



---

# Westminster United Nations Association

Campaigning for a strong, credible and effective UN

---

## Annual Report 2023-2024

This annual report covers the period ending 31 March 2024 and will be formally

presented at the next Annual General Meeting together with an oral report.

---

### **Our activities**

#### **20<sup>th</sup> International Law Lecture**

Held in memory of Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen, the 20<sup>th</sup> lecture titled *Tenacity and innovation: developments in the global fight against impunity* was given by Professor Kingsley Abbott, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in the School of Advanced Studies at the University of London. In his address, he noted the challenges to recognised intergovernmental institutions such as the International Court of Justice, an organ of the United Nations and attacks on the International Criminal Court (ICC), remarking that some might see the very survival of the international Human Rights structure to be a miracle in itself. But civil society in many countries has shown itself to be robust and universally supportive of Human Rights driven initiatives. New legal strategies include the Open Society Foundation barometer which serves as a global reality check, painting a picture of the attitudes, concerns, and hopes of people across thirty countries, one of the largest ever studies of global public opinion. The lecture was co-hosted with the Centre for International Studies and Diplomacy at SOAS and supported by the Bar Council of England and Wales.

#### **International Day of UN Peacekeepers**

Our 20<sup>th</sup> Conference marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN peacekeeping. In the Folke Bernadotte Memorial Conversation, Dr Karin von Hippel, RUSI Director-General, and Nicholas Haysom, Special Representative and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan, reviewed the UN's current challenges in that country. Sessions tackled Peacekeeping Training, the work of the

Peace Operations Training Institute, and that of the Institutional and Operational Partnership Service at the UN Office to the African Union. Also, the Swiss approach to peacekeeping.

The wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph saw Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the UN, and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, Lt. Gen Sir CRV Walker, lead diplomats from ninety nations and contingents from army units returned from UN deployment. The Band of the Royal Marines provided musical support. Pupils from the Grey Coat School for Girls and the City of Westminster School for Boys led the diplomats throughout.

#### ***Launch: 'The Political Cartoons of Derso and Kelen: Years of Hope and Despair'***

We hosted this informative book launch which introduced us to the work of these two cartoonists who followed political events between 1923 to 1950 with wit and satire. We thank Stefan Slater and David Macfadyen, co-authors of the book. The event was held in the Chapel of Central Hall Westminster.

#### ***Meeting: 'Who cares about human rights beyond the horizon?'***

David Hammond, Chief Executive of *Human Rights at Sea*, revealed alarming statistics: there are thirty million people at sea at any moment. Amongst those, forty-five percent of women working at sea reported sexual harassment and an unknown number, thought to be between thirty and one hundred thousand fishers, lose their life at work every year. Mr Hammond introduced the Geneva Declaration of Human Rights at Sea launched in 2022. The meeting was

held in the House of Lords and hosted by Lord Teverson, a patron of *Human Rights at Sea*.

### **Marking the 75<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Day [1]**

10 December marked the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was marked, Sadly, we also marked the deaths of UN staff in Palestine and Israel while working for peace, including 130 UNRWA staff in Gaza since the Hamas-led atrocity of 7 October. A wreath-laying ceremony took place on United Nations Green, led by members of the Westminster UNA Young Professionals.

### **Marking the 75<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Day [2]**

We hosted a debate titled "*Human Rights: universal values or mere political construct?*" The debate was chaired by Baroness Frances DeSouza, former Director of Article 19, and led by Professor Merris Amos of the Human Rights Law Centre at Queen Mary University and Schona Jolly KC of Cloisters Chambers. Baroness DeSouza then moderated a lively exchange of views with the audience, covering many issues, later cutting the 75th anniversary birthday cake.

### **Meeting: 'Dag Hammarskjöld's Plane Crash: The Continuing Search for Truth'**

We co-hosted this all-day hybrid conference in which leading international experts reviewed progress of the ongoing UN investigation into the crash led by Justice Othman. They urged continued support for the initiative. Despite overwhelming support within the UN General Assembly for Justice Othman's mandate, the UK and US have consistently declined to co-sponsor further resolutions for renewal. This underscores the challenges faced in obtaining transparency and cooperation from UN Member States.

### **Meeting "When our cultural heritage is destroyed, children are dispossessed."**

Professor Peter Stone, UNESCO Chair in Cultural Property Protection & Peace at Newcastle University, stressed the importance of intergovernmental treaties in ensuring cultural property is protected in times of conflict. The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its 1954 and 1999 Protocols point the way but how will these be actioned, he asked.

### **Launch: Campaign to stop the inhumanity at Europe's borders**

We co-hosted in Methodist Central Hall this Europe-wide campaign which we joined in October 2023. It had by then attracted the support of eighty-five expert organisations from seventeen countries working in the fields of humanitarian response, asylum, and migrant rights. They seek to pressure European governments and relevant European institutions to profoundly reform the current border regime and practices, and to stop the inhumanities being experienced by people on the move.

### **UNA Connecticut**

Our sister chapter continues with its long-running UNA scholarships programme targeting schools in the State. It continues to highlight the plight of women survivors of human trafficking, principally in Nepal.

### **Westminster UNA Young Professionals**

Westminster Young Professionals are playing an increasingly significant role in our work. We encourage young people interested in the work and mission of the United Nations to join them.

---

### **Our Honorary Officers**

We are delighted that Baroness Cox of Queensbury will continue as President and Juliet Colman as Joint Vice-President. With great sadness, our Vice-President Sir Peter Marshall

died aged 98. He participated in several of our events from the UN's 70th anniversary and authored stirring essays all posted on our news page.

---

### **Our Finances**

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. The annual accounts for all years are available for inspection by members.

---

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

**David Wardrop, Chair      Vivienne Eka, Hon Secretary**

**12 October 2024**