

United Nations Association

Westminster Branch

Campaigning for a strong, credible and effective UN



Annual Report 2019-2020

This annual report refers to the period ending 31 March 2020. It will be formally presented at the next annual

general meeting to be held later this year, together with an oral report of events and initiatives up to that date.

Our activities

The 17th annual Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen International Law Lecture titled *"In Search of the International Law of Cyberspace: A Travelogue"* was given by Professor Michael Schmitt, Professor of Public International Law, Exeter Law School. He identified important challenges facing the international community in the cyber field. It is posted on our webpage.

We are fortunate to retain the support of the International Relations Committee of the Bar Council and the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS.

Our 16th Conference to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers was titled *The Thin Blue Line*. The session titled *"Should the UN take sides?"* asked whether the UN should be a party to the conflict in the country in which it attempts to keep the peace, when there's no peace to keep.

The Folke Bernadotte memorial lecture was given by Ambassador Ellen Margrethe Løj, former SRSG in Liberia and South Sudan. She listed the challenges facing the UN in the field, regretting the lack of unity of the Security Council which, over the years, has adopted mandates for UN peacekeeping missions which only served to hamper the ability of the mission to interact with the various parties to the conflict and thus implement the mandate.

The afternoon session, now named the Margaret Anstee memorial seminar tackled *"Policing, Peacebuilding and Peacekeeping"* and the final address given by Professor Paul D. Williams,

George Washington University, one of the world's most experienced observers on UN peacekeeping.

The traditional Cenotaph wreath-laying ceremony featured a government minister, the military and police along with diplomats from more than a hundred countries. Count Edward Bernadotte laid the wreath in memory of his grandfather, Count Folke Bernadotte. Commandant René de Labarrière, first UN fatality, was also remembered.

Prayers were offered by the Reverend KJ Adolphe 1st Battalion, Scots Guards and Dr Wendi Momen, Bahá'í Community. The Scots Guards, recently returned from Cyprus, and staff from the Defence Medical Services, returned from South Sudan also participated. The Band of the Parachute Regiment provided musical support.

The public address system was managed by members of the Youth Production Network, all with disabilities and magnificently overcoming these. Once again, pupils from the Grey Coat Hospital School for Girls and City of Westminster School for Boys stewarded the event and the UN Veterans Association provided the Colour Guard. We again welcomed the support of UNA-UK in coordinating this event, a considerable administrative burden.

In April, our well-attended meeting titled *"The unexplained deaths of Dag Hammarskjöld and colleagues: Why UK cooperation with the UN's search for the truth is important"* featured a panel of speakers who set out to show how governments, especially the UK, continued to hinder the UN's efforts to reach the truth. The

texts of all addresses can be read in our news items.

At the meeting, we reported that we had submitted a Freedom of Information Request to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, seeking explanations for its refusal to cooperate with the UN Inquiry. Not content with the FCO's reply, we persisted and, again not content, we complained to the Information Commissioner. After this reporting year, the Commissioner judged against us. We decided not to pursue the matter, but a full report is posted on our news page and also on website hammarskjoldinquiry.info to which the UN refers all those seeking updated information on the issue. We are proud of this recognition by the UN.

In June, we set up a working group to review UN mechanisms to protect religious minorities and to address violations of freedom of religion or belief. In the Spring, we set up a Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum which welcomes all interested UNA members to participate. We welcomed the UK government's new envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief but regretted that the UK will not run candidates for election to the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies in 2020. Also, we committed to mark the new UN International Day on Violence based on Religion or Belief, in 2020.

Since the previous reporting year, we had been working with those seeking the release of Asia Bibi from a Pakistan jail. In May, after news of her arrival in Canada, later joined by her family, we could chronicle the full story (news item, 8 May).

In July, our well-attended, half-day conference titled "*It's my language, it's my life!*" marked the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages. This was co-organised with the Foundation for Endangered Languages and Survival International. Speakers reported on various international initiatives connected with the UN Year and our news report provides useful hyperlinks.

Also, in July, we again participated in the '*Mandela Mile*', marking the centenary of his birth and

supporting the causes he espoused. Westminster UN Young Professionals helped organise the event which was linked by livestream to other 'walks with Nelson' in cities round the world. The original '*Mandela Mile*' is the route joining Nelson Mandela's statue in Parliament Square and his bust beside the Royal Festival Hall.

In September, to mark the International Day of Peace, and together with London University's Institute of Commonwealth Studies, we hosted Pastor Dr James Wuye and Imam Dr Muhammad Ashafa, the 'Imam and the Pastor', who spoke about their continuing efforts to strengthen inter-faith relations in Nigeria.

On November, in association with the British Association of Former UN Civil Servants, we organised a meeting to mark the centenary of the founding of the League of Nations. Professor Patricia Clavin, University of Oxford, gave a well-received lecture on the emergence of the League.

In November, our 14th *We the Peoples* film festival screened 40 films in ten locations, attracting good audiences and excellent specialist speakers. Unable to use the National Film Theatre, we could not run the *#TweetaPitch* competition. Again, students of the Event Academy curated these screenings.

We continue to monitor developments in parliament relating to the relocation of the House of Lords, confident that we may soon be able to rename Broad Sanctuary Green as United Nations Green.

The Westminster UNA Young Professionals organised several social event which attracted excellent new members, in turn leading to policymaking. It is hoped the 'Meet the Ambassador' programme will be continued, in association with the Royal Overseas League Younger Member programme

Our twin UNA, Connecticut, continues its busy programme with visits by its officers to several international hotspots.

Our Honorary Officers

We are delighted that Baroness Cox of Queensbury and Lord Judd of Portsea have agreed to continue as Joint Presidents. Juliet Colman and

HH Prince Mohsin Ali Khan have both agreed to continue as Joint Vice-Presidents.

Our Funds

Our ambitious programme of events is underpinned by the generous legacy of Ruth

Steinkraus-Cohen. The Fidelity Fund in which we have invested has rewarded us well.

We welcome your comments. Please contact us on info@unawestminster.org.uk

David Wardrop, Chairman

Paul Mrazek, Vice-Chairman

Vivienne Eka, Hon Secretary

6 July 2020