



## ***Minutes of the UNA LASER AGM held on Saturday 28th October 2023 in Bermondsey Village Hall, London SE1 3TD and by Zoom***

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### **1 Apologies**

There were no apologies.

### **2 Minutes of last AGM and Matters Arising**

The minutes were accepted.

### **3 Chair's Report**

[Here](#) is a link to the text of the Chair's report, which covered the war-torn context of the past year, LASER's campaigning, the Regional meetings, the *Whatnext4UN* website and the situation with UNA-UK. She also stressed that LASER is a team effort and thanked: the Executive Committee (in particular Treasurer Peter Webster, Secretary Jane Beeley and Pulse designer Suheil Shahryar, as well as Gonzalo Alvarez who was standing down); Environment Officer and website updater Annesha Kar Gupta; many outstanding branches and, finally, all members who are the lifeblood and *raison d'être* of the organisation.

### **4 Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer, Peter Webster, thanked Alan Palmer warmly for examining the accounts and signing them off. Peter presented the year's accounts (up to 30th June). These accounts can be seen online [here](#). You will see that the *What Next for the UN* (WN4UN) headings remain. The web costs for the WN4UN website have been passed over to Peace Child International. The accounts show £100 from Barbara Judge which she raised at her branch flag day for UNICEF. He noted that bank charges are disproportionately high so, with Antony Vallyon's help, we are investigating alternative providers, such as Virgin Money. The cost to hire the Bermondsey Village Hall remains very reasonable. Our total funds have only gone down by £200. On the balance sheet you will see that our total funds are £4,239.

At the end of the presentation Trisha stressed the importance of setting aside a reserve to support new branches. Keith Hindell commended LASER for spending just £700 odd on all activities. Catherine Pluygers lamented the fact that when Brighton branch closed, its funds (£1,500) had to be written off as UNA-UK did not see fit to pass them on to LASER. Adoption of the accounts and report was proposed by Jane Beeley and seconded by Ian Elgie. This was passed unanimously both in the room and online.

### **5 Policy Committee Chair's Report**

As Chair of the Policy Committee, Peter Webster reported that this year his report was rather brief as in 2023 we had relinquished our usual Policy Conference in the Spring of 2023 in favour of the national UNA-UK event held on Saturday 1 April 2023. Since the UNA-UK event was very different, we had decided in future to continue with ours each year as it is interactive, involves members more and, most importantly, follows up on the agreed resolutions. In 2022, having submitted the final versions of the resolutions to the Foreign

Secretary, it was gratifying to receive a much swifter and fuller response than in previous years, and we hope this will continue in the future.

He announced that the next LASER Policy Conference will be held in the Spring, on Saturday 9 March, 2024 and reminded members that all resolutions already passed can be viewed on the LASER website. He also reminded people of the process for submitting and amending resolutions and that the timetable for submissions and amendments will be circulated in the next issue of *Pulse*. If they wish, each group may submit up to two or three resolutions. He thanked all those who spend the time and effort drafting the resolutions and amendments.

## **6 Environmental Officer's Report**

This report is based on a survey of branches in accordance with the Carbon Footprint Reduction Resolution agreed at the 2020 Policy Conference. Of those approached, four branches (Bexhill & Hastings, Enfield & the Barnets, Streatham & Clapham, and Harpenden) together with LASER, had responded to Annesha Kargupta, the Environmental Officer. Ian Elgie, representing Eastbourne branch, explained that overwork had prevented him from reporting to her this time. However, those representing the International Air Show held in the town each year have made a commitment to offset carbon for the next four years. Similarly, a large local furniture company has promised to plant 15,000 trees. Here is a link to Annesha's full report:

<https://unalaser.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-Environment-Officers-Report.pdf>

## **7 Distinguished Service Award**

David Wardrop said it was an honour to speak for all as we salute one of our own, namely Neville Grant. After a sterling career teaching English Literature in Nigeria, Neville returned to the UK, moved to Blackheath and became chair of Blackheath & Greenwich UNA in the mid-1980s. He continued in this role for many years and ensured that the branch played an active part in promoting local interest in the UN and support for its work. He maintained an interesting and varied programme of talks. He kept a high profile in his local community by taking over the editorship of the local newspaper *Westcombe News*. He secured the continuing success of this publication by continuing in this role, and also as its chief reporter and financial director, for twenty years.

Within the local UNA group, together with branch member Wendy Hillier, he set up the Refugee Forum, a sensitive initiative which aimed to support refugees in the Blackheath and Greenwich area, to address any concerns they might have and to help them feel part of – and welcomed by – the local community. Neville started holding annual art auctions to raise money for UNHCR, which became an innovative, distinctive and highly effective feature of the branch's fundraising programme.

Neville has served on the LASER executive committee for many years, making a valuable contribution both as chair and then as secretary. He has a keen knowledge of international issues and has been an expert commentator especially on African affairs. David said that in 2009 when they worked together organising the annual LASER conference with an environmental theme, Neville came up with the title *Thinking Outside the Box*, pushed for and secured the high profile venue the International Maritime Organisation, and persuaded the chief of that organisation to join other high profile speakers on climate change, thus ensuring that it was an event not to be missed, indeed the most important environmental conference held in the UK that year. This is the power and energy he has given to our

organisation.

In recent years health issues have caused him to relinquish his role as secretary of LASER and also as chair of Blackheath & Greenwich. He is a hard act to follow, and sadly no one has stepped into his shoes to lead the branch. Trisha is trying to revive the branch, and Neville is helping her to do this.

Lately he has been demonstrating his diverse talents by writing a book, *Shakespeare in an Age of Anxiety*, which is due to be published in two weeks' time. We wish him well in his latest creative project and thank him for his active, highly effective contribution to UNA over many years.

## **8 Awarding of the Stevens Trophy**

Trisha announced that this year Streatham & Clapham branch has won the Stevens Trophy. She drew attention to the variety of recent projects undertaken by the branch:

- Over the last three years regularly during each spring and summer they have held group letter writing sessions via Zoom with other branches and members to produce suitable wording to highlight concerns on environmental issues and press for action on these to MPs ahead of the Climate Change Conferences COP26 in Glasgow, COP27 in Egypt, and COP28 in UAE.
- They have forged links with local schools on the theme of peace, focused on the International Day of Peace established by the UN and celebrated each year on 21 September.
- Also on the theme of children, having familiarised themselves with the UNICEF Child Friendly Communities Programme, which Lambeth is currently undertaking with UNICEF-UK, they have then actively spread awareness and understanding amongst local people about this important initiative. At a local wellbeing event they explained to people locally what this means in terms of the decisions and practice of Lambeth Council.
- This year on Saturday 17th June at a church in Streatham they held a free Hunger Lunch, to which all were welcome. It focused on *Famine around the world: immediate actions and long-term solutions*. This bread-and-cheese lunchtime event included videos from UNICEF and FAO, followed by discussion. It raised money for UNICEF and CAFOD.
- In November they will host a webinar on a largely unreported but worthwhile project *Using Taxation to Advance Sustainable Development Globally*, a conversation exploring tax justice and global development. A panel of international speakers introduced different aspects of this fascinating topic.

The branch was applauded. Trisha thanked Sarah Webster, branch secretary, and Peter Webster, branch chair, for their innovative programme, concern for the vulnerable and environmental leadership.

## **9 Elections**

(Winners of the Stevens Trophy, namely Peter Webster, are automatically on the Committee).

The following were elected:

Chair: Trisha Rogers    Treasurer: Peter Webster    Secretary: Jane Beeley

Continuing Committee members: Gillian Dare, Ali Hessami, Salem Mezhoud, Valeria Minisini, Titilayo Odukale, Catherine Pluygers, Suheil Shahryar, Antony Vallyon and David Wardrop.

Two new Committee members: Andrew Boakes and Hana Shono.

## 10 Urgent Resolutions

Here is a link to the text of the two resolutions:

<https://unalaser.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/AGM-resolutions.pdf>

There follows a report of the discussion of the two resolutions:

### 1. COP 28

This was put forward by the Policy Committee. Valeria spoke in favour of the motion, pointing out that the government has backtracked on its climate commitments. We can't afford to waste any more time as climate change is real, and unless action is taken the Pacific islands and other low-lying lands could cease to exist in twenty years' time.

Sheila Kesby proposed an amendment to section 5, changing the wording to 'military-related emissions'. Catherine suggested instead 'military and related emissions'. The amendment was agreed and the motion was passed.

### 2. Israel/Palestine

This was also put forward by the policy committee. Before the resolution was discussed, Peter praised the recent, longer statement published by UNA-UK. Trisha agreed, but she pointed out that the Palestinians' right to return had not been included and this was an important omission. It was agreed that she should tell UNA-UK on LASER's behalf that we support their statement but would like them to add a statement on the right to return. David drew attention to the Secretary General's statement yesterday which he felt was very relevant to ours. Then the LASER resolution was discussed at some length. Some felt that a reference should be made to the West Bank, and/or to Hamas, and/or to averting the threat of Palestinian expulsion from the territory. Several changes and/or additions to the wording, and to the order of the sections, were proposed and discussed. Eventually, having congratulated the policy committee on producing the resolution, which he said captures a snapshot in time in a fast-changing situation, David proposed that to save time we vote to accept the resolution as it stands. A vote was taken, and the resolution was passed without alteration.

## 11 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

## 12 Presentation from the LASER President – HE Dr Fatou Bensouda, *Reflections of a Former ICC Chief Prosecutor*

Here is a link to her presentation:

<https://unalaser.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/231028-UNA-LASER-AGM-ANNUAL-LECTURE-Reflections-of-an-ICC-Prosecutor.pdf>

## 13 Presentations from branches:

**Bexhill and Hastings** (Sheila Kesby) – Peace and Human Security Programme

**Blackheath and Greenwich** (Neville Grant) – supporting local refugees; raising funds for UNHCR

**Canterbury** (Valeria Minisini) – working with the SDGs in the local community; annual UN Day event;

**Eastbourne** (Ian Elgie) – Carbon sequestration by branches

**Enfield and the Barnets** (Ali HYassami) – Using computer modelling to support greener

energy use in partnership with a local organisation

**Harpenden** (Suheil Shahryar) – finding and engaging good speakers

**Streatham and Clapham** (Peter and Sarah Webster) – supporting UNICEF Child-friendly community; local COP28 campaigning

**Tunbridge Wells and Weald** (Jane Beeley) - MUNGA (2 models - Uckfield and T Wells)

**Westminster** (David Wardrop) – working with partners for major annual event (like law lecture)

**Patricia Rogers Chair**

**Jane Beeley Secretary**