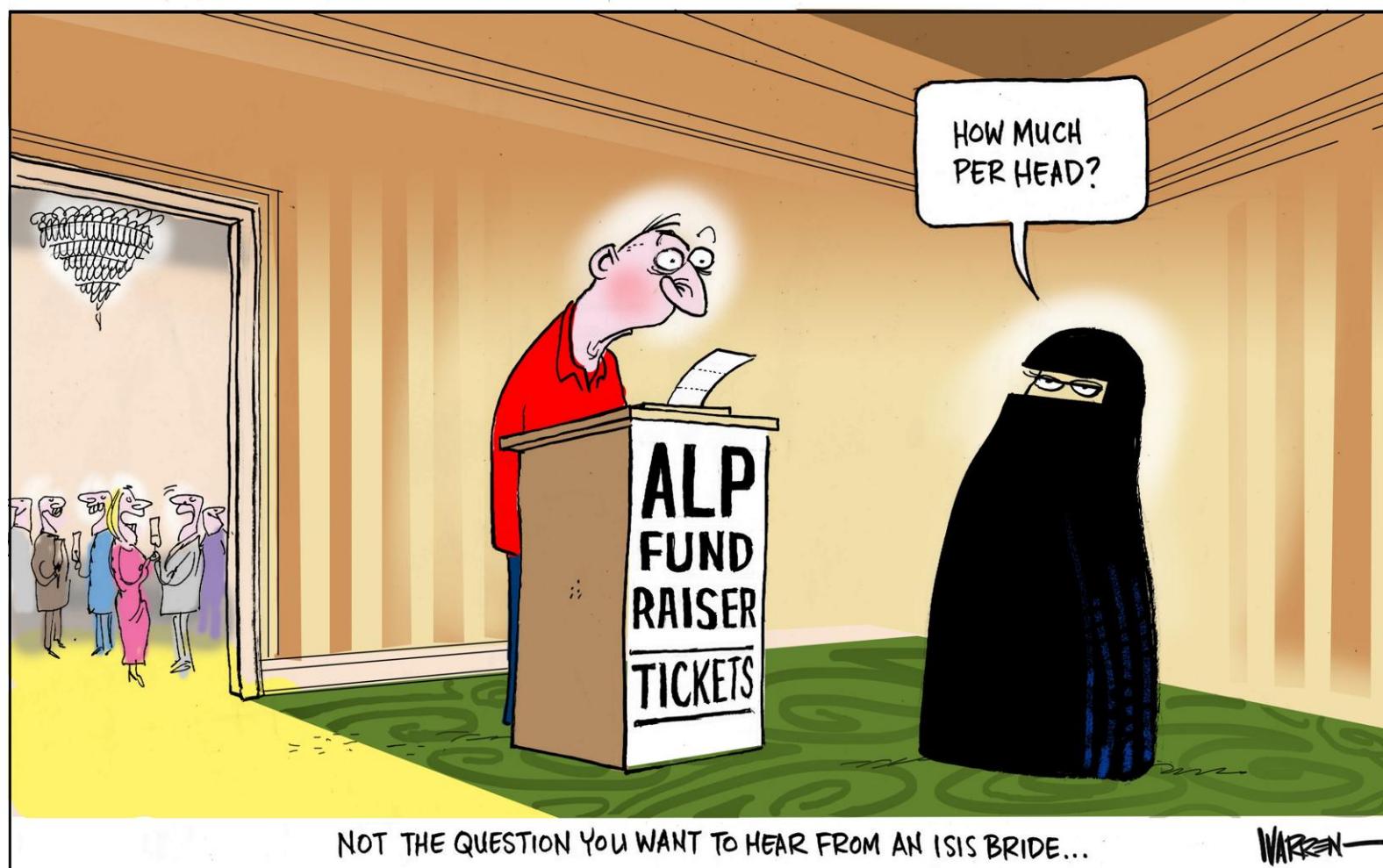


WARREN BROWN



A mother's sacrifice for the whole world to see



JAMES ELDER

Amina. Fawzia. Nala. All mothers. All grief-stricken. All women whose heroic efforts to save their children were not enough.

Mother after mother who I spoke with while in Somalia last month told me of burying babies on gruelling walks from drought-destroyed livelihoods to the hope of help, the search for water.

They are part of a rolling tragedy unfolding in the Horn of Africa, where a climate-induced catastrophe has hundreds of thousands of children on the brink of famine.

Numbers are often perilous when talking about disasters, for they risk erasing the human face of a crisis, but some numbers count.

Every minute in Somalia, a child is admitted to a health facility with the deadliest form of malnutrition. Many don't even make it that far.

Hunger is a lethal threat but so too is its companion, disease. When children are severely malnourished, they are about 10 times more likely than well-nourished children to succumb to conditions such as diarrhoea or measles. And so the world waits to see if famine will officially be declared in Somalia.

But let's be clear, whether or not the F-word is used, people are dying.

By the time famine is declared, at least 20 per cent of households face an extreme lack of food, at least 30 per cent of children under the age of

five are suffering from wasting or other forms of acute malnutrition and people are dying each day due to outright starvation or the interaction of malnutrition and disease. During the 2011 famine in Somalia, about 50 per cent of the more than 260,000 deaths occurred before a famine was officially declared.

That included tens and tens of thousands of children. And so we must learn the lessons from the past. We cannot wait for famine to be declared before we act to save lives.

Twenty years ago I started working for UNICEF, in Angola. Since then, I have worked from Zimbabwe to Ethiopia, Kenya to Mozambique.

What struck me then, and continues to move me now, is the lengths families and communities take to protect their children.

A mother carrying her child and walking for 18 days; a grandfather giving the last of his maize to families on the move; a father working a world away to provide for his family.

As Australians stand together to fight record flooding, just years after ferocious bushfires, few nations like ours know the reality of a changing climate. Somalia has had three big

droughts in just over a decade, on top of flooding, and a biblical plague of locusts.

Children living in Somalia barely have any carbon footprint and yet they are among some of the most exposed citizens on the planet to climate and environmental shocks. As such, Somali mums and dads can no longer face these odds alone.

I had an old school mate in Goulburn who used to say he didn't buy lotto tickets because he "had already won the lottery ... the lottery of birth". Perhaps then it's moments like these in Somalia when we need to cash in some of 'that win' and come together against common enemies of poverty, drought and inequality so as to assure a more fair go for all. Because when early action is taken in the face of drought and malnutrition – as happened in Somalia in 2017 – the results are overwhelming.

Children's lives are saved, the devastating and permanent damage of malnutrition on children's brains is prevented and countries' workforces and economies benefit.

Facing famine is not as 'simple' as feeding mouths. It is reaching people in very remote communities

surviving in the face of prolonged drought. It is trucking in clean water when the ground water wells are dry; it is providing medical teams and supplies to treat malnutrition and related diseases.

In Somalia alone, UNICEF teams have treated 300,000 children with the most severe malnutrition this year and supplied water to half a million people in just three months.

Innovation is being set in motion.

Successful work on mapping groundwater using geospatial imagery and data is already underway in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia to improve water systems and help families build their resilience to climate change.

Other solutions require leadership and honesty. Governments and business must fulfil the promises they have been making.

As the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put it: "Some government and business leaders are saying one thing – but doing another. Simply put, they are lying. And the results will be catastrophic."

We also desperately need more parties to step up and commit further flexible resources for the Horn of Africa, to ensure UNICEF and partners can move quickly and efficiently and to make sure that all children's needs – from nutrition to education and child protection – are accounted for.

We know how to save and protect lives in Somalia now and in the long term but as a global community we must not wait any longer to act.

Australia's James Elder is a UNICEF global spokesperson.

“What struck me is the lengths families and communities take to protect their children”

Perinatal care high priority



ARABELLA GIBSON

Demand for perinatal mental health services has continued to surge year-on-year since the beginning of the pandemic.

This demand should come as no surprise, especially given the isolation and loneliness experienced by expectant and new parents over the past few years.

There is a lot of pressure to perceive the birthing journey as a magical and perfect time, which is why some may be surprised to know that, in Australia, perinatal depression and anxiety affects one in five new mothers and one in 10 new fathers, impacting 100,000 families every year. There is not one cause for perinatal mental health issues, nor is there a specific type of person it impacts.

In fact, perinatal mental health struggles can affect any expectant and new parent and can come as a complete surprise. For all parents, it is important to remember that some anxiety and worries, as well as changes in sleep, eating and routine, are normal factors when adjusting to parenthood. However, there are warning signs to look out for to determine if you may be experiencing perinatal depression or anxiety, or adjustment disorders.

If you experience several of the following symptoms over a two-week period and notice a significant impact on quality of daily life, at any time throughout your pregnancy and parenting journey, you may be vulnerable to, or experiencing, a depressive or anxious episode.

These symptoms can include a lack of enjoyment in previously loved activities, feeling numb or hopeless about the future, separating yourself from loved ones, repetitive negative thought patterns or frequent feelings of loss, guilt, or grief. For expectant and new parents who may start to notice these warning signs, it is vital they have access to early support for perinatal mental health issues.

As CEO of a leading perinatal mental health charity, Gidget Foundation Australia, and mum of twins myself, I cannot stress enough how important the need for support is during this time in your life.

In fact, Gidget Foundation Australia clinicians have observed a surge in the need for more support for expectant and new parents, delivering 121 per cent more clinical treatment services in 2022 than in 2021, which was already up by 59 per cent in 2020. With demand for perinatal mental health services continuing to surge year-on-year, we are delighted to welcome a \$15.85 million investment from the Australian Government to fund the opening of 12 new perinatal mental health centres for expectant and new parents over the next four years.

This announcement is in line with Perinatal Mental Health Week where Gidget Foundation Australia, along with over 45 other perinatal mental health organisations, have united to ensure that families across the country know they are supported. **Arabella Gibson is the CEO of the Gidget Foundation.**