LASER ELECTION CANDIDATES, 2026

OFFICERS

Chair

David Cheesman

nominated by Nazia Khanum, seconded by Trisha Rogers



My PhD is in South Asian history (SOAS). I am: founder-Secretary of UNA Luton; Board Member (former Chair) of Squared Housing Association, Luton; Patron of Purbachal – The Eastern Sky (Bangladeshi cultural organisation); Policy Advisor at the Financial Conduct Authority; Joint Director of Equality in Diversity (independent research, management and training consultancy); Fellow, Royal Statistical Society and Royal Society of Arts. I believe the United Nations is essential for maintaining international peace, upholding the rule of law and championing climate change; but I support urgent reform to increase its effectiveness by making the Security Council more accountable to the General Assembly.

Secretary

Sarah Winterbottom

nominated by Neville Grant, seconded by Antony Vallyon



Sarah brings 20+ years' communications experience to the LASER EC role, with skills in strategic thinking, engagement and turning ideas into action. A Greenwich resident since studying French Literature at Goldsmiths, University of London, she re-engaged with her local UNA on returning to the area, helping deliver public talks with the University of Greenwich on protecting refugees and women in politics. 2026, Sarah is committed to revitalising the branch alongside long-standing Chair, Neville Grant. She aims to raise UNA's profile and grow membership by building strategic local partnerships, broadening community engagement, through a relevant, ambitious and inclusive programme of events.

Treasurer

Peter Webster

nominated by Trisha Rogers, seconded by Catherine Pluygers



I am chair of the Region's Policy Committee, and of Streatham & Clapham Branch. Outside UNA, I work in Responsible/Ethical Investment. I have a Maths degree and an MBA. I believe it has never been more important for UNA to stand up for multilateralism and stronger, more effective international law alongside other steps to strengthen human rights and the protection of the planet we all depend upon. As part of that, we must also press our own government to follow international law, advance shared global goals and be a constructive UN member state and permanent member of the Security Council.

Executive Committee

Jane Beeley

nominated by Marguerita Morton, seconded by Jane MacNaghten



I have chaired Tunbridge Wells & Wealden branch for over thirty years. I am now co-chair. I joined the LASER committee in 2014 and became Secretary of LASER in 2021. My full-time career as a chartered librarian focused on education and health, including work with students for the Open University, where I gained my degree, and running two hospital libraries. For fifteen years I was special needs governor at a local primary school. In addition to a longstanding interest in promoting education and health for all, and in humanitarian issues, I am keen to work to achieve climate SDGs.

Gillian Dare

nominated by David Wardrop, seconded by Antony Vallyon



Former Diplomat working in Sub-Saharan Africa and on Middle East including Iraq and Jordan and South Asia issues and in Brussels; specialised in political and security policies in conflict-affected and fragile counties; represented the UK on multi-lateral platforms. Senior Policy Officer for WPS in international contexts. Trustee for NGOs working with refugees, minorities in the Middle East (*Mosaic Middle East*), women in Afghanistan (*WPP*) and Chair of *Beyond Conflict,* an NGO addressing trauma of frontline workers & victims of violence,. Member of UK FORB Forum, Chair of its Iraq Working Group and a member of several All Party Parliamentary Groups.

Ali Hessami

nominated by Antony Vallyon, seconded by Salem Mezhoud



Ali Hessami is a systems engineer with background in industrial electronic control, systems design and development, risk management, standardisation, safety and security engineering and knowledge management. He's a long term supporter of the UN and its humanitarian agencies specifically UNICEF and UNHCR and been a member and lately co-chair of the Enfield and Barnets Branch on UNA. Main areas of interest are multilateralism, innovative governance models, peace building, climate change literacy and Ethics of Technology specially AI.

Keyet Makonnen

Nominated by Arun Wilson, seconded by Catherine Pluygers



Princess Keyet Makonnen is Chair of UNA Global South, a development specialist with decades of experience working with women, refugees and communities across Africa and the Middle East. She ran the Ethiopian Refugee Helpline for 27 years, supporting refugees across Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster. She co-founded and coordinates the Voices of African Women campaign of WILPF, promoting grassroots women's work in Africa and the diaspora, and has organised peace conferences and CEDAW training with SOAS. An advocate of self-sustaining development and people's rights, she would bring experience, diaspora networks and a Global South perspective to the UNA LASER executive committee.

Salem Mezhoud

Nominated by Ali Hessami, seconded by David Wardrop



I have a cross-functional experience as Head of region/programmes with the UN and NGOs in Human rights and humanitarian affairs: OHCHR, OCHA, UNICEF, ILO, HRW, MRG. I held academic posts at the Sorbonne, Columbia, Wilson Center (DC) and King's College London; and broadcasting roles: BBC World Service, VOA, RFI, specialising in Africa and the Mediterranean, covering conflict, post-conflict, Counter-terrorism. My involvement with UNA since 1984, included representing UNA at the European Social Forum (Paris). I serve on the Executive Committee of UNA Westminster and on the Board and Executive Committees of the Foundation for Endangered Languages and United Against Inhumanity.

Valeria Minisini

nominated by Carl Wright, seconded by Trisha Rogers



Valeria has been Chair of UNA Canterbury since 2021 and has been UNA LASER's Campaigns Officer since 2022. She holds a degree in Politics and International Relations and now works in sustainability communications. Valeria speaks four languages and has lived in three countries - contributing to her interests in international cooperation and building a better world together.

Catherine Pluygers

Nominated by Trisha Rogers, seconded by Peter Webster



I am a musician. My visit to North Korea as a soloist inspired me to get a Birkbeck University degree in development. I was a long-standing committee member of UNA Westminster and am Vice-Chair of UNA Wandsworth. I was Chair of LASER 2015-19 and am Chair of UNA London Trust. I have a particular interest in the welfare of women and have sat on the executive committees of WILPF and Voices of African Women. I have helped deliver major projects for UNA, WILPF and Voices of African Women. I'm working on a monthly newsletter for diaspora Women's groups.

Suheil Shahryar

nominated by Ali Hesami, seconded by Antony Vallyon



I have been the Chair of UNA Harpenden since 2021. During my tenure, our group has been one of the most active UNA groups in the UK, with monthly public lectures from prominent academics and other community events. I have also been active in running several working groups for LASER, including one on how to end wars of aggression. We are discussing with St Albans Cathedral of jointly holding regular discussion meetings on peace and justice. As a former technologist, I drafted LASER's privacy policy. I also maintain the websites of UNA Harpenden and three other community groups in Harpenden.

Antony Vallyon

Nominated by Gillian Dare, seconded by Trisha Rogers



I am a Member of Westminster branch, LASER Executive Committee, Policy Committee, and Trustee; and of the Academic Council for UN System (ACUNS). My interest in UN was enhanced by working for UN University in Tokyo and at the UN Secretariat in New York in 1997 on peace, development, human rights and UN reform. Formerly active in UNA-USA and Australia, I was a branch Chair, then as President of UNA New Zealand from 2007-2010 was on the National Disaster Relief Forum, led the NZ delegation to the 2009 WFUNA Plenary in Seoul, and was Rapporteur for the UN Renewal session.

David Wardrop

Nominated by Trisha Rogers, seconded by Salem Mezhoud



I am a long-time member of the L&SER committee and have chaired Westminster UNA since 2001. Over the years, we have initiated and sustained a film festival, an international law lecture, and a conference and wreath-laying ceremony to mark International UN Peacekeepers Day. In 2021, the government agreed to our proposal for the naming of United Nations Green, here in the heart of London.