



London & SE Region
United Nations Association

LASER

TRIENNIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE LONDON & SOUTH EAST REGION
WORKING FOR A STRONG, CREDIBLE & EFFECTIVE UNITED NATIONS

ISSUE 10 | JUNE 2010

Welcome to the June Issue of LaSER, the newsletter for all United Nations Association members in the London and Southeast Region.

In this issue...

Message from the Chairman 1

Human Rights and UN Peacekeepers' Day celebrations 2

UN Press Freedom Day and Hustings 2010 3

London & South East Region Summer Council Notice 3

Reports from two regional UNA branches 4

The Region remembers Jeffrey Segall..... 4

Events Listing 4

Scam Warning 4

Copy date of the next issue:
27th September 2010.

For contribution guideline and details, go to:
www.unalondonandse.org/Publications.htm

Editor: Angela Viano
(editor@unalondonandse.org)

Message from your Chairman

We are all looking forward very much to the UN Forum on 12th June - a new departure for UNA-UK which looks like being an outstanding success, and will, we hope, do much to put UNA and the issues we care about on the map. Those who regret not having Annual Conference this year may be reassured that UNA-UK (and we hope all our members!) are actively campaigning on the key policy issues that were adopted at our conference last year in Edinburgh.

For our part, London and SE Region have been raising a number of issues with UNA-UK's Policy Advisory Committee consistent with our policies and priorities, including: torture and rendition, the plight of the Chagossians, the arms trade, and journalistic freedom.



© UNA-UK/Simon Hollington

I am glad that we can somewhat belatedly formally honour David Wardrop, Chair of UNA Westminster, in this newsletter with the photograph of David (right) receiving his "Distinguished Service Award" from UNA-UK – handed over at the Spring Council meeting of the region on 20th March.

The main focus of the Spring Council was to workshop the key questions we thought candidates should be asked during the General Election. Experience across the region varied during the election: on balance, those branches that managed to organize their own hustings meeting fared better (in terms of coverage of key questions) than in those areas where a large local hustings had been organized, and UNA members had to take their chance on asking their questions.

From our own experience in Blackheath, we would encourage UNA branches to hold their own hustings where possible in future. Roger Hallam's report on page 3 of this newsletter shows what can be done!

Talking of elections, we will be holding our own later this year: your Chair has done his four years as laid down in our constitution, and so it is not too early for branches to think about who they would wish to elect as Chair - and indeed onto the committee. Nomination forms will be going out with our next newsletter in September.

Meanwhile I would like on behalf of us all to thank Linda Leung for editing this newsletter (and the website) over the past year, and to thank Angela Viano for taking over. ■

Neville Grant

ENJOY A UNA AWAY DAY!

**River trip to Greenwich
BYO picnic in the park
Sunday 11th July 2010**

Join us at **Westminster Pier** to catch the **11.00 am Leisure River Service** boat to **Greenwich**. Arrival at 12pm. Thence walk southwards 400 yards along King William Walk, and turn right through the gate into Greenwich Park - NW corner. Return any time you like.

Wet weather programme: National Maritime Museum (free) or Fan Museum in Croom's Hill.





On Human Rights in the Region

UNA Westminster Branch | David Wardrop

A meeting titled "*Who deserves to be on the UN Human Rights Council?*", hosted on 10th May by the new UCL Faculty of Law, aimed to provide an overview of the HRC and to review the records in womens' rights of India and Nigeria, both current HRC members. Liesl Gertholtz, Human Rights Watch, commented on its size, current location, manipulation by block-voting by members and poor or no reporting back on the Universal Periodic review (UPR). Nonetheless substantive resolutions on maternal deaths were successfully passed. Martha Baker, WILPF, covered UN legislation on women's rights including CEDAW and UN SCR1325 and commented on the proposed UN body for women, the Gender Equality Architecture Reform (GEAR).

According to Mrs Subhashini, Indian High Commission, India remains a keen supporter of the UPR process. Most of the outstanding recommendations concerned Human Rights Education, especially relating to gender and caste-based discrimination. Akin Oyateru, Nigeria High Commission, reported on positive developments regarding trafficking, violence against women and reproductive health. He stated that Nigeria was addressing violence against women through family law on assault and battery. He saw the present HRC as a vast improvement on its predecessor though still weak. ■

UK Peacekeeping Day

UNA Westminster branch held its 7th annual conference and ceremony to mark **International UN Peacekeepers Day** on 20th May. The conference theme "*Keeping the Peace, protecting the people*" was stressed by keynote speaker Alan Doss, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for DRC and in charge of MONUC, the UN mission there. He reviewed its achievements and continuing challenges. This mandate now covers forty nine objectives but even with 20,000 uniformed personnel, its challenges remain enormous.

Edward Burke from Spanish Think Tank FRIDE used his own recent experience in

Afghanistan to contrast US and UK methods to encourage community stabilisation in its war-torn provinces. The US military takes leadership reflecting security dangers for NGOs but the UK Stabilisation Unit leadership is shared between the military and civilians who are better trained in community liaison. He felt that a healthier option. Jacob Ravndal from the Norwegian Think Tank FFI chronicled the chequered history of

UNA Twickenham and Richmond | Virginia Morris



Early May 2010 saw the official unveiling of a monument located outside York House, Twickenham, to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the **UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights**. UNA Twickenham and Richmond were involved in the project from the start and our Chair, Cllr. Virginia Morris, was instrumental in getting Richmond Council to adopt the initial idea as a public art project and provide funds. UNA also contributed along with the local branch of Amnesty International. Pupils from two Richmond schools and residents from the Twickenham Day Centre were involved in the design of the installation and UNA members talked to the pupils about the Universal Declaration prior to the meetings with the artist Samantha Haynes. The monument was unveiled by the Mayor of Richmond Councillor Celia Hodges along with our Chair and John Reekie from Amnesty International. ■

intelligence gathering in UN peacekeeping since the first Congo operation in 1961. Since then, UN officers have sought in vain to implement politically acceptable intelligence systems. But newly introduced field-based information collection cells appear to be acceptable and



Members of the UN Veterans Colour Party honour fallen UN Peacekeepers as the band of the Coldstream Guards plays The Last Post. Photo: Benedict Parsons

about time too! Progress on this issue eases the way for the introduction of aerial surveillance technology to UN peacekeeping forces. Two experts, Sandy Allsopp (Allsopp Helikites Ltd) and Andrew Stewart (Thales UK) showed how such systems, currently denied UN force commanders, can lead to more informed awareness on the ground, keeping the peace and

protecting the people.

The traditional memorial service took place in a traffic-free Whitehall where eighty-five embassies laid wreaths at the Cenotaph. The Band of the Coldstream Guards provided musical support. Texts of all lectures can be found on (www.unawestminster.org.uk) and the ceremony can be watched on www.tv786.net/una ■



Press Freedom Day debate | Keith Hindell

At a lively debate to mark the UN's Press Freedom Day a large majority decided that "Unregulated political comment helps the democratic process". In other words most of the audience at this event, organised by the UK National Commission for UNESCO, approved of the free for all nature of the internet blogosphere in which everyone can have their say about the current election.

The partisans of this view described it as a wonderful expression of freedom of speech in an over-regulated world. Their critics agreed that it would be impractical to police the internet but claimed that internet journalism and comment actually had little effect on the democratic process. Despite all the attention paid by the regular media, internet comment attracts only 4% of people in Britain although 70% are connected. Like Speaker's Corner at Hyde Park the blogosphere is a colourful, anarchic jungle, stuffed with conspiracy theorists abiding by no rules of honest journalism and is ignored by most voters.

While some of its supporters pointed out that it has more influence in countries where press and broadcasting is government controlled such as in Iran, others added that President Obama had raised enormous amounts of campaign money through the internet and his supporters had swayed many voters this way. It's only a matter of time they implied before it's just as influential here. No doubt there will be a reckoning after May 6th, whatever the result.

UNESCO marks World Press Freedom Day to remind everyone that a free media is essential to inform the citizenry and enable them to hold their governments to account. Regrettably 112 journalists have been murdered around the world in the past year simply for doing their job. ■

Hustings 2010 | Roger Hallam



The 2010 general election – with its televised debates and the prospect of a hung parliament – brought a queue of NGOs wanting to get their key questions put to candidates in public.

In Enfield the local UNA has organized hustings at every local, London, national and European election since 2005, so the routine was familiar. This time we went into partnership with the local Trinity-at-Bowes Methodist Church in Palmers Green, with the focus on Enfield Southgate constituency: that's right, the one where Michael Portillo was famously defeated in 1997. Around 110 people put questions to a panel including the Conservatives (who eventually retained the seat they won back in 2005), and a local GP standing as an Independent.

Questions ranged from immigration to pensions and the health service to Heathrow expansion. But we found time for some of our own key concerns: Trident renewal, British complicity in the torture of detainees and climate change after Copenhagen. The event gave voters the opportunity to gauge the candidates' response to some fundamental questions. ■



London and Southeast Region Summer Council Meeting: "The Road to Mexico"

A follow-up to last year's conference at the IMO on Climate Change.
We now look forward to the international negotiations in Mexico in December.

Saturday 24th July 2010 at the Friends Meeting House
Ship Street, Brighton, BN1 1AF East Sussex
1.30pm – 5pm

Speakers: Polly Higgins, Barrister, Advocate of Planetary Rights
"Preventing Ecocide: the Legal Way Forward"
Bernadette Vallely, CE Women's Environmental Network
"The Impact of Climate Change on Women"
Debbie Tripley, CE Environmental Law Foundation
"Climate Change Advocacy at the Local Level"

Followed by refreshments and Action Workshops

Places are limited. Members are asked to register in advance. RSVP by phone or email to Wendy Higgs (Hon Sec)
e: wjhiggs@gmail.com | M: 07751 297 291 | T: 020 8318 1050

Directions: to get to the **Friends Meeting House** from the station, go down Queens Road opposite the station. Go straight on past North Road and Church Street, and turn left at Church Street. Ship Street is the first turning on the right. Follow Ship Street round to the left and the Friends Meeting House is directly on the left. About 6-10 minutes.



Purley with Sutton Branch's Inter-School Debating Final | Jas Weir

On 25th May Sutton High School hosted the Final of Purley with Sutton Branch's long running Inter-School debating competition, contested by the last four of 32 schools from across Croydon, Sutton and Surrey. Wilson's, Old Palace, Sutton Grammar and Caterham School debated a variety of topics and were judged by Les Kemp, Rodney Towner and Pat Cook.

Chaired by Dick Moran the final concluded with The Lord Tope C.B.E. awarding the Digby-Weightman Shield to the winners from Sutton Grammar School, represented by Edmund Bradbury and Max Daly; the Fowler Cup to the runners up Caterham School represented by Danielle Vaughan and Samantha Rawlinson; and the Mayoral Trophy to Max Daly as the best individual speaker. The format for next year's competition will be altered to ensure the final does not conflict with the examination schedules. ■

UNA Putney and Roehampton

Annual Report 2009/2010 | Jo Stocks

In September we celebrated the **UN International Year of Astronomy**. Anita Heward of the Royal Astronomical Society gave a most interesting talk entitled "*The Next Giant Leap – Mars and Beyond*" which included a fascinating visual presentation. A January well-attended meeting on the subject of *The UN, Human Rights and Liberty* was addressed by Sir Brian Barber and Vijay Mehta, Chairman of Action for UN Renewal (which has now merged with the World Disarmament Campaign to form Uniting for Peace). Our season ended with a public celebration of **International Women's Day** held at the Putney Methodist Church. On the "*Crisis for Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo – How Can the UN Help?*" debated Martha Jean Baker of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Nounou Booto of WILPF and International Action Network on Small Arms and Vijay Mehta.

United Nations Day in October was celebrated at Putney Methodist Church in the presence of our President the Mayor of Wandsworth Professor Brian Prichard. Presiding Reverend Jed Davis gave prominence to the work of the United Nations agencies and prayers were said for all those in areas of conflict around the world.

Scam Warning!



A number of our members have been receiving urgent e-mails from people claiming to be stranded abroad, having been robbed, with urgent demands for money to be sent to the Western Union in Lagos, Kuala Lumpur, and so on. As may be inferred from linguistic and stylistic features, these are scams.

A phone call to the FCO Duty Officer will confirm whether anyone has registered as a "DBS" – a "Distressed British Subject".

The Region remembers Jeffrey Segall 1924 - 2010



Jeffrey Segall, veteran champion of UN reform through the more systematic participation of world civil society, died on 22nd May after a long period of illness.

For many years a member of the Finchley Branch of UNA, he founded and led a series of reform initiatives from the early 1980s, culminating in UNGA-Link UK (UK Network for Civil Society Link with UN General Assembly).

All were to promote his conviction that peace would only be possible when "we the peoples" were given due weight in the UN system against the *realpolitik* of the member states.

If you would like to make a contribution to honour Jeffrey's work, you can send cheques payable to UNICEF whose work was close to his heart and that of his wife, Elizabeth.

Forthcoming Events

UNA Lewisham

Thursday 17th June 2010 / 7.30pm

UNA Lewisham will host a talk entitled "**Nuclear free world and how to achieve it**". The meeting will be chaired by the mayor of Lewisham with guest speaker UNA-UK Chair Lord Hannay of Chiswick. This event will take place at Lewisham Town Hall, Civic Suite, Catford Road SE6 4RU. Contact: Gurbakhsh Garcha on 0208 699 2050 Mob. 0795 2983 254, or bwana_singha@yahoo.com

UNA-Westminster

Wednesday 30th June 2010 / 6.30pm

UNA Westminster Branch will hold a meeting titled "**The UN at war: FDR's Global UN Day 1942. Lessons for a stronger UN today**".

Dr. Dan Plesch, Director, Centre for International Studies & Diplomacy, SOAS.

The event will take place at the House of Lords, Room 4a. For more information contact David Wardrop on 0207 385 6738 or info@unawestminster.org



Tuesday 27 July 2010 / 7.30pm

Let's get together at the National Theatre

"**Welcome to Thebes**", a new play by Moira Buffini
Book your own seats. Try for the **Traveler** tickets at £10.
E-mail Irina_Zhitkova@hotmail.co.uk
Or by post to 61 Sedlescombe Road, London SW6 1RE

Wealden UNA

Friday 2nd July 2010 / 9.00am – 3.00pm

Uckfield Community Technology College.

Model UN General Assembly 0845-1520.

This MUNGA focuses on Climate Change, The Water Crisis, Women's Rights, Renewable Energy and the Abolition of War. Enquiries to Rosemary Baker – 01825 712553