

United Nations Association London and South-East Region Newsletter for April 2020



MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR of L&SER UNA, Patricia Rogers:

Dear All

I am sorry we were not able to meet for the Spring Council as we had planned on 4th April. I shall have to introduce you to the charming Bermondsey Village Hall at some future date. I hope you are all keeping well and not finding this isolation too difficult. An unexpected consequence of the shutdown is how much cleaner the world becomes with greatly reduced traffic, illustrating people's influence on our environment.

The pandemic has reminded everyone, too, of how interlinked the world is and has highlighted the importance of international collaboration; so let's hope it will strengthen support for the UN and its agencies even after the pandemic is over. The work of WHO is being crucial in helping the global medical community work together (see their live [press briefings](#)); UNHCR is tackling the immense job of protecting vulnerable refugees and [needs our support](#) more than ever at this time; meanwhile the Secretary General is [calling for a global ceasefire](#) to help strengthen the fight against COVID-19. As you will see elsewhere in this newsletter, Bexhill and Hastings UNA Branch have provided an excellent site for keeping in touch with these developments.

I have written on behalf of LASER to our Foreign Secretary and to my MP to help strengthen the SG's message. You can find the letter to the Foreign Secretary [here](#) in case you'd like to send a similar one. Do copy it to your MP to help ensure it is brought to the Foreign Secretary's attention.

I know several branches are holding Zoom meetings, many are using the web to keep in touch with developments around the world; others are using the situation and electronic media to increase awareness of our interdependence and the work of the UN agencies. For those less comfortable with electronic communications, many are using the opportunity to catch up on reading. But I do hope you are not finding this time too lonely. Do let us know if there is any way we can help (such as if you would like regular telephone calls). Please email me with suggestions of how we can support each other.

To cheer us all up, let's look forward beyond the lockdown! As you know, the UN will have its 75th birthday on 24th October and, in the hope that we shall all be out of isolation by then, we are planning, with Peace Child International, to hold an afternoon and evening event in London on that day. We expect to focus on building a more secure world, but are still working on the details. Do put this event in your diaries now!

With very best wishes

Trisha Rogers

1 Support for the UNSG's call for a global ceasefire

Written on 21st March:

Dear Foreign Secretary

In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, last week the **UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a global ceasefire** to "end the sickness of war" and focus all of the world's resources on fighting the pandemic. He said, "Our world faces a common enemy, COVID-19. The virus does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly. Meanwhile armed conflict rages on around the world. The most vulnerable ... pay the highest price."

I am writing to you on behalf of the London and South East Region of the United Nations Association (UNA LASER) to **urge you to support the Secretary General's call for a global ceasefire and to instruct Karen Pierce to do proactively all in her power at the UN to bring this about.**

Please will you work for such a ceasefire not only through the United Nations Security Council and other key UN mechanisms. Also please use your good offices to achieve ceasefires in wars in which the UK is involved, such as the war in Yemen on which the UK is currently pen holder at the UN and where billions of pounds worth of UK-manufactured arms have been responsible for much of the destruction, including of hospitals and clinics.

In all conflicts, health services suffer. When, as will surely happen, COVID-19 reaches such countries, the consequences will be horrific. It has become clearer than ever in recent weeks both that we are unavoidably globally interdependent and also that genuine security for us all has more to do with working together towards human and planetary wellbeing than with violent attempts at domination.

So, we in UNA LASER urge you to use all your good offices to help bring about the ceasefire being called for by the UN Secretary General. Such an achievement would relieve immense suffering and help us all work together to tackle COVID-19.

Yours faithfully

Patricia Shephard Rogers,
Chair UNA LASER

2 Petition for debt cancellation linked to corona virus

The economic crash caused by coronavirus has pushed indebted countries even deeper into debt crisis.

The call to cancel debts for the most vulnerable countries is gathering speed and I have added my voice to it by signing this petition, you can sign too here: jubileedebt.org.uk/actions/stop-coronavirus-debt-disaster.

The impacts of the pandemic could spell enormous problems for countries already ravaged by war or natural disasters. Most people in these countries depend on selling farm produce and raw materials for their livelihoods. Not only are they getting less money for products like copper and coffee, the cost of borrowing has shot up. A double whammy for those worst off.

We have an opportunity to make a difference. Soon world leaders will meet to discuss the crisis and we can send them a strong message. We are demanding urgent debt cancellation. Please add your voice: jubileedebt.org.uk/actions/stop-coronavirus-debt-disaster.

3 Summer Council

News from TRUNA (Twickenham and Richmond UNA)

Sadly, Rodney Mantle has had to stand down as Chair for health reasons. We wish him well, and thank him for his excellent contribution.

Renee Smit has taken over for the time being. She writes:

"L&SER UNA's Summer Council which TRUNA has been planning for July 4th 2020 is on hold due to COVID 19. At present all we can do is to wait until the Government is able to set some (clearer) dates about extending or lifting the restrictions. Watch this space!"

4 UNA Climate and Oceans

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.

These volunteer-run groups support our work by organising a diverse range of grass-roots activities.

Ranging from speaker and fundraising events from campus events to Model United Nations, these activities raise awareness and interest in the work of the United Nations at a local level across the country.

If you would like to join UNA Climate and Oceans, please email Gonzalo Alvarez on the email address provided.

Gonzalo adds: Please note:

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CRISIS SUMMIT - SUSSEX

The Biodiversity and Climate Crisis Summit I was organising for the whole of Sussex for the 3rd of June has now been **postponed**, which is a shame because we had around 20 Government, NGOs and Community Groups participating from across Sussex and had fantastic Speakers lined up and two expert Panels for this event. We are planning to re-schedule it for the first or second week in November and I don't think that will clash with LASER AGM. Hopefully this will be the case.

Contact: Gonzalo Alvarez, unaukhanb@gmail.com Tel. 07552 690519

5 UNA Bexhill and Hastings

Gonzalo writes:

I trust you are well and staying safe during this COVID-19 crisis. I am sharing with you a link to our UNA YouTube Channel with UN updates regarding the COVID-19 crisis. I have created different Playlists with selected updated official UN videos in order to facilitate viewing, these are:

- UN Daily Briefings
- UN response to COVID-19 Crisis
- UN World Health Organization

They are all very good videos and they show very clearly the UN's view on managing this global Pandemic. The UN Secretary General's video regarding the ceasefire is in one of the Playlists too and the latest one on the global socio-economic impacts and a call for solidarity with poorer countries. Here is the direct link to the UN Playlists page on our UNA YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5SEg8smhL-nDDSN18TcWrA/playlists?>

Here is a link to the Home page of our UNA YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5SEg8smhL-nDDSN18TcWrA/featured?>

Here in the South Coast UNA will be very much operational using our different UNA Social Media platforms, informing the community and the general public. We will be sharing the UN videos through our UNA YouTube Channel on our UNA Facebook pages, etc.

I am also sharing the latest UN Report: "**Shared Responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19**" (March 2020). It's a comprehensive report about a coordinated global action and the vital role of multilateralism in tackling the crisis

6 Blackheath & Greenwich UNA

Wendy Higgs reports that the Luxor Street Children project is now getting a lot of local support in Egypt. Thanks to L&SER Trust for helping to pump prime this project.

Neville Grant's talk on UNA75 that was due to be given at St George's Church Westcombe Park SE3 7SE has had to be postponed in view of COVID-19.



7 The United Nations Association – Canterbury Branch

Michael Vince reports:

Our next UNA *zoom* based **branch meeting** will be on the **18th April**, more details below.

I commend a short 'Talk to Aljazeera' programme in which *UN officials say every resource must be mobilised to prevent a 'wildfire' of cases in fragile states and refugee camps*. With comments from UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres at <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/talktojazeera/>.



This 25-minute presentation emphasises the valuable work of the UN and its various agencies. It addresses the need for effective social and climatic change if we are to cope with the emergencies of the future. In this 75th year of the UN

UNA-CB have agreed to proceed with our *SDG* programme as best we can. To this end we have planned to hold a *zoom*-based seminar led by Bala Chandramahon at 10.30 on the 18th April related to **SDG 17. Localising the SDGs: learning through a North/South Partnership.** We will explore the potential for establishing a partnership for our Canterbury civil society, (potentially also local government and business society groups) initially with the municipality of Entebbe, Uganda.

The plan for our summer meeting, considering **The Role of the UN in 2045**, on the 11th July, might well need to take the same video format, albeit condensed and without the strawberry tea.

We continue to plan for a 75th Anniversary service, but are prepared for change from our original 11th October aspirational date, depending on the COVID-19 virus.

