

SEPTEMBER 2020: ISSUE #4

# AUSTRALIA AT THE UN



Photo courtesy: UN Photo/Evan Schneider



## Message from Ambassador The Hon Mitch Fifield

The absence of world leaders and international delegations at this year's Leaders' Week made for a much more subdued atmosphere.

But while pre-recorded statements may lack the excitement and unpredictability of a live address, this year's backdrop of a global pandemic meant the messages from those leading national and international response efforts were more important than ever.

As all nations confront this uniquely global crisis, I was particularly encouraged by the appeals from every corner of the globe for greater international cooperation and multilateralism.

This is perhaps because so many UN agencies continue to play a critical role in pandemic response. From the WHO guiding the health response, to the World Food Programme providing vital humanitarian deliveries, UN efforts haven't gone unnoticed by the international community.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, I'm proud of Australia's achievements at Leaders' Week this year.

Australia advocated for timely and equitable access to a COVID-19 vaccine in the Pacific; reaffirmed our strong commitment to the Responsibility to Protect principle as a way of preventing mass atrocity crimes; demonstrated Australia's willingness to push back on targeted disinformation campaigns; and championed LGBTI rights through our membership of the UN's LGBTI Core Group.

Throughout UNGA75, Australia will continue our advocacy on these and a number of other important issues.

We look forward to working productively with all Member States during the UNGA Committee season.

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- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's UNGA address
- Australia's UN Youth Representative
- Concern over COVID-19 disinformation



## 'Our common hope' - Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison addresses the UN General Assembly

**In the competition for best UNGA backdrop, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was a top contender.**

Delivering his General Debate address from the lawn of Kirribilli House, the Sydney Opera House gleaming in the background, the Prime Minister began his remarks by noting that the COVID crisis has reminded us of our shared humanity.

Amid a global pandemic and worsening economic crisis, the Prime Minister outlined the steps Australia has taken to combat the virus, including the national COVIDsafe action plan, and investments in the health and hospital system, alongside new testing, tracing and outbreak containment capabilities.

As vaccine trials progress around the world, the Prime Minister echoed similar warnings issued by the WHO and Secretary-General Guterres for nations to avoid 'vaccine nationalism'. The Prime Minister made Australia's view on fair and equitable access to vaccines clear.

"Whoever finds the vaccine must share it. This is a global responsibility, and it's a moral responsibility, for a vaccine to be shared far and wide.

"Some might see short term advantage, or even profit. But I assure you to anyone who may think along those lines, humanity will have a very long memory and be a very, very severe judge," the Prime Minister said.

Having advocated strongly for the independent review into the global response to the pandemic, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Australia's support for the WHO-led review.

A record 145 countries co-sponsored the World Health Assembly resolution establishing the review, providing a clear mandate to independently evaluate the response and identify the zoonotic source of the virus, including how it was transmitted to humans.



Building on Australia's co-authoring of a joint statement on the dangers of COVID-19 disinformation, the Prime Minister warned of the dangers of targeted disinformation campaigns which sow fear and division.

While there has been speculation that the COVID crisis may tempt countries to look inward, Australia remains committed to the international rules-based order, including mechanisms governing global trade and multilateral cooperation.

Prime Minister Morrison described Australian efforts to lead reform of the World Trade Organization, including advocating for trade rules that are "predictable, transparent and non-discriminatory" and helping design the first-ever set of global digital trade rules.

As Australia nears the end of its term on the UN Human Rights Council, Prime Minister Morrison expressed Australia's ongoing commitment – as a modern, liberal democracy – to promoting universal values like human rights, gender equality and the rule of law.

"I'm proud that we've raised our voice and been heard on important issues like the rights of women and girls, the rights of Indigenous peoples, and the global abolition of the death penalty," he said.

Concluding his address, the Prime Minister struck a positive note, arguing that in the face of one of the greatest global challenges since 1945, UN Member States must "commit again" to realising the "common hope that binds us all together".

Prime Minister Morrison's full remarks are available to [read here](#).

## Introducing Australia's 2020-21 UN Youth Representative: Lucy Stronach

**As the COVID-19 crisis continues, much of the work to respond and recover from the pandemic is taking place now.**

But due to the unprecedented scale of the crisis, it is likely that future generations will still be addressing the consequences and ramifications of the pandemic for years to come.

It is therefore critical that young people have a say in the decisions that affect them, including by having a platform at the United Nations.

The UN Youth Representative Program was established in 1999 by UN Youth Australia (*fun fact*: Australia's first UN Youth Representative was Andrew Hudson, who all these years later leads [Crisis Action](#) in New York).

Each year, UN Youth Australia undertakes an extensive selection process to identify the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations. In 2020-21, that person is Lucy Stronach.

Taking on the role amid a global pandemic has been an immense challenge.

We spoke to Lucy about how she has adapted the UN Youth Representative program to the virtual environment and how she plans to bring the views and perspectives of Australian youth to the international stage.

### **What exactly is the role of Australia's UN Youth Representative?**

Appointed annually by UN Youth Australia and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations undertakes Australia's largest consultation of young people.

From December 2020, I'll be embarking on a six-month long Listening Tour, heading to some of the most rural communities and urban centres of every state and territory in the country.

During the Listening Tour, I'll gather data on what issues young people care most about, the future they want to build, and work to involve them in being key drivers in decision and change-making.



I'll then have the incredible opportunity to deliver these ideas and solutions straight to policy and decision makers across Australia and internationally.

Come next year (and if COVID permits), I'll be travelling to New York to speak to the UN General Assembly, based on what the youth of Australia relay to me.

### **Why do you think it's important to have youth voices and perspectives represented at the UN?**

Historically, youth have struggled to get their voices heard and to have decision-makers listen to what areas we seek to improve.

Yet, youth voices are so crucial to creating just policy and practices, and a fairer future.

Young people represent some of the most engaged and educated voices in the world, and I've never seen such passion for change as I do now.

The UN provides a unique platform for states to engage multilaterally and develop some of the most comprehensive international standards on so many crucial issues.

When young people have the opportunity to speak or be represented at the UN, it gives us hope that decision makers may improve on giving us a real say in the policies and practices that shape our lives.

Young people need and deserve a seat at the table, and a role like the Youth Rep gives us this.

## How are you approaching the role? What do you hope to achieve?

Moving forward, it is my number one priority to ensure that as many diverse, underrepresented and voiceless young Australians have a platform to share their stories and their needs.

I believe 2021 is the year for massive, tangible change to the systems that govern our lives.

During my program, young Australians will not just be involved in discussing issues but instead focusing on developing solutions.

These solutions will be driven by young people and based on best practice and available evidence to ensure they are taken seriously by policymakers around the country.

I'll also be asking the following question during the Listening Tour: *'What would Australia look like if young people were the key drivers of decision making?'*

I hope that I can achieve a few goals during my program: to raise awareness and educate young people on the importance of evidence-based practice; to foster better relationships and information sharing between young people, policy-makers and organisations/institutions working on critical issues; and to present real, tangible solutions (created and developed by young people) to some of the biggest issues facing us today.

## What does the UN Youth Representative role look like in practice? And how has your work been impacted by COVID-19?

Right now I'm doing a lot of networking, ensuring I liaise with diverse groups and individuals so the Listening Tour can be truly representative of all Australian youth.

At this stage, there is a lot of planning and logistics work occurring. But come December I'll be hitting the road in Western Australia for the Listening Tour in the hope state borders will open by 2021!

COVID-19 has had a very unique impact on my role. I actually found out I was the Youth Rep in December 2019 and was working towards the 2020 program until the pandemic struck.



Naturally, the typical Listening Tour was delayed, but I've been given an incredible opportunity through this, including the time to really prepare myself and my team for the 2021 program.

In the absence of a 2020 program, myself and another UN Youth volunteer were also able to start a very exciting new project, **a podcast titled 'For the Future'**.

This podcast has allowed us to continue to empower, engage and educate young people whilst giving them a platform to speak up about the issues they find most concerning.

## The UN turns 75 this year, how do you think young Australians view the UN? Do we need to do more to engage young Australians in the work of the UN?

Despite the immense and systematic challenges facing us, young people are hopeful, and I know the UN is an institution that works to foster that hope.

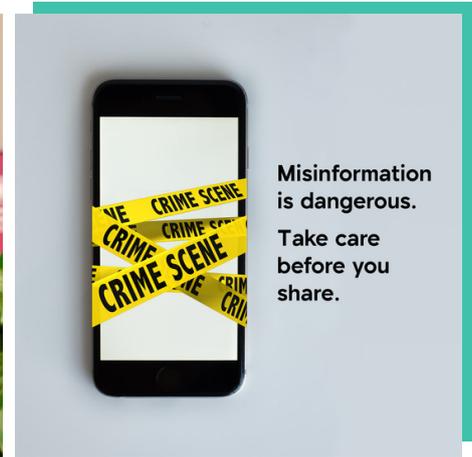
However, I think young Australians can find the UN somewhat intimidating and perhaps an institution they can't get involved with until much further into their careers and lives.

I'd love to see a breaking down of those barriers and misconceptions through greater education/awareness raising amongst young Australians.

I do think more could be done to highlight the crucial role young people play in the work of the UN and how they can contribute, which is something I'm endeavouring to assist with during my role.

Follow Lucy's journey as Australia's UN Youth Representative on Twitter [@Lucy\\_Stronach\\_](#)

You can also listen to the first episodes of the 'For the Future' podcast [here](#).



## Australia's Foreign Minister expresses concern about COVID-19 disinformation

**The Alliance for Multilateralism is an informal network of countries committed to the international rules-based order and multilateral institutions.**

The Alliance aims to protect and preserve international norms, agreements and institutions, and advocates for reforms designed to deliver a more inclusive and effective multilateral system.

Led by the Foreign Ministers of Germany and France, the Alliance held a virtual side-event in the margins of Leaders' Week this month focused around four themes: climate, health, digital and gender.

Speaking on the digital theme, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne acknowledged that the pandemic had led many of us to embrace new, digitally enabled ways of working which would have impacts beyond the virus' lifetime.

But while there had been some benefits in the shift online, the Foreign Minister was clear that some had chosen to take advantage of the COVID crisis to harm others.

This includes malign actors who have used this opportunity to pursue their own financial, political or strategic gain.

The Foreign Minister expressed particular concern over the spread of disinformation.

"Disinformation undermines countries' efforts to contain the virus and to save lives. COVID-19 related misinformation and disinformation can undermine public health responses and threaten social cohesion," Minister Payne warned.

Australia commended efforts by the WHO and the United Nations to combat dangerous dis- and misinformation, including the "Stop the Spread" and "Verified" campaigns.

Accurate, verified and attributed information is key to combatting disinformation online and these campaigns are two examples of concrete action to address this issue.

Recognising that social media respects no boundaries, the Foreign Minister called on "all of us" – the international community, international organisations, regional institutions and the private sector – to demonstrate a strong global response.

