

UN Association Westminster Branch Annual Report 2008-2009

I am pleased to submit our Annual Report together with the Branch's financial report for the year to 31 March 2009. I refer briefly to activities which have taken place during the current year. The Westminster Branch continues to consolidate its programme of activities which is underpinned by three important annual events, the International Law lecture, the UN Peacekeepers Day conference and the We the Peoples film festival. For each of these we seek sponsorship funding to make them as self-supporting as possible. But, as important, we seek to encourage our members to attend these events and to introduce themselves when they come.

Our activities

The guest speaker at our last Annual General Meeting was Sir Richard Jolly, Honorary Professor and Research Associate of the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex who spoke to the subject "Is there a Right to Development?" We are always delighted to welcome Richard to our meetings, in whatever capacity. His fund of knowledge in the field of development and the challenges facing the United Nations are unrivalled.

In November, we held our 3rd We the Peoples film festival. We showed twenty eight films in eight locations. The season opened with two European Premieres being screened concurrently five miles apart! Clifford Chance LLP kindly hosted the screening of the new Human Rights film produced for the UN High Commission for Human Rights while the Frontline Club screened a new film on Afghanistan. Five universities screened films and we co-hosted with the National Film Theatre the world's first international Film Festival for directors and producers aged 19 and under. In association with BOND, we organised a workshop for NGOs on new media technology. Sales of the compilation DVD of the previous year's films have now exceeded 700.

In March, we organised a meeting in the House of Lords titled "Islam, Democracy and Human Rights". Speakers included Amadee Turner QC, Professor Malawi Al-Raced Professor of Anthropology of Religion, King's College London and Dr Asamiya Hazan Senior Lecturer, Middlesex University and Director of the City Circle. This enlightening event led to lively discussion through and after the meeting.

In April, the 7th Annual Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen International Law Lecture titled "International Dispute Settlement: Developments and Challenges" was delivered by Maurice Mendelson QC, Blackstone Chambers Barristers. Professor Mendelson is Emeritus Professor of International Law, University College London and has been for many years a loyal member of UNA. This lecture series always attracts a good audience and we are again grateful to Clifford Chance LLP for their continuing sponsorship. Also, we thank the International Relations Committee of the Bar Council for their support and the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy, SOAS, London University for arranging this event in the excellent Brunei Gallery lecture theatre.

In May, the 5th Conference to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers titled "Understanding and effectively tackling new peacekeeping challenges" featured a strong cast of speakers. The keynote Folke Bernadotte address given by General Patrick Cammaert, ret, former

General Officer Commanding, Eastern Division, MONUC who spoke to the title "The UN Peacekeeping commander's perspective; from HQ and from the field". Bill Bell, Head of Protection, Save the Children UK and Corinna Csaky, Global Protection Advocate, Save the Children UK introduced their organisation's new report on tackling sexual exploitation and abuse of children in peace support operations. Senior-Colonel Tang Busheng, Peoples Liberation Army of China spoke on the selection and training of PLA personnel for UN peacekeeping duties and Professor Francoise Hampson, Department of Law, University of Essex asked the question "Today's UN peacekeepers and aid workers; accountable to whom?"

The remembrance ceremony at the Cenotaph held during the conference was led by Count Oscar Bernadotte, grandson of the UN's first mediator. Dr Kim Howells, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Air Vice Marshall C M Nickols, MBE, ACDS, Royal Air Force and Sir Ian Blair, QPM, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis laid wreaths as did representatives of sixty-five embassies and high commissions. Musical support was provided by the Band of the Grenadier Guards. Pupils from the City of Westminster School for Boys stewarded the event, leading diplomats through the wreath-laying programme with great professionalism. This is the largest event held worldwide to mark this anniversary.

In July, we held a concert at St. John's, Smith Square to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, featuring the award-winning young pianist Libor Novacek and Voces8, the A Capella vocal ensemble. Also, we commissioned a short play titled *How the Universal Declaration was won* which set out to reveal the politics behind this historic 1948 agreement between rival ideologies. Its final moments relived the crucial General Assembly vote. Representatives of embassies of countries which participated in the 1948 vote reprised their roles with gusto!

In October this year, we held a belated 100th birthday tribute to Elizabeth MacKeith, one of our Vice-Presidents at the Goring Hotel, Victoria, attended by former and current members of the Westminster Committee and members of her family. Duncan Sands, Mayor of Westminster, a great grandson of Winston Churchill was also a guest. Our thanks to William Say for organising the event.

Also in October, we organized a talk in the Houses of Parliament by Benny Dembitzer, to launch his new book "The Attack on World Poverty". Drawing on his considerable experience and expertise on development issues, Benny spoke with passion and authority about the changes needed in governance if Africa was ever to escape the cycle of debt, famine, environmental catastrophe and deprivation. Benny was joined in debate by Lord Frank Judd, a UNA Westminster President and former Director of Oxfam and Malcolm Bruce MP, Chair of the Overseas Development Select Committee.

UNA-Connecticut

We retain close links with our twin, the Connecticut chapter of UNA-USA. Its activities can be followed through our website. Its 2009 United Nations *Calendar for Peace* identified important events of the last sixty years, principally those identified with Arms Control and Disarmament. We distributed 500 copies throughout UNA. Sadly in February 2009, UNA Connecticut's President Irving

Stolberg died. A man of deep political convictions and a paid up member of the awkward squad, Irv once served as speaker of the Connecticut House of Representatives. A regular visitor to the UK, Irv supported a number of joint projects involving UNA Westminster members. A good friend who is much missed.

Our Honorary Officers

We are delighted that Lord Lester of Herne Hill QC has agreed to replace the late Lord Russell Johnson and join Baroness Cox of Queensbury and Lord Judd of Portsea as a Joint President. We are pleased that our Joint Vice-Presidents, Juliet Colman, the Rt. Hon. Jeremy Thorpe PC, Ben Whitaker, Elizabeth Macbeth and Prince Mohsin Ali Khan agreed to continue in those roles.

Our Website

Now in its 4th year, it has been praised for its unique 'one-stop guide' to the UN Millennium Development Goals, its reports on major branch activities and its guides to relevant UN initiatives. As well as all this, it links to about 150 websites and when visitors to the site feel exhausted, it can play funky World Music. Also on the home page, a dove can be encouraged to fly across the screen to music by Tchaikovsky, all in the cause of peace! Try it for yourself.

Our Funds

Our ambitious programme of events is underpinned by the generous legacy of the late Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen but our policy is to seek specific financial support for our flagship events. The Branch incurred some additional costs in programme expenditure last year especially in relation to UDHR activities. We were fortunate in receiving a further and final tranche of legacy income from the estate of Ruth Steinkraus Cohen, following the death of Perry Joseph who worked for both Ruth and her husband loyally for many years.

Treasurer

Sadly due to work and other commitments, our Treasurer Ryan Gawn had to step down from his position during the year. However, following an extensive search a UNA Westminster sub-group interviewed and appointed George Nimfour to serve as our new Treasurer until the 2009 AGM.

Our Future

Our programme planning continues with new initiatives to be launched in 2010. I am excellently supported by my fellow officers and our committee but there remain many jobs to do to ensure we maintain our high standards. If you wish to take on a larger role in branch activities, please do not hesitate to contact me or fellow committee members. And remember, you can reach any of us through info@unawestminster.org.uk.

Our members

Our members will always be our strength although we would like to see you all more often at our meetings. This year we will be making a concerted effort to improve our communications with you e.g. through the regular mailing of programmed activities by e-mail and the use of members' surveys. Please let us know what you like and don't like about our programme and tell us what you would like to see us doing more or less of in the future. Your opinion matters to us and we want UNA Westminster to become the membership NGO of choice for people who believe in concerted international action to solve the world's problems.

David Wardrop, Chairman
on behalf of your committee

October 2009