



UNA LASER Newsletter, May 2020

From LASER Chair: Campaigning at this Challenging Time



To tackle the effects of the current pandemic, we urgently need global cooperation under the guidance of the UN and its agencies. For example, on your behalf, I have recently taken the following four actions. Please take action, too! In addition to sending the linked letters (as emails), I have written similar letters to my MP requesting his support.

Note that if you just copy in your MPs to the (emailed) letter to the Minister, MPs do not feel obliged to take action, so it is important to send them separate letters. Also, if MPs write to a Minister, the Minister has to see the letter and reply, whereas a letter from a member of the general public might be dealt with by an official. To be most effective, therefore, please write to the Minister involved and send a similar letter to your MP asking him/her to take the matter up with the relevant Minister. It is important to include your full postal address on all these letters.

We shall continue to put such letters on our website. Please [let me know](#) if you feel there is something on which LASER should be campaigning.

1. The pandemic is putting an impossible strain on the poor countries encumbered by international debt (mostly to the International Monetary Fund, IMF). I signed, on behalf of LASER, the [Jubilee Debt Campaign \(JDC\) petition](#) to Chancellor Rishi Sunak. There is further information about these debts on both the [JDC website](#) and that of [the IMF](#). This situation has now moved on and we shall alert you if more campaigning action seems necessary.
2. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has called for a global ceasefire to help countries tackle the pandemic and limit its harm to their peoples. On behalf of LASER, [I have written](#) to the Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, to ask him to support this call. I have asked, too, that our UN ambassador do all in her power at

the UN to bring this about, and that we use our good offices to bring ceasefires to wars in which we are involved, such as in Yemen, where UK is currently penholder at the UN and where billions of pounds worth of UK-manufactured arms have been used.

3. The key UN agency bringing experts and politicians together and advising countries on how best to deal with the pandemic is, of course, the World Health Organisation (WHO). We were therefore appalled that President Trump chose this moment to cut funding for WHO. [I wrote](#) on your behalf to our Secretary of State for International Development, Anne Marie Trevelyan, asking her to make an additional contribution to WHO and to encourage other countries to do the same.
4. [The BBC news report](#) on the “worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World war” alerted us to the urgency of the need for the World Food Programme (WFP) to be able to address the impending famine “of biblical proportions”, caused by the pandemic as well as by unprecedented locust infestations, in at least 10 countries. Its fourth annual *Global Report on Food Crises* identified four necessary immediate initiatives that the WFP can take, with appropriate support. The UN Secretary-General has urged the international community, led by the Global Network against Food Crises, to respond to this call from the WFP. Now that the UK has left the EU, it is not clear how we relate to the Global Network against Food Crises. [I have therefore written](#) on your behalf to the Secretary of State for International Development, Anne Marie Trevelyan, asking her to clarify the UK’s response to the Secretary-General’s call.

Some of us on the LASER committee have discussed (by Zoom) with our elected Trustees (Carl Wright and Dorothea Christiana) how members can best relate with UNA headquarters. Please let me know if you or your branch has any experiences to contribute to this discussion. We should particularly [like to know](#) your thoughts about the new subscription arrangements.

As I mentioned in the last Newsletter, I realise that this is a particularly difficult time for some of our members. Several branches are continuing to be active, sharing their meetings electronically. Others have not yet taken this step. Please [let me know](#) if LASER or I can help. You might know another member who is not as digitally connected as you and therefore even more cut off. If they would like telephone calls, again, please [let me know](#).

Forthcoming LASER events

16th May, 10:30 – 12:30

Regional Policy (zoom) meeting. You need to register in advance to join this Zoom meeting. Further details are on our website [here](#).

24th October (UN’s 75th Birthday)

We are in the early stages of planning, with Peace Child International and other NGOs, an event to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN. After this time of great insecurity, we have decided to consider aspects of security and how the UN supports and could improve them. Following some plenary speeches, there are likely to be working groups on: peace and security, health security, environmental security, economic security, digital security, food security. Please [let me know](#) if you would like to help in the planning of any of these groups. After the conference and a buffet supper, we hope to include a concert and dialogue. We would like to hold the event in central London, but realise it might have to be held digitally. Either way, do save the date: 24th October, 13:30 – 21:30.

Next Newsletter

We will issue a full e-newsletter in June and I look forward to receiving your contributions. These could include, for example, announcements of forthcoming events (virtual or otherwise), branch plans for celebrating UN75, reports on initiatives and campaigns, or reflections on UN-related matters.

Please send your contributions to me, [Jane Beeley](#), by **Monday 1st June**.



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