

UNA LASER Chair's Report, 2nd November, 2024

Global context of violence and environmental distress



Shockingly, the context for our work this year has been dominated by the same major wars as last year -Russia/Ukraine; Sudan; Israel/Palestine and now the wider region – as well as climate change.

Campaigning

Campaigning is a central part of our activity. Mostly we do it through writing to our MPs and other key people, as well as some face to face conversations. We have addressed many important international issues, while continuing to tackle the two major international challenges that have stood out during the year and on which I don't have time to go into detail here:

- The war in Israel/Palestine and the surrounding region

- Climate Change

in coordination with organisations of which we are members and in response to popular demand of member. Topics included:

- The Global Plastics Treaty
- Encouraging a Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Several aspects of the Women, Peace and Security agenda
- The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Bill (Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill) whose delay in the House of Lords we had strongly encouraged and which the election then pre-empted from returning to the House of Commons, but we need to be alert for its reintroduction.
- Increased respect for the International legal systems, including International Humanitarian Law and increased status and respect for the International Courts (the ICJ and the ICC).
- Among the other topics we promoted over the election were:
 - restoring UK overseas development assistance to 0.7% GNI
 - contributing more to the Climate Change Loss and Damage Fund
 - stopping arms sales to countries with egregious human rights abuses, such as Israel and Saudi Arabia
 - Cancelling Trident and generally working harder towards nuclear disarmament
 - restoring our previous funding to UNRWA, which the government did quickly after taking office.

Details of all these campaigns are in *Pulse* (available on our website) and many are covered in the News section of our website.

Regional Councils

Annually we hold 2 Councils, as well as our AGM. This year, for our **Spring Council** we held our **Policy Conference**. This was the culmination of months of work from groups, Policy Committee and other members. We now have 24 resolutions, many new this year, some updated from earlier years. These are always shared with the FCDO, other appropriate departments, other parties, and appropriate individuals and we frequently get responses

indicating that they have some effect.

Next year we plan to hold our Policy Conference on **15th March** online and in London, probably this hall. Send draft resolutions by **27th January**; fuller details in the next *Pulse*. UNA-UK's conference will be on 26th April.

Our Summer Council was hosted by UNA Bexhill and Hastings as a hybrid event. Those of us who went in-person were made very welcome by Sheila Kesby and her team. The theme was *Ploughshare into Swords?*, focussing on peace and security, building on the evolving Bexhill and Hastings *Peace Policy Statement*.



We are delighted that next year's Summer Council will be hosted by UNA Westminster and the following year's by UNA Eastbourne.

Working Groups



Groups (also known as branches) can gain huge strength from engaging with other branches on shared goals. One of the ways we are building on this is through inter-branch Working Groups. We have established our first three working groups – on the :

- Threat to Democracy in India
- Local Delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals
- Reform at the UN Security Council

UNA-UK



As we all know, this is a time of transitions in UNA-UK who have been headless for several months. We are delighted that they have now appointed (to start in January) their new Chair (Ian Martin, former Secretary-General of Amnesty International, and holder of a number or senior UN posts, including in Libya, Nepal, East Timor, Ethiopia).

Another important credential is that he has also been a long-time supporter of UNA Westminster. He plans to join us at lunchtime for part of today. UNA-UK will now focus on the crucial recruitment of a new Chief Executive Officer. We still await the new website (including mechanism to put supporters and local groups in touch with each other).

We are grateful to our 2 elected trustees (Tim Jarman and Dorothea Christiana) for their work, including their Groups Meetings, next on 27th November (deadline for registration 22nd November) and for which they are asking for suggestions of agenda items **by 13th November**.

Contributions



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

- Thank you to the **Executive Committee** for all their support.
- After today's election, some of them will no longer be on the committee. I would like to thank them all for their help and support this year.
- **Peter Webster** is our indefatigable Treasurer and Chair of the Policy Committee, as well as running, with his wife, Sarah, UNA Streatham and Clapham.
- **Jane Beeley**, as well as running UNA Tunbridge Wells and Weald, is our Regional Secretary
- **Valeria Minisini**, who as well as chairing UNA Canterbury, provides thorough background research for many of our campaigns
- **Suheil Shahryar**, as well as running UNA Harpenden, beautifies and posts out *Pulse* with great efficiency.
- I would also like to thank **Annesha Kar Gupta**, who, as well as being a diligent Environmental Officer and carrying out the mandate given to her by our Policy Conference, has helped keep our website up to date, even though she is now living in India. I'm sure you all find useful the Events calendar and access to recent editions of *Pulse* that Annesha keeps up to date on unalaser.org. Many of us are bad about announcing our events on the UNA-UK website and Annesha may help us with this.
- Our community of branches runs a wide range of activities. I will talk more about this later today.
- And my final thank you is to You – **all our members** – who are the lifeblood and raison d'être of the organisation.

We should welcome a range of further contributions, such as with the website, 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 – but thank you for all you already do.