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The Laser Pulse
The Newsletter of UNA LASER

2025 Issue No. 4, March 2025

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Table of Contents

From Our Chair

Campaigning

LASER Policy Conference

Groups' News and Information

- UNA-UK Conference and Support
- UNA Working Groups
- Earth Ambassadors
- Celebrating UN80

UNA Events

- UNA Westminster
- UNA Wandsworth
- UNA Luton
- UNA Warwick
- UNA Harpenden
- UNA Bexhill and Hastings
- UNA-UK 2025 Conference
- UNA Tunbridge wells and the Weald
- UNA Canterbury

Financial Support for LASER

The Next Edition of LASER Pulse

From Our Chair



The world is dramatically changing, with many long-held assumptions and alliances being challenged. We shall discuss at our Policy Conference on 15th March possible action on those many issues that you have chosen to highlight; see below for details and to register. Thank you for the expertise, thought and work that has gone into these resolutions.

The international rules-based system is currently under intense threat – both in concept and in resources – and we urgently need to support the work of the UN, its Secretariat, central organs, agencies, programmes, linked financial institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and legal structures (the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court). The Secretary-General is trying to uphold the visions of [The UN Charter](#) and [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) as he addresses issues such as climate change, disarmament, long-term peace in Gaza, Ukraine and the Sudan, and many more. However, he is being sidelined by powerful leaders who are ignoring the rules-based system and human rights and fairness and instead focussing on transactional politics and their own benefits.

Campaigning

Meanwhile the most important international issue that we can immediately influence is our government's foreign policy and expenditure. In the last 50 years, there have been huge development advances around the world, such as in raised life expectancy, reduced maternal mortality and more widespread literacy. However, some people (such as women in Afghanistan) are being left behind and there are currently many areas (such as Sudan, Myanmar, Gaza, Ukraine, Syria and Yemen) of intense humanitarian need. Aid also helps address many global challenges, such as environmental destruction, migration, terrorism, the spread of disease and conflict, as [we explain in this article](#).

We have long been campaigning for the UK, as one of the world's richest countries, to return to the UN target of spending at least 0.7% of our Gross National Income on overseas development assistance (ODA or 'aid'). It has therefore been shocking this week to have the announcement that UK aid will be reduced from 0.5% to 0.3% (a 40% decrease). And this at a time when there is being the decimation of contributions from the world's biggest aid donor, the US.

Please [write to your MP](#) to stress that UK aid should not be reduced in 2027, but increased soon back to the agreed target of 0.7% Gross National Income. There are many other budgets (or changes to the fiscal rules) from which the increased military expenditure can be found. You can remind MPs and [the government](#) that aid:

- alleviates the suffering of the world's poorest,
- prevents environmental destruction and increase progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,
- reduces refugee numbers,
- helps to reduce terrorism,
- reduces the spread of disease, and
- reduces conflict.

LASER Policy Conference

Our Policy Conference will be on **Saturday, 15th March 2025, 12:00-18:00**. It will be at **Bermondsey Village Hall**, Kirby Grove, London SE1 3TD and online. Please bring a packed lunch. Drinks will be provided. If you would like to attend in-person, please register [here](#). If you would like to join online, please register [here](#).

Thank you for the draft resolutions and amendments. [The Agenda for the day is here](#). We very much look forward to you joining us.

Groups' News and Information

UNA-UK Conference and Support

To highlight the work of UNA Groups, the 2025 UNA-UK Conference on **Saturday 12th April** will include a presentation of previous and upcoming UNA Groups' activities. All UNA Groups are encouraged to indicate their interests as well as a list of all activities that they wish to be showcased, including any pictures, by completing [this form](#). The deadline for submission is **Friday 14th March**. Please note that should there not be enough time for UNA Groups to give individual presentations, the Conference Committee will collate all submissions into one combined presentation.

UNA Working Groups

These Working Groups bring UNA 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, with some international experts as advisers, to consider how to make the UN Security Council more effective, with particular emphasis on

the veto. This 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 the Working 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 of this work 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](#). The next meeting of the group is on zoom on **4th March at 16:00** and will include a presentation on the ISO-SDG standard. The group welcomes engagement with civic society and the local authorities. For further information on their work and to join the group, please contact [Ali Hessami](#).

- **Threat to Democracy 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, raise awareness (such as through creating a presentation for UNA Groups) and suggest other ways of taking the campaign forward. It has drafted a resolution on the Protection of Minorities in India for LASER to consider at the Policy Conference, which you can see in the Policy Conference agenda (see earlier link). This resolution 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.

- **Strengthening International Law - Amending the Charter**

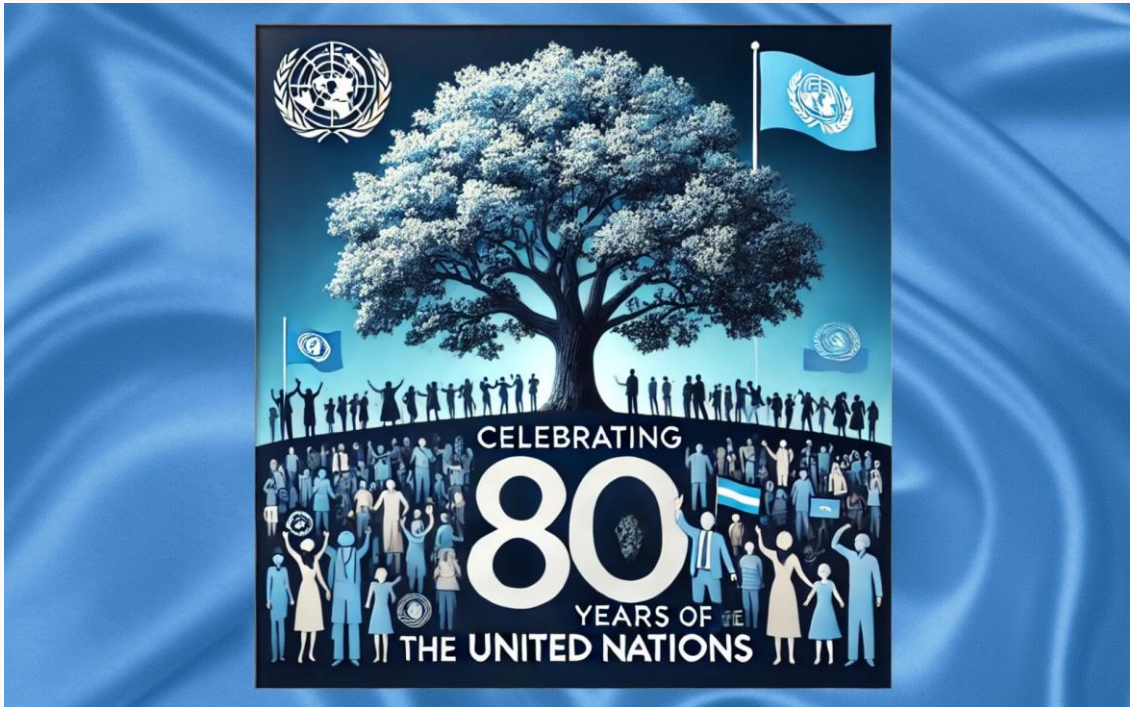
Members are invited to help make history by joining a new Working Group to analyse and improve [this Resolution](#) on how to make the UN more effective. The group will be chaired by LASER Head of Policy, Peter Webster and will convene by zoom. For further information, please contact [Greta Vipond](#).

Earth Ambassadors



We continue our series of inspirational activities by different UNA Groups, shared at LASER AGMs, with the UNA Scotland Earth Ambassadors project, responding to the Glasgow UNFCCC COP26. It is helping some outstanding young climate activists from around the world to work together, leading up to a planned conference in Scotland in September. Details of the project are on the [LASER Groups page](#), and further information can be requested [here](#).

Celebrating UN80



UN80 gives many opportunities to engage your local community, media and leaders in thinking about the work of the UN and our roles in helping its effectiveness.

There are three key dates that you could use: **26th June** when the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco, UN Day (**24th October**, when the UN Charter came into effect) and **10th January 2026** (80 years since the first meeting of the UN General Assembly, which was held in London). If you don't already do so, you could suggest that the day is marked by your local Council flying the UN flag and perhaps inviting your MP(s), other local leaders and media to the flag-raising ceremony. You might, too, like to follow many areas in asking your council to floodlight the main civic building in UN blue. Note that an 80th anniversary is an oak anniversary, so you might like to mark UN80 by planting an oak in a prominent local position, with appropriate ceremony, community and media involvement and plaque.

UNA Events

UNA Westminster



On **11th 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**, on ***Fragmented Refuge: It’s time to rebuild the case for humanity***, marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The speaker, **Professor Catherine Briddick** (University of Oxford’s Refugee Studies Centre), will review today’s changed attitudes to the call of humanity, explore access to protection and the enforcement of international refugee law, and draw on the experiences of those involved in drafting the [UN Refugee Convention](#). The event will be followed by a free wine reception. Please register [here](#).

On **22nd 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**, 61 Whitehall, London SW1A 2ET. Further details, as they become available, will be on the [UNA Westminster website](#).



UNA Wandsworth

On **11th March, 19:30-21:30**, UNA Wandsworth is celebrating **International Women’s Day** with a meeting on ***USA/UN Aid Crisis Hits Women the Hardest; What is to be done?***. It will be in the **Community Church**, Werter Road, London SW15 2LL.

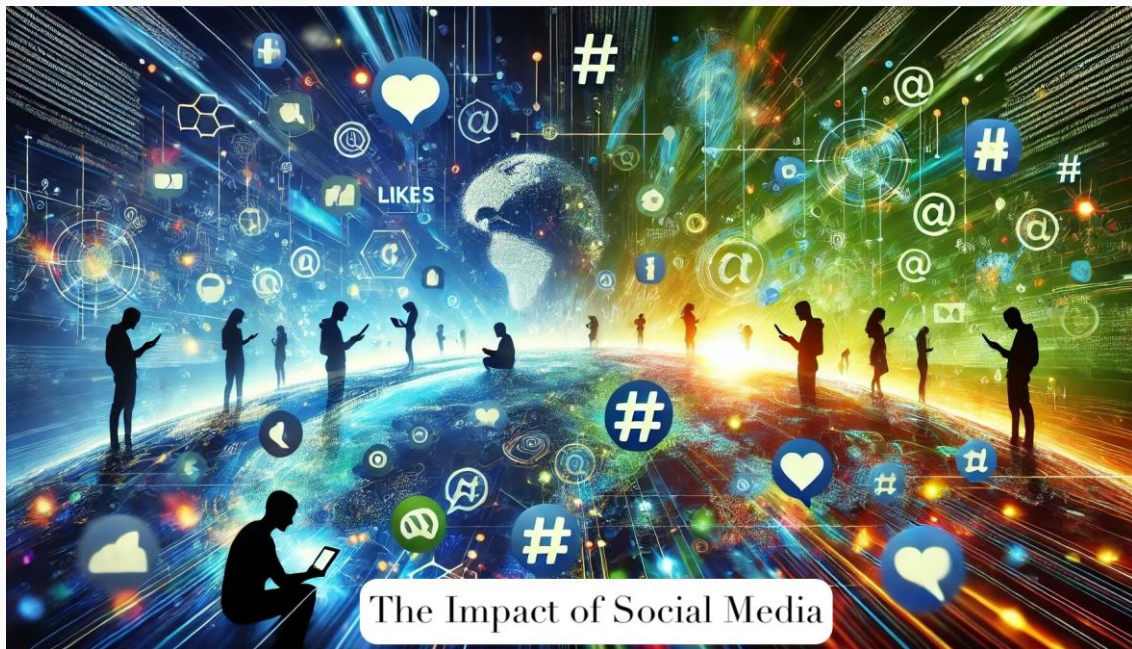
UNA Luton

On **14th March, 18:00-20:00**, UNA Luton will be celebrating **International Women’s Day**, with a virtual meeting on ***Rights, Equality, Empowerment for All Women and Girls*** to discuss global, national and local issues impacting gender equity. Speakers include **Dr Nazia Khanum** (on ***Key global challenges and progress re gender equality***); **Susan Beaumont** (on ***Women’s Rights in Afghanistan***), **Debra Knight** (on ***Nine Red Presents: Abuse and Violence Faced by Women***) and **Sadia Rahman** (on ***Hijab: Perception and Prejudice***). The zoom link is [here](#), with meeting ID 879-2448-1457 and Passcode 554543.

UNA Warwick

On 17th March, 18:30-20:00, UNA Warwick District is hosting an online meeting on ***Middle East and Global Affairs***. The speaker is **Professor Yossi Mekelberg** (from the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House). He will consider the latest developments in: Gaza and Israel; the growing US-China rivalry; the war in Ukraine; the future of international institutions in an era of rising nationalism. The zoom link is [here](#), with meeting ID 824 7994 6009 and passcode 291771.

UNA Harpenden



On 22nd March, 10:30-12:30, UNA Harpenden will host a hybrid event at **The Salvation Army Hall**, Leyton Green, Harpenden AL5 2TG on ***The Space of the World: can human solidarity survive social media and what if it can't?***. The speaker, **Professor Nick Couldry** (London School of Economics and Political Science), will reflect on the global space of social communications and interaction that has been constructed over the past three decades through a commercialised internet and the emergence of digital platforms whose business model depends on the extraction of data from their users and the shaping of user behaviour to optimise advertising value. Further information about the talk is [here](#). Please register [here](#).

UNA Bexhill and Hastings

On **26th April, 13:45-16:40**, at **St. Peter's Community Centre**, Church Street, Bexhill-on-Sea TN40 2HE, UNA Bexhill and Hastings invites you to a public seminar on ***UN Mother Earth Day: The Environment, Capitalism, Peace and Justice***, looking at the tensions and connections between the environment and capitalism and between peace and justice. For further information and to register, please contact [the Chair](#).

UNA-UK 2025 Conference



On **12th 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 is available [here](#). Please register [here](#). We need UNA-UK – and they need us! If you are not currently a paid-up member, **do join!** Details are on their website [here](#).

UNA Tunbridge Wells and the Weald

On **10th May, 14:00-16:00**, in **The Old Auction House**, Linden Park Road, Tunbridge Wells TN2 5QL, UNA Tunbridge Wells and the Weald will hold a discussion on ***The International System in the Age of Trump***, led by **Mike Martin, MP**, followed by the group's **AGM**. For further information, please contact [here](#).

UNA Canterbury

On **26th October**, in the late afternoon, UNA Canterbury will be holding its annual Peace Service in **Canterbury Cathedral**, 11 The Precincts, Canterbury CT1 2EH. More details will be coming in future editions of *Pulse*, but do save the date!

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 **8th April, 2025**. Please keep announcements short and include all the information requested in [the Pulse template](#). **We encourage the inclusion of a picture, but please ensure that any pictures you include are not copyright-protected, as we add each edition of *Pulse* to our website for public access and would need to pay copyright fees.**



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