

AUGUST 2014 VOL. 1 ISSUE 3

**COPENHAGEN
EDITION**

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on human
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genetics
and why
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aren't just
biological
machines**



Healing in Sierra Leone

NGO Play31 uses football to reconcile communities after the civil war

THE MURMUR

DENMARK goes on holiday in July. The streets are empty, parliament is closed and domestic news is scarce. But the world keeps turning. We saw the downing of MH17 over eastern Ukraine and a bloody war break out in Gaza.

While the government here at home still seems set on spending 30 billion kroner on new fighter jets, Denmark isn't in much of a position to resolve either conflict. But there are Danes out in the world who are trying to make a difference. In this issue we spoke to a few of them.

Jakob Silas Lund started a charity that uses football to reconcile communities in Sierra Leone that were torn apart by the civil war. Rebel forces kidnapped men and children and forced them to fight and rape people they used to live alongside. To bring them together and redevelop community spirit after the war, Lund decided to organise football matches in remote towns and villages. The project quickly grew and now the football festivals also include talks about human rights and the education of Peace Ambassadors whose role is to resolve conflict and maintain the focus on the human rights after the festivals ended.

Human rights are a vital component of development, Lund argues. Christian Friis Bach agrees. The former development minister just bagged a top job at the UN – executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Council for Europe – where he hopes to sustain peace and co-operation by encouraging and facilitating trade. Human rights are his passion, however, and in our interview we discussed how they can be used to enable people in developing countries secure their future.

A second Dane was appointed an important UN role. Ellen Margrethe Løj will direct peace-keeping efforts in South Sudan. The region is struggling to cope with conflict after the government collapsed last year. It's a tough job but she can draw upon her experience directing the UN's peace keeping mission in Liberia to see her through.

Danes are also helping emerging Kurdistan in an unlikely way – with road markings. The region is experiencing an economic boom but its infrastructure still needs upgrading. Winding mountain roads are difficult enough to navigate, but when there are no lines on roads where sheep roam free, the danger level is increased a notch.

OUR CULTURAL SECTION (turn the newspaper over and there you have it) is more firmly based in Denmark.

Copenhagen Fashio Week kicks off in August and we take a look at efforts to make the industry more sustainable. Water is best used to grow food, not cotton, so alternative fabrics will have to be developed.

Brewing giants such as Carlsberg are losing their dominance to small producers as beer drinkers become more sophisticated in their taste and demanding of higher quality. We take a look at the rise of craft beer and Danish brewers whose success is becoming recognised abroad. Denmark is also importing gastronomic trends, particularly from central America. Latin food is 'hot' as evidenced by a rise in restaurants and street vendors supplying the exotic and lipsmackingly spicy food.

WE LOVE making The Murmur, but we are very much in our infancy. There is only so much that our small team can read and write, so we need your help. We are looking for contributors to supply us with articles on issues that interest them and which we've not come across, and interns who are interested in starting a career in journalism to help us with the everyday challenges that a start-up publication faces. If you are interested, please get in touch! **M**

THE MURMUR

If you want to do something, you can still do it without having a record-high IQ or rich parents. I didn't have any of that. There's nothing extraordinary about me.

JAKOB SILAS LUND
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MONTH IN REVIEW

FOREIGN MINISTER CONDEMNS GAZA OFFENSIVE
Martin Lidegaard wrote on Twitter that he "condemned the tragic bombing of a UN school, the unacceptably high number of civilian casualties in Gaza and Hamas' continued attacks". PM Helle Thorning-Schmidt refused to sign a letter with fellow Scandinavian Social Democrat leaders condemning Israel.

Low wage loophole closed
The government has closed a loophole that enables companies to employ Danes on lower Irish salaries. Airline Ryanair is among the companies now forced to pay Danish salaries to their workers based in Denmark.

PHOTO: FLICKR / JILL_A_BROWN



Legalised drugs?
The government will look at decriminalising illegal narcotics following a recommendation by the WHO. The organisation argues that decriminalisation will reduce the number of incarcerated drug users and reduce the spread of HIV.
The issue will be taken up when parliament opens again in the autumn, though there is little political support for the initiative.

30 BILLION KRONER JET CONTRACT PROCEEDS
The competition to supply the Air Force with 30 new fighter jets took a turn in July when Saab pulled out of the running. The 30 billion kroner contract will replace Denmark's ageing fleet of Lockheed Martin F-16 jets. According to Politiken, Saab thinks the government has already decided not to purchase its Gripen Next Generation jet, in favour of the Lockheed Martin F-35. Boeing's Super Hornet and Cassidian's Eurofighter Typhoon remain in the running.

The contract is Denmark's single largest public investment so far this century and has sparked a fevered debate about the government's priorities. The same money could employ thousands of teachers or purchase turbines to support Denmark's renewable energy ambitions.
But supporters of the deal argue that Denmark needs to fulfil its obligation to participate in international military missions. In 2011, Danish jets were used in NATO's mission in Libya.



CRUISE SHIPS FORGOING COPENHAGEN DUE TO CITY ROADWORKS
Cruise ships are starting to avoid Copenhagen.

The cruise ships bring hundreds of thousands of tourists to the city each year, but after peaking in 2012 when 840,000 visitors were dropped off by the mam-

moth floating cities, only 750,000 people are expected to call on the city in 2014.
Infrastructure projects in the city have been cited as one reason for the decrease in cruise guests.

"It's still hard for tourist buses to get permission to drop people off close enough to the attractions," Claus Bødker, cruise director of Cruise Copenhagen Network, told Berlingske newspaper.

DID THE GOVERNMENT LET THE FBI INTERVIEW WIKILEAKS INFORMER IN DENMARK?

Wikileaks has demanded that the police investigate whether the government let the FBI interview an Icelandic Wikileaks informer on Danish soil. Sigurdur Thordarson has admitted to spying on Wikileaks for the American police agency and met with them three times in Denmark to pass on information.

In an interview with Wired magazine, Thordarson said he met with FBI agents three times in Denmark, twice in Copenhagen and once in Aarhus.

The meetings were moved to Denmark when the Icelandic government refused to allow the agents to carry out an investigation in Iceland.

Wikileaks reported Thordarson and three unnamed FBI agents to the East Jutland Police in July. It also asked the independent police complaints commission to investigate the Danish intelligence agency PET.

It is illegal for the FBI to conduct an investigation in Denmark without permission, but the government has refused to comment.

PHOTO: FLICKR / GOLGARTH



Ukraine match moved
FC Copenhagen moved their match in Eastern Ukraine following the downing of the MH17 airliner.

The Champions League qualifier against Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk was moved to Kiev, but Copenhagen fans were chased by their rivals at half-time after they allegedly waved a Russian flag during the match.

The match ended in a scoreless draw.

NEWSMAKER

TASTIER, HEALTHIER, MORE DANISH

Agriculture Minister DAN JØRGENSEN'S food revolution has caused a minor uproar in a country that pays notoriously little attention to what it puts in its collective mouth

IF THERE is a way to Danes' hearts, it is through their wallets. Such is the reality in a country's with the world's greatest tax burden.

Dan Jørgensen, however, would like to see people think more about their bellies than their bank balance next time they shop. As food, agriculture and fisheries minister in a country with the EU's highest food prices, he has his task cut out for him.

Jørgensen has long had greenish issues like climate and animal welfare on his agenda. The reputation was one forged in Brussels where, as MEP, he sat as vice-chair of the European Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.

Danes, then, knew what they were in for when he was appointed to his first cabinet post earlier this year. Or maybe they thought they knew what they were getting, for his ministry had, until then, been more associated with gently nudging consumers and producers – if it was associated with anything at all.

Perhaps because of his passion for food, perhaps encouraged by the surge in Danes' self-confidence about their *terroir*, or perhaps because he saw an opening during the summer slow season, Jørgensen launched not one but two broadsides against the nation's food producers and consumers in July.

His first complaint was directed at supermarkets. He argued they encourage consumers to make bad food choices by placing unhealthy foods in high-traffic locations, and prominently advertising junk food



place in their weekly flyers.

"Retailers need to be forced to re-think how we get people to make healthier choices," Jørgensen told Politiken newspaper. "As it is right now, we see cynical attempts to place highly unhealthy foods on offer. I don't think retailers are doing enough."

It did not go down well; consumers and retailers bristled at being told what they should, and should not, be eating. Their resistance almost served to justify his point, but he was nevertheless labelled as "North Korean" by the political opposition – a term inspired, no doubt, by the "food revolution" Jørgensen says he is pursuing.

su.

Better received was his message that, when in doubt, health-conscious Danes should reach for a nationally produced food item. Nutritionists agreed. Organic food growers said he was oversimplifying the issue, but were pleased with the attention the matter was getting. A patriotic people could better swallow this message.

Jørgensen has defended his food activism. "As food minister, I've got an opinion about what we eat," he told Jyllands-Posten newspaper.

The food minister, though, has remained silent about summer's other big food issue: lower VAT on

healthy food. But then again, he's never claimed to be tax minister. **M**

Kevin McGwin

nationally produced food item. Nutritionists agreed. Organic food growers said he was oversimplifying the issue, but were pleased with the attention the matter was getting. A patriotic people could better swallow this message.

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"It will be tough. Next to impossible"

INTERVIEW South Sudan is suffering from a humanitarian crisis following the outbreak of civil war. **ELLEN MARGRETHE LØJ** will soon lead the UN's peacemaking mission in the country where 1.5 million have been made refugees and five million are dependent on international aid



UN Photo/Station Winter

HOPES were high when South Sudan gained independence following a referendum in 2011. Conflict over territory and oil reserves sparked a war with Sudan soon after, however, and in 2013 a civil war erupted following a political power struggle. Inter-ethnic clashes have created over 1,500,000 refugees of which around 400,000 have sought shelter in neighbouring Kenya, Sudan and Uganda. Immediately following South Sudan's independence, the UN Security Council established a peace-

keeping mission, UNMISS, whose goal was to consolidate peace and help the country develop. But the civil war has laid waste to the nascent country's political system, making state building an impossibility. In May the UN responded to the worsening situation and altered UNMISS's mandate to include the protection of civilians, monitoring human rights and supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Veteran Danish diplomat Ellen Margrethe Løj is now leading the

mission, following her appointment in July. Løj has served as the Danish ambassador to the UN, Israel and the Czech Republic and led the UN mission in Liberia between 2008 and 2011. "Liberia was very different," Løj says over the phone from northern Jutland where she is holidaying with her family. "The fighting was over and a peace agreement was in place. But we had to respond to the impact of the 200,000 refugees that had fled to the country following fighting in neighbouring Ivory Coast, bringing with them weapons." She added that the 2011 elections in Liberia were also particularly challenging. "If the mission has a mandate to promote nation and state building then you become closely involved with the government, but you have to remain impartial when it comes to the different political parties. It's a difficult balancing act," Løj says. UNMISS is composed of around 12,500 military personnel and 1,300 civilian police and technical special-

ists. Their job is to help maintain peace and provide relief to the five million people who are dependent on international aid. "South Sudan is experiencing a dire humanitarian situation. Millions of people risk starvation and there are thousands of internally displaced people," says Løj, adding that she isn't an expert on the country's political situation – yet. "I will have to learn about it when I arrive. For peace-keeping missions to succeed we need to make sure we have our own house in order first. Peace-keeping missions have military, civilian and police components, and they all need to pull together." Despite her experience, Løj is realistic about UNMISS's chances of securing peace in the region. "The mission in South Sudan is very complex and difficult. When people congratulate me on the new position I tell them not to. It will be tough. Next to impossible. The best I can do is try." **M**

Peter Stanners

RESEARCH

HAPPINESS IS ... GENETIC
Denmark regularly tops the world happiness rankings, and now researchers at the University of Warwick may have an explanation: genetics. After analysing international happiness surveys and the prevalence of a gene that influences happiness, the researchers concluded that the greater a nation's genetic distance from Denmark, the lower the reported well-being in that nation. "There are reasons to believe that genetic patterns may help researchers to understand international well-being levels," says Dr Eugenio Proto from the university's Department of Economics.

CANCER DRUG BRINGS HIV OUT OF HIDING
Cancer drug romidepsin causes HIV levels in infected cells to almost quadruple, according to University of Aarhus researchers. The discovery is hoped to yield a new strategy for fighting the virus. HIV's cunning is its ability to hide inside CD4 immune cells that are unable to fight the virus. Killer T cells can fight the virus, but they are unable to detect it when hidden inside CD4 cells. While anti-retroviral drugs can suppress HIV to such an extent that it becomes undetectable in some patients, the virus can re-emerge if the treatment isn't continued.

But when sufferers are given romidepsin, dormant HIV is reactivated, leaving a mark on infected CD4 cells that enabled killer T cells to target and destroy them. The treatment worked in five out of six individuals in the study, though researchers say the immune reaction was not strong enough to completely destroy the virus. "But the mechanism of activating and revealing the virus could be used together with other drugs that could wipe out HIV," says senior researcher and physician Ole Schmeltz Søgaard. Researchers are planning a trial that combines romidepsin with a vaccine that strengthens T cells.

MOVEMENT DISORDERS IN YOUNG PEOPLE RELATED TO ADHD
A mutation that interferes with the brain's transport of dopamine may cause parkinsonism in young people, according to the University of Copenhagen. The mutation affects a transport protein that controls the reuptake of dopamine. Small fluctuations can have major consequences for brain function. The researchers believe that DAT mutations may cause or predispose to the development of an entire spectrum of brain diseases, from ADHD to serious movement disorders in infants. **M**

Peter Stanners

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Photos: Play31

Battling war wounds with football

INTERVIEW They were pulled from their homes, armed with guns and forced to fight against their neighbours. When the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone finally subsided, the reconciliation process needed to begin. But how? **JAKOB SILAS LUND'S** solution was to harness the positive power of football



Jakob Silas Lund started Play31 in 2008, aged only 25 (Photo: Peter Stanners)

HOW DOES A COUNTRY rebuild itself after suffering 50,000 deaths, 2.5 million refugees and the sexual abuse of 250,000 women? In a country that the UN judged to be the least developed in the world in 2008, what can unite people who were once forced into lethal conflict with their neighbours?

Football. That was Jakob Silas Lund's realisation when he visited the Sierra Leone in 2008 while studying for his master's in international affairs and human rights at Columbia University in New York. After noticing the passion that Sierra Leone as a nation had for the sport, he established a non-governmental organisation, Play31, to encourage reconcilia-

I met a young woman who was gang-raped by 15 rebels.

tion through football. The name refers to article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states, "Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure [and] to engage in play and recreational activities."

Since the NGO was established in 2009, Play31 has organised dozens of football tournaments in Sierra Leone, drawing over 60,000 players. The tournaments for men, women and children also include workshops about human rights and conflict resolution. Local leaders are educated as peace ambassadors who promote these values in the remote and poorly developed rural areas where hate between neighbours still festers,



ABOVE: In 1999, rebel RUF forces attempted to kidnap Anthony (also pictured on the front page of this issue) and use him as a child soldier. When his parents resisted, the rebels tried to kill the whole family, chopping of Anthony's arm in the process. But Anthony survived and was discovered alive by neighbours the following day. Jakob Silas Lund was inspired to start Play31 after meeting the young man.

LEFT: Play31 organises football festivals for men, women and children in rural Sierra Leone. The football matches offer an opportunity for communities to come together and start the process of reconciliation following the decade-long civil war.

RIGHT: The football festivals also include educational workshops and events to teach communities about their rights. Women's rights are strengthened through the work of Girls Peace Clubs where young women aged 12 to 18 learn how to face daily challenges, such as the demand for sex in exchange for good grades in school.



more than a decade after the conflict ended.

MOVING BEYOND THE HORROR

Despite the lingering tensions, Lund says that the desire for reconciliation was clear when he first visited Sierra Leone in 2008 at the invitation of a friend in New York, John Caulker, executive director of the peace-building organisation Fambul Tok.

In Sierra Leone, Lund met Moses 'Samba' Kpambu, a man who was born in the jungles of Sierra Leone. At the age of 28, he was forcibly recruited to fight for the rebel forces, the RUF, during the country's decade-long civil war. He was among tens of thou-

There's hardly anyone who hasn't connected with someone else through play.

sands men and children who were forced to fight their countrymen and who, when the war ended in 2002, were left to start a new life beside people whose family members they had killed, and women they had raped.

"But I was blown away by their ability to move on and start the process of reconciliation and forgiveness. I had never seen anything like that before. I've heard the most horrendous stories. Samba's is just one. The way he was forced to kill and was nearly killed several times himself – that just blows my mind. But it's not the worst story I've heard. The same day I met Samba, I met a young woman who was gang-

raped by 15 rebels. But now, she's one of many who are actively working to bring the community back together. For her to stand up and be embraced by a community that wants reconciliation was just amazing," says Lund.

FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

Back in New York, Lund drew up the idea for the organisation and, within a few months, he had convinced UN ambassadors to support it. To raise awareness, he hosted the first DiploMatch in 2009: a game between two teams of ambassadors, including the Secretary General himself, Ban Ki-moon.

Lund returned to Sierra Leone the same year with a few thou-

sand dollars to buy equipment for the tournaments. In 2010, Hummel, a Danish sportswear firm, partnered with Play31 and now sponsors the equipment and provides financial support. The NGO quickly gained accolades, including the 2011 Beyond Sport Award – juried by former UK prime minister Tony Blair – the 2012 Join Our Core, awarded by Ben and Jerry's, a Peace and Sport award in 2013.

"There's hardly anyone who hasn't connected with someone else through play, which is why the idea resonated with people. I didn't have to fight to get people on board and like the idea," Lund says, sitting outside a Copenha-▶



Photos: Play31



LEFT: To provide a lasting impact in the communities Play31 visits, they educate high-standing members to serve as Peace Ambassadors. Their role is to promote the focus and importance of rights, while also serving to diffuse potential conflicts as they arise.

ABOVE, BELOW, RIGHT: Danish sportswear company Hummel has partnered with Play31 and provides the sporting equipment for free.



gen café on a balmy summer day.

Lund grew up in a liberal Danish community, and the first books he read recounted the woes of Native American people in the US. Travelling from an early age, he knew the rest of the world wasn't as fortunate as Scandinavia. As a young man, he joined Amnesty International, stopping strangers on the street and urging them to help the organisation with their time and wallets.

Play31 was an opportunity to put his human-rights studies into action. At first, the organisation hoped to give children the chance to play, but he quickly realised there was an opportunity to use football as a vehicle for social change. The football tournaments turned into football festivals, with dinner and a disco following the sporting day. The impact on the community was immediate. Relatives in distant villages started to visit each other again. Trust grew.

But for the initiative to be sustainable once the organisation

We realised that many of the problems these communities faced in sustaining peace were linked to the violation of women's rights.

left the villages, people needed to stay and keep the message of conflict resolution and human rights in focus. They began educating Peace Ambassadors: high-ranking members of the community who could engage debate and diffuse conflict. Their focus then spread out to empowering women.

"We started the Girls Peace Clubs to educate adolescent girls about women's rights and life skills. For example, to know they have the right to refuse the offer of sex for better grades at school, which remains a pervasive problem. No issue is as important to tackle as the violation of women's rights – we realised that many of the problems these communities faced in sustaining peace were linked to the violation of women's rights. When a girl is raped, it creates problems for her and her family, and creates a rift between the families involved."

LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Play31 Sierra Leone now organises the 20 to 30 football festi-

vals held in the country annually. The local organisation is staffed by community residents, but the Danish NGO provides support through funding and helps design the programme and curriculum.

"At first, we directly employed the staff in Sierra Leone, but over the years, we've helped them develop their own organisation. Their independence is important, because it increases the sense of ownership that communities have to the mission – without it, the process of reconciliation would likely fail to have a lasting impact," Lund says.

The staff of Play31 Sierra Leone approach communities cautiously, starting out by simply asking if there is a need for what they provide. They then look for around 20 potential Peace Ambassadors – they try to ensure an equal split between men and women, and a fair representation of Muslims and Christians, as well as former fighters and their victims. The human-rights workshops that are held prior to the

football festivals can draw a few hundred participants, Lund says.

"There's not much going on in these villages. Most don't even have electricity, so it's exciting when we come along. But you can also tell that the people want to improve their communities and lives. You see these masses of people getting engaged and riled up by the discussions."

The football festivals are not always successful, however, and Lund has discovered that the tournaments can polarise some communities. He recounts one recent event that had to be cancelled when teams from rival villages came close to fighting. Experiences like these have left him feeling dejected and prepared to shelve the entire project.

"But our partners in Sierra Leone convinced me that the conflicts actually showed how much the work was needed. That a football match could almost lead to violence demonstrates how much the legacy of the war is still present in people's minds. So we de-

cided to set up peace accords – documents where the teams agree to treat each other with respect."

Despite these issues, Lund says he has witnessed the power of the organisation's strategy. He recalls how one girl was supposed to play opposite a man who had raped her during the war. She told a Peace Ambassador, who reached out to the man. He broke down and said he wanted to meet her and apologise. They met before the match, and she forgave him.

Lund hopes Play31's success can be brought to northern Uganda, a region which was terrorised by warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army from the 1980s until around 2006.

LOMBORG'S NO FAN

While anecdotes are powerful, Lund says the NGO could do more to measure and document its impact, and he has found a company to help. The organisation is also not universally admi-

If you want to do something, you can still do it without having a record-high IQ or rich parents. There's nothing extraordinary about me.



red. Last year, Lund participated in 'The Biggest Loser', a Danish TV show in which different NGOs competed for funding. One of the panellists was the controversial economist Bjørn Lomborg, who argued that Play31's impact was limited and, therefore, not worthy of funding.

"I understood his argument because, if you compare our work to vaccination drives, for example, which are literally saving the lives of little children, then it's hard to say that we deserve funding instead of UNICEF. But it shouldn't be a comparison. Our work deals with the lives that people are leading, and the kinds of communities they want to create and change, and we couldn't do that if they weren't alive. Just vaccinating children isn't enough."

Lund says Sierra Leone is still suffering from the same institutional corruption, lack of infrastructure, high unemployment and basic inequality that helped ignite its civil war in the first place. During the rainy season,

the roads in rural areas turn to mud, making travel impossible. And even in the dry season, little public transport is available. But he hopes that the human-rights education that Play31 provides will encourage people in Sierra Leone to start making more demands on their leaders, creating change from within.

Last year Lund published *Juni-ior Rambo*, a biography of Samba's life as a child soldier. He hopes his story will inform others about the reality of conflict in parts of Africa, as well as stir them into action.

"For us to understand the depth of these conflicts, we need personal stories. I think the portrayal of conflicts in Africa has been overly simplified, as though they're just savages roaming around killing each other in eternal conflicts. I wanted to show a different side of that. I wanted to show that war is always horrible, but that people don't cease to be people during the wars. Samba continues to be a father, a hus-

band, a good guy and a son of a bitch. All of these complex personalities persisted throughout the war," Lund says.

Most 31-year-olds haven't organised football matches attended by Ban Ki-moon or had Tony Blair hand them awards. But Lund says that anyone could emulate his success, they just need to make an effort.

"Making a book or an organisation come alive is an amazing feeling, but it only happens if you actually try. The hockey player Wayne Gretzky was right when he said you miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take. I needed help and people who have skills that complement my own. I probably could have done with knowing that earlier. But my revelation has been that if you want to do something, you can still do it without having a record-high IQ or rich parents. I didn't have any of that. There's nothing extraordinary about me." M

Peter Stanners



Iraqi Kurdistan is the safest part of the country and is attracting millions of tourists in the process

On the road to the other Iraq

While the rest of Iraq suffers from the rise of the brutal insurgent group Islamic State, Iraqi Kurdistan is experiencing an economic boom. Danish expertise is contributing by helping make the roads safer with longer-lasting road markings

IMAGINE a slalom race, except you're not on skis. You're on a road in Iraqi Kurdistan, and the markers aren't red and blue flags, but docile white sheep. Zigzagging through moving obstacles and potholes in a car without seatbelts is the norm when driving outside cities. But main roads paved with high-quality asphalt are also dangerous, even without sheep, because they often lack road markings.

But Danish expertise is helping to make these roads safer. In an Italian restaurant in Sulaimaniyah, one of the region's largest cities, The Murmur met Jesper Isaksen, Lars Frandsen and Johan Musak, three Danish workers from the road surface marking compa-

Words + photos:
Malene Ørsted

ny LKF Vejmarkering, which has marked roads in Denmark and abroad for more than 50 years. They primarily use a thermoplastic material that is melted and extruded onto the road and which lasts four to eight times longer than regular paint. Its longevity makes it popular across Europe, but it has yet to be used in Kurdistan – until now.

"We produce a large amount of striping material on the island of Langeland, and have many years' experience. But they don't have the know-how here; otherwise I think someone would be doing it. It would have saved them a lot of money if they had," Isaksen says.

"We're welcomed down here,

and they're grateful for our work," Musak adds.

Their expertise is much appreciated. Three million (mostly Iraqi) tourists visited the region last year, but Iraqi Kurdistan's tourism board hopes seven million tourists will visit annually by 2025. To reach the target, they need to attract more foreign visitors, which they expect to draw mostly from Europe and the Gulf states.

THE NEW DUBAI

Iraqi Kurdistan is Iraq's northern region, and is controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Comprising the provinces of Sulaimaniyah, Erbil and Duhok, it has been hailed as the

"New Dubai" and the "Other Iraq" thanks to its booming construction and oil industries and high level of safety.

The Kurdish people are spread across the borderlands of Turkey, Iraq and Iran, but have never had their own state. Despite being granted formal autonomy in Iraq in 1970, they remained in conflict with Saddam Hussein's regime. In the final years of the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, thousands were killed in poison gas attacks.

Following Hussein's defeat in the First Gulf War, they were offered protection in the form of a northern no-fly zone, enforced by the UK, US and France. It became a de-facto autonomous region fol-

lowing the withdrawal of Hussein's troops, and the first elections for the Kurdistan Regional Government were held in 1992. The region's autonomy was further strengthened following the US-led invasion in 2003. Its Peshmerga troops, which co-operated with US forces, are now responsible for maintaining stability in the region and holding back the Islamist group IS – the Islamic State – which has taken control of large swathes of Iraq and Syria.

"Kurdistan is acknowledged as safe and strong, and that's why [US Secretary of State] Kerry on his visit some weeks ago shared his hopes of Kurdistan staying with Iraq so that it could help the other regions," says Beri Shalmashi, a filmmaker of Kurdish heritage who was brought up in the Netherlands.

"But our President rejects that idea. He thinks Kurdistan doesn't benefit from being connected to a region that is still such a mess," says Shalmashi, who recently moved to the region.

RELATIVE PEACE

Kurdistan's stability seems to be paving the way to eventual independence, which Shalmashi supports, arguing that Kurdistan and Iraq were hardly a match made in heaven.

"The issue dates back to the First World War ... Iraq is a state drawn with straight lines on a map. The idea of Kurdistan as a separate country was wiped away in a single meeting. It has never been a question of whether, but only how long, Iraq could stay together," she says.

Due to the current threat posed by IS, Peshmerga forces have been stationed in areas disputed by Iraq and the KRG, far beyond Kurdish borders. And so far, they have been effective at keeping IS out of Kurdistan.

"The conflict in the rest of Iraq is a Shia-Sunni conflict between Arabs, and therefore has no relation to the Kurdish area. Iraq was never a natural state to begin with," Shalmashi says.

Inside the restaurant, the three

Danish road-surface marking company LKF Vejmarkering is in Iraqi Kurdistan to mark roads with a material that lasts four to eight times longer than paint. The workers say they feel safe and welcomed in the region. No word though on what the sheep make of the fair-skinned men in high visibility jackets.



One night I discovered that I had lost my phone by the side of the road, but it was still there when we came back the next morning.

LARS FRANDSEN

Danes are drinking beers and smoking.

They were originally concerned about going to Kurdistan, but have been pleasantly surprised by the kind and accommodating people, the availability of bacon cheeseburgers and alcohol in the bigger cities, and of course, the high level of safety.

"The Kurds are very vigilant. They have metal detectors at the entrance to supermarkets, for example, and there are plenty of checkpoints manned by armed guards. So I haven't been afraid down here," says Frandsen, and the two others agree.

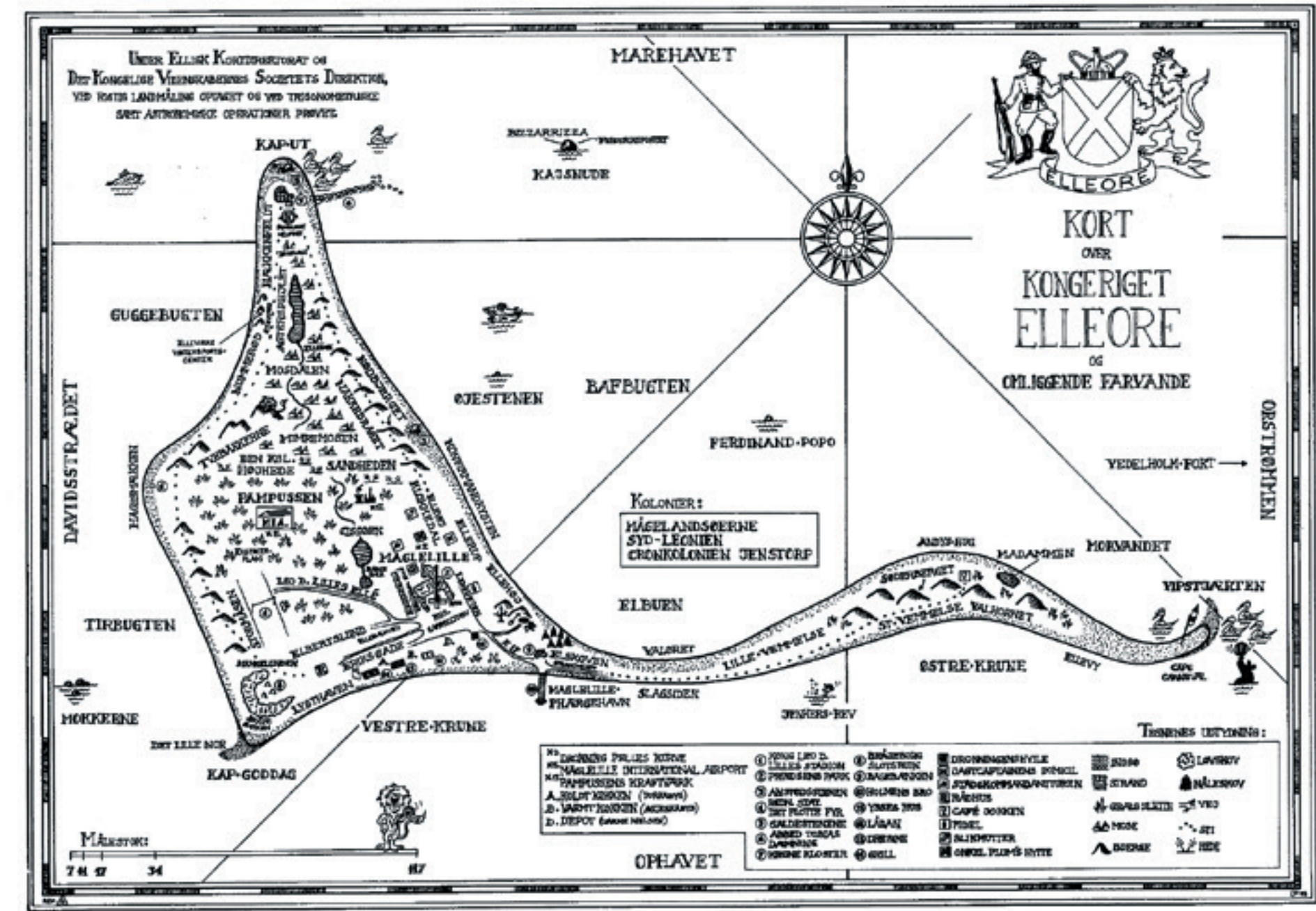
"One night I discovered that I had lost my phone by the side of the road, but it was still there when we came back the next morning. That would never have happened in Denmark. Somebody would have taken it," says Isaksen.

Their stay in Sulaimaniyah ended in May, but they all said they would return to the region to work. The Foreign Ministry advises Danes to avoid all non-essential travel to Kurdistan, however, so LKF is currently trying to secure insurance for its employees.

"I think it is a mistake. I don't really think that the Foreign Ministry knows anything about the situation. I can't be certain, but I can't see that there is anything wrong down here. If I were asked to work here again, I would be more than happy to come back," says Isaksen.

It might be a few years before they would consider visiting the country as tourists, however. Despite the fact that the people are pleasant and the infrastructure is undergoing a rapid transformation, other issues – such as a poor level of English – mean it can be difficult to get around and communicate, especially outside the bigger cities.

But while hotels are being built, roads painted, and traffic safety improved, younger generations of Kurds are learning English in school. Who knows, maybe the sheep will even learn to stay outside the stripes. **M**



This kingdom is a stage (but its subjects are more than mere players)

There are two versions of history on the island of Elleore: the real one and theirs. Sorting out which is which isn't always that easy. But that's all part of the fun, say its subjects

THE HISTORY of the Kingdom of Elleore dates back to 1944. Or 944.

Or, rather, its history begins in 1944 and 944. Because like just about everything about Elleore, there is the real version of the story and their version of the story. If you aren't one of the kingdom's 250 or so subjects, sorting out which is which is frustrating. If you are a subject, it's all a part of the fun.

A few facts first: The Kingdom of Elleore isn't an officially recognised entity. But it does exist. It's got a Wikipedia entry and it is listed as one of the world's smallest micronations. Small it is: it occupies an island in Roskilde Fjord measuring 15,000 square metres (Vatican City, measuring 440,000 square km, is a giant by comparison). Their territory is actually a bird sanctuary, but environmental authorities have giv-

en them permission set up on the island for a week each August.

Other than being small and temporary, Elleore resembles a real kingdom in most other respects: it has a regular (and growing) population, it issues passports, coins, stamps, has two universities, a royal house and an elected government.

The current prime minister is Viscountess Blaireause (her real name is Charlotte Moltke), and she admits that it can be hard for the uninitiated to get a handle on what's real and what's Elleore. Like when she answers the telephone using her Elleorean name.

"But that's part of the fun. We don't always know ourselves where one begins and the other ends, but I guess you could say that's what makes this fun for us."

In the Elleorean version of history, Irish monks settled the island in 944. In the Danish version, it began exactly 1,000 years later, on August 27, 1944, when a group of school teachers bought it for use as a summer camp.

"Elleore became an escape," Blaireause says, pointing out that 1944 marked the fourth year of the Nazi occupation of Denmark. "It was a place they could go to, physically and mentally, where they could satirise the society they were living in."

Seventy years later, Danish society is radically different from the one the first Elleoreans grew up in, but the kingdom's citizens say it would be wrong to conclude that it no longer has a purpose.

"The essence of Elleore is our sense of community and our love

Elleore became an escape.

VISCOUNTESS BLAIREAUSE

for the kingdom. Satirising society might have been one of the reasons why Elleore was founded, but the most important thing then and now is that we are community - and that we're a micronation. That's what makes this fun."

Unlike the society around it, Elleore, Blaireause says, has hung on to many traditions that folks on the mainland have long since forgotten.

For example, social occasions organised by the royal family during the year are formal events and require proper etiquette. During their annual ball, ladies are required to have a ball card. Citizens are also raised to address each other by title and display social courtesies that were once considered common.

In the 1940s, doing so was an

exaggeration of societal norms. In today's society, Elleore's formality catches new citizens off guard. "It's an eye-opener for a lot of young people," Blaireause says. "But these were things that I have actually been able to draw on at other times."

Still, she's quick to point out that when it comes right down to it "Elleore is a game. We're doing this for the fun of it. We gather and we have a good laugh."

Elleore, though, isn't all fun and games. Firstly, there is the historical obligation. Citizenship, though voluntary, is limited to students of Kildegaard Privatskole. Originally, their involvement stopped after they completed school, but the kingdom has since reformed its laws, and now permits former students to remain involved.

That's resulted in something of a population boom, and has seen the annual Elleore Week (the one week they actually spend in their

Ladies are required to have a ball card. Citizens are also raised to address each other by title and display social courtesies that were once considered common.

kingdom) become less of a student summer camp than a family outing. Secondly, Elleore is work. When they are on the island everyone pitches in to make the tiny society function, often filling multiple positions. When they are "abroad" in Denmark, as they say, many remain involved planning or taking part in social events or attending to the business of state.

"We're always in character," Blaireause says. "In a way, we're on holiday 51 weeks a year, but just because we're not on Elleore doesn't mean the Kingdom of Elleore ceases to exist."

The 70th anniversary Elleore Parade takes place in Roskilde on August 27. The parade begins at Hestetorvet and finishes at town hall, where representatives from the Kingdom will be received by Roskilde Mayor Joy Mogensen at 3pm. **M**

Kevin McGwin

THE KINGDOM OF ELLEORE

Location: Roskilde Fjord

Area: 0.015 square km

Population: 263 (2006 census)

Head of state: King Leo III (2003-)

Unit of currency: Leo D'or

Official languages: Danish and Interlingua

Form of government: Constitutional monarchy

Head of government: Viscountess Blaireause

Citizens: Students of Kildegård Privatskole

Motto: Vi hjælpes ad (Let us help one another)

National anthem: Ave nostre patria

Tax rate: 100%



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Graffiti in Sisimiut highlights the growing push for independence among Greenlanders

A constitution of their own

Greenland wants to prepare for its future independence by drawing up a constitution, but Copenhagen isn't so keen on the idea

THE TIME IS RIGHT for Greenland to begin looking into the practicalities of drawing up its own constitution, lawmakers in the self-governing member of the Kingdom of Denmark agree.

"We could be seeing the establishment of a number of major industrial projects, and it is important that we have had the chance to speak with each other about how we want our society and our country to look like," Premier Aleqa Hammond, said during celebrations of Greenland's national day on June 21.

The idea of a separate constitution for Greenland was first put forward in 2011. At that time, the previous government began the process of establishing constitutional commission.

An election in 2013 put the work on hold, but now Hammond says the work will resume and expects to seat a committee before the next general election is scheduled to be held, in 2017.

Hammond admitted that the constitution's eventual goal was to form the basis of an independ-

ent Greenland. She has previously stated that she hopes Greenland will break away from Denmark in her lifetime, but she made it clear that preparing the groundwork for that would take time.

"Right now, it's important that we take stock of ourselves and improve our legal, economic, cultural and social competencies and capacities so that we can allow them to harmonise with our values."

The most recent agreement defining Greenland's relationship to the Kingdom of Denmark was adopted in 2009. That document permits the country to declare its independence at any time it sees fit.

Two years after the agreement took effect – in the fall of 2011 – Siumut, Hammond's party, then in opposition, became the first to suggest a constitutional committee, whose work, it said, would help the country define itself as a single nation.

A nearly identical proposal was eventually put forward by the government at the time and approved by a parliament.

Given the broad agreement about drawing up a constitution, the most difficult task a constitutional committee will face will be to convince Copenhagen that a Greenlandic constitution may exist side by side with the existing Danish constitution.

MIXED MESSAGES

According to the letter of the law, says Ole Spiermann, a legal expert familiar with Nuuk-Copenhagen relations, that might not be possible. But, he pointed out that there were multiple examples in the current relationship between Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, the third member of the Kingdom of Denmark, of the constitution being violated.

Copenhagen has sent mixed messages about constitutions for the two countries. In 2010, the previous government told the Faroes that it could not adopt a constitution without leaving the kingdom. The current government, however, has softened its stance; in its most recent statement about the matter, it said constitutions, if passed,

would be seen as supplementary to existing legal frameworks.

"The government respects Greenlandic and Faroese wishes to draw up their own constitutions, but it is important that they do not cast doubt" on the two countries' relationship to Denmark.

When Greenland's parliament approved the constitutional committee in 2011, it stated that it would be compatible with the Danish constitution and the Self-Rule Act – perhaps not wishing to give Copenhagen reason to dispel the legal grey zone.

According to Spiermann, the actual document that Greenland ended up with would be less important than the debates they had during the process of drawing it up.

"Independence isn't just a status," he said. "It is also the process of coming to a decision. A part of Greenland's independence lies in the fact that it is the people of Greenland themselves who decide whether Greenland is to be independent." **M**

Kevin McGwin

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Photo: Peter Stanners

INTERVIEW He resigned as development minister in November after taking responsibility for over-spending by a state-funded NGO. But he has bounced back and was recently appointed the executive secretary of the United Nation's Economic Council for Europe (UNECE). **CHRISTIAN FRIIS BACH** discusses his new role and his passion for the human-rights approach to development that, he argues, enables people to better their lives as proud citizens instead of treating them as weak and vulnerable victims in need of handouts

Farmer, economist, human-rights advocate, UN executive secretary

In November 2012, Denmark was one of several EU countries that suspended aid to Uganda after it was discovered that the Ugandan prime minister's office had siphoned approximately 90 million kroner – intended to rebuild the country's war-torn northern region – into private bank accounts. The suspension of aid was a blow to Uganda, and quite an ironic one: the fraud was discovered by Uganda's own independent state auditor, an office that had been established with assistance from Denmark.

Former development minister Christian Friis Bach beams while recalling the story. To him, it's a perfect example of how development should work to ensure human rights. In his view, stable, independent and nonpartisan institutions are among the best tools that citizens have to keep their leaders accountable and prevent corruption. In Uganda's case, the auditor discovered that needy citizens, suffering from the fallout of a war waged by resistance leader Joseph Kony and his child soldiers, were being denied the support to which they were entitled.

COMMITTED TO HUMAN RIGHTS "In terms of development, the biggest change has been a shift away from seeing it as merely providing hand-outs to people who cannot change their own lives, to a human-rights approach that enables people to fight for their rights – towards seeing these people as proud citizens who can change their own communities. It's a move away from thinking of people in developing countries as vulnerable and weak," Bach says.

Bach has had an international outlook since childhood – he spent

I'm incredibly enthusiastic about what people can do to change their own lives. Sometimes, they just need a hand – a framework to work in, and an environment that will unleash the force of individuals and communities.

his teen years cycling around his neighbourhood to sell fair-trade coffee. After earning a degree in agronomy and a PhD in economics, he started an academic programme in development economics at the University of Copenhagen in 1996. His CV boasts a range of positions within the public and private sectors, including stints as the chairman of Action Aid Denmark and as the international director of DanChurchAid, as well as the founder of two companies and a volunteer in a number of civil organisations, including Amnesty International. Together with his family, he now also runs a small farm.

INTERNATIONAL CAREER

As a member of the Radikale party, he was elected to parliament in 2011 and was immediately appointed development minister. But in 2013 he chose to resign after an error in the Foreign Ministry led him to pass on incorrect information to Parliament and public about whether the Danish government had approved the suspect travel rules of GGGI, a Danish-funded NGO.

The setback was only short-lived, however: this August, he was appointed executive secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) – one of five UN regional commissions, with 56 members spanning the northern hemisphere – making Bach the highest-ranking Dane in the UN.

"Some of the world's brightest development economists have worked on these economic commissions, so I'm proud to be part of that legacy," Bach says in his office in parliament, which he is in the process of packing down ahead of his move to Geneva.

"Most people haven't heard of the UNECE, but it's probably the UN organisation with the greatest daily impact on the lives of Europeans. Whenever you get in your car, all of the safety standards – from the airbags to the seatbelts – originated from the UNECE. It helps set standards for everything from food to pollution. So it has an impressive impact. Nobody else fills the vacuum of developing norms, standards and regulations that can facilitate trade transport and economic co-operation across European borders."

In his new role, Bach says he will reinforce the UNECE's work through his commitment to ensuring human rights. As an example of this approach in action, he points to the commission's Aarhus Convention, which was signed in Denmark's second city in 1998 and increases public involvement in governmental decision-making regarding the environment.

His belief in the human-rights approach to development is outlined in his book *Det er min stol* ('It is My Chair'), in which he discusses how equality, participation, transparency and responsibility can be used to empower citizens in developing nations.

As an example of transparency, he describes how he visited health clinics in Kenya which clearly displayed the prices for different procedures and publicly posted their financial transactions. A health committee also had to approve all of the clinic's payments. In this way, local citizens could see exactly how the clinics were run, which helped curb corruption.

"But I learned that you need to be humble about how much change you can accomplish from the outside. I've witnessed many projects

where we tried to change people's lives from the outside, but they ran into difficulty after we left because citizens weren't involved in the process of change. But I've also seen situations where people brought about astonishing change by standing up for their rights – engaged citizens who managed to transform their communities," he says.

"I'm incredibly enthusiastic about what people can do to change their own lives. Sometimes, they just need a hand – a framework to work in, and an environment that will unleash the force of individuals and communities. Every citizen has a set of rights that are individual but interlinked and universal. This is the strongest idea that we've ever created, and it encompasses my entire understanding of development."

RIGHTS AREN'T WESTERN

While Bach insists that a framework like the UN Convention on Human Rights is universal, it is not globally accepted. China, in particular, has criticised the West's apparent hegemony in interpreting what constitutes human rights. And even in the West, human rights are considered problematic. The UK has threatened to pull out of the European Court of Human Rights over criticism regarding legal overreaches which prevented the government from extraditing foreign criminals.

Despite these challenges, Bach argues that it is fallacious to see any one definition of 'human rights' as complete.

"Of course human rights can be troublesome. It's what can happen when citizens are empowered to keep their governments accountable and claim their rights. But

human rights aren't perfect, and they're adjusted and refined every day in Geneva," Bach says, adding that even Denmark has been criticised for failing to implement human-rights legislation.

"But that's what makes it such an incredible tool – human rights require dignity and freedom for all individuals. We can safely say that these aren't only Western values. Countries around the world have developed them over the past 200 years so we can use them to address issues in those countries. They also enable us to stand up and ask countries to live up to what they've signed. Regardless of whether it's gay rights in Uganda or minority rights in Burma or refugee and child rights in Denmark, we all have a common framework we can use. That's its power."

WEEKEND FARMER

While human rights set the conditions for development, Bach argues that trade secures the conditions for peace. The UNECE has historically played a very important role in maintaining peace via trade across Europe, and Bach believes its role is just as important now as it was at its inception following the Second World War. But securing trade requires setting technical standards, which are perhaps less exciting than ensuring the right to education or liberty.

"I hope the UNECE can work harder to fulfil its historic mission to strengthen ties and co-operation between European countries,

and to create peace and progress in the process. When countries stop fighting they become dependent on each other. Settling the tensions we are now seeing in the Ukraine is beyond the UNECE's mandate. But when it is settled I hope the UNECE can come in with its historic vision and trust and help secure the peace," Bach says, adding that current developments in Ukraine and the EU, where the recent parliamentary elections reflected a resurgence of anti-integrationist parties, suggest that many Europeans are becoming more insular.

"People want their countries to be independent. They don't want to be dependent on Russian gas, for example. But if we want peace and progress, then we need to strengthen ties between countries. History has shown us that breaking ties increases the chance of conflict. But because the UNECE has the trust of both sides, both inside and outside the EU, I hope that it can play a meaningful role and contribute to a Europe without the kind of conflicts that we're seeing in Ukraine today," Bach says.

Bach's wife and three children aren't joining him in Geneva, so he will be commuting back to Denmark – and the family's 45-acre farm – on the weekends.

"Yes, I'll be a weekend farmer. I'm looking forward to it – it's good to do some practical work. To use your hands instead of just your head." **M**

Peter Stanners



Photo: Peter Stanners

CHRISTIAN FRIIS BACH - SELECTED CV

- 2014 – Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
- 2011 – Elected MP for De Radikale. Appointed as Minister for Development
- 2008 – Founder of the Danish Initiative for Ethical trade. Subsequently a board member
- 2005 – International Director of DanChurchAid
- 2002 – Journalist for the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR)
- 1999 – Associate Professor of International and Development Economics at the University of Copenhagen
- 1997 – Chairman of ActionAid Denmark
- 1996 – PhD in International Economics from the Royal Danish Agricultural University

THE MURMUR NEEDS YOU!

After three issues, the interest and feedback we have received has been overwhelming. We want to thank everyone who has been in touch with us with their thoughts, comments and suggestions. But we still have a long way to go and we need curious and engaged people to help make **THE MURMUR** the best it could possibly be. Below are a few positions that we need filling in August. If you are interested, please send us an email with your CV and a cover letter to **PETER@MURMUR.DK**.

CONTRIBUTORS

Are you a specialist in an overlooked field? Have you bumped into someone with an interesting story? Do you think there are important issues that are affecting Denmark that aren't being talked about? We want to hear from you!

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Help ensure that The Murmur is following international themes and trends that have an impact on the Danish society. We need interns to keep abreast of the international and domestic news and report back with a view to develop future stories. These stories will be shared at weekly editorial meetings together with key editorial staff. Editorial interns will also have the opportunity to write and have their stories published.

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WONDERFUL COPENHAGEN



Mogens Lykketoft, the speaker of Parliament, addressed a demonstration in central Copenhagen on July 16 calling for peace in the Gaza Strip as civilian casualties began to mount

CAPTURED

Photo: Peter Stanners



Illustration: Sara Houmann Mortensen / sarassagenblogspot.com

The tyranny of small things and happiness

IN THE HIGHER ECHELONS of the scientific establishment, there is open speculation that consciousness is the universe's prime mover: there would be no matter without consciousness, and consciousness is not reducible to its biological parts.

What then should we make of recent research conducted at the UK's University of Warwick, which has pinpointed why Danes are 'the happiest people in the world'? According to the study, a large number of the Danes who testified to being happy also have a gene that boosts their serotonin receptors. This suggests a correlation between happiness and genetics. And, what's more, the study found that this happiness factor was stronger when a person was in close genetic proximity to a Dane. (Denmark's eternal rivals, the Dutch, while not our immediate geographical neighbours, were runners up.)

Humans may be considered multidimensional light beings temporarily enjoying material form.

Humans may be considered multidimensional light beings temporarily enjoying material form, but this study shows that our happiness may be contingent on genetics: we are nothing more than advanced biological machines. How does that compute?

For a start, it doesn't explain our tendency to self-medicate. Nearly ten percent of Danes take antidepressants. The average Dane drinks the approximate equivalent of 40 bottles of vodka a year. Half a million Danes regularly enjoy recreational cannabis. And we just love our over-the-counter painkillers, with each Dane popping a whopping 180 of those babies each year.

Perhaps it's the hangovers? Or the stress? Surely it can't be the happiness. Or can it be? My theory is that it all comes down to human adaptability. And this is something that Danes have truly mastered. As a population, we are incredibly plastic. Put a Dane in a hole for 35 years, and then ask him how he's doing. Chances are that he will tell you that he's just fine. The reality is that most Danes lead incredibly stressful lives. This is by no means a new phenomenon. Like most civilised populations on the planet, we have been suppressed for centuries – if not millennia – by big men, by Viking and feudal lords, by the church, and now by corporate capitalism and its political puppets.

The tyranny of small things keeps us on a choke-hold with no

Humans may be considered multi-dimensional light beings temporarily enjoying material form.



Claus Ankersen is an internationally acclaimed writer, artist and performance poet.

possible means of escape. Securing next month's pay check, being a good colleague, parent, friend or partner, doing things the right way, keeping up, wearing and believing the right stuff, buying the latest gadgets, saving for the holidays or the upcoming festival, paying our bills, paying our bills and paying our bills. Plus worrying about the coming winter, genetically modified crops, air pollution and the general state of affairs in the world. The worries never end.

As ironic as it may seem, problems are relative – even if you live in a nice, secure northern European state, you can still be stressed out and struggling. After all, as a new and much larger Asian and African middle-class emerges, middle-class European consumers are becoming more and more obsolete. Thus, we happily suffer the tyranny of small things – be it bills, black thoughts or our genes. We are dutifully extinguishing ourselves – choosing to self-destruct, to be done in by agents of slow-death in our food or medicine, or merely opting to not procreate.

But if asked, then: sure, we're happy. We are happy because we Danes are such eminently adaptable

organisms. Especially now. It's summer, our favourite time of year. Everything blooms, and on a microcosmic level, so does our DNA. I believe that, in time, the scientific establishment will demonstrate that there is no such thing as 'junk DNA'. It's merely DNA waiting to be coded by our new patterns of being in the world – by the steps we take, the food we eat, the thoughts we think and the kisses we kiss. Consciousness, after all, can be described as an awareness of and attention to the present moment, and attention is just another word for love.

The lines that settle into your face when you reach middle age reflect a lifetime of emotions. If bitterness is your prime emotion for 20 years, then it is bound to show on your face by the time you reach age 50. So perhaps happiness can actually become encoded in our genes? If that's the case, then we can do a lot of the embedding ourselves.

So remember to smile. Even though life in the real-world laboratory of Denmark may be tough, at least it's still summer. Any good Dane will drink to that. Happy encoding. **M**

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FOREIGN

A shattered childhood: the war on Gaza's kids

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF EID, the Muslim celebration that caps the end of Ramadan, a day meant for celebration, joy and fun. But in Gaza, the day ended in bloodshed. More than 50 children were standing in line, waiting for their turn on a ramshackle carousel, when a bomb hit, blasting the day of joy into a day of mourning.

I stayed in Gaza for only five days. I write "only" because the civilians are trapped there. They can't flee because the borders with Israel and Egypt are closed and, on the other side, there is only water patrolled by Israeli military ships. That is why Gaza is called the biggest prison in the world.

During my short time in Gaza, I spent a lot of time at Shifa, the main hospital. I've covered numerous conflicts and wars in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen during my ten years as a journalist, but I've never seen so many dead or wounded children in such a short span of time. "It's a war against the children," I heard several foreign journalists say. By that they meant that, even if it isn't Israel's intention to hit the kids, the fact is that hundreds have already died, killed by Israeli bombings.

During my fourth day there, ambulances carried untold wounded children to the hospital and – if the kids were lucky – their grieving parents, too. How many mothers and fathers did I not see at that hospital, distraught by grief or staring ahead of them with vacant eyes because they'd been told their child had died and they would never be able to hug or kiss their child again.

We pride ourselves on professional distance to events. But it was unbearable. Many times I broke down. I had to remove myself and find somewhere to cry

unobserved because I couldn't take anymore. And just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, it got worse. A mother was told her child was dead and she fainted. A man was told his son was would never rise from the hospital bed again. He started shouting "Allahu akbar. Allahu akbar," with a quivering voice as if the invocation of God could somehow help him, now that his child was gone for good.

A boy was trying to walk down the hallway in the hospital, leaning on two adult family members. He wasn't older than 12. Half of his face was shattered. For the rest of his life, he will bear the mark of war and people will look away from his mutilated face when they see him walking down the street. Another kid, a five-year-old girl with burns all over her body, is also scarred for life.

A three-year-old boy was so frightened by the bombing that he ran from his father's arms, falling in his panic and sustaining a concussion. Next to the boy was a little car toy, donated by a charity to celebrate Eid. The young father was standing next to boy's bed, caressing his son's cheeks. He was trying to be brave but he had tears in his eyes. Once in a while the child would throw up. The father did his best to comfort the kid, who fainted every time he finished vomiting.

As I was leaving, I went over and gave the father a hug. I have a six-year old son and a seven-year-old daughter and I could imagine what he was going through. "May God be with your child," I told him. He nodded politely and smiled a little. It occurred to me that it wasn't only the children who needed comfort – the parents did, too.

During a 24-hour ceasefire, the



An injured child receives treatment in Gaza (Photo: Nagieb Khaja)

residents of Shujaiya, Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis, where some of the most severe fighting took place, now had the chance to finally search for loved ones under the rubble.

When I walked around Shujaiya, I couldn't stop thinking of the pictures I've seen of the aftermath of the Dresden bombing in 1945.

It was like everything had been swept off the face of the earth. Crying men and women searching for their belongings and their memories in the dust. "Nothing! There is nothing left," a crying woman was saying. I saw a group of men suddenly shouting. I ran over and realised that they had found a body in the rubble.

Other men came running, some of them looking desperate. When they saw the body, they started to cry – a father, a brother. His body was so crushed and dusty that it was impossible to determine his age.

Two women came running toward the body. A man stopped them and told them it was best to wait. The women tried to run past them, but the men held them firmly, struggling to spare them

from the sight. The women started to shout the man's name: "Mohammed. Mohammed," as if trying in vain to wake him. The younger woman fell to the ground in grief. The men tried to bring life back to her lifeless body.

In Beit Hanoun the destruction was almost as bad as in Shujaiyah. Here, too, people were looking for their belongings in the rubble.

Very close to the border I saw a couple. The woman told me that their house had been bombed. She showed me around. She kept asking: "Where are the rockets? Where are the Hamas fighters? Why did they do this to us?" Her husband was crying in the background. "We are innocent civilians. Why are the Israelis punishing us? What have we done to them? Why do they start a new war against us almost every two or three years," he asked wiping his eyes, which were red with grief.

After five days in Gaza, I wonder what the future will hold for these families; these children who have already witnessed so much. Even those who've escaped physical injury so far have been hurt. This is a scarred generation. ■



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COLUMN

Understanding other people's stupid feelings

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL in Hellerup was an oasis of acceptance. Children from dozens of different countries got along swimmingly. There was no bullying or name-calling and academic success was considered cool.

But when NATO began its bombing campaign in Yugoslavia in 1999, things changed. I was in ninth grade and I had a Yugoslav classmate who I remember giving me a hard time for being British. While it was harmless and never extended beyond a few hostile words, it was an important moment – the first time our class had been divided over a global conflict.

The NATO bombing campaign succeeded in that it led to the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces from Kosovo. But there was a price. At least 500 Yugoslav civilians and 1,000 police officers were killed in the process. If I had friends and family in Yugoslavia when bombs were raining down, I am sure I would be terrified too.

I don't know if my Serbian classmate was a Milosevic supporter, but many Serbians were. Tens of thousands of supporters attended his funeral following his death in 2006 while on trial for war crimes. I know him as a man who was complicit in the Srebrenica massacre. What do they know him as? How could they support him knowing what he did? Or did they choose to ignore the evidence in order to maintain their adoration of their strong nationalist leader?

I reckon they supported him because it felt right. But feelings aren't beliefs. We feel first and think second. We are presented with an issue, we respond emotionally, we question why we felt that way, and then we start post-rationalisation. When asked to justify our belief, we wheel out the rationalisation, forgetting that the belief started with a feeling in our gut.

There are people in the world who sincerely believe that Milosevic wouldn't have let the Srebrenica massacre go ahead, that Russia wasn't responsible for the downing of MH17 and that Israel's offensive against Palestine is a justifiable use of force. They feel that Milosevic had his people's best interest at heart, that Russia is a great country suffering from a Western witch hunt and that Israel should use every available measure to secure its future.

In all three cases, people will choose to ignore the whole truth while building a logical framework to support their emotional belief. We are emotional creatures, it is normal. So we

have to have compassion for Israelis who fear a missile might break through the Iron Dome, respect the pride that Serbians and Russians have for their national narrative and recognise the sincerity with which many Christians hold their religious values.

Feelings are stupid, but they can change. Demonstrating compassion for people you don't agree with is the first essential step for challenging emotional reasoning. Throwing facts around doesn't change anything. Take Richard Dawkins' atheistic crusade. His method is to chuck facts at people he disagrees with, and to insult them when the facts don't stick. He may often be right, but having all the facts isn't enough to change people's perspectives.

Sure, some people can be swayed by evidence alone. But we know many are not. Instead we have to address why people feel the way they do and acknowledge the legitimacy of those feelings. Putting someone on the back foot by attacking them as wilfully ignorant, is unlikely to make people address the feelings that support their beliefs.

This strategy is used by powerful people to shore up support. Opponents of gay marriage accuse supporters of attacking the traditional nuclear family. The North Korean leadership insists the West is out to get it. They all fabricate an enemy whose alleged goal is to undermine the beliefs and traditions that people hold dear.

The true evil lies in the wilfully ignorant ideologues who tap into these sincere feelings – Zionist, Christian, Muslim, nationalist fundamentalists whose narrative is founded on a belief that they are better or more worthy. At its core is desire for power and in the process their misinformation begets grief, suffering and horror.

It's difficult to prove to someone that they are being emotionally manipulated, or that something they fear isn't a threat. But bringing them round to the side of reason, first requires getting them to challenge their feelings and supporting them as they break their emotional cycles. Only then will they be susceptible to information that helps them form beliefs about the true state of the world, not how they feel the world should be. ■

Peter Stanners



Richard Dawkins is really bad at understanding other people's stupid feelings

Photo: Mark Coggins / flickr