



Minutes of the UNA LASER AGM held on Saturday, 2nd November 2024, in Bermondsey Village Hall, London SE1 3TD, and by Zoom

1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

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2 Minutes of the last AGM and Matters Arising

The minutes were accepted. There were no matters arising.

3 Chair's Report

Here is a link to the full text of the [Chair's Report](#)

4 Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Peter Webster, presented this year's accounts. He thanked Alan Palmer, chartered accountant, for examining and approving them.

Here is a link to the [2024 Accounts](#)

A small income was raised from donations, but chiefly through the efforts of Barbara Judge who, despite her own ill health and the closure of Dartford branch, managed to hold a flag day this year in aid of UNA LASER and UNICEF. LASER expenditure also included donations to UNICEF, including in support of its Gaza appeal. In the future, high bank charges will not be incurred, as LASER is starting to implement online banking with Virgin Money. This year LASER joined the Climate Change Coalition and paid an annual subscription of £60.

Peter took questions following his report. Under expenditure, the low web costs compared to 2023 were queried. Peter said that this was due to the completion of the *What next for the UN?* campaign, which had celebrated the UN's 75th anniversary. Regarding the balance sheet, some people inquired about the Suzanne Long Fund. Peter explained that she had been a longstanding employee of UNA-UK whose work focused on schools. She set up the fund some time ago before she retired. Peter would be happy to advise any branches working with schools on how to apply to make use of the remaining £180.97.

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5 Report of the Chair of the Policy Committee

Peter Webster reported that, following the LASER annual policy conference on 9 March, he had sent all agreed resolutions to the Foreign Office. Unusually, this year he received no response. This may have been because of the general election. In the coming week, he will follow this up with a letter to the new Foreign Secretary.

Peter invited members to submit resolutions to be considered for the next policy conference. The deadline for submission was 27 January 2025. There is a restriction on length. The policy committee reviews draft resolutions, and those covering the same subject are amalgamated. The draft resolutions are published, and members are then invited to submit their amendments. Peter drew attention to the Bexhill & Hastings resolution on peace and the

definition of self-defence. This will be worked on jointly by the branch and the policy committee, with a view to producing a peace policy strategy.

Trisha urged members who wished to do so to join the policy committee. Key dates for submitting resolutions for the 2025 conference would be printed in the next issue of Pulse newsletter, to be published the following week. Next year's conference will be held on Saturday 15 March. It will be a hybrid meeting.

6 Environmental Officer's Report

Here is a link to the [Environment 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, three branches (Eastbourne, Enfield & the Barnets, and Streatham & Clapham,) together with LASER, had responded to Annesha Kargupta, the Environmental Officer.

Trisha thanked Annesha for her report and also for her work on the website. She drew attention to Eastbourne's practical and successful project of tree planting to offset carbon, and she urged members to donate to support this work. She endorsed Rob Storey's support for car-sharing schemes to reduce traffic, especially in cities.

7 Distinguished Service Award

Trisha Rogers said that when she was with the Council for Education in World Citizenship in the 1990s, the school speaker on whom the Council got the most glowing reports was Brian Beeley, today's distinguished service award recipient. He preferred to call his talk *The Holy Land*, because of the dispute over names and borders – although he always clarified these with meticulous maps and accurate historical and cultural explanations. He wrote one of the Council's most popular Broadsheets on this subject in 1992 and, for more than 30 years, he has been a widely appreciated source of reliable and balanced information on this challenging part of the world.

He had lived for a year in a Turkish village around 1969, when he developed a deep appreciation of the Middle East. He then worked at The Economist Intelligence Unit and the OECD before becoming a full-time academic in the USA, Iran, Scotland and, finally for more than 30 years, the Open University, where Trisha first met him and, more importantly, he met his wife Jane.

He has always been a strong internationalist, and was central to a group Trisha set up to link schools in Tunbridge Wells with some schools in Cochi, Kerala, India. He always provided a combination of wisdom and fun – such as explaining the mysteries of croquet to the visiting Indian teachers. He has been involved with UNA groups at least since the 1950s, when he gave a talk on Malta to the Tyneside UNA. He and Jane have for many years run the Tunbridge Wells UNA, where they were central to more than 20 years of MUNGAs involving about 12 local schools. He always took a leading part in the briefing day and in mentoring the young people in their knowledge and leadership.

Trisha concluded by saying that Brian – now approaching his 90th birthday in January and fighting ill health – continues to be a much-valued source of information and judgement on many international issues, particularly those in the Middle East. We enormously appreciate his many contributions to our community and are delighted to award him the 2024 Distinguished Service Award.

8 Awarding of the Stevens Trophy

David Wardrop spoke of the importance of honouring our local branches and the work they do. He was especially pleased to announce that Bexhill & Hastings branch had won the Stevens Trophy for 2024. He mentioned the fact that in the last ten years the supportive branch had spawned a new organisation, namely UNA Climate & Oceans, run by Gonzalo Alvarez. He praised Sheila Kesby and her committee for this year's Summer Council, which was organised so brilliantly with a good range of different speakers. Branch members made special efforts to provide a welcoming atmosphere for visitors. The event, entitled *Ploughshares into Swords!!* provided an opportunity for those present to discuss aspects of this topic, some controversial, at some length. Alyn Ware, founder and director of Law not War, and Professor Richard Sakwa, were the keynote speakers. The day built on the valuable extended statements which Sheila has produced in the last few years focusing on the UN's work in creating a more peaceful world, and how it can be made more effective. Attendees were able to make their own contributions to the branch draft Peace Policy Statement at afternoon workshops.

This theme has a particular resonance in the current context of our war-torn world. David stressed that Sheila and her fellow committee members have taken on a challenging project. War is as old as mankind, but by contrast peace is a comparatively new invention which is difficult to keep and maintain. He urged her to be steadfast and stick to her goal. He congratulated her and the branch warmly and presented her with the trophy.

9 Elections

The following were elected:

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

Committee members: Andrew Boakes, David Cheesman, Gillian Dare, Jessica Giles, Ali Hessami, Salem Mezhoud, Valeria Minisini, Catherine Pluygers, Suheil Shahryar, Hana Shona, Antony Vallyon and David Wardrop.

10 Resolution to revise the UNA LASER Constitution

As regards Section 9 The Financial Affairs of the Region, Peter Webster explained that, because the committee had decided to open a new online bank account with Virgin Money, they were required by the company to supply names and addresses for all those in control of the funds. However, the executive committee had become quite large, so it seemed sensible to set up a small group of four or five finance trustees to be responsible for everything to do with the money. Then the bank would only require personal details from them.

It would still be possible to write cheques (to be signed by two people), but obtaining signatures can be difficult, so it was proposed to have two people having to approve online payments.

In addition, small improvements to explanations of some administrative arrangements in the Constitution were proposed, including clarification of rule 5c under the heading Meetings of the Region. This rule was also referred to in section 13 Alterations of Rules.

A vote was taken. With just one vote against, the revisions were passed. One person on Zoom complained that the voting process had been too quick. Peter agreed to allow more time for any subsequent voting.

11 Any Other Business

There was no other business.

The AGM was followed in the afternoon by presentations from branches:

Westminster (David Wardrop) – UNA Study Tours

UNA Scotland (Hana Shono) – UNAS Earth Ambassadors

UNA Medway (Beth Atkins) – Establishing a new UNA Local Group

UNA Scotland (Georgiana Bugeag) – Attending – and sharing lessons from – a major UN event

Westminster (Hayden Greenfield) – a local UNA Young Professionals Section

Presentation from the LASER President – HE Dr Fatou Bensouda

Here is a link to [her presentation](#)