



Westminster United Nations Association

Campaigning for a strong, credible and effective UN

Annual Report 2024-2025

This annual report covers the period ending 31 March 2025 and will be formally

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

OUR ACTIVITIES

21st International Law Lecture

Held in memory of Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen, the 21st lecture titled *Fragmented Refuge: It's Time to Rebuild the Case for Humanity*, was held to mark the 75th anniversary of the creation of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. It was given by Dr Catherine Briddick, Andrew W Mellon Associate Professor of International Human Rights and Refugee Law at the University of Oxford. Dr Briddick elaborated on the historical context of the international refugee protection system and highlighted the ongoing challenges facing it. The lecture and questions by the audience emphasised the tension between ideals of universal human rights and the fragmented, discriminatory practices currently defining refugee law. 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.

Events marking the International Day of UN Peacekeepers

Our 21st Conference marked the 60th anniversary of UN peacekeeping in Cyprus. The Folke Bernadotte Memorial Lecture was given by Colin Stewart, the UN SG's Special Representative and Head of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. Other speakers included Col Dr Manal Abu Al Ghanam, Jordanian Armed Forces, Dr Alexandra Novosseloff, Centre Thucydide, University Paris Panthéon Assas and Col Simon Horne, RUSI British Army Visiting Fellow.

The wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph saw Lord Ahmad, Minister of State for the UN, and Air Vice-Marshal Rich Pratley, Assistant Chief of Defence Staff for Support Operations lead diplomats from ninety nations and contingents from army units returned from UN deployment. The wreath in memory of Count Folke Bernadotte was laid by Astrid Bernadotte, his grand- daughter. The Band of the Royal Air Force College provided musical support. Pupils from the Grey Coat School for Girls and the City of Westminster School for Boys led the diplomats throughout.

Study visit to the UN in Vienna

Our second study visit to the UN in Vienna included presentations on a wide range of UN initiatives as well as from other organisations. Over five days, the group discussed the programmes of these UN agencies: UN International Development Organisation (UNIDO), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO), UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Outside the UN family, the group had meetings with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMP), the International Institute of Peace, and the city's diminutive, unique Peace Museum. We also enjoyed a guided tour of the magnificent

Museum of Military History and a visit to the Sigmund Freud Museum.

Meeting in Parliament: “Can the UN ride the AI wave or will it get left behind?” We hosted this meeting kindly chaired by Lord Clement-Jones, Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI. It featured addresses by Anjali Mazumder, Theme Lead on AI and Justice & Human Rights for the Alan Turing Institute for Data Science and Artificial Intelligence and Dr Tony Roberts, Digital Cluster Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

The meeting heard that in March 2024, the UN General Assembly had agreed to take a leap in the dark, to ‘seize the opportunities’ that AI can offer. In May, the AI for Good Global Summit coined the phrase “All voices need to be at the AI table”, restating the SDG maxim “Leave no one behind”. And in November, its latest report ‘Governing AI for Humanity’ set out a clear course building on the Guiding Principles already set out. However, the AI opportunity had arrived at a difficult time, especially for the Global South as all ‘advanced technology’ nations are seeking to gather together their own leading tech players, seeking to set out the territory of action. With leading tech companies acting like non-state actors, able to take initiatives in several different jurisdictions, one is tempted to believe even the governments have ‘missed the AI wave’.

Campaign to stop the inhumanity at Europe’s borders

Having co-hosted the launch of this Europe-wide campaign last year, we continue to participate in regular online meetings which are much pre-occupied by developing a cogent manifesto to be launched in Summer 2025. The network now numbers 135 member organisations based in 17 European countries, all working in 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 inhumanity being experienced by people on the move. We continue membership of the

London Strategic Migration Partnership which liaises with London-based organisations working for the rehabilitation of migrant groups in the city.

The ongoing Hammarskjöld Inquiry

We were disappointed that the Labour government appears to have shown no curiosity in the widely supported UN inquiry into the possible causes of the plane crash in 1961 in which former UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and colleagues died. On 24 December 2024, 141 Member States supported a resolution in the UN General Assembly to pursue the continuing UN-led inquiry but not the UK. After some months, the FCDO explained its action which we consider to be inadequate and which we will pursue.

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.

Our UNA Young Professionals

The Westminster Young Professionals ‘Meet the Ambassador’ series restarted in hosting HE Yannis Tsaousis, Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic of Greece. The event in the National Liberal Club was co-hosted with the National Liberal Club Commonwealth and European Forums. Also, the group has launched its series of social meetings at *The Feathers* opposite St James’s Park tube station. 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.

Our Finances

Our ambitious programme of events is underpinned by the generous legacy of Ruth Steinkraus-Cohen. The Fidelity Fund in which we invested has rewarded us well. The annual accounts for all previous years are available for inspection by members.

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

David Wardrop, Chair

12 May 2025

Vivienne Eka, Hon Secretary