

MARGARET JOAN ANSTEE

Never Learn to Type

A WOMAN AT THE UNITED NATIONS



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Photo of Margaret Anstee: Robert Michael Schuster

Dame Margaret Anstee served the United Nations (UN) for over four decades (1952–93), and, in 1987, was the first woman to achieve the rank of Under Secretary-General. She worked on operational programmes of economic and social development in all regions of the world, mostly with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). From 1987–92 she served as Director-General of the UN at Vienna, Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and Co-ordinator of all UN narcotic drug control programmes. From 1992–3 she was the Secretary-General's Special Representative to Angola, the first woman to head a UN peacekeeping mission including its military component.

Dame Margaret served successively as Resident Representative of UNDP in eight countries, in Asia, Latin America and Africa. From 1974–87 she occupied senior positions at UN headquarters in New York and was also given special responsibility for a number of disaster relief programmes, including the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the Mexican earthquake of 1985 and the Kuwait oil wells of 1991.

From 1967–8 Dame Margaret served as Senior Economic Adviser to Harold Wilson in the Prime Minister's Office of the Government of the United Kingdom.

Dame Margaret was educated at Newnham College, Cambridge, of which she is an Honorary Fellow. She continues to work *ad honorem* for the UN and for the President and Government of Bolivia. Amongst other activities she is a member of Jimmy Carter's International Council for Conflict Resolution.

Previous books by the same author

The Administration of International Development Aid, The Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York, 1969.

Gate of the Sun: A Prospect of Bolivia, Longman, London, 1970.

Bolivia: Gate of the Sun, Erikson, New York, 1971 (American edition).

Africa and the World, A Haile Selassie Prize Trust Symposium, edited jointly with R.K.A. Gardiner and C.L. Patterson, Oxford University Press, 1970.

Orphan of the Cold War: The Inside Story of the Angolan Peace Process, 1992–3, Macmillan Press, London, 1996.

(American edition of same name, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1996. Portuguese edition, *Orfão da Guerra Fria: Radiografia do Colapso do Processo de Paz Angolano 1992–3*, Campo das Letras, Oporto, 1997).

'What a life! She strode – and occasionally stumbled – across Development, the UN and the men in her life with a style, intelligence and curiosity reminiscent of those extraordinary Victorian women explorers. She is one of those redoubtable Englishwomen for whom England was always a size too small.'

Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator, United Nations Development Programme

'As a leading international civil servant, Margaret Anstee has lived with the great themes of post-war history: poverty, conflict and the unending difficulty of limiting either. But she also writes of romance and travel, friendship and daily incident – even about making herself a ball-gown out of a parachute and dancing the night away.'

Onora O'Neill, Principal, Newnham College, Cambridge

'An intelligent and courageous human being, Dame Margaret Anstee is also a wonderful writer. She vividly presents for us the adventures she has experienced, the battles she has won and lost and the fascinating people she has encountered along the way.'

Gerald J. Bender, Professor (and former Director), School of International Relations, University of Southern California, and former President of the African Studies Association

'The preamble of the UN Charter announces the commitment of the Peoples of the United Nations to, among other things, "reaffirm the faith in the fundamental dignity and worth of the human person" and "promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". No one has lived for these principles more selflessly or diligently than Margaret Anstee. Her life of service to the global community is inspirational, and her story is highly recommended to anyone interested in the remarkable development of the UN since 1945.'

Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States of America

'Margaret Joan Anstee is a true pioneer of the international community. Her career spans more than half a century's service across four continents. The first woman to be appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, she has made an enormous and enduring contribution to the UN family – and continues to do so to this day. With this memoir, she offers an account of a rich and fascinating life, as well as the kind of insight only the insider can provide into the nature of conflict, development and the work for peace.'

Kofi A. Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations

'Margaret Anstee's memoir provides insight into the problems women face in the man's world of the United Nations. Yet the real world is at least half a woman's world. Women, as she says, have a great deal to contribute.'

Rt Hon. Shirley Williams, leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords

'To succeed as a woman in the upper reaches of the UN you need to be intelligent and rather stubborn. As Foreign Secretary I knew that [Margaret] Joan Anstee was both. I could guess at the difficulties with which she wrestled in the labyrinth of UN Headquarters and later as she struggled on behalf of us all to bring peace to Angola. But until I read this dramatic book I had no notion of the earlier struggles which brought her from a village green in Essex through Cambridge, the Foreign Office, the Labour Party and Downing Street, to the centre of international life in the UN.'

The Rt Hon. Lord Hurd of Westwell CH CBE PC (Douglas Hurd, former UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs)

'[Margaret] Joan Anstee's varied and exciting career in national and international service has been primarily a search for the economic and social sources of greater

security and equity in the world. Her book also provides an unusual, and refreshingly specific, account of the United Nations in action and of its unsung but significant achievements as well as its better known shortcomings.'

Sir Brian Urquhart, former Under Secretary-General of the United Nations

'An engrossing story, told with deep conviction as well as a sharp eye for describing a wide range of societies and people. A personal – as well as a political – adventure story, Dame Margaret's memoir paints a revealing portrait of life on the frontlines of the engagement between the developed and developing worlds.' *Chester A. Crocker, Professor at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, Washington, and former US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs*

'During 41 years of UN service Margaret Anstee visited 130 member states and always her strong sense of adventure comes through. Not for her the stuffiness of maps and reference books, this is a writer who sets off up rivers, into the plains, mountains and deserts to get to the heart of a country. This is a remarkable story told by a remarkable lady.'

Rt. Hon Peter Hain, MP, Secretary of State for Wales (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1999–2002)

'Dame Margaret Anstee has made an outstanding contribution to development, peace-keeping and conflict resolution over four decades. Her achievements are truly inspirational.'

The Rt Hon. Jack Straw MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

'A truly absorbing account of achievement and adventure, by a remarkable woman trail-blazing in the once pinstriped world of international diplomacy. Margaret Anstee wisely never learned to type – but she certainly knows how to write in a way that engages and holds the reader's attention from beginning to end.'

The Rt Hon. The Lord Howe of Aberavon CH QC (Geoffrey Howe, former UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Deputy Prime Minister)

'Dame Margaret Anstee's story begins in rural England and describes the breaking down of the barriers of gender discrimination in a man's world, of facing the challenges of development in the third world, especially in Bolivia, and of conflict resolution and peace-keeping in the globalised world. A story written with wit, charm and affection about a life devoted to the evolution of the United Nations where she achieved the position of Under Secretary-General.'

Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, President of Bolivia

'Margaret Joan Anstee is the first woman to have headed a United Nations peace-keeping mission and her experience for over four decades in the UN is unique. Her book *Never Learn to Type* is a remarkable and entertaining account of her adventures in many parts of the world.'

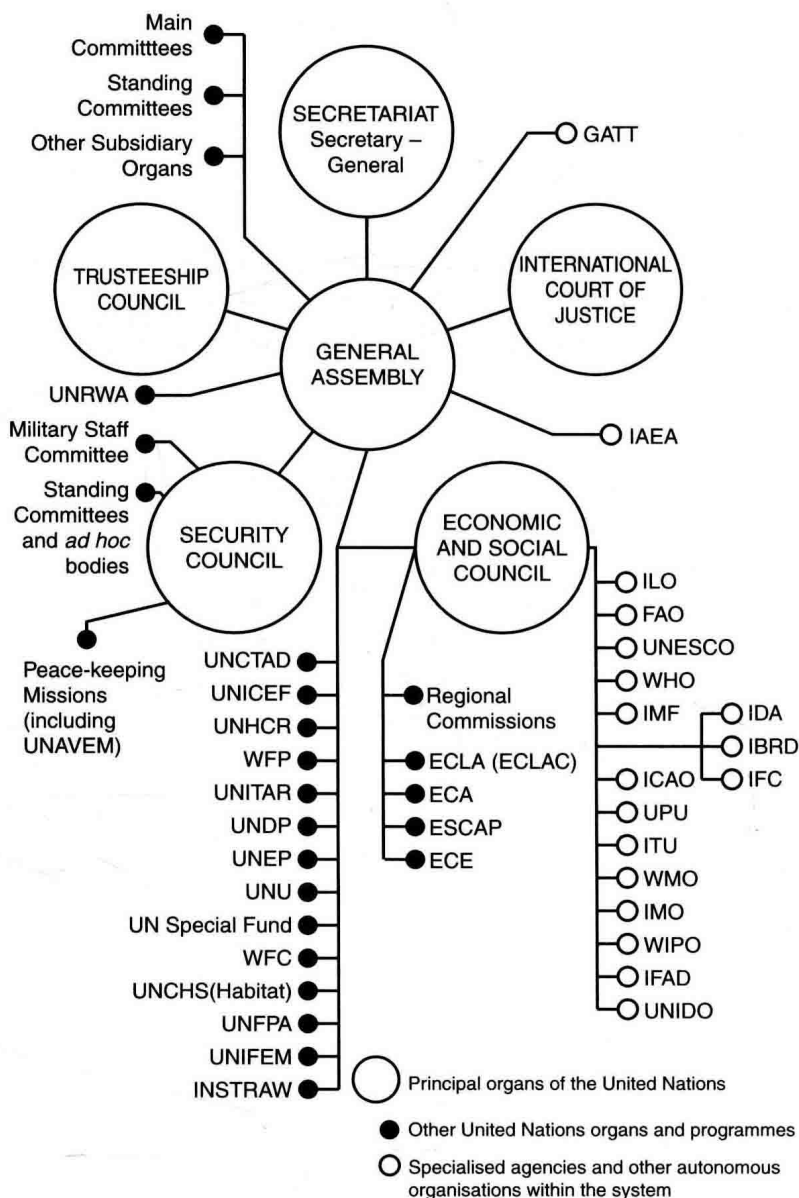
Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

'I am very pleased to have a new opportunity to express my gratitude to Margaret for the remarkable services she rendered for 41 years to the United Nations. In my 10 years as Secretary-General, my experience with her was extraordinary. Her affection, intelligence and strength to achieve her goals always had my admiration and support. On many occasions her actions as Secretary-General's Special Representative were very successful and helpful for different countries.'

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

For my beloved parents, and for Christina, my aunt,
without whose love and constant support and
encouragement none of the rest would have been
possible.

The United Nations System



This is a simplified chart of the United Nations System designed to assist the readers of this book. The full titles of the organisations mentioned in the text are given in the List of Acronyms on page 520.

Preface

As a child I dreamed of roaming the world, a wild ambition for a small girl in an English country village, likely to leave school at 14 and whose career horizon might have been expected to be limited to a job in the nearest town and marriage to a local boy. Even my wildest dreams could not foresee that I would live in a dozen countries, visit over 130 more, and wander in some of the remotest places in the world. Now, as I write in my home in Bolivia, looking out over the vivid blue waters of Lake Titicaca to the shimmering white peaks of the Cordillera Real of the Andes that girdle this magical world, I realise once again how extraordinarily lucky I have been.

I was given the opportunity to surmount barriers that women had never previously been allowed to cross and eventually became the first woman to rise through the ranks of the United Nations to the highest level under the Secretary-General, that of Under Secretary-General. During my 41 years service I was involved in some of the major events of my lifetime – processes of profound social change, wars, revolutions and catastrophes, both natural and man-made.

Along the years many people have asked me to write my experiences. I was always too busy. I still am, but in this book have at last tried to do so, conscious, in the evocative words of Gabriel García Márquez, at the beginning of his own memoirs, that '*La vida no es la que uno vivió, sino la que recuerda, y cómo la recuerda para contarla*' – 'Life is not the one you lived, but the one you remember, and how you remember it when you tell the tale.'

Memory is selective, mine evidently not sufficiently so, for many incidents and anecdotes have had to be excised from this book, for reasons of space, and in order not to try the reader's patience excessively.

There have been many challenges along the way and, inevitably, setbacks and disappointments as well as successes, sadness and sometimes tragedy, as well as moments of great happiness. Through it all I have been buoyed up by my mother's favourite dictum, relentlessly drilled into me during my childhood: 'Never say your mother had a jibber.' I would have liked it to be the title of this book but was advised that no one would understand it. For me the meaning has always been crystal-clear. A jibber is a horse that jibs at a fence and my dear mother was determined that I should take my fences head-on. Her words have echoed throughout my life, long after she was dead. As this volume may show, I have continued to charge at fences, when it might have been more prudent to walk round the side, sometimes knocking off the top rail, often falling into the water on the other side.

The title that now adorns this book is a dictum that I invented for myself and have also stuck to throughout my career. I was lucky enough to study at one of the most prestigious universities in the world at a time when places for women were severely limited. Subsequent career openings for women with arts degrees, even those with first-class honours, were sparse indeed, apart from teaching. Many of my peers had to take secretarial courses and became high-powered assistants to men often not as bright or as qualified as themselves. I decided very early on that I would never learn to type, in order to avoid a similar fate. Nowadays, in our computer-dominated world, everyone has to learn to type to some degree, including men. But in my day the dictum served me well.

When you reach a 'certain age', especially in a life as varied as mine, you feel the need to assess whether it has all been haphazard and a matter of chance and coincidence, or whether some pattern has informed it. That is what I have tried to do in these pages. Three main streams seem to run through them, sometimes on the surface, sometimes as barely discernible undercurrents.

Conflict and war have certainly been recurrent themes. My coming into the world was the result of a chance encounter brought about by the circumstances of the 1914–18 Great War. My early childhood was overshadowed by the intense fear of war and was then very nearly brought to an untimely end by the Second

World War. Fears of an even more deadly conflagration loomed over my four decades with the United Nations and, although that fortunately did not happen, the Cold War effectively blocked many endeavours to improve world security in its widest sense. After that came to an end, I finished my formal career leading a doomed peace-keeping mission, trying to resolve a vicious civil war in Angola. Many activities relating to the resolution of conflicts continue to occupy me to this day.

It is not surprising, then, that so much of my life has been taken up by the United Nations, the second continuous element. I joined it when both the organisation and I were very young, as a local field staff member in a programme that was only just beginning. It was a heady period when, fired by the optimism of youth and the ideals enshrined in the United Nations Charter, many of us thought, perhaps naively, that together we might really help to change the world. That vision was to be tempered by sober experience. Yet many years of fieldwork in all developing regions, and my subsequent senior posts at Headquarters, allowed me to take part in many rewarding areas of the United Nations work: political, economic, social and humanitarian. I was also able to follow the many vicissitudes that dogged the organisation, as well as the changes that have enabled it to survive to this day.

The third stream reflects the perspective of a woman who, by chance, found herself challenging deeply rooted beliefs and traditions that had hitherto circumscribed a woman's role in international affairs. In my tomboy childhood I bitterly resented the disadvantages that I perceived the female condition to entail. Later I learned to hold my own in what was then very much a man's world and took part in the evolution of woman's place in that world, as I hope this book will also show.

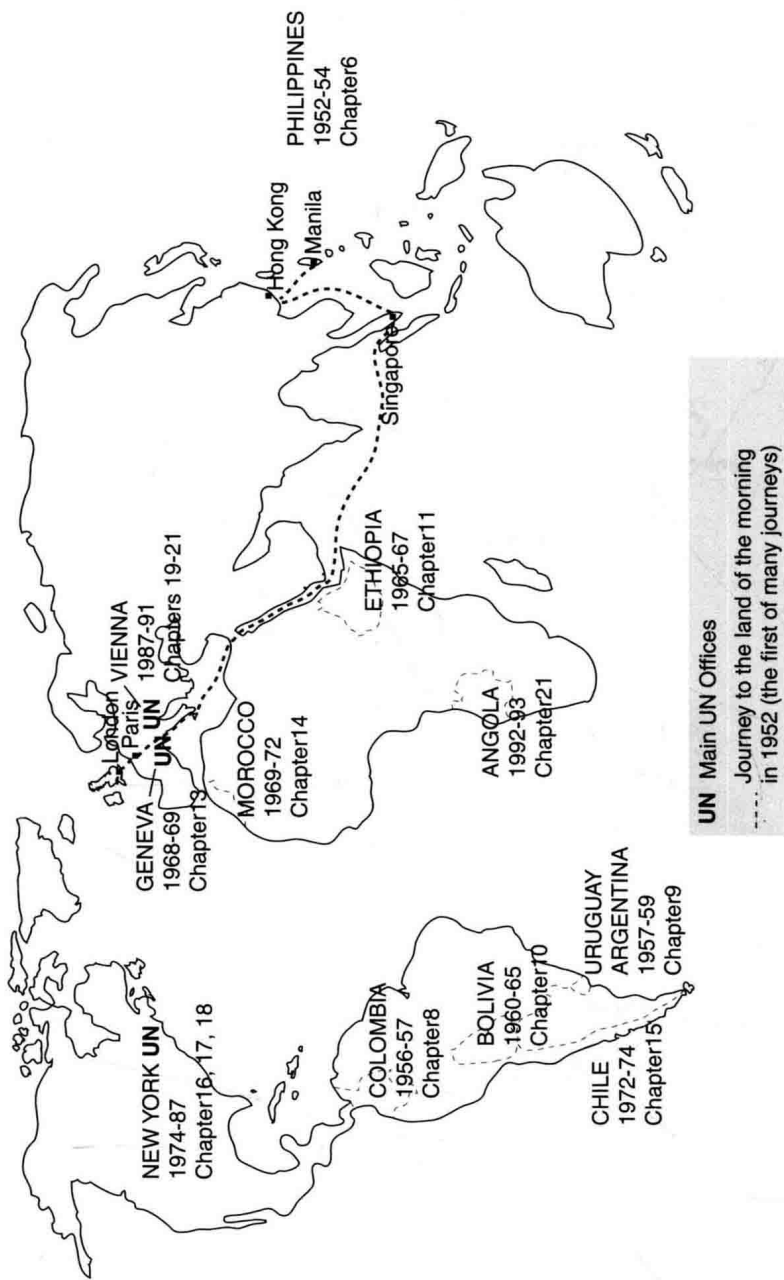
I could not have done all these things without the love, friendship and support of many people all over the world, first and foremost my beloved parents and my Aunt Christina. I am sad that they are no longer here to read this tribute to them. Neither is Jacko (Commander Sir Robert Jackson, a much admired United Nations official with a legendary capacity for troubleshooting and successfully managing large-scale operations in the most adverse circumstances imaginable), with whom I shared many years of

personal and professional companionship. Many others too numerous to mention, and not only those in high positions, have helped me along the way, especially in its stony places. Many of them too are gone, but I do not forget them. Among them were several men who encouraged and supported me academically and professionally at a time when it was far from the norm for women to have careers such as mine. Their names figure in these pages.

Now that I no longer have an office or a secretary but still travel the world and am as busy as ever, the dictum that saved me from becoming a secretary myself has caught up with me. I am accordingly immensely grateful to Kristina Thompson who patiently typed two of the much longer earlier versions of this book, and to Margaret Fry who, at short notice, undertook the arduous task of producing the final text. My gratitude goes also to my editor, Sally Smith, who was invaluable in advising me how to cut and shape the narrative of a very varied life.

Villa Margarita
Lake Titicaca

March 2003



Map 1 Map references relating to the text.



Map 2 Latin America.

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