Photography student at Queensland College of Art, with her studies

grounded in photographic art as a means to express creativity and challenge the standard. Her interest lies within portraying visually striking and impactful stories which navigate and cross boundaries and borders.

“Exiled Pain” by Isabella Porras -

Isabella Porras investigates the ongoing state of revolution in Nicaragua, exploring the personal effects of revolution through an interview with a refugee, Luciano Garcia, who was exiled from Nicaragua.

Isabella Porras majors in Documentary Photography at the Queensland College of Art, her work centers around exploring Australian identity, migration and personal life.

“Kakuma & COVID-19” by Kasun Ubayasiri and Rwango Kadafi -

“Kakuma” is a collaboration between Brisbane based photojournalist Kasun Ubayasiri and Kakuma based journalist

Rwango Kadafi, investigating in real-time the conditions of the Kakuma refugee camp amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Kasun Ubayasiri is a senior lecturer and Program Director of Journalism at Griffith University, Queensland Australia. His research focuses on the role of journalism in Human rights including environmental rights, news media in armed conflict, and media censorship and its impact on democratic accountability.

“Leopards, Wolves and other Foul Things” by Rhett Kleine -

Photojournalist Rhett Kleine documents the lives of Changpa nomads, and how their practices and ways of living are changing due to the effects of climate change in the region.

Rhett Kleine is a photo and text-based journalist, Rhett recently acted as assistant managing editor for The Argus before coming on for the founding of MiddleGround. His work aims to strike a deeper chord, telling the stories of individuals and tying them into national and global stories - pairing contextual information with a dedication to evoking empathy.

“Controls on War” by John Rodsted

For SafeGround’s ‘Stay in Command’ Podcast series John Rodsted interviewed Paul Barratt, an expert in the field of Australia’s Department of Defence, collecting his inside view on policy and decision making within the force.

“Quarrying a Slippery Land in God’s Own Country” by Siddhant Vashistha

Siddhant Vashistha covers the increasing number of natural disaster-based deaths in the Indian state of Kerala, thought to be worsened by the increased quarrying and the refusal of the government to listen to protestors about these issues.

Siddhant Vashistha is a third-year student of journalism. He’s an environmentalist at heart and loves to debate ideas. He also enjoys observing the dance of nature.

“SafeGround calls for red lines amid Australia’s autonomous weapons development” By Matilda Byrne

Matilda Byrne urges Australian policy makers to ensure meaningful human control over the deployment of lethal force, regarding the weaponisation of artificial intelligence within the Australian Department of Defence.

“Treaty on the Prohibition on Nuclear Weapons Entered into Force” by Lorel Thomas

Lorel Thomas explores the resistance of the Australian Government to join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in addition to their unwillingness to even engage in productive moves to rid the world of nuclear weapons, and the danger this stance poses.

Lorel was with SafeGround for 20 years and National Coordinator for 10. She now volunteers with a number of peace and social justice organisations.

“UXOs in the Pacific” and interview with Annie Kwai by Isabealla Porras and Catherine Putz

Exploring the Solomon Islanders wartime contributions from an Indigenous perspective, an interview with Annie Kwai is followed by an exposition on the risks UXOs still pose to Pacific communities by Isabella Porras.

Annie Kwai is a historian who has recently launched her book “Solomon Islanders in World War II: An Indigenous perspective”. The book is the first ever written by a Solomon Islander about the events of the Second World War.