



UNA LASER Newsletter
February 2021

From our Chair, Trisha Rogers



Current Campaigns

The [UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) has just come into effect. It had been opened for signature by the Secretary-General in September 2017. Then, following the deposit with the Secretary-General of the 50th ratification on 24th October 2020, it came into effect on 22 January. Do write to your MPs, as well as to the Prime Minister and Defence Secretary, to encourage the UK to engage with this process and sign this Treaty.

[Here](#) is the letter we have written on behalf of LASER, which you can adapt.

At this time when many poorer countries are struggling to cope with the pandemic, thus threatening their progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, we are continuing our campaign for the UK to reinstate its commitment to give 0.7% Gross National Income as overseas aid. See [here our letters to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer](#). Do write about this to them, as well as to your MP (giving your postal address to show you are a constituent).

Ideas and Support for Branches

Branches come in many shapes and sizes; there is no prescribed format or type of event. We thought it would be useful to share the wide range of what is done by different branches and have collected them [here](#). Do [let us know](#) if there are things your branch has done that are not included here. Please don't be daunted by the wide range of possibilities - you can choose just one! We hope that one or two of these examples might spark some new ideas for manageable ways to recruit members and be active as 'critical friends' of the UN.

Forthcoming Events

Have your say! Our Policy Conference will be held by zoom on 27th February at 10:30am; registration is required in advance [here](#). Thank you to all those who have provided draft resolutions, which the Policy Committee has now combined and which you can read [here](#). The Policy Committee particularly invites further proposals on Ecocide and any updates our existing resolution on Hong Kong as well as suggestions on how best to strengthen Human Rights mechanisms. Please [send in](#) your amendments by Sunday 21st February at 6pm.

Our Spring Council will be on 17th April at 4pm. Echoing our plans of a year ago – but now with zoom to save us from cancellation – it will be *Back from the Brink? Cop 26 and Beyond*. We shall have speakers on the science (Dr Michaela Higglin of Reading University), the politics and finance (Professor Nick Robins of LSE, tbc), and activism (Suart Neaverson of the Climate Change Coalition). [Please register here](#).

Preparing for Future Pandemics is the focus of an expert group considering the lessons from this pandemic. If

you would like to be involved, please contact [Paul Mrazek](#) of UNA Westminster. The first meeting will be in April.

UN [International Mother Language Day](#) is celebrated on 21st February, each year, to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. This year the theme is *Fostering Multilingualism for Inclusion in Education and Society*. Next year will also mark the start of the UN Decade of Indigenous languages. Strongly aware of the monolingualism of most of us and how difficult this makes it for us to be fully aware of other cultures and the challenges of effective cross-cultural communication, LASER plans to mark the event in 2022. We would be particularly [interested in hearing](#) from LASER members whose mother tongue is not English and who might like to speak about some of their linguistic experiences.

Newsletters past and future

Please send any contributions for the next Newsletter [to Neville](#) by 1st March. Thanks to Annesha Kar Gupta's work you can now find our past [newsletters on our website](#).

Discussion Paper

On behalf of the UNA-Bexhill & Hastings Branch I would like to introduce [our discussion paper entitled, Global Capitalism versus Human Health and Welfare](#).

When the Covid-19 crisis forced us to cancel our annual public event to celebrate UN Day, the Branch agreed that I re-write the programme as an on-line discussion paper (DP). We then launched this DP locally as our celebration of the UN's 75th Anniversary on 24th October, 2020. After that, we distributed the DP to the nations, regions and branches in UNA-UK.

Regarding the status of the DP, I would like to make two things clear. The first is that while I have the approval from the UNA-Bexhill & Hastings Branch to write and distribute this DP, I am solely responsible for its content. The second thing is that this DP is not about debating the various 'quick-fix' options for dealing with the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic. I am not saying I think this is unimportant. We are 'where we are now' and this crisis has to be resolved. However these 'quick-fix' options, necessary for dealing with Covid-19 in the immediate term, will not serve to deal with it in the long term. I am saying, therefore, that in order to avoid being 'where we are now' ever again, we should address the underlying causality of the current and future pandemics. Presenting what could be called the 'complex-fix' options makes for a lengthy document. But please be reassured that only 13 of the 30 pages are about setting out the actual discussion. The supporting information in the appendices are for people who are unfamiliar with the workings of the UN/UNA.

Just to summarise, we in the Bexhill & Hastings Branch invite our UNA colleagues and groups, government and non-government organisations, and the public to take part in the discussion as set out in [this Paper](#). We would welcome, by 30th April 2021, critical constructive comments, ideas and suggestions to be sent to me via any of my contact details given below. I intend to use the results of the discussion in a final report as part of our branch celebration of UN Day 2021. [Sheila Kesby](#)

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(Formally, Secretary, UNA-Canterbury Branch) Tel: 01242-224536.

Refugees in Hotels: Government Solution

My name is Hagir Ahmed and I sit on the UNA LASER Committee. I am the Operational Lead supporting refugees, asylum-seekers, new arrivals and migrants accommodated in hotels and guest-houses in central London and across eight London Boroughs.

I support refugees and migrants with various services, including:

- providing food & drinks, clothing, GP & medical registrations
- accompanying them to hospitals and medical appointments
- facilitating contact with legal assistance and lawyers, translators and bilingual advocates.

I am writing this article to share my ideas on the problem of refugees' accommodation facilities and its possible solutions.

Since the beginning of the pandemic I have been working in various locations to address the concerns of refugees accommodated in hotels in London and further afield. There are pros and cons to the refugee hotel solution.

Pros:

- Space not over crowded
- Ease of organising COVID-secure separation
- Safe environment, often with 24/7 security and CCTV.

Cons:

- No facilities for young children, teenagers or those with disabilities and health issues
- No drinking water provided, with occupants being directed to drink water from the bathroom taps
- No fresh fruit and vegetables provided
- Low quality and unhealthy food provided, with lack of choice and no provisions for those with special dietary requirements
- Lack of exercise space
- No kitchen or cooking facilities
- Restricted feeding times (should someone miss a scheduled mealtime, there is no food available until the next scheduled mealtime)
- Small food portion sizes, which have recently been once more reduced in size
- Inadequate resources
- High expense to the taxpayer
- Short-term, unsustainable solution.

CONCLUSION

Whilst working through the pandemic supporting refugees, new arrivals and migrants. it has come to my attention that the majority of refugees accommodated in hotels and guest houses have similar ongoing issues and complaints which in general are:

- Lack of funds to make personal phone calls or journey to attend appointments
- No seasonal clothing provided or budgeted for
- Issues of depression distress and mental concerns among adults and children due to being isolated in one room for the majority of the days and night with up to 4-7 members of the family living in one room.

I believe that in this current climate there are many issues to face that are unique, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore now, more than ever, it is imperative that data is shared and a collaborative effort be made between all the agencies working with these refugees, asylum-seekers, new arrivals and migrants.



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