UNA LASER Chair's Report, 25th October, 2025

Intro

Welcome. We don't charge for these events, but do have considerable expenses. Now that we have successfully moved our bank account, on which more later, we would welcome regular donations from those members who can afford it. Do celebrate the new bank account by setting up a standing order; I suggest £3:00 (less than an Americana – or what the Canadians now call a Canadiana) per month! The account details are here and on the agenda. The papers for this meeting can be found here.

Global context of violence and environmental distress



Shockingly, the context for our work this year has been dominated by the same major conflicts as for the last 2 years - Russia/Ukraine; Sudan; Israel/Palestine – as well as climate change. Those have been the backdrop for our campaigns, but we have also tried to focus on areas either going under the radar or where the UN, and rules based international system are particularly relevant.



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:

- The war in Israel/Palestine and the surrounding region
- Climate Change

On both of these we have campaigned in coordination with partner organisations, such as the Britain Palestine Project and the Climate Coalition), but focussing on the international structures and rules-based systems and what the UK government should do to strengthen them.
Other topics (often supported by articles on our website written by our Campaigns Officer, Valeria Minisini included:

- UK Aid
- Urgent humanitarian needs
- Sustainable development goals
- Low and middle-income country debt (in coordination with Debt Justice, of which we are a member)
- Conflict prevention and peace-building
- Ukraine
- Nuclear disarmament

Details of all these campaigns are in our newsletter, *Pulse* (available on our website) and many are presented more fully 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 again held our **Policy Conference**. This was the culmination of months of work from groups, Policy Committee and other members. We agreed 38 resolutions, many new this year, some updated from earlier years. These are always shared with the FCDO, other appropriate departments, other parties, and relevant parts of the UN; we frequently get responses indicating that they have had some effect.

Next year we plan to hold our Policy Conference again in March online and in London, probably this hall. Send draft resolutions by **late January**; fuller details coming soon in *Pulse.*

Our Summer Council was a hybrid event hosted by UNA Westminster, in the week of the 80th anniversary of the San Francisco signing of the UN Charter and held in the building that housed the first meeting of the UN General Assembly, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster. The excellent programme – coordinated by David Wardrop – considered some of the UN's achievements, the importance of reliable information (acknowledging the risks taken by many journalists in order to provide it), the current challenges and thoughts for the future of the UN. The day ended with our eating a delicious UN80 birthday cake on UN Green, the naming and activities on which are among David Wardrop's many UN-related achievements.

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

Working Groups



UNA Groups (also known as branches) can gain huge strength from engaging with other branches and members on shared goals. LASER has helped to support this through our establishment of UNA Working Groups, which are not restricted to LASER members.

Our first Working Group to reach its goal and stop meeting as a Working Group but morph, with partner organisations, into an effective lobbying coalition is David Cheeseman's *UN Security Council Veto Reform* group. Their excellent proposals on how the non-elected members of the Security Council can mitigate the stalling effects of a P5 veto were supported in a resolution at our Policy Conference and are now being considered at various national and international fora.

The Working Group on *the Threat to Democracy in India*, coordinated by Suheil Shahryar, led to a resolution agreed at our Policy Conference. Further lobbying is being taken forward by that group.

Current Working Groups (with details in *Pulse* and on our website) are considering:

- Local Delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals
- SDG Guidance and Use Cases
- Digital & Emerging Technologies
- Achieving Peace in Europe
- Tyranny, Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Interrogating the draft second UN Charter
- Imagining a UN Fit for the 21st Century
- Systemic Transformation Network.

More details on all of these are in *Pulse* and on our LASER website.



UNA-UK

We are delighted that UNA-UK no longer seems headless, but the new Chair, Ian Martin – who had just been appointed and was soon to take office this time last year – has now been joined by an experienced, knowledgeable and visionary Chief Executive, Jane Kinninmont, whom we warmly welcome today.

We welcome the dramatic transformation. We even hope soon to see the long-awaited revised website (**including mechanism to put supporters and local groups in touch with each other**).

As they come to the end of their terms of office, we are grateful to our 2 elected trustees (Tim Jarman and Dorothea Christiana) for their work, including coordinating the quarterly Groups Meetings, next on **18th November**. We strongly encourage all groups to have a representative at these meetings.

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.

- **Jane Beeley**, who is also Co-Chair of UNA Tunbridge Wells and Wealden, is now standing down as our Regional Secretary – very many thanks, Jane, for all your work and support.
- **Andrew Boakes**, who has been involved with UNA for decades, including on their central board and as Chair of the UNA-UK Policy Conference. We have greatly appreciated your contributions to the LASER Executive Committee, Andrew, and are delighted that you are planning to continue as a member of our Policy Committee.
- **Peter Webster** is our indefatigable Treasurer, Chair of the Policy Committee, general problem solver, as well as running, with his wife, Sarah, UNA Streatham and Clapham.
- **Valeria Minisini**, who as well as chairing UNA Canterbury, provides thorough background research for many of our campaigns
- **Suheil Shahryar**, as well as running the very active UNA Harpenden, has been beautifying and posting out *Pulse* with great efficiency. He is now standing down from this role.
- **Hana Shono**, the Chair of the UNA-UK Conference Committee and member of UNA Streatham, has been a much valued member of the Executive Committee, but is standing down now that she is living for a while in Japan. However, we are most grateful that she has volunteered to take over from **Suheil** the beautifying and mailing out of *Pulse.*
- Other members of our Executive Committee whom I warmly thank for their contributions this year are **Ali Hessami** (who is joining with Suheil and Peter to advise us on our IT work and social media), **Antony Vallyon** (who has kindly agreed to stand as our Secretary), **Catherine Pluygers** (UNA Wandsworth and Chair of the UNA London Trust), **David Cheesman** (Secretary UNA Luton and coordinator of our first Working Group to move to a second stage), **David Wardrop** (UNA Westminster and the energy and vision behind the wonderful UN Green)**, Gillian Dare** (UNA Twickenham and Richmond), **Jessica Giles** (Chair, UNA Medway), **Salem Mezhoud** (UNA Westminster and LASER Representative on the United Against Inhumanity campaign)
- I would also like to thank **Annesha Kar Gupta**, who, as well as being a diligent Environmental Officer and carrying out the survey 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.
- The lifeblood of LASER is our community of groups/branches who run a wide range of activities. Many of these are advertised ahead in *Pulse*, but we don't have room to share reports of past activities. Recently there have been some special UN80 events (such the blue lighting of Council offices in Eastbourne and the ceremony to relaunch a beautiful birdbath in Enfield and the Barnets' local park that was originally installed to mark the inauguration of the League of Nations Union. I don't have time to tell you more of such events now, but am thinking of opening a page of group event photographs on our website – so do send them to me! We shall hear about some particularly inspirational activities later today, and details of these will then be added to the list on our website to inspire each other.
- And my final thank you is to You – **all our members** – who are the energy 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.

I have now exceeded the term as Chair recommended by our constitution and have decided this should be my last year. It would be wonderful to find someone who could be Vice Chair this year, with a view to taking over. Please consider doing this or help us find someone to do it. Often the most effective way is to identify the talented person and then tap them on the shoulder saying you are the ideal person for this role!

Thank you for all you already do.