

**WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED**  
to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,  
which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind



**A proposal for the Inaugural Annual Event  
to mark the first UN General Assembly**

**London, 10 January 2022**

**“We met first in London”**

This event, to be annual, marks the anniversary of the opening session of the UN General Assembly held in London on 10 January 1946. The reasoning behind the choice of the war-torn, bomb-scarred city as its backdrop is elegantly outlined in the Preamble to the UN Charter, to ‘save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.’

Despite this unique association, the British government has been slow to mark UN anniversaries, succumbing to pressure for the United Nations Association (UNA-UK) to mark the UN’s 50th anniversary. Likewise, for the 60th anniversary and for the UN’s 75th anniversary, it had no plan but following intensive campaigning, it agreed to name United Nations Green which faces Methodist Central Hall, host to the first UN General Assembly, on 10 January 2021.

Now London has reaffirmed its unique link with the UN’s earliest days, we will remind the world that the UN first met in our city, recalling the determination of its founding nations to continue their pursuit of global peace in partnership, despite ideological differences.

### **What is our message?**

“Multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most,” stated UN Secretary-General António Guterres when accepting the Charlemagne Prize in 2019, reminding us that unilateral nationalism can too easily exert its age-old attraction, feeding on primeval fear of ‘the other’, mesmerising communities into inward-facing retreat.

President Roosevelt recognised this danger. In 1919, with war ended but with the victorious powers already seeking to prioritise their own demands, he had watched President Wilson fail to unite them as he had hoped. In seeking agreement on the new United Nations while the war was still being fought, Roosevelt sought to carry through that sense of unity that would soon bring them military victory, and onwards together to create a new world order of peace and development. Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, continued this theme in his opening address to the UN General Assembly:

*The initiation of discussions (on the United Nations in San Francisco) while our enemies were still in the field against us was at once an act of faith in our victory and an acknowledgement of the cause for which we were fighting. After the first world war there was a tendency to regard the League of Nations as something outside the ordinary range of foreign policy. Governments continued on the old lines, pursuing individual aims and following the path of power politics, not understanding that the world had passed into a new epoch. It should make us all realize that the welfare of every one of us is bound up with the welfare of the world as a whole and that we are truly all members one of another.’*

### **Lessons from COP26**

It is too early to assess the outcome of COP26, but some doubters see the same fault-lines that hindered the creation of the League of Nations, with major Member States prioritising goals for their own convenience. Hearing the warnings from the UNFCCC, some might have hoped for an equivalent of the ‘Declaration by United Nations’ (1 January 1942), based on the Atlantic Charter, when twenty-six nations pledged:

- 1] to employ their full resources, military and economic, and
- 2] to cooperate with each other and not make a separate armistice with the enemies.

Those doubters argue that COP26 appears to have failed in pressing that all should share the moment of victory over runaway climate change at the same time, not sequentially with some crossing the finishing line at a time of their own choosing.

### **The event**

Over these the seventy-six years, the UN Charter and, lately, the UN75 Declaration (September 2020) and the Secretary-General’s report ‘Our Common Agenda’ (September 2021) could be key passage points to critically review.

### **So what happened?**

See News Item 10 January 2022