

BOOK REVIEW

75 Years of the United Nations and Behavioral Sciences: A Review of *Behavioral Science in the Global Arena: Addressing Timely Issues at the United Nations and Beyond* byElaine P. Congress, Harold Takooshian, and Abigail Asper
Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2020, 233 pp., \$45.99

Reviewed by Grant J. Rich

In *Behavioral Science in the Global Arena*, Elaine Congress, Harold Takooshian, and Abigail Asper have carefully edited a volume focused on the United Nations (U.N.) and the significance and relevance of behavioral sciences to its mission. As the U.N. celebrates its 75th year in 2020, the volume is an especially timely contribution, and surprisingly unique, in that whereas many books have been written about the U.N., the present one is arguably the first with this emphasis. This book is one with clear implications for readers of this American Psychological Association (APA) Division 48 *Peace & Conflict* journal, given their demonstrated interest and efforts to apply behavioral science to conflict resolution.

The editors focus mostly on two key behavioral sciences—psychology and social work—and explicitly aimed to offer a reader-friendly format that ensures an accessible style, welcoming even to those not familiar with the U.N. The book could be argued to be somewhat inclusive, in the sense that it includes 10 student coauthors (of a total of 21 contributors). The book's three editors are well qualified to coedit such a book. Lead editor Elaine Congress is Professor and Associate Dean of the Fordham University School of Social Service and at the U.N. represents the International Federation of Social Workers, serving as Vice-Chair of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Committee on Mental Health among other roles. Congress has authored 10 books on cultural diversity, immigrants, health, and ethics. Harold Takooshian has been a Fordham

University faculty member since 1975 and completed his PhD under Stanley Milgram. He has taught at 12 institutions in six nations, served as Past President of the APA Division 52 (international psychology), and edited several books on international psychology. He has served with the U.N. as APA's representative. Abigail Asper has served as an NGO representative to the U.N. for the International Federation of Social Workers and a member of the NGO Committees on the Status of Women and on Migration.

Florence Denmark, past president of the APA and the International Council of Psychologists offers an insightful foreword to the book. She was involved with the launching of the first psychology at the U.N. Day in 2007. Denmark notes the history of the prior League of Nations and the context of two world wars leading to the 1945 formation of the United Nations as well as the recent creation of the 17 sustainable development goals and the relevance of the behavioral sciences to the U.N. mission.

One helpful feature of the book, especially one partly written by and for students, is that each chapter includes a set of thought-provoking study questions that are helpful conversation starters or possible discussion or essay question prompts. Chapters also end with a helpful glossary of key terms. These may serve as educational teaching tools or study aids because the critical concepts are succinctly defined all in one place.

The book itself is sensibly organized with five main sections: (a) serving current populations, (b) upholding social justice, (c) promoting harmony, (d) improving human health, and (e) supporting environmental health. The populations section includes chapters on aging, child welfare and well-being, migrant adaptation and well-being, and gender equity. For those less familiar with the U.N., chapter one on the behavioral sciences at the U.N. is a must-read. Here coauthors Takooshian and Congress offer a succinct overview of the U.N., including its organizational structure as well as the past and present role of NGOs at the U.N. Particular emphasis is devoted to the history of psychology and social work at the U.N., both formally and informally. For the book's social justice section, chapters focus on poverty and inequality, social protection, freedom and democracy, and human rights. In the harmony section of the book, authors address counterterrorism and crime prevention and control. The fourth section is focused on improving health, including mental health, with discussions specifically on happiness and well-being, physical health, and disaster and trauma intervention. Finally, the book's last section on supporting environmental health includes two chapters, one on pro-

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moting environmental health (challenges and successes) and the other on reducing urban noise. The book ends with a brief summative conclusion that cites both liberal and conservative thinkers who argue humanity is living in the best of times compared with the social issues faced by previous generations but also references Charles Dickens' (1859) famous 19th century novel, *Tale of Two Cities*, which posed a classic dilemma, paraphrased as "This is the best of times, but also the

worst of times" (p. 219). After completing this book, it is clear that both are valid viewpoints, depending on the social issue in question and the particular time and place around the globe.

Reference

Dickens, C. (1859). *Tale of two cities*. London, UK: Chapman and Hall.