

United Nations Association

Westminster Branch

Campaigning for a strong, credible and effective UN



Annual Report 2014-2015

We submit our Annual Report in time for discussion at the delayed Annual General Meeting for the previous year. The financial report for the year to 31 March 2015 is in trial balance stage. Although

the previous year's report has been posted for some time, we will ensure this delay is not repeated. An oral report of current activities will be made at the Annual General Meeting.

Our activities

The 12th annual Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen International Law Lecture titled *"UN Special Procedures and the Implementation of International Human Rights Law"* was delivered by Dr Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The 53 UN Special Procedures mechanisms cover many subjects, examining a country or human rights related theme globally. Identifying they suffer from lack of state cooperation and resources; politicisation; and poor mainstreaming of human rights within the UN system, he showed how they could be strengthened. We again thank the International Relations Committee of the Bar Council for its support and the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS, London University for arranging this event in the excellent Brunei Gallery lecture theatre.

For our 11th Conference to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, Melinda Simmons, Head of Conflict Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office clarified why UN Peacekeeping matters to the UK and about the challenges that UN Peacekeeping faces and the role of the UK. Also speaking were Air Vice Marshal (Ret'd) Mike Harwood, former Head, British Defence Staff, Washington, DC and UK Representative to the UN Military Staff Committee, New York, Major General (Ret'd) Peter Williams, former Deputy Chief UN Military Observer, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Richard Norton-Taylor, Defence and Security Writer, The Guardian. The diplomatic wreath-laying ceremony returned to the Cenotaph. Prayers were offered by the Right Reverend Richard Moth, Catholic Bishop of the Forces and Sayed Ali Abbas

Razawi, Joint Secretary, Majlis-e-Ulama Europe. About eighty embassies and high commissions participated in this, the world's largest ceremony to mark this important anniversary. The first wreath, in memory of Count Folke Bernadotte, UN mediator assassinated in Palestine in 1948, was laid by Astrid Bernadotte, his grand-daughter. Colonel Alain Bayle, Army Attaché, French Embassy laid the wreath in memory of French officer, Commandant René de Labarrière, the first UN fatality. Debbie Bowles, Treasurer, War Widows Association laid a wreath on behalf of all widows of fallen peacekeepers. The Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas provided musical support. Pupils from the Grey Coat Hospital School for Girls and City of Westminster School for Boys stewarded the event, leading diplomats and the UN Veterans' Association provided the Colour Guard.

In June, our packed meeting in the House of Lords titled *"Does the UK have a credible race equality strategy or is a new vision required?"* gave members the opportunity to fire questions at political parties on their race policy. The meeting was chaired by Lord Herman Ouseley and centred around the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

Our speakers were Rachel Zaltzman, Head of its Human Rights and Respect programme of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Barbara Cohen, a former UK NGO delegate to the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), Baroness Thornton, Labour Party equalities spokesperson and Journalist Lester Holloway. The numerous contributions from the

large audience included a robust debate around affirmative action vs. positive discrimination and the need for a level playing field.

In July, we hosted a briefing in the House of Lords for London-based diplomats on the Report of the Hammarskjöld Commission. This was presented to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in November 2013 who, after careful study, has been persuaded that it introduces 'new evidence' of events leading up to the death in 1961 of UN SG Dag Hammarskjöld in a plane crash as he sought to bring peace in the Congo, now the D.R.C, and on subsequent initiatives to ascertain the cause of the accident. Lord Marks of Henley-on Thames, a member of the former Hammarskjöld Trust, led diplomats through the sequence of events. Later in the year, UNA Westminster coordinated a worldwide campaign to press the UN General Assembly to agree to reopen the Inquiry into Hammarskjöld's death. Our initiative was supported by leading diplomats in several countries and was rewarded by the unanimous General Assembly vote on 29 December, leading Ban Ki Moon to set up a new Panel which reported in June 2015. UNA

Westminster continues to coordinate international awareness programmes through its secondary website at www.humanrights2008.org.uk.

In September, the Branch flew high to mark the UN International Day of Peace, repeating our Flights for Peace adventure, using the Emirates Air Line, the cable car service which links the O2 Arena and the Royal Docks. Again, over a hundred people responded to our challenge to meet people with a different faith, ethnicity or even age to take the opportunity to ask 'those questions they had always wanted to ask'

In November, we held our 9th *We the Peoples* film festival, screening films in several locations. The Young Film Makers Day at the National Film Theatre attracted great numbers. The *#Tweeterpitch* award of £500 was won by Jade Jackman whose film will show the work of a Kabul-based Afghan woman graffiti artist. The film will be screened at the 2015 Youth Day at the BFI. We thank the British Film Institute for hosting the event and also the students of the Ashdown Academy who curated the many screenings in the 2014 Festival programme.

UNA-Connecticut

Our twin UNA Connecticut continues its busy programme. Its annual *UN Calendar for Peace* is

now available by e-mail, informs us daily of key international events that happened on that day.

Our Honorary Officers

We are delighted that our Joint Presidents, Baroness Cox of Queensbury, Lord Judd of Portsea and Lord Lester of Herne Hill, QC all agreed to continue to serve. With great regret, we record the deaths of two of our Joint Vice-Presidents, the Rt.

Hon. Jeremy Thorpe PC and Ben Whitaker. We have commented on their contributions through our website. Juliet Colman and HH Prince Mohsin Ali Khan have both agreed to continue as Joint Presidents.

Our Funds

Our ambitious programme of events is underpinned by the generous legacy of Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen. The two Fidelity Funds in which we have invested

major sums continue to reward us well as shown in our financial statement.

Contacting each other

E-mail is becoming the preferred member contact method and we assure members that addresses are not shared with third parties. We use the *Mailchimp* facility to reach members and most meetings are

promoted through *Eventbrite*. Please help defray costs by enabling us to contact you in this manner. Contact us on info@unawestminster.org.uk.