



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

In this issue...

Report on Region's AGM	1-2
The Region remembers Ruth Caruana	2
Introducing the Region's new Chair	2
Executive Committee 2010-2011	2
Celebrating United Nations Day	3
Maddy Webster & UNA Canterbury	3
Human Rights Day Lunch	4
UNA Brighton & Hove Annual Report	4
UNA-UK Roadshow London & SE Region	4
Events Listing	4

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Report on the Region's AGM – November 2010

At the Region's Annual General Meeting on 13th November, we bade farewell to the outgoing Chairman, Neville Grant, and warmly welcomed Roger Hallam, the new Chairman and the 2010-2011 Executive Committee (see page 2).

Jas Weir, Chair of Purley with Sutton Branch, receiving the Stephens Trophy.



From left to right: Marie-Claire Faray, Baroness Helena Kennedy, Jas Weir, Roger Hallam.

The Stephens Trophy this year was awarded to Purley with Sutton branch in recognition of their work on the debating project in local schools.

We were delighted to welcome two speakers on the theme of **Violence Against Women**: our President, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, and Marie-Claire Faray, of the Voices of African Women and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

As one of Britain's most distinguished lawyers, **Helena Kennedy** has spent her professional life championing civil liberties and promoting human rights, using many public platforms – including the House of Lords, to which she was elevated in 1997 – to argue with passion, wit and humanity for social justice.

In her book *"Eve was Framed"*, Helena presents a cogently argued examination of how the British legal system discriminates against women. The essence of her case is that justice is compromised because, too often, the people who are caught up in an already flawed legal process are judged on grounds that have nothing to do with the facts of their cases.

Helena's speech was inspiring. She pointed out that expectations of women were different from those of men. There was a feeling that when women were in trouble of one kind or another, "they brought things down on their own head".

She reminded us that it was a woman – Eleanor Roosevelt – who said, over 60 years ago, that "too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression". Yet it was the same woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, who played an important part in her husband's "New Deal" to deliver relief to the poor and destitute, and chaired the committee that drafted and approved the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

But while it was right to campaign and give women a proper voice in public affairs, in initiatives such as UNSCR 1325, we should also not lose sight of the fact that, in this country, two women every week are killed by their partners.

Very serious too was the problem of human trafficking – of women and children – which had reached appalling levels. At a recent House of Commons debate, it was revealed that women from Eastern Europe were brought to Scotland to pick raspberries, only to end up being sexually exploited.

There needed to be radical changes in public attitude to women, to make violence totally unacceptable. A key role could be played by a campaign of education, to achieve a humane and just society.

Jane Grant

**Report on the Region's AGM – November 2010** (cont'd from page 1)

Violence against women, a worldwide phenomenon, was addressed by **Marie-Claire Faray** in a harrowing talk on unbelievable atrocities being committed in the DRC.

This was a patriarchal world, where men did not want to give up their superior status or privilege; or acknowledge that they were abusing women; and a world where the fight for minerals had been fuelling violence for many years. The minerals were often under the control of ruthless militia groups, while foreign companies that bought the minerals, often illegally, were in effect supporting the violence, leaving a tiny minority of Congolese people to benefit and live in luxury (mostly men) while a huge majority were poor, dying or being abused (mostly women).

Marie-Claire graphically highlighted the plight of millions of Congolese women who are survivors of an oppressive and exploitative system that was using tools such as militarism, violent masculinity, retrograde patriarchy, religion and international impunity to fuel its greed.

Many heads of government in Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region were former armed rebel leaders or members of armed groups who had been heavily involved in violence, including sexual violence, against African women, and the abuse of children.

They had done so with the support of permanent members of the UN Security Council – countries that benefit from the DRC's natural resources.

Introducing the Region's new Chairman

The UNA London and South East Region warmly welcomes its new Chairman, Roger Hallam, elected at the Region's AGM in November 2010.

Roger has been a member of UNA-UK for 8 years and is Chair and a founder member of the Enfield & the Barnets Branch. Roger is retired after teaching for more than 30 years at what is now London Metropolitan University.

He has been actively involved in racial equality for many years and is a Trustee and former Chair of Enfield Racial Equality Council.

We wish Roger all the best in his new role!

Marie-Claire called on all UN members to respect and implement the United Nation's original vision to achieve peace, demilitarisation, and implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for all.

She called for the African Great Lakes Region to be demilitarised, and for the UK government to stop supporting oppressive regimes, and to monitor and evaluate the impact of UK taxpayers' contribution of \$1million a day spent in the DRC.

Finally, she called on governments worldwide to act on the "*Voices of African Women Declaration*". The petition can be signed at www.gopetition.co.uk/online/24336.html ■

Neville Grant

The Region remembers Ruth Caruana 1925 - 2010

A member of the Highgate & Muswell Hill UNA Branch, Ruth Caruana is fondly remembered by Irene Norton, Chairman of the Branch.

"We are sad to report the death of our committee member Ruth Caruana who died on 10th September 2010.

She volunteered for eleven years and regularly raised the top amount of money for our UNA Day Collections. She also sold raffle tickets at our annual garden parties. She was a good friend and will be sorely missed".

Executive Committee 2010/2011

A new committee was also elected at the AGM.

CHAIRMAN	Roger Hallam (Enfield & the Barnets)
HON. SECRETARY	Neville Grant (Blackheath & Greenwich)
HON. TREASURER	Peter Webster (Streatham & Clapham)

Committee Members

Joyce Edmond-Smith (Brighton & Hove)
 Max Ehrenwerth (Hampstead/Camden)
 Keith Hindell (Westminster)
 Wendy Higgs (Blackheath & Greenwich)
 Sheila Kesby (Canterbury)
 Catherine Pluygers (Westminster)
 Angela Viano (Westminster)
 David Wardrop (Westminster)

A Reminder to all Branches

The Regional Committee agreed last year to allow branches to offer local membership as a way to enhance recruitment. For **£5** local members will enjoy the rights:

- To attend and speak at branch meetings
- To receive the branch newsletter if any

- To receive the region's LaSER newsletter
- To attend Regional Council meetings as an observer

Local membership does not entitle the holder to receive free copies of New World, attend national policy conferences or hold branch office. It lasts for one year and is not renewable - by that time we hope the local member would be more than ready to become a full member of UNA-UK. Local membership fees may be retained by branches.



Celebrating United Nations Day



From left to right: Deal mayor, Cllr. Bano; Deputy Youth mayor, Marie Sharkey; Pam Brivio, Deal Branch Secretary; Simon Heuberger, Médecins Sans Frontières

On 20th October, the Mayor of Deal Cllr. Ben Bano hosted a civic reception at Deal Town Hall to mark the 65th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter.

A framed certificate was presented to mark the occasion and extracts from the UN Charter were read out by the Deal Deputy Youth Mayor Marie Sharkey.

The reception was followed by a public meeting at which Simon Heuberger of Médecins Sans Frontières spoke about the invaluable humanitarian work his organisation does in countries such as Haiti and Pakistan.

Cllr. Bano said, "I was pleased to be able to mark United Nations Day with members of the Deal Branch".

Deal Branch Secretary, Pam Brivio, commented, "The reception by the Mayor and our meeting afterwards reminded us that the principles of the United Nations Charter are as relevant now as they were when they were first signed 65 years ago". ■



Putney & Roehampton Branch members with Cllr. Jenny Nickels (mid, back row).

Members of the Putney & Roehampton Branch were joined by Deputy Mayor of Wandsworth, Cllr. Jenny Nickels, when they celebrated United Nations Day on 16th October at the beautiful Buddhapadipa Temple in Wimbledon.

Phrakru Samu Lom led the Chants of the Day, while Mr Andrew Brown, Chairman of the Lay Buddhist Association, and Mr Philip Mobedji spoke about Buddhism and the United Nations.

Afterwards there was friendly chat over tea, coffee and cakes.

For information about Putney & Roehampton UNA and its forthcoming events please telephone 020 8870 5536 or 07776 356 334. ■

On Maddy Webster and UNA Canterbury's "new course" | Sheila Kesby



Last November, members of UNA Canterbury gathered to honour Madeleine Webster as she retired as our long-time secretary. Maddy leaves the branch in excellent shape with 44 members and good connections to other like-minded groups, which together provides the Canterbury district with its own "international community".

Our annual branch programme has been a mix of small lunchtime and larger public venue speaker/discussion meetings. Most ended with a collection for whichever charity the speaker represented, such as Amnesty International, the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, or smaller NGOs like Kent-based "Health-for-All" that works with NGOs in India and Ethiopia. The

branch also maintained a representative to the Region, and to the UNA's national forums and conferences.

However, our new committee decided to heed Maddy's final advice not to continue running the branch in same way. Instead, we should build on the contacts she has made with other groups and focus more on what the UN is about. Therefore, we plan to carry out a research and consultation exercise with existing and potential members of all ages and backgrounds. We aim not only to increase numbers, but to explore and enhance the meaning and opportunities in being a member of the UNA.

If you would like to share in, or contribute to, the re-development of UNA Canterbury, please get in touch with us and contact Sheila Kesby, Interim Secretary, on 01227 463968 or at s.kesby339@btinternet.com ■



Human Rights Day Lunch | Gurbakhsh Garcha

The 26th Human Rights Day Lunch organised by UNA Lewisham on Sunday 12th December was pleased to welcome Mr Fazil Kawani, Head of Development of the Refugee Council. In his presentation, he outlined key issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers, half a million of whom currently lived in Greater London.

A former refugee himself – he arrived in the UK in 1980 aged 18 - Mr Kawani spoke about the work of the Council which was founded in 1954 and was financially sustained by the government and through charitable funds.

At the national level the Council was particularly concerned with issues relating to the conditions for asylum seekers, especially juveniles, in detention centres; difficulties in obtaining information to corroborate accounts of asylum seekers; the quality of legal advice available; and slow decision-making by the Government and Tribunals.

The Council's work was particularly focused on assimilation and the improvement of language skills.

Mr Kawani also confirmed that the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees applied only to those adversely affected by the actions of their own government. However, civil wars could produce grey areas.

There was an in-depth discussion as to the extent to which for the rest of their lives refugees continued to think of themselves primarily as refugees. ■

Forthcoming Events

UNA-UK Road Show - London and SE Region Tuesday 15th February 2011 | 6.30-8:30 pm

UNA-UK Executive Director Phil Mulligan is consulting the membership as widely as possible in formulating a new strategic plan to guide the organization through the period July 2011 to June 2015. This will involve "road shows" in all UNA's regions with a final version of the plan hopefully being approved by the Board in July.

Each roadshow aims to work with members on generating ideas and areas of policy focus.

London and South-East Region's road show will be held at 19 Buckingham Street WC2. Because of costs in Central London space is limited to 30. If you wish to attend please inform Hon. Secretary, Neville Grant (neville.grant@gmail.com / 020 8858 8489).

Lewisham UNA

Wednesday 2nd March 2011 | 6.00 - 7.30pm
Symposium: "The UN Achievements & Challenges"
Goldsmiths, University of London, New Academic Building, Room LG 01, New Cross, London SE14 6NW

Presentations by Neville Grant (formerly UNDP consultant); Mans Nyberg, UNHCR; Prof. Sanjay Seth, Head of Politics Dept. at Goldsmiths; followed by questions, panel discussion and reception. All welcome.

Contact: Gurbakhsh Garcha (020 8699 2050)

UNA Brighton & Hove | Joyce Edmond-Smith

Annual Report 2010 and more

2010 was a busy and varied year for our Brighton & Hove UNA Branch.

We developed good relations with the UNA student group at Sussex University, facilitated a joint meeting on nuclear issues, and hope to organize more joint activities in the future. In July we held the very successful Summer Regional event "The Road to Mexico" and were delighted by Phil Mulligan's presence (see LaSER, October Issue). With the Brighton & Hove Interfaith group we held our joint yearly meeting on UNA day around a UN theme, whereas in October we had a very successful event on Biodiversity.

At our recent AGM in November we invited Peter Bottomley MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary United Nations Group, to address us on contemporary issues facing the UN. Moreover, the branch enjoys good relations with the local Council, has an elected member nominated to the Committee and is also invited annually to the Mayor's Parlour. Our most recent event is the annual "New Year's Get Together" which took place on Saturday 16th January. It was very enjoyable and the branch and its members would like to thank Joan Oram for her hospitality.

Our goals in 2011 are to further develop our work with students' organisations, interfaith groups etc; continue our regular lunch-time talks; and start a collaboration with the World Development Movement. ■

Putney and Roehampton UNA

Friday 11th March 2011 | 7.30pm

UN International Women's Day - Trafficking of Women into the UK | The Community Church Hall, Werter Road, Putney, London SW15 2LL (opp. Sainsbury's)

Main speaker: Silibaziso Silva Hove, "The Poppy Project" Team Leader; David Barrett, Professor of Applied Social Science, University of Bedfordshire (TBC).

Contact: Catherine Pluygers
(020 8699 1101 / catherinepluygers@hotmail.com)

Blackheath & Greenwich UNA

Tuesday 8th March 2011 | 7.30 - 9.00 pm

Women's Voice in the Peace Process

The Old Bakehouse, Age Exchange, Bennet Park, Blackheath
Talk by: Diane Brace, of WILPF, to celebrate International Women's Day. Followed by discussion and refreshments. All welcome. Enquiries: Neville Grant 8858 8489

Saturday 19th February 2011 | 1.00 pm

Greenwich Social Network event

Royal Festival Hall

BYO picnic, or come and buy a sandwich. Meet near the bar. Followed by a free Indian Dance Workshop, to hone one's Oriental Dancing skills (for spectators or participants!)

Enquiries: Wendy Higgs 07751 297291