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The Next Edition of Laser Pulse

From Our Chair



Trisha Rogers

Events in Gaza continue to dominate our attention. South Africa's case to the World Court (the International Court of Justice), accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza, has led to the court's interim ruling that there is a case to answer and to require Israel to "take all measures within its powers" to prevent civilian deaths in Gaza and to allow aid into Gaza. Israel has to report back to the ICJ on how it is doing this in one month from the ICJ ruling on 26th January. Many have seen this ruling as welcome evidence of the rules-based global order in action (although, so far, there is been little evidence of its effectiveness on the ground) and an end to the exceptionalism usually provided for Israel.

Our President HE Fatou Bensouda, Gambian High Commissioner and former Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), has shared with us [her fascinating AGM speech](#) about her work at that other pillar of the rules-based global order, the ICC.

Possibly not coincidentally, at the same time as the South Africa ICJ case about Israel's behaviour in Gaza was on the front pages, Israel made serious accusations against 12 members of the staff of UNWRA (the UN agency providing almost all the humanitarian support to about 2 million residents in Gaza, most of whom are now displaced, struggling with intensely inadequate water, food, sanitation, shelter, healthcare).



Although Israel has refused to provide the full evidence for its allegation that these people took part in the October 7 atrocities in Israel, UNWRA immediately suspended these 12 staff members (out of its total of about 13,000 staff) pending investigations (both its own and one set up by the UN Secretary-General). In spite of this quick response and the tiny proportion of UNWRA staff involved, the UK has responded by suspending its support to UNWRA, putting at even greater risk the lives and health of the people of Gaza.

The Bill preventing publicly funded organisations from campaigning using boycotts, divestment or sanctions (BDS) has completed its 3rd reading in the House of Commons. On 20th February there is due to be the 2nd reading in the Lords of this BDS Bill (officially known as *Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters)*). The only territories named explicitly in the Bill not to receive boycotts, divestment or sanctions are Israel, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Occupied Golan Heights.



We are due to have a UK election within a year. UNA groups often host election hustings at which the candidates come together to explain their policies, often with a particular focus on international issues. The Climate Coalition's [Local Intelligence Hub](#) is a useful live source of data about MPs, political candidates, constituencies, as well as other climate activists to help in our preparation for these events.

Campaigning

Israel/Gaza

1. Please email your MP to urge the UK government to reinstate its support to UNWRA. It should also do all it can to end the killing and destruction in Gaza and to work towards a peaceful solution, respecting the human rights of all who live in the region.

We welcome the change in tone, as our Foreign Secretary David Cameron has stopped unequivocally supporting the Israel government's actions, and advocates a "pause in the fighting". But we must reinstate UK support for UNWRA to help alleviated the terrible humanitarian suffering and call for an immediate ceasefire leading to long-term peace.





2. Boycotts and sanctions were enormously effective in ending apartheid in South Africa. Many organisations now try to trade and invest ethically to avoid supporting illegal or immoral activities. The *Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters)* Bill would prevent any publicly funded organisation from putting pressure or avoiding trading with organisations of which they disapproved. We continue [lobbying in LASER](#) against this Bill. Please write to your MPs - and any peers you know, since the Bill is now in the House of Lords with its second reading there due on 20th February – urging that this Bill should not be passed.

Climate Change

For Valentine's Day, the Climate Coalition is launching this [Show the Love film](#) to encourage communities to work together to combat climate change, and to share their stories. For these activities, there is useful data in Nat Bullard's [annual presentation](#) summarising a wide range of decarbonisation statistics (including ocean heat, deforestation, vehicle efficiency and much more). We can still [take stock](#) of the achievements and shortcomings of COP28 and write to our MPs pressing for the UK to take the following actions:



- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050
- Commit substantially to the Loss and Damage Fund
- Make Loss and Damage contributions in the form of grants, not loans, and as new funding
- Move fast: timing is crucial!

Policy Conference



Our 2024 Policy Conference will be held at [Bermondsey Village Hall](#), London SE1 3TD – and online – on **9th March, starting at 12 noon**. This is the chance for our members and supporters to help decide what stance the Region should take on a wide range of international issues.

If you want to join by zoom, please register [here](#). Registrations for attending in-person at the hall are [here](#). Please register on Eventbrite only if you plan to come (and cancel your registration if you change your mind), because our numbers are close to capacity and we don't want to turn people away unnecessarily.

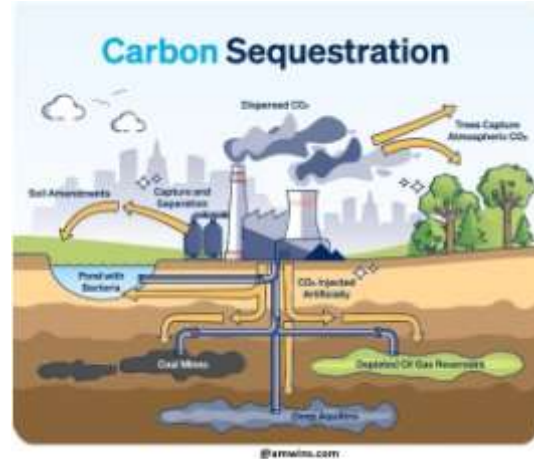
If you do plan to come, register quickly! There is no problem with registering to join the zoom link, even if you are uncertain about your plans.

We have now received proposed resolutions, which the Policy Committee has consolidated into [these draft resolutions](#). You can suggest amendments to these and to our existing resolutions, which should add **not more than 75 words** to the total length of the resolution. Please [send in](#) amendments to these resolution by **26th February**.

Group/Branch Support

We continue to share our recent AGM presentations of inspiring activities from some LASER groups/branches. The presentation by Ian Elgie from Eastbourne described [Carbon Sequestration by Branches](#), such as through Eastbourne's tree-planting projects in Uganda and in Bangladesh, which are supported by many other branches and by LASER.

These presentations from groups/branches, as well as being shared in each edition of *Pulse*, can now be found on the [Branches page of our website](#).



The 2024 Public Liability Insurance certificate, which covers our public activities, is [here](#).

Events

UNA Bexhill and Hastings

On **24th February, 13:15**, at the **Quaker Meeting House, Bexhill-on-Sea, TN40 1DG**, UNA Bexhill and Hastings are hosting their **AGM**, followed at **14:00** by a public seminar on **Refugees & Migrants and Local Communities**, with speakers **Sheila Kesby, Barbara Echlin** and **Bea Rogers** discussing how to unite our local communities to welcome refugees and migrants. Please register [here](#).

UNA Warwick



On **24th February, 12:30-14:45**, UNA Warwick are hosting a hybrid event, at the **Leamington Spa Baptist Church, CV32 4RN**, on **Inside Report on Russian Society**, with speaker **Dr James Pearce**, historian and journalist. Two years since its invasion of Ukraine, Russian society has become more isolated from the west, but the country appears to be coping well. Is this look deceptive? Tea/coffee will be provided; feel free to bring your own lunch. Further enquiries [here](#). The zoom link is [here](#).

UNA Luton

On **25th February, 16:00-18:00**, UNA Luton is holding a webinar on ***Purbachal – the Eastern Sky***, celebrating **International Mother Language Day**, which will combine talks, poetry, recitation, singing and a film, with cultural and faith diversity. Contributors include **the Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Luton Sixth Form College Principal and CEO, local MPs and Mayor**. The celebration aims to raise awareness of the importance of multilingual education in the early years, promoting respect for diversity and peace. For further information, please contact [here](#). The zoom link is [here](#).



UNA Westminster



On **29th February, 10:30 - 17:00**, UNA Westminster is hosting an all-day online conference on ***Dag Hammarskjöld's plane crash: The Continuing Search for Truth***. Our speakers at this all-day online conference will set out the landscape in which the UN inquiry has had to work, the obstacles it has faced, and identify those issues which deserve further and urgent attention. Please register [here](#).

On **19th March, 18:30**, at the **Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS, WC1B 5DQ**, UNA Westminster is hosting the **20th Annual Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen International Law Lecture**. The lecture will be given by **Professor Kingsley Abbott**, Director, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Studies at the University of London. Please register [here](#).





On **23 May**, UNA Westminster, with the Royal United Services Institute will host the **International Day of UN Peacekeepers, 20th annual conference**, with a break at 13:00 for the **global diplomats' wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph**. For more details, as they become available, see UNA Westminster [Future Events page here](#).

On **15-19 April**, UNA Westminster is organising a 5-day, 6-night **Study Visit to the UN Centre in Vienna**, host to several important UN agencies and programmes, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and respected Think Tanks. For further information, please email [here](#).



South London UNA



On **5th March, 19:30**, at **The Community Church**, Werter Road, London SW15 2LL (opposite Sainsbury's), SLUNA is holding an International Women's Day event, **Strengthening Women's Organisations at Grassroots Level**, chaired by **Catherine Pluygers**, Wandsworth UNA, with convenor **Gillian Dare**, former diplomat. The speaker will be **Sierra Schraff Thomas**, Womankind Worldwide. There will be refreshments. For further information, please contact [Robert and Meena Storey](#) or [Catherine Pluygers](#).

UNA Harpenden

On **Saturday 9th March, 10:30**, at the **Salvation Army, Harpenden AL5 2TG**, UNA Harpenden is hosting a talk by **Professor David Egerton**, Hans Rausing Professor of the History of Science and Technology and of Modern History at King's College, on ***Political Economy, Internationalism and British Thinking***. This talk will suggest there was a distinctive British way of thinking about peace and war, often unrecognised by practitioners and critics. Please use [this link](#) to register for the talk. If you plan to hurry home after the talk, to join (most of) our Policy Conference online, don't forget to register [here!](#)



Political Economy, Internationalism and British Thinking about the World
by Professor David Egerton, Kings College

Uniting for Peace



On **27 February, 18:00-20:00**, Uniting for Peace are holding their annual Spring Conference (online) on ***Avoiding a Broader Middle East War – Building Bridges for Peace Between Israel and Palestine***, focusing on cultivating harmony. Speakers include **Sarah Leah Whitson** (Arab World Now), **Jonathan Kuttab** (Al-Haq and non-Violence International), **Tony Greenstein** (Palestine Solidarity Campaign), **Vijay Mehta** (Uniting for Peace), **Ahmad Shahidov** (Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights). Please register [here](#) or use [this direct zoom link](#).

UNA Bexhill and Hastings: LASER Summer Council

On **22nd June, 2024**, UNA Bexhill and Hastings will host the **LASER Summer Council** in **Bexhill**. The theme will be ***Peace and Human Security: Ploughshares into Swords?*** Further information will be in future editions of *Pulse*, but book the date in your diaries now!



Grants Available

The [London UNA Trust](#) (registered charity number 290951) exists to increase the understanding of global problems and the role of the UN in tackling them. They allocate some funds to provide bursaries for young people and others to learn more about the UN. They also allocate funds to support initiatives by United Nations Association groups – or others – to educate people about international issues, including the work of the UN. And they have emergency grants for refugees: for food, clothing and legal fees. The trustees meet periodically to consider applications. **Please note that grants are not available to support people in attending UNA events in the UK.** To apply for a grant, please use the [application form](#) on their website. For further information, please contact [the Trust Chair](#).

The Next Edition of Laser Pulse

Please [send us](#) any materials or suggestions for the next edition of *Pulse* by **12th March 2024**.

Note:

1. For announcement of events, it is helpful if you can download and use [this template](#).
2. Please also note that amendments to resolutions for our Policy Conference need to be [sent in here](#) by **26th February**.



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