

A PEDESTRIAN APPROACH TO UN-BUILDING

Ghandi was once asked what he thought about Western civilisation. He answered: 'it would be a good idea'. That goes for the United Nations as well. While there is a conglomerate of organisations bearing that name, there is still much work to be done before all nations – that is, the people of this world - are united. One clear sign that the people of this world are not united yet is the fact that the Vienna International Centre is securely fenced off from the city that surrounds it.

UN staff in Vienna do not live in ivory towers – work regularly confronts many of us with harsh realities. But we certainly work in very *grey* towers, and the grey business of petty bureaucracy and diplomatic infighting consumes much of our energy. Outside our windows, we can see a completely different world. On a clear winter's day, the spectacular white mass of the Schneeberg stands against a deep blue sky on the southern horizon; in autumn, the yellow and russet brown of the Vienna Woods are just on the other side of the Danube; in spring, the dozen different hues of green in the Donaupark are right under our noses and make us itch to get out of the office and breathe some real, unconditioned air.

The VIC Hiking and Mountaineering Club gets UN staff out of those grey towers, immerses them into one of the most beautiful countries in Europe (plus some others), and makes them understand that sometimes cattle can be more interesting than conferences, pine trees more important than programme targets and a chat in your imperfect German with local pub regulars more instructive than a carefully polished exchange of thoughts with your Permanent Representative. The Club, in short, is about much more than getting or staying physically fit (you don't even have to leave the VIC for that).

Like the creation of the UN, mountain walking is a slow business and often an uphill struggle. In its own pedestrian way, the VIC Hiking and Mountaineering Club helps to turn the idea of the United Nations into reality.