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2026 Issue No. 2, February

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From Our Chair



Trisha Rogers

Kidnapping an elected President; threats to attack a fellow NATO member in order to take over its land; creation of a Board with huge aspirations (to replace the UN?), no consultation or legitimacy and a Chair for Life; plans for a high-rise tourist destination in Gaza with no consultation with its citizens: January was a month of shocking actions on the global geopolitical stage. But there were sensible responses, refuting the aphorism of Thucydides that the strong can do what they can and the weak must suffer what they must and noting that ‘middle powers’ are not powerless. It recognised the dangers of ignoring the rules-based international order that has been established over the last 80 years. It’s true that this ‘rules-based, international order’ story was always partially false; the strongest exempted themselves when convenient; there has been a gap between rhetoric and reality. But UN entities like WTO, WHO, COP, and other parts of the UN have greatly helped collective problem-solving, assisted populations affected by conflict, famine and other disasters, supported development and have some democratic legitimacy. The ‘middle powers’ can be effective only if they work together. So is the UN useless and dead, as its critics posit?



UNA Merton’s member, Alison Williams, who attended the UN80 event, proudly carrying the UN staff badge her father wore when he attended the first General Assembly meeting 80 years earlier.

There was a vigorous response to this question – in front of more than 2,000 people – in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, on 17th January. It was a day, organised by UNA-UK, of inspirational presentations and discussion about the achievements, challenges and aspirations of the UN family of organisations. It opened with a video message from Juan Manuel Santos, Chair of the Elders, and was led in-person by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres and the President of the General Assembly, Annalena Baerbock. They reminded us not only of the challenges facing the UN, but also of its many achievements. (Videos of the different sections of the day are being made available [here](#).) The overarching message of the day was one of realistic hopefulness. It is up to all of us – active citizens who care about global solidarity – to ensure the necessary revisions and improvements to the UN’s structure and ways of working. We need honesty about the world as it is, and then to work with others to address its challenges in an ethical, equitable way.

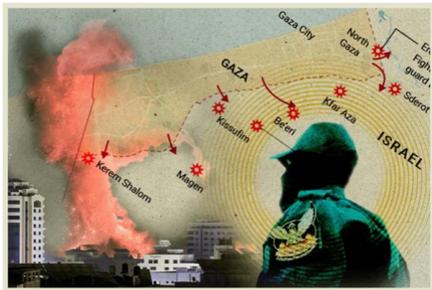
There have been other interesting international responses to the lack of necessary action in the UN, such as the formation of the Hague Group, initially of eight countries, committed to acting together to promote international law. Their first focus is on Palestine, urgently addressing the genocide occurring in Gaza, and recalling eight relevant rulings in international law. They also feel their approach is important for “the future of a world where justice prevails over impunity”). Several UNA Working Groups (see below) are working to suggest ways the UK can promote ways to improve the UN to enable it to better achieve its objective of supporting a rules-based world.

This month, we are welcoming two new LASER Officers. I am delighted to say that Executive Committee member David Cheesman has accepted our invitation to take on the role of Vice Chair. We are also welcoming Hana Shono to be our newly designated Communications Officer, which will include sending out Pulse, a task that we are grateful to Executive Committee member Suheil Shahryar for doing efficiently for the last few years. You can read more about our new Officers [here](#).

Campaigning

We encourage members to [engage with their MPs](#) when trying to influence UK government policy (which can then influence UN actions). We can, of course, also write directly to the relevant [ministers](#), but ministers usually read only letters 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 and ask questions in the House. It is important to give your full home address when you write, so your MP knows you are a constituent.

Israel/Palestine



Our Government has yet to respond to the conclusion of the International Court of Justice 18 months ago that the 1967 occupation of Palestine is “unlawful”. In response, Britain should ban trade in goods, services and investments with illegal Israeli settlements. All Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal and on stolen land. LASER supports 80 leading NGOs who are mounting a campaign across Europe to ban settlement trade. To see the letter you are encouraged to send to your MP, [please click here](#) and enter your postcode, whereupon the letter will be addressed to your MP. You are, of course, free to modify the letter as you choose. Then fill in your name and address where indicated, press send, and your work is done. For now.

Now that the body of the last missing hostage has been found and returned to his family, Gaza should move to the next stage of the Peace Process. But one of the key factors in negotiations is having visionary, popular and diplomatic leaders on both sides. This has long been lacking for the Palestinians, exacerbated by many of their leaders having been killed during the conflicts. Marwan Barghouti – who has repeatedly said that he supports only unarmed resistance – is the most popular Palestinian leader, but has been in Israeli prisons for 23 years. Prime Minister Netanyahu has declared he would never release him, as he would unite the Palestinians. LASER supports the **Free Marwan** campaign and asks our readers to ask their MPs to [e-mail them](#) to support [the Free Marwan statement](#).

LASER Events

LASER Policy Conference

Our Policy Conference will be **on 28th March, 2026**, at the Sands Film Studio, in Rotherhithe, London SE16 4HZ and online, **starting at 11:30am**. Register for coming in-person [here](#); register to attend on Zoom [here](#). Thank you for the draft resolutions that you have been submitting. The draft resolutions are [here](#). Amendments should be [submitted by 2nd March](#). The final agenda will then be circulated before the meeting.

This is your chance to help decide what stance the Region should take on a wide range of international issues. After the conference, we shall submit the resolutions to the UK government, relevant parts of the UN, as well as political party leaders with other actors of influence on the issue concerned. You can see our current resolutions – for inspiration and for the framework we use – [here](#).

Amendments to existing resolutions should add not more than 75 words to the total length of the resolution. Please do not send in longer resolutions, as this creates considerable additional work for the Policy Committee and may lead to the resolutions being rejected.



LASER Summer Council

NOTE REVISED DATE AND VENUE!!

On **Saturday 4th July, 2026**, UNA Eastbourne will host our Summer Council at Eastbourne's **Victoria Baptist Church, BN21 1UE** (about half an hour's walk or short bus ride from Eastbourne station). The title is *Climate Challenges' Risk Assessment and Adaptation Costs: International and Local Perspectives*. On **Sunday 5th July**, UNA Eastbourne will organise a walk along the Peace Path to the Peace Memorial at Beachy Head. So keep the whole weekend free to spend in Eastbourne! There will be further details in future editions of *Pulse*.



Other UNA Events

UNA Harpenden



On **14th February, 10:30**, UNA Harpenden is hosting a hybrid public event at [the Salvation Army](#), Harpenden AL5 2TG, on *Speaking about the Israel/Palestine Conflict*, led by **Jenny Manson**, co-chair of Jewish Voices for Liberation. You can find out more [about the speaker](#). All are welcome; refreshments will be available. Please register [here](#).

On **14th March, 10:30**, UNA Harpenden is hosting a hybrid public lecture on *Diverse Global Future – how the world is becoming less western* by **Dr Samir Puri** (King's College, London) at [Salvation Army](#), Harpenden AL5 2TG. Please see more about the speaker [here](#) and register [here](#).



UNA Luton



On **17th February, 19:00**, UNA Luton, with Purbachal – the Eastern Sky, is holding a free online event celebrating *International Mother Language Day*. The event will include talk, poetry, song, and dance; it aims to promote awareness about the importance of promoting and preserving mother languages as significant cultural identities for all communities in plural societies, helping to build PEACE across diversity. The Zoom link is [here](#), with passcode 739496.

UNA Tunbridge Wells and Wealden



On **26th February, 19:00**, UNA Tunbridge Wells and Wealden will hold – at the **Old Auction House**, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 5QL – a public talk on *The Story of the Nigerian-Biafran Conflict, Fifty-Six Years On*. The talk will be given by **Councillor Ukonu Obasi** (former Executive Director of a Nigerian charity and advocate of human rights and the self-determination of Biafrans). Please register for this free talk [here](#).

UNA Bexhill and Hastings

On **Saturday 28th February, 13:15 – 17:15**, UNA Bexhill and Hastings are holding their **AGM** (13:13 – 14:00) followed by a public seminar on *Warfare, Welfare, Climate Change and the United Nations*, led by **Gonzalo Alvarez** (Chair of UNA Climate and Oceans, and LASER Climate and Oceans Officer) and **Sheila Kesby** (Chair of UNA Bexhill and Hastings). This will be at **St. Peter's Community Centre**, Bexhill-on-Sea, TN40 2HE. Within their campaign for Strengthening the United Nations by supporting Member States to fulfil their obligations to the UN Charter, they will address how the mal-effects of Escalating Warfare and Climate Change negate the mitigating measures taken by their respective campaigns. The event is free, but donations will be welcome on the day. Registration will be at the event.

UNA Westminster

On **20th April, 18:30**, at **SOAS Gallery**, Russell Square, London WC1B 5DQ, UNA Westminster – with SOAS at the University of London, and the Bar Council of England and Wales – is hosting the **23rd Ruth Steinkraus-Cohn International Law Lecture**. **Professor Philippa Webb** (University of Oxford Blavatnik School of Government) will be speaking on *Toppling Heads: Regime Change and Immunity in International Law*. This free, in-person lecture will be followed by a reception. Please register [here](#).

Groups' and Members' Information and Support

Group Descriptions and Activities

There is a list of LASER Groups [on our website](#). Please check your entries and [let us know](#) of any changes you would like.

As well as publicising activities of our LASER Groups in *Pulse*, we also sometimes publicise other activities in our region that are relevant to our work, as well as activities outside our region that are accessible online or easily reached by people in our region. Please see the end of this newsletter for how to submit material.

Public Liability Insurance

Please find [here](#) confirmation of UNA-UK's 2026 public liability insurance. As in previous years, they have negotiated with their insurers to cover local UNA Group events. Please note the following conditions included in the insurance policy for it to remain valid:

1. **Coverage for Events:** UNA Groups will be covered up to a total of £5 million for events held on their premises and at third-party locations/venues, provided that the third-party locations/venues have their own insurance in place. Additionally, it is important to note that the UNA Group must be proven negligent for any claim to be valid.
 2. **Property Damage Claims:** claims for damage to property at fundraising events or events where catering is provided for seven days or less. The coverage applies if the damage occurs during the demonstration, erection, construction, or dismantling of the property, as well as in transit to and from Europe. This transit coverage does include movement within the UK.
 3. **Excess payable** on an insurance claim is £250 per claim.
 4. The UNA Group must be named on the UNA Groups list provided to the insurers at the time of the event.
 5. The event should be organised by the group itself, and not a third party.
 6. A claim can only be made for **events that take place in the United Kingdom**.
 7. The event does **not exceed 48 hours**.
 8. The event does **not exceed 1000 in the total number of people** at the event at any one time.
 9. The event does **not involve high-value exhibitions** (valued over £250,000), restricted items or dangerous goods/activities (such as weapons, extreme sports, animal rides, professional sports, medications/drugs, amusement rides, etc.).
 10. It is the UNA Group's responsibility to submit all evidence and information to UNA-UK for the claim to be submitted to insurers.
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Inspirational Group Activities

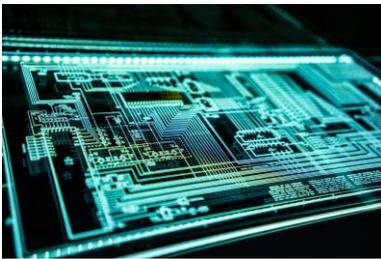
- UNA Luton Chair, Nazia Khanuum, made a video for our AGM to describe the memorial bench that UNA Luton has installed in memory of a longstanding, much-loved member, Fatema Islam. UNA Luton worked with the [Legend on the Bench](#) charity to erect a beautiful bench designed as a place where people could sit and talk, but also providing suicide-prevention support through telephone numbers and a QR code leading to information on professional support groups. This beautiful bench means help is 'just a scan away'. You can find a link to the video in the list of some [groups' inspirational activities on our website](#).
- You can find descriptions of inspirational activities from other [groups on our Groups' page](#). Please [tell us](#) if you know of another inspirational activity by a UNA group that we could share.

UNA Working Groups

These Working Groups (which are also listed on the [LASER website](#)) bring together groups and individual members to work together on key areas. There are no set structures or required outcomes. They mostly meet online and might want to develop campaigns, awareness-raising materials, presentations, resolutions or reports. The groups can lead to further research, campaigning or other action.

If there is a topic you would like to research and take forward in consultation with other interested members, do [contact us](#) about starting a new UNA Working Group.

Digital & Emerging Technologies



In December, the UN created the Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies, to support the newly adopted [Global Digital Compact](#) (GDC). The GDC is a framework that supports an open, sustainable, fair, safe and secure digital future for everyone. The GDC will seek to address governance, inclusion, and access across technology and AI. This new Working Group will investigate and decide in which areas of the GDC we can lend support, and develop plans and actions to advance its objectives. All are welcome to join. People with experience in governance, community-led technology groups, open source software and experience in emerging technologies (e.g., blockchain, AI, BioTech, IoT) are encouraged to contact us. We expect to meet remotely every other month, with planned in-person gatherings occasionally. As we focus on particular topics, meetings may occur more regularly. Please contact [Cameron McAnsh](#) for more information and to join the group.

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. The UN SDG Working Group has focused on SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 13 Climate Change.

The SDG Forum works with the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and the Business Improvement District. It has participated in the Tunbridge Wells Climate Fair, and this year will help to establish a Climate Hub. The UNA TWW is cooperating closely on a joint venture to ban the use of single-use plastics in order to establish a 'Plastic Free Tunbridge Wells'.

SDG Guidance and Use Cases



Since September 2024, this Working Group has been meeting every eight weeks to exchange experiences and collaborate to promote the adoption and implementation of the SDGs by UNA groups. One of the group's members is a UK representative at the ISO/UNDP PAS 53002:2024, *Guidelines for contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. The ISO/UNDP guidelines address: setting SDG impact objectives and targets; engaging with stakeholders; collecting data on impacts; generating options; making risk-based decisions; and understanding trade-offs to increase positive impact. We intend to generate an overview resource from this standard for the benefit of other UNA groups. We shall also discuss specific SDG adoption, research and use cases by various groups, including SDG initiatives on SDG 2 (hunger) and SDG 13 (climate impact) in UNA Enfield and the Barnets. Please contact [Ali Hessami](#) for further information.

Achieving Peace in Europe

The group, launched on 21st May 2025, aims to develop a resolution on *Defending Europe Responsibly* for submission to the 2026 UNA LASER Policy Conference, to be accepted by LASER and then presented to the UK Foreign Secretary and other European leaders. The background information to the formation of the working group can be found [here](#), with further information [here](#) in the paper *How does Europe defend itself responsibly?* by **Suheil Sharyar**. To join the group, please register [here](#).

Tyranny, Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction - Interrogating the Draft Second United Nations Charter

The Group aims to assess how well this *Second UN Charter* (written by an international team of experts on UN reform) will strengthen International Law through a series of discussions, each starting with an attempt to 'diagnose' the root causes of our unpeaceful world, which in its present course, is predicted to make itself extinct. It will then try to find, in each case, a 'cure' for this 'disease', working from our own experiences and our findings in the 'Second Charter'. Finally, in each case, and later in summary, it will attempt to expedite these 'cures' through the 'force of law' – as expressed in all the various forms of International Law. The group will be chaired by LASER Head of Policy, Peter Webster, and will convene by zoom. For more information and to join the group, please contact [Greta Vipond](#). Even if you do not want to join the group, [Greta Vipond](#) would be very interested to receive your responses to the following 3 questions, as this would contribute to the thinking of the group:

- What are the basic requirements now for effective, and dynamic World Governance?
 - What are the core principles you would like to see as the basis of a Second UN Charter?
 - Which core principles should we retain that are embedded in the present [UN Charter](#)?
-

Imagining a UN Fit for the 21st Century

The classical and inflexible governance of the UN, built around classical institutional models of post war era, renders it unfit for a dynamic and new multipolar world order. The UN governance can and should be

re-engineered for the brave new world. This Working Group is adopting a novel research method creatively to explore the drivers and opportunities for a reformed structure and governance, leading to a UN that will be agile, inclusive, representative, transparent, accountable and fair to the needs, rights and values of the international community in this century of exponential change and shifting power dynamics. It is intended to produce a consensus-based, ideal structure/governance/regulatory model and associated brief narrative for the UN in the 21st century. The groups have agreed that the aim of the creative study is *UN Reforms through Diverse, Representative and Agile Coalitions*. For more information and to join, please contact [Ali Hessami](#).

Systemic Transformation Network

This Working Group is being led by **Barrie Oxtoby** of UNA Shropshire and **Suheil Shahryar** of UNA Harpenden. Following the release of [UNA-UK Strategy 2026-30](#), Barrie and Suheil are offering their systemic transformation approach to UNA groups and partners to align their objectives and operational plans with the UNA-UK strategy. They would be keen to hear from interested UNA group leaders. For information, see [here](#).

Financial Support for LASER

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

How about a monthly ‘cup-of-coffee £3.00’ in the form of a standing order? Please [let us know](#) of any donation.

The Next Edition of LASER *Pulse*

Please send us any materials for the next edition of *Pulse* by **2nd March, 2026**. We suggest that events are initially publicised over a month ahead, as the *Pulse* mailing date may have to be varied to fit in with other constraints – such as preparations for the Policy Conference. Please keep announcements short and include all the information requested in [the Pulse template](#). We welcome pictures, but **please ensure that any pictures you send are not copyright-protected**, as we add each edition of *Pulse* to our website for public access and would be liable for copyright fees. Please note, too, that, since previous editions of *Pulse* are available on our website, **any announcements should include only information (such as contact details) that you are happy to have publicly accessible on the internet**.