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**The Laser Pulse**  
The Newsletter of UNA LASER

**2025 Issue No. 1, January 2025**

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## Table of Contents

### From Our Chair

#### Campaigning

- Gaza

#### LASER Policy Conference

#### Groups' News and Consultation

- UNA Working Groups
- UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award

#### UNA Events

- UNA Warwick District
- UNA Medway
- UNA Harpenden
- UNA Bexhill and Hastings
- UNA UK 2025 Conference
- UNA Westminster

#### Financial Support for LASER

#### The Next Edition of Pulse

## From Our Chair



New Year is a time for assessing the past to build a better future. We echo UN Secretary General's thoughts at the end of 2024:

*"2024 has brought unfathomable sorrow for people around the world. Conflicts have intensified, inflicting pain and suffering on a massive scale. This pain is keenly felt across our United Nations family. We have lost cherished colleagues who made the ultimate sacrifice in carrying out our vital mission. We honour their memory and grieve together.*

*"This year, we faced a world in which our mission of peace, sustainable development and human rights has never been more necessary – or more challenged. But even in the darkest hours, United Nations personnel are a constant beacon of hope and light – delivering lifesaving aid and working tirelessly to advance peace, human rights, climate action and sustainable development. I am deeply privileged and profoundly grateful to serve alongside them."*

We reinforce the last paragraph by applauding the work of [PassBlue's Person of the Year for 2024](#), **Francesca Albanese**, UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian territories. Her brave, tireless work has contributed greatly to the global effort to promote the rights of the Palestinian people through international Law.

The remarkable [UN Special Rapporteurs \(or 'Procedures'\)](#) are appointed by the UN's Human Rights Council and act (unpaid by the UN) independently of governments, but with logistical support from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. We are proud to have been supporting Francesca Albanese's work in our continuing calls to the UK government to build on the UK's history (as Palestine Mandate holder from 1923 to 1948) and powerful international position (as permanent member of the Security Council) and be more active in trying to end the terrible suffering of both the people of Gaza and Hamas' Israeli hostages

## Campaigning

We encourage members to [engage with their MPs](#) when trying to influence UK government policy. We can, of course, all also write directly to the relevant [ministers](#), but ministers usually read letters only from MPs (while most other letters are dealt with by officials), so we prioritise getting MPs on board and encouraging them to contact the relevant ministers. It is important to give your address when you write, so your MP knows you are a constituent.

### Gaza

@news.un.org



Over 46,000 people (more than 44,500 Palestinians and 1,700 Israelis) – including about 140 journalists and over 224 humanitarian aid workers – have been killed in the war between Israel and Hamas, since Hamas' horrific attacks into Israel of 7th October 2023 and their taking of hostages. Already, in the first three days of 2025, more than 100 have been killed. The vast majority of the dead are women and children, including increasing numbers dying from malnutrition. About 2 million people have been displaced, many several times. It is thought that nearly 100 of the original roughly 250 hostages remain in Hamas' custody.

If you did not have time in December to take action, please do so now – or please do it again! Here are suggested calls for the UK government (as well as a way we can help as individuals). The UK government should:

- Join more than 146 other countries in [recognising the state of Palestine now](#).
- [Sanction Itamar Ben Gvir and Besalel Smotrich](#), Israel's most extreme ministers committed to the ongoing war and annexation of Gaza, **now**.
- [Suspend all arms sales](#) to Israel **now** and press for a complete ceasefire and release of the hostages.
- In line with the [warrants of the International Criminal Court](#), do all it can to bring to justice Israel Prime Minister Netanyahu and former Defence Minister Yoav Galant, as well as Hamas military commander Mohammed Deif, as uncertainty remains about Israel's claim to have killed him.
- Support the work of the [Red Cross to help hostages](#) taken from Israel.
- Call for the end of [sexual and physical abuse and torture of Israeli hostages by Hamas](#).
- Increase its support to [UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency](#), which is the organisation providing most of the humanitarian support in Gaza. We can all support UNRWA individually, too.

## LASER Policy Conference

Our Policy Conference will be on **15<sup>th</sup> March, 2025** in London and online, starting before lunch. Further details on venue and times will be in the next issue of *Pulse* in early February, when registration will open.

**Draft resolutions must be submitted by 27th January.** The draft resolutions will be aggregated by the Policy Committee and circulated around 10th February, with the deadline for **amendments being 24th February.**

This is your chance to help decide what stance the Region should take on a wide range of international issues. Resolutions need to be on an international topic and must call for action by the UK government or the UN. The Policy Committee may also share resolutions with political party leaders and with others actors of influence on the issues concerned.

Resolutions can propose policies and also set out background facts or statements of concern that you would like the Region to support, and they can be submitted by UNA Groups or individual members. You can see our current resolutions – for inspiration and for the framework of notes and calls to action that we use – [here](#). Note that we then promote the resolutions more widely – including forwarding them to the Foreign Secretary and other key actors – and share the responses on our website.

New resolutions need to be **175 words or fewer** in total. You can also suggest amendments to existing resolutions which should add **not more than 75 words** to the total length of the resolution. *Please do not send in longer resolutions or amendments, as this creates a lot of extra work for the hard-pressed Policy Committee!*

## Group News

### UNA Working Groups

These Working Groups bring together groups and individual members to work together on key areas. There are no set structures or required outcomes. They mostly meet electronically and might want to develop campaigns, awareness-raising materials, presentations, or reports.

- **UN Security Council Veto Reform**

Several UNA groups and individual members have come together to consider how to make the UN Security Council more effective, with particular emphasis on the veto. Their working group is investigating how to constrain the veto if it can't be removed altogether. If you would like a summary of the recent meeting and would like to join the group, please email Group Convenor, [David Cheesman](#).

- **Local Implementation of the SDGs**

Several LASER UNA groups, working with their local Councils on [local implementation](#) of the [Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs](#), have created a Local SDG Working Group to support and learn from each other. Some UNA Groups have several years' experience and have established effective local SDG committees; others are just starting. Do contact Co-Chair of UNA Tunbridge Wells and the Weald, [Marguerita Morton](#), if you would like to join this Working Group. UNA Enfield and the Barnets (EBUNA), part of this Working Group, is focusing on SDG2 (hunger) and SDG 13 (climate impact) and has issued their [EBUNA SDG Interim Research Report](#). For further information on their work, please contact [Ali Hessami](#).

- **Protection of Minorities in India**

The Chair of UNA Harpenden, [Suheil Shahryar](#), invites you to join a working group to help devise a campaign on the current threats to democracy in India, including the demonization of India's 200+ Muslims and other ethnic minorities (14% of India's total population), with its potential for huge human rights abuses. The group is working to analyse the situation, draft a resolution for LASER to consider, raise awareness (such as through creating a presentation for local groups) and suggest other ways of taking the campaign forward. They would welcome your comments on [their draft resolution](#). This considers the situation in the light of: international articles and declarations; the Indian constitution; and recent reports on the persecution of minorities. It then urges actions by the UK government, South Asian countries, and the UN.

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### UNICEF'S Rights Respecting Schools Award

UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Award demonstrates evidence that a school puts the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) into practice within the school and beyond. All schools can [register for this award programme](#). Schools in London can receive funding for this (from London's Violence Reduction Unit) so need to make it clear on their application that they are in London. UNA groups might like to [help a local school get started](#) on this award programme.

## UNA Events

### UNA Warwick District

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On 18<sup>th</sup> January, 12:35-13:45, Warwick UNA are holding a meeting online and at the **Leamington Spa Baptist Church**, Chandos Street, Leamington Spa, CV32 4RN, with feminist activist, psychologist and author, **Dr Helen Liebling**, speaking on ***Conflict, Resilience and Justice: Tackling Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Africa***. Dr Liebling has worked extensively in Uganda, Liberia, Rwanda, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Her books and articles have advanced global understanding of trauma recovery and justice for survivors. The talk will be preceded by a short AGM. The zoom link is [here](#), with ID 862 9714 0947 and passcode 392327. For further information, please contact [the Chair](#).

### UNA Medway



On 20<sup>th</sup> January, 19.00-21.00 UNA Medway will be holding a *Blue Monday Party*. This is to combat the January blues on the day psychologists identify as the most depressing day of the year. The aim is to turn this into a celebration of the amazing work the UN (and UNA-UK and its groups) have undertaken over the years. Please do come and join us. For more details contact [UNA Medway chair](#).

### UNA Harpenden





UNA Harpenden invites you to attend its AGM and Group Discussion on **Saturday 8 February 2025, 10:30-12:30 at the Salvation Army, Leyton Green, Harpenden AL5 2TG**. The AGM will be presided over by the Harpenden Town Mayor. To attend in person, please register [here](#).

### UNA Bexhill and Hastings



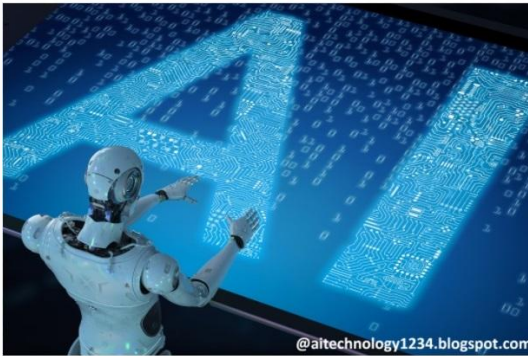
On **22<sup>nd</sup> February, 13:15-17:00**, UNA Bexhill and Hastings is holding a free meeting at **St. Peter's Community Centre**, Church Street, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN40 2HE with a discussion on ***Rural Town Planning and Development***, led by **Stephen Hardy**, preceded by a short AGM, and a tea break. The discussion will consider how the government's *National Housing Plans* will affect plans to revive local communities with sustainable businesses and services, as well as to provide more affordable housing. For further information and to register, please contact [the Chair](#).

### UNA UK 2025 Conference



On 12<sup>th</sup> April, 10:30-17:00, the UNA Conference Committee is organising the 2025 UNA Conference, to be held in London and online. It will include some keynote addresses, presentations, discussion sessions and opportunities to engage with UNA-UK staff. In-person attendance will cost £10; virtual attendance is free. More information will be available soon. Please register [here](#).

### UNA Westminster



On 27<sup>th</sup> January, UNA Westminster is holding a free public meeting in the **House of Lords** on ***Can the UN ride the AI Wave or will it get Left Behind?***. The meeting will be chaired by **Lord Clement-Jones**, Co-Chair All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI, with panellists **Anjali Mazumder**, Theme Lead on AI and Justice & Human Rights, Alan Turing Institute for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence (UK), and **Dr Tony Roberts**, Digital Cluster Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. Please register [here](#).

On 11<sup>th</sup> March, 18:30, UNA Westminster – with the Bar Council and the Centre for International Studies at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) – will be holding at **SOAS' Brunei Gallery**, London WC1H 0XG, the twenty-second annual **Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen International Law Lecture**, this year marking the **75th anniversary of the formation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)**. The speaker will be **Professor Catherine Briddick**, University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre. Further details, as they become available, will be on the [UNA Westminster website](#).





On 22<sup>nd</sup> May UNA Westminster will be holding its twenty-second annual **International Day of UN Peacekeepers Conference and Wreath-laying**, based at the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall, London. Further details, as they become available, will be on the [UNA Westminster website](#).

## Financial Support for LASER

LASER does not ask for subscriptions from its members or groups, nor does it charge for attendance at its events. We therefore welcome donations to UNA London and South East Region account. Please [let us know](#) if you would like to make a donation.

## The Next Edition of LASER Pulse

Please [send us](#) any materials for the next edition of *Pulse* by **3rd February, 2025**. Please keep announcements short and include all the information requested in [the Pulse template](#). Note that draft resolutions and amendments need to be **submitted by 27<sup>th</sup> January**.