

UNA LASER AGM 20th November 2021

Chair's Report

1. Zoom

Another year dominated by COVID has meant very little face-to-face contact. But we have still been active.

2. UN75

In the 2 months following our October 2020 UN75 Festival – *Building a More Secure World* – we brought together the recommended actions from the workshops on Health Security, Food Security, Environmental Security, Economic Security, Digital Security and Peace and Security. Each had recommended actions for individuals, communities, nations and the international community. The resultant publication, *Urgent Actions for a More Secure World*, is available on the festival website, www.whatnext4un.org, as are the recordings of the workshops, conference and concert of the festival. We had planned to present the *Actions* publication to the UN Secretary-General on 10th January when he had been due to visit London to mark the 75th anniversary of the first General Assembly meeting, held in central London. However, COVID resulted in the cancellation of his visit, so, on 10th January, we presented the *Actions* to him electronically. We also created an electronic assembly for secondary schools based on the Health and Security workshop; please contact me for a link to this.

3. Campaigning

Campaigning has again been a central part of our activity. The details are all on our website

- In January we campaigned for the UK to join the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
- In March we urged the government not to cut UK aid to the suffering people of Yemen.
- In May, as well as supporting a Just Energy Transition and a Green Recovery, we promoted the Glasgow Action Plan for COP26:
 - for mitigation, limiting temperature rise to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels
 - for adaptation, enabling communities to adapt
 - for help to address climate-change-created loss and damage (social, cultural and economic).
- In May, in response to renewed violence in the Holy Land, we campaigned for actions to help bring peace to Israel/Palestine.
- In May, we supported a coalition calling for an overhaul of the UK domestic oil and gas policies.
- In May, as part of the Crack the Crises coalition and targeting the G7 meeting, we urged the rich world's leaders to ensure COVID vaccines for all, as well as to address climate change.
- In August, we promoted the work of our Working Group on Aid and Development, led by Catherine Pluygers, to press for urgent restoration of UK aid to the promised 0.7% gross national income.
- In August and October, led by our small Afghanistan Working Group, we pressed for government and international actions to mitigate the suffering – especially of women and children – caused by the international community's sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan and the takeover there by the Taliban.
- In October, in the lead-up to COP26, we campaigned for:
 - greenhouse emissions caused by military activity to be considered at the COPs
 - COP26 to deliver on loss and damage finance for poorer countries.
- In November (as members of the Climate Coalition) we have been giving on our website regular updates and suggested actions from COP26.

4. Regional Councils

Our Spring Council (*Back from the Brink? COP26 and Beyond*) looked at science (Dr Michaela Higgin), toolkits and commitment ceremonies (Nigel Dower, UNA Aberdeen) and activism (Stuart Neaverson) linked to Climate Change and COP26.

Our Summer Council, run by Twickenham and Richmond UNA (TRUNA), led by René Smit, focused on the *UN: Past, Present – and Future?* The speakers were David Wardrop (on the Past), Prof Christine Chinkin (on

UNSC 1325, Women, Peace and Security), Prof Paul Ekins (on Climate Change), Prof Sir Richard Jolly (on UN effectiveness and challenges), and Dr Sara Pantuliano (on principles, participation and accountability).

5. Contributions

LASER is very much a team effort and I should like to thank the many who have contributed to our Region's activities.

- Branches have been very resourceful in running a wide range of mostly virtual activities and campaigns. I will highlight here a few especially noteworthy features:
 - our new member, Luton Branch, is imaginative in involving local dignitaries (mayors, MPs, Lord Lieutenants, religious leaders, academic leaders) in their virtual events.
 - Westminster Branch – after years of unknotted tangles of red tape – launched the newly named UN Green in the heart of London.
 - Several branches – notably Tunbridge Wells & Wealden and Climate & Oceans – have successfully involved more young people in their events.
 - Many branches have helped to build up awareness of climate change and momentum for political activity in the lead-up to COP 26, including Streatham and Clapham coordinating a COP correspondents' group.
 - Eastbourne has been ahead of the climate change curve in its promotion of scientifically analysed Mvule tree-planting in Uganda .
 - A subcommittee is working on ways to support branches (mainly by learning from other branches, such as in techniques to find new helpers). If any branch is having difficulties, please contact me and we will try to help.
 - Gonzalo Alvarez ran a branches' training session on effective use of social media.
- Thank you to the Executive Committee for all their support.
- I should like particularly to thank Peter Webster, our indefatigable Treasurer, who has not only managed the money effectively (much more work than usual this year as we had large grants from the FCDO and Polden-Puckham for our UN75 Festival), but also led a successful Policy Conference and helped many meet the technical challenges thrown up by our new zoom-centred activities (while still holding down a demanding fulltime job). He also gave an [excellent presentation](#) to the UNA Groups' meeting in May showing the many ways in which LASER was supporting work towards COP26. There will be a link to this in the minutes of this meeting.
- Jane Beeley has found time, as well as chairing the Tunbridge Wells and Wealden branch, to be an efficient and eagle-eyed Regional Secretary.
- Neville Grant helped edit the Newsletter for much of the year.
- Sarah Webster has helped manage the Mailchimp mailings of the Newsletter.
- Catherine Pluygers, my predecessor, who has founded the LASER Working Group on Aid and Development, to campaign for the restoration of UK aid to 0.7% GNI. She has also built strong links with Rotary International, who have a lot in common with us and whom I think some branches might find a useful source of support in running the branch. (It's generally more successful to tap someone on the shoulder and say "I think it would be great to have you in our team" than to put out a general advertisement.
- Annesha Kar Gupta, as well as being our Environmental Officer, has helped keep our website up to date
- You – all our members, who are the lifeblood of the organisation,

We should welcome a range of further contributions, such as with the website, with editing and mailing out the monthly newsletters, with leading on various campaigns, with branch support, with engagement with young people, with suggesting and leading other regional roles. Do get in touch with me to take this further.