

A Documentary by Paula Gleeson



# THE BLUE FLAG

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## Contents

Synopsis	02
Background	04
Premise	08

# The Blue Flag

The United Nations is the most recognised international organization in the world today but what does it actually do, is it still relevant, and is all the media and public criticism justified? These were the questions filmmaker Paula Gleeson was tired of asking her TV screen and with only a camera as company decided to embark on a journey around the world of this complex institution. Her journey took her to UN headquarters in New York and on UN missions to Liberia, the Congo, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon.

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# Background

“In 2002, like most people in the world, I was watching with concern the prelude to war in Iraq. It was September of 2002 that George W. Bush made his speech in the General Assembly at UN Headquarters asking the UN to join him in the war with Iraq or run the risk of becoming irrelevant. I was certain the UN would stand its ground and in fact do what I thought it was supposed to do, which is prevent war. It seemed that in the lead up to the Iraq war that the UN was like a toothless tiger watching idly by as Iraq was bombed and attacked. George W. Bush was right; in my mind the UN had become irrelevant by seemingly doing nothing.

It was at this time that the UN came under much criticism and people demanded answers and I was certainly no different. The only difference was that I had somewhere to go with my frustration and questioning: I had a father in a senior position at the UN who had been working in the UN system for over ten years and was based in New York. It was through my father that I got to hear another perspective about why the UN didn't or couldn't do anything to stop the war, and I was curious as to why from the media accounts that none of these stories were coming out.

It was over these months that I felt more and more strongly that there was an untold story waiting to be heard and there was no better time to start than at the height of the United Nations criticism.”

**Paula Gleeson, Director.**



**Lebanon is filmed a  
week after the 30 Day  
War in 2006.**



# Premise

**The Blue Flag** is a 52-minute documentary. The introduction to the documentary will begin with short scenes of the Secretary Generals of the UN, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon talking of the UN's failings and its response to the Iraq war, leading in to the archival footage of George Bush's speech at the General Assembly on September 12, 2002 asking for the UN to stand with him or run the risk of becoming irrelevant.

This archival speech will then draw back and be seen on an "animated" TV screen where we pull back to show a puppet animation of Paula sitting on the couch, eating pizza and watching the speech in frustration. Narration will come in at this point asking us where we were at this time in our lives. Paula will have a light bulb moment of needing to "get up off the couch" and get some answers. Puppet Paula, let's call her "PP", pulls out her cargo pants and HD camera out of pile of dirty clothes and is suddenly in New York at the HQ of the UN.

We interview some of the big wigs of the UN, including Paula's father, and ask them what the UN is all about, trying to get some sense of the UN and how they feel about where they work. As we film the interior of the UN foyer we notice a tattered UN flag and a sign that says it is the flag from the UN Iraq office bombing in Baghdad that killed 22 UN employees. We then show clips of two survivors of the UN bombing: one still working in the system and one that is too injured to return. It is here that the focus shifts in the journey to that of the work of the UN staff in the field, as we realise that is where the real sacrifices and stories are happening.

Locations included in the film are:

- Liberia
- Lebanon
- Palestinian Territories
- Democratic Republic of Congo
- Jordan/Iraq Office

Gradually we start to unravel the "real" work of the UN in the field. We choose missions that are not seemingly obvious or are in the headlines, starting with one of the UN's most successful missions in Liberia where we talk to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, villagers and ex-combatants trying to make a life after 14 years of civil war, and the UN staff of every level who are trying to rebuild the country. We also talk to the Peacekeepers about what they can and can't do; about the bad rap they get in the media; and show these soldiers in a different light through interviews and patrols.

We then parallel the Liberian mission with a completely different and highly topical region, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon (Lebanon is filmed a week after the 30 Day War in 2006), we question where the UN is in these political struggles and again speak with political players, locals and an incredibly frustrated UN staff.

Back in New York we talk to the renowned UN expert Dr Edward Luck about some of the frustrations and also to explain some of the more complex areas of the UN system, like the Security Council, General Assembly and International Law.

After two and a half years of filming and many locations around the world, Paula summarises what she has learnt and her opinion of the UN.

This is a documentary that dares to be as brave as the people in it, travelling to countries that are usually only known because of war or poverty, filming alone, with only personal investment, aspiring to bring a story to life that focuses on the positive parts of people, the parts of us that want to help and want to make a difference.

## **Director/Producer/Camera**

**Paula Gleeson**

## **Consulting Producer**

**Andrew Pike**

## **Editor**

**Nicki Johnson**







N-20

Paula Gleeson

The Blue Flag

**Thank you**

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