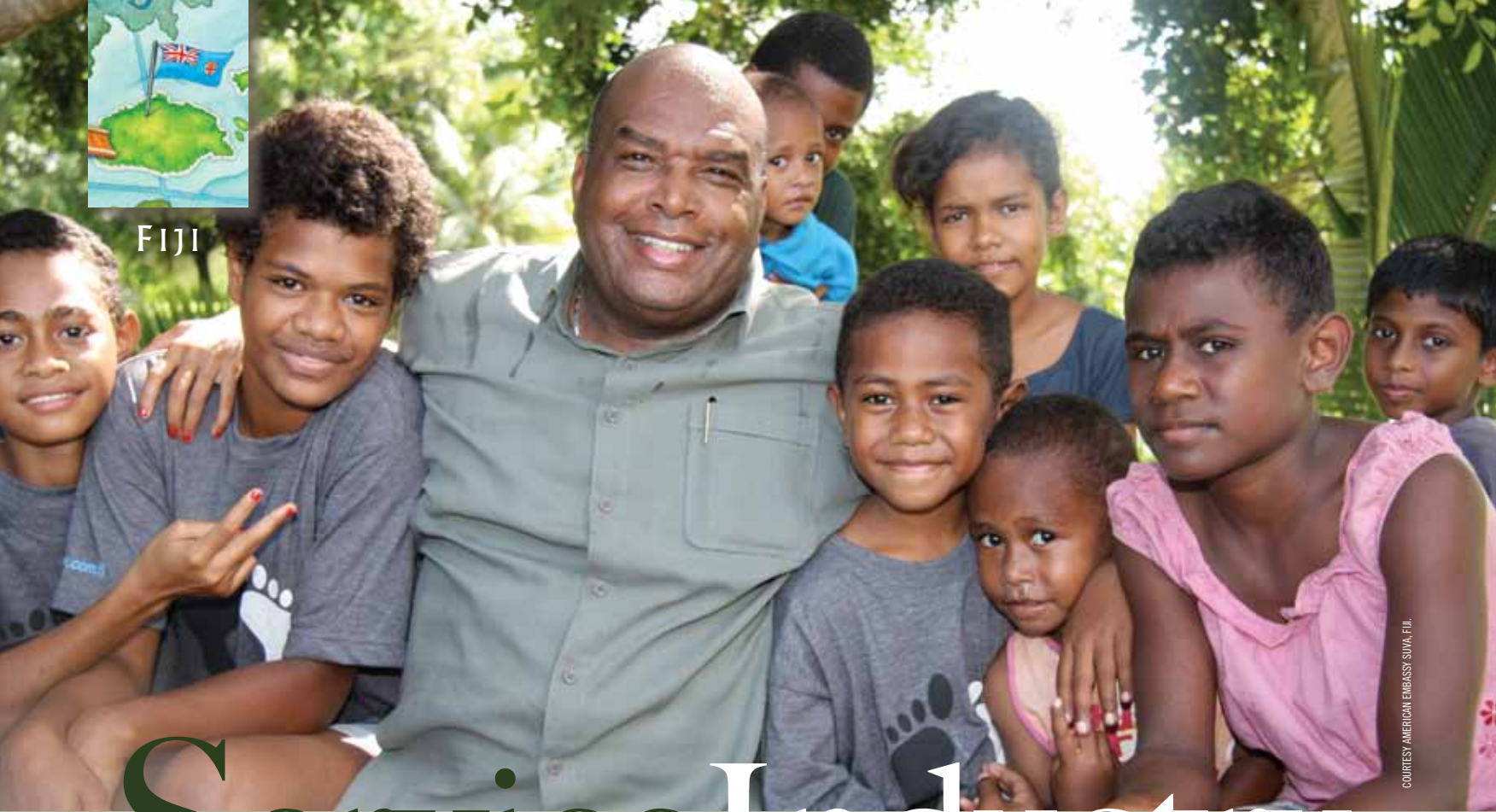




FIJI



COURTESY AMERICAN EMBASSY SUVA, FIJI

Service Industry

Foreign service officer Steven McGann '73, now U.S. Ambassador to Fiji, has made a career of facing challenging issues in dangerous environments.

BY KARRYN MILLER

In December 2006, the Republic of the Fiji Islands endured its fourth coup d'état in two decades. This past April, the South Pacific nation's constitution was abolished and, over the summer, the country was suspended from the Commonwealth, a grouping of 53 former British colonies, dependencies, and other territories, for failing to set an election date. Many in the international community consider the island's state of affairs in untenable disarray.

It was at this critical juncture that Steven McGann '73 began his term as U.S. ambassador to the Republics of Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, and the Kingdom of Tonga and the Republic of Tuvalu. His objective is no small feat: "to nudge Fiji toward restoration of democracy and a freely elected civilian government through engaging its leaders in government and civil society," he says. "The ultimate goal is to help Fiji build democratic structures that would allow it to develop a sustainable constitutional government and help end Fiji's 'coup culture.'"

While Fiji may be the highest-profile country included in McGann's charge, each of the myriad isles has its own distinct challenges. A rise in sea level, for example, would engulf Tuvalu's nine low-lying atolls and demolish the homes of around 10,000 people.

With a three-decade career as a foreign service officer, McGann is accustomed to working on some of the world's most challenging issues in some of its most difficult and dangerous environments. From 1995-1998 he was deputy political counselor and regional labor attaché in Nairobi. Three weeks after he left the post, simultaneous bombings destroyed both his former office and the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

"I was in Washington, D.C., en route to my assignment at the United States Mission to the United Nations (USUN) when the blast occurred," McGann recalls. "I spent three days almost non-stop in the State Department Operations Center, helping to coordinate the U.S. response to the incident. I knew all of the victims. It helped reinforce the notion that joining the foreign service is not just a career choice, but also comes with the real meaning of representing your country.

"I think a career in the foreign service is better seen as a continuum in which you have the ability to help develop and implement foreign policy," he says. "At each stage along the way, you are of a different rank and have different responsibilities but you are not a singular actor."

Even so, McGann's efforts have had visible and wide-reaching results. In his USUN assignment from 1998-2000 he worked on a General Assembly resolution banning driftnet fishing to protect marine stocks and the environment. In addition, he was involved in a Security Council resolution imposing sanctions against a country harboring terrorists. "Both had immediate consequences," he says.

At that same time, McGann drafted a Security Council resolution that endorsed Nelson Mandela's role as UN Special Envoy for Burundi: a position that allowed the two to work side-by-side. "What stands out was the sharpness of his mind," McGann recalls. "I will never forget being at an early breakfast meeting in which he did a line-in/line-out review of the resolution. After this, I went back to my fifteen Security Council interlocutors for the easiest negotiation of my career. Whenever another delegation questioned a paragraph, I merely had to say this is what President Mandela wanted and it was adopted without comment."

As McGann's career entered the new century, his sphere of influence shifted. For two years following his assignment at the UN in New York, he held the role of South Asia Bureau's Deputy Director of the Office for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. In his mission to build democracy in Afghanistan he assisted with the development of the UN framework for negotiations at the 2001 Bonn Conference, which led to the formation of an interim government in Kabul and consequent elections in Afghanistan. "I also worked to implement a mechanism that

still forms the basis of consultation and cooperation between Afghan and American women," McGann says.

His ensuing position was director of Asia and the Near East in the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. With control over \$370 million in humanitarian assistance, McGann provided policy oversight and guidance to non-governmental organizations assisting displaced Afghans, Iraqis, Palestinians,

Bhutanese, Tibetans, Hmong, and North Korean peoples. When asked what was memorable about the assignment,

McGann responds: "I would have to say working to repatriate three million Afghans living in refugee camps in Pakistan was a worthy effort."

The fact that his day-to-day job would be so multifaceted, and his career path so varied, was what initially attracted McGann to a career in the foreign service. "I started thinking about the foreign service at CMC," he recalls. "It was in a box that included public service, journalism, law, and teaching. I guess the foreign service and State Department emerged because it contained a little bit of them all."

Looking back, McGann credits his international relations courses with Professor Ed Haley as his best classroom preparation, along with political science classes: namely constitutional law, plus another that focused on Abraham Lincoln.

The State Department has a notoriously selective hiring process, including a written test and an all-day oral assessment, and McGann credits CMC's unique and diverse curriculum for helping him land the job. "I see my CMC liberal arts education as being helpful to pass a rather far-reaching foreign service examination that depends on a wide range of knowledge," he says. "Knowing a little about a lot of things has seemed to help in the world of diplomacy, which revolves around conversation."

McGann will serve as ambassador to the Republic of Fiji and neighboring South Pacific islands until 2011. After that he would, if asked, likely accept another ambassadorial appointment. If not, he views working in a think tank or academic environment as attractive options. "It's too soon for biography or retirement," he says, "but timely to reflect on how my foreign service career would contribute to developing future policy approaches."

I think a career in the foreign service is better seen as a continuum in which you have the ability to help develop and implement foreign policy.