



## ***London and South-East Region***

***Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA***

### **Apologies**

Genia Browning, James Dodds, Jane Grant, Peter Greaves, Roger Hallam, Wendy Higgs, Sheila Kesby, Susan Tirbutt, Peter Webster, David Wardrop, Dr Carl Wright

### **1. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

These were approved unanimously.

### **2. Chair's report**

Catherine Pluygers said:

The International Community, the ideals of the UN, and international law are coming under an unprecedented threat, and the work of the UN, and of UNA, is more important than ever. I continue to be very pleased with the efforts of all our branches and the breadth of what they do. All have worked very hard and some have produced outstanding results. Bexhill & Hastings, Canterbury, Eastbourne Tunbridge Wells and Westminster deserve special mention. Our thanks to them, and to our L&SER committee for the work they have done both for the region and the branches to which they belong.

A number of important events have taken place during the year. In February we had a full-day event on policy issues, led by Peter Webster, which included presentations from Paul Tippell the Campaign Leader on Yemen, and Gonzalo Alvarez, Campaign leader on Climate and Oceans. The latter has since also become UNA-UK's Campaign officer on the issue; an important feature of this campaign has been networking with over a dozen different organisations, proud to be associated with the UNA logo.

The Region also continues to support UNA-UK and plays its part in UNA-UK events. The Region's Trust has given financial support not just to branches, but to UNA-UK, to assist in publication of the UNA-UK's flagship magazine *New World*.

Other regional events this year include our Spring Council meeting chaired by Keith Hindell at which we focussed on the issue of migration. The Region was very fortunate to have two distinguished speakers for this event, Myrian Cherti, a National Officer at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Marley Morris, a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). A report can be found on our website.

The summer council in July took place at King Charles the Martyr Church Hall in Tunbridge Wells, hosted by Tunbridge Wells and Wealden Branch. Kate Sander discussed "Tunbridge Wells Welcomes Refugees"; Alan Bullion discussed "Social Divisions and Identity in Sri Lanka", and Dr Brian Beeley gave a talk on "Palestine since Trump – a new Look at Israel's Future". Neville Grant highlighted some of the issues on the West Bank with a powerpoint presentation.

Many L&SER members took part in the members' policy conference at NCVO in November.

### **3 Policy Committee Report: Resolutions**

CP reported that policy issues have become increasingly important in the last five years of her chairmanship. The region now has its own campaign issues and priorities, which overlap with those of UNA-UK. Our own members have drafted resolutions to which branches can refer to guide their own policy and campaign work. These resolutions are spelt out on the L&SER website. [*A list of them appears as an appendix to these minutes*] This is an important aspect of our work this year. A new resolution on Hong Kong is being framed.

### **4 Volunteers**

L&SER has arranged for several short-term volunteers to assist with our work. A campaigning volunteer, Micaiah Longe, has been attached to UNA-UK in Whitehall Court for three months to identify campaigning leaders from UNA membership in different parliamentary constituencies, for lobbying purposes, and Keyet Makonnen, who liaises with WILPF and African women's organisations. Reports on their work are pending.

As a development of this work on policy/resolutions your committee has been in meetings with head office UNA-UK to ensure that we are all pulling in the same direction.

### **5 International Court of the Environment**

Antony Vallyon is L&SER's rapporteur on this issue. The aim of the International Court for the Environment would be the promotion, development, determination and enforcement of **environmental** law at the international level. At its heart, the campaign to establish the ICE is based on the recognition that the principal causes and effects of the world's **major environmental** problems are international in nature and so require solutions. Political support for this proposal has been, at its best, mixed, but is gaining traction. Those lobbying for it, including our former President Stephen Hockman QC, have been placing the proposal on the map at international climate conferences, but so far there are not yet pathways on the map linking it to action.

### **6 The L&SER Newsletter**

For some years this was edited by Neville, and circulated by post, but this was found too expensive. More recently, it has been an e-newsletter, and was edited by Jane Beeley and Neville Grant, and then formatted and sent out by email to members. Lucette Stevens suddenly pulled out, and L&SER was left high and dry; we are grateful to UNA-UK for agreeing to handle a one-off emailing to members of the region this autumn, publicising inter alia the AGM; but we are now looking for some one else to do this job – and to update it every two months or so, Peter and Sarah Webster have kindly agreed to do this in the interim until we find a more permanent solution. So far four candidates have been interviewed, but no one has as yet agreed to take it on.

### **7 The website**

Originally designed by Lucette, it has been redesigned by Peter Webster, but it needs a web-master (or mistress) to keep it up to date. We have managed to get the region's resolutions listed on it, and a list of branches in the region, though in many cases there is no information as yet about some of them – and no built-in link with those branches that have their own websites.

### **8 Campaigns**

**8.1** During the year, two campaigns have had significant successes. Paul Tippell's campaign on Yemen, with its concomitant corollary relating to UK's arms sales to the Saudis, is extremely well

informed and researched, and has achieved a high profile among some Parliamentarians, but has not received as much support or recognition by UNA-UK as it deserves. This despite the urgency of the humanitarian crisis, and the call for a peace process, neither of which could be objected to by anyone. Among the problems Paul has had has been data protection issues, which have hampered attempts to get the message out to where it needs to be heard.

**8.2** A UNA Climate and Oceans project spear-headed by Gonzalo Alvarez of Bexhill and Hastings UNA has been officially recognised by UNA-UK as a Network UNA and has been given its own UNA-UK Logo. This is a great development and will help ambitious plans for 2020 including forging new partnerships and working alongside local UNAs, local Authorities, local MPs, Government Agencies, regional NGOs and Community groups. The campaign to try to save the oceans from multiple pressures is being carried out within the context of the UN SDGs. In the words of UNA UK:

"UNA-UK is supporting the establishment of issue-focused UNA networks such as UNA Climate and Oceans. This will enable our members and supporters to connect beyond their local communities and campaign on climate change - the defining issue of our time."

The project has also been given its own page on the UNA-UK website, so it will provide the framework to be part of the UNA-UK national movement. Here is the link publicising future events:

<https://www.una.org.uk/branch/una-climate-and-oceans>

**8.3** Meanwhile other branches are of course free to carry out their own campaigns; for example, UNA Tunbridge Wells has been working on the Hong Kong issue, and UNA Westminster has been carrying out a long campaign for a rigorous investigation into the Dag Hammarskjold mystery, subject of a recent two-hour documentary on Channel 5; another campaign seeks to put UN 75 on the map.

## **9 The Region's Trust Fund**

The strategic reserve, quite separate from L&SER's accounts, amounts to some £130,000 and applications for grants from it are welcome, subject to the criteria laid out in the website. Grants were made during the year to: UNA-UK, WILPF, Hear Women Gargar Foundation, Dartford UNA, Bexhill & Hastings UNA, and Blackheath & Greenwich UNA.

## **10 Financial report**

In the unavoidable absence of our Treasurer, Peter Webster, Sarah Webster summarised the accounts. This revealed:

### **2018/19**

Fund at start of year £4,481.32

Fund at end of year £3,873.32

### **2017/18**

Fund at start of year £5668

Fund at end of year £4,481.32

## **11 Any Other business**

The following were brought to the attention of the Hon. Sec at the end of the meeting:

**11.1 UN 75** David Wardrop forwarded this minute:

**UN75 The Intention:** To initiate dialogues in all settings – from classrooms to boardrooms, parliaments to village halls.

Who will drive this in the UK? In June, UNA Westminster urged UNA to take a lead, but it refused, “too busy with Together First.” Only lately has it shown interest, partly because Natalie is seconded to work with the UN75 team in New York. Angie Pankhania has passed UNA leadership to Carl and David.

Next Thursday, the Academic Council on the UN System (ACUNS) will host a meeting of interested parties in Coventry University where it is based. David will attend and Carl Wright will link by Skype. David has reminded the FCO that for UN50, HMG:

- Funded a UN exhibition in the VE Day display in Hyde Park Corner
- Took over Westminster Hall for event attended by the Queen, Prince Philip and Prince Charles
- Arranged invitations for UNA guests to Buck House garden party, noting that former Foreign

Secretary Geoffrey Howe chaired UN50 and Prince Charles was Patron. and so on David worried that what could have been a UNA-led programme (like UN50) will now likely comprise an uncoordinated array of independent initiatives, lacking impact anywhere. An update will follow.

### **11.2 Principles of International law**

Chris Coverly of UNA Bexhill and Hastings UNA and Make War History circulated a document - the 1970 UN Declaration on Principles of International Law; which virtually made most wars illegal. Perhaps an issue that should be revisited in one of our meetings?

### **11.3 Election 2019**

Members should use this event to highlight international and UN issues, as requested by UNA-UK. Blackheath & Greenwich was one of several branches organizing local hustings events.

### **11.4 Hear Women Foundation**

Catherine, Keyet and Neville gave well-received presentations to a group of mainly Arab women on the value of the UN, and its important role in supporting women’s issues.

### **11.5 Sri Lanka**

Puni Shiyami reminded the meeting of the dire situation of Tamils in Sri Lanka, who apart from having their property despoiled and taken over by the military, were victimized by oppressive measures, and were being made the target of “psychological warfare”.

### **11.6 Film Festival**

Those who attended some of the films being shown in the *We the Peoples* film festival organised by Westminster UNA are full of praise for the event. The films highlighted many pressing issues.

**11.7** The Hon Sec had received an extremely informative newsletter from Dartford and District UNA.

### **11.8 UN Peace Service in Canterbury Cathedral**

In October, UNA Canterbury collaborated with Canterbury Cathedral for the 36<sup>th</sup> year in this event, in which UNA and other local community groups processed down the aisle to mark UN Day. The theme of the service was “Reverse Global Warming to Prevent More Wars”. The service was attended by the largest congregation so far, and many local dignitaries including the Lord Mayor Councillors and Steve Cutts, former assistant Secretary General of the UN). L&SER was represented by Gonzalo Alvarez, Trisha Rogers, and Neville and Jane Grant. Speakers included David Wardrop and Carl Wright; the latter brilliantly summarised Global Warming and its consequences, and the importance of close co-operation between other countries, including the EU.

The highlight of the service, however, was a compelling speech by 13-year old Pascal Sleigh, on the dire consequences of unrestrained climate change. His speech can be seen (and heard) on <https://vimeo.com/367582032/c54a093dfa>

*All are urged to visit it: not enough ‘hits’ so far!*

## **12 Awards and commemorations**

**12.1** All were very sorry to hear the death of stalwart UNA supporter Irene Norton, aged 92. For many years chair of Highgate UNA, she ran a UN Flagday, and took a stall at the Highgate Fair, and ran regular meetings; earlier this year she wrote a letter to her MP about the fate of Yemeni children. Keith Hindell read out an appreciation, and presented flowers to her daughter Christina. Irene comes from the Greek εἰρήνη, which fittingly means “Peace”.

**12.2 The Stevens Trophy** was awarded to Eastbourne UNA in recognition of the very well-attended events they have organised during the year, and their tree-planting initiative in Uganda. Neville will look after the trophy pending a visit to Eastbourne just after Christmas, when he will hand over the trophy to Ian Elgie a member of Eastbourne UNA.

### **13 Elections**

**13.1** Catherine thanked the L&SER Committee for their support during the year, and urged members to come forward if they wished to join the committee. We seek all skills but in particular seek somebody to function as our press officer/web manager to get our message out nationally.

#### **13.2 The following were elected or re-elected to the L&SER Committee**

Patricia Rogers (Chair) Westminster UNA

Neville Grant (Hon. Sec.) Blackheath & Greenwich UNA

Peter Webster (Treasurer) Clapham & Streatham UNA

#### **Committee members:**

Hagir Ahmed

Gonzalo Alvarez (Bexhill and Hastings UNA)

Jane Beeley (Tunbridge Wells UNA)

Wendy Higgs (Blackheath & Greenwich UNA),

Keith Hindell (Westminster UNA)

Keyet Makonnem

Rodney Mantle (Twickenham & Richmond UNA)

Catherine Pluygers (Putney & Roehampton/Westminster UNA)

Deqa Salad

Patricia Rogers (Westminster UNA)

Rob Storey (Putney UNA)

Antony Vallyon (Westminster UNA)

David Wardrop (Westminster UNA)

**13.3** Catherine Pluygers was thanked profusely for the sterling work she had done as chair for the last five years. Trisha Rogers thanked the meeting for electing her as the new chair; she looked forward to serving the region, and supporting local branches. Amid great applause, she then gave a presentation to Catherine to thank her for everything she had done.

### **14. Presentations by visiting speakers**

**Following the formal AGM and a break for refreshments, the meeting, chaired by Catherine Pluygers, proceeded to presentations by three visiting speakers.**

- **Dr Dan Plesch** of SOAS on Globalism Trumps Patriotism. The founder/director of the British American Security Council in Washington DC 1987 - 2001, when he became Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute. (RUSI) He is currently Director and Reader at the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS. He is the author of several books including *Human Rights After Hitler* and *America, Hitler and the UN*.

In his talk Dr Plesch gave a brief survey of relevant nomenclature. He pointed out that “Globalism” was frequently used as an anti-Semitic trope to mean “Zionist Conspiracy”.

The word “**Globalist**” is a term with an **anti-Semitic** history, and is often understood as code for “Jews,” so this language is activating and traumatizing for a lot of Jews: especially so in the wake of a bomb attack at the home of George Soros, a prominent Jewish philanthropist who is often unjustly branded with the “**globalist**” label. He also spoke of the difference between patriotism (pride in one’s v country) and nationalism (assertion of a nation’s superiority, which could develop into fascism). The lessons of 1945 seemed to have been forgotten as nationalism was again rearing its ugly head: it seemed to encourage a number of side effects such as the politics of voter suppression eg. in the US, 2000 polling stations had been closed, and discriminatory rules on photo IDs for people seeking to exercise their vote was eroding the democratic base. This could easily happen here in the UK. Patriotism was entirely compatible with internationalism, which meant working with other countries for the common good of all nations: hence the value of the EU, and the UN. The UN itself should develop sanctions against countries where human rights were being eroded. Failure of UN to enforce international law meant a diplomatic vacuum which states filled by beginning to act unilaterally.

- **Leslie Abdela** on “The role of women in the peace and reconciliation process|”: Leslie has worked in over fifty countries, including many in fragile and post-conflict situations, including Kosovo, Afghanistan, Libya and Sierra Leone.. She is a member of Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) an advocate network for NGOs, and has published widely. She won the 2009 Woman political Journalist of the Year Award.

Lesley spoke of her experiences working with women in numerous situations, and how they were often the main victims of conflict – yet, paradoxically, could also be the main agents to achieve a solution to conflict. Despite UN Resolution 1325, they still did not play a nearly big enough role in peace negotiations and reconciliation, despite a vast body of evidence showing that peace was achieved more successfully, and lasted for much longer, if women were involved. She suggested that no country should be given aid to resolve a conflict unless both sides had at least 40% of the negotiators were women.

- **Ahlam Akram** spoke on “Women and human rights in the Arab world”. She is a peace and human rights activist campaigner, writer and broadcaster of Palestinian origin who has lived in London since 1979. She is a powerful advocate for women’s rights, and has spoken and written widely about under-age marriage, FGM, honour killings against women, due to a complex combination of patriarchal religious interpretations and social and cultural norms.

The issues adumbrated above were endemic in many countries, and it was scandalous that they were tolerated by the international community; those in predominantly Islamic countries who campaigned against abuses were regularly victimised. What had happened to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? She called on western women to do more to highlight the issues and raise them in international fora; but they seemed more concerned with comparatively trivial issues compared with the abuses she listed.

A lively discussion followed these presentations. One contentious issue was how far Islam sanctioned biases against women. One point made by Dr Plesch is worth noting: when the UDHR was being framed, the issue of gender equality was raised by, in his memory, women from Egypt Pakistan and Brazil, giving the lie to the canard that human rights were a culturally-biased European concept. At the time, some western women were against any mention of gender equality on the grounds that it was “vulgar”.

## **15 Proposed policy resolution on Hong Kong.**

This motion, moved by Marguerita Morton and Jane Beeley of Tunbridge Wells UNA, sought to urge the government of the UK to take diplomatic action to resolve the crisis in Hong Kong, and the erosion of the “Basic Law” that had set up “One Country, two Systems”.

During the discussion, it was noted that language that was too strong was likely to be counterproductive when dealing with the Chinese, but more diplomatic language could still be effective. The revised wording of the resolution (written subsequently) is as follows:

### **Draft Motion on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR)**

#### **UNA London and South East Region notes:**

1. the continuous deterioration of civil and political rights in Hong Kong.
2. the increasing challenges the model of ‘one country, two systems’ is facing.
3. that over the past years and more recent months the people of Hong Kong have conducted mass peaceful protests in favour of democracy and the full implementation of the Basic Law, exercising their fundamental rights to assemble and express themselves freely.

#### **The Region expresses deep concern:**

4. that demonstrations have been described by the Chinese authorities as ‘terrorism’ and are met with a level of force which is disproportionate to the overall peaceful protests and prohibited by international norms and standards.
5. that Chinese authorities on several occasions over the past months ‘warned’ the people of Hong Kong to ‘put an end to the chaos in Hong Kong’.
6. and deeply regrets the incidents of violence on all sides.

#### **The Region urges the UK Government:**

7. to call on the Chinese government to fulfil the promises made during the handover, and to request that a UN special rapporteur undertakes an independent investigation into the violence in Hong Kong.

8. to call for an open dialogue between the authorities and people of Hong Kong aimed at finding a solution to this sensitive issue.
9. to grant holders of a British National (Overseas) Citizenship in Hong Kong a right of abode in the UK.
10. to restate the moral and legal responsibility of the UK and Hong Kong governments to support processes to ensure that democracy, the rule of law and human rights are upheld in Hong Kong.
11. to ensure that the UK and our international partners suspend all export licenses for crowd control equipment to Hong Kong.

**The Region calls on the UN and all member states:**

12. to call for an immediate end to violence from all sides.
13. to ask the authorities in Hong Kong and China to act with restraint and ensure the protection of human rights and freedoms as laid down in the Basic Law for all citizens.
14. to request those same authorities to support an independent investigation by a UN special rapporteur into reported incidents of excessive use of force by law enforcement officials and other security personnel.

**16 End of meeting** The meeting closed at 5.15.

**Appendix**

**List of the Region's Policy Resolutions**

The resolutions are set out on the region's website – [www.unalaser.org](http://www.unalaser.org)

1. Asia Bibi case
2. Atrocity prevention
3. Climate
4. How did Dag Hammarskjold die?
5. Human Rights
6. Localising the SDGs
7. North Korea
8. Nuclear
9. Oceans
10. Palestine 100 years after the Balfour Declaration
11. Protection of journalists
12. Sri-Lanka
13. Strengthening UN peacekeeping and peace building missions
14. The role of women in the U
15. UN reform

16. UN Sustainable Development Goals

17. Women, Peace and Security

18. Yemen

A resolution on Hong Kong is in preparation