

UNA-Westchester Global Connection



United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) Westchester Chapter
<http://www.unawestchester.org> February 2017

MEMBERS' DAY AT THE UNITED NATIONS, 2017

The U.S. and the UN: New Leaders, Pressing Challenges

**Conference Room 4, United Nations Headquarters
760 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017**

Hosted by the UNA-USA Mid-Atlantic Region

**Friday, February 17, 2017
An All-Day Event**

Members' Day at the UN is one of the most important gatherings for UNA-USA during the year. It provides members with a great opportunity to hear from top UN voices and network with fellow UN supporters from around the country. UNA-USA members and UN supporters will meet at the UN Headquarters to participate in a day of dynamic and informative discussion on the most pressing issues facing the United Nations. Members will get exclusive access to the UN, where they will hear from experts on topics like refugees and sustainable development, and network with community leaders, academics and students, and representatives from think tanks and like-minded organizations.

Tentative Panel Topics:

- The Road to 2030: Paving the Way to Transforming Our World
- Displaced Humanity: Where Do We Go from Here?
- Engaging Youth in the UN
- Turmoil, Terror, and the Failure of the Arab Spring: What Hope for Fresh Solutions?

Please register:

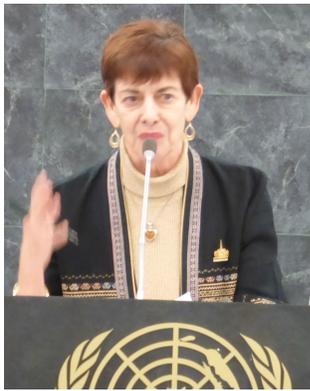
<https://www.eiseverywhere.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=211067&>

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Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

I have been away from New York for two months and am sorry for having been out of touch for a long time. Let us hope that 2017 brings some level of peace and stability to our ailing world and country. UNA-Westchester and all its members will need a new vitality and strength to support the United Nations under threat of defunding from the incoming Congress. We will need active advocacy on behalf of all UNA-USA chapters to protect and support the valuable work of the UN on refugees, the Sustainable Development Goals, climate change and other initiatives.

Our UN Day and Human Rights Day events in late 2016 raised awareness of the plight of refugees in the world and what we can do to help. Our UN Day in White Plains on October 23 at the YWCA of White Plains and Central Westchester had as its theme, *“One Humanity, Shared Responsibility: Responding Locally to the Refugee Crisis”* and featured excellent speakers Mr. Bela Hovy, head of the UN’s Migration Division, and Ms. Munira Okovic, a Bosnian refugee, who was able to personalize the refugee experience in America. Mr. Andrew Courtney and Ms. Mary Refling of the Westchester Refugee Task Force, described measures we can take to welcome Syrian refugees to our communities in the next several months. UNA-Westchester and its partners, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. (AKA), have also pledged to support the UNA-USA national initiative, Adopt-A-Future, which aims to support schools in refugee camps in Kenya. The program is responding to the request of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As a follow-up to UN Day, the

Human Rights Day program, held at the Harrison Public Library on December 11, had the theme, “Shining Light on a Dark World: South Sudan” and featured Mr. Jean-Victor Nkolo (Office of the UN Special Adviser on Africa) and Ms. Nya Chambang, South Sudan refugee and founder of the Thon Met African Peace Foundation. Members of the Westchester Refugee Task Force were on hand to assist. We will continue to follow this initiative throughout the year.

Another national UNA-USA initiative is to spread the word about Model UN and UN programs through a series of Mini-simulations that provide schools with a one-hour session using a Model UN template, but not requiring elaborate preparation on the part of the students. UNA-Westchester and AKA received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to provide training to teachers so that they could present Mini-Sims on Climate Change in local schools. One session was held at Mount Vernon and Woodlands High Schools and we are hoping to spread this throughout Westchester County. Mercy College will hold a one-day Mini-Model UN session on Climate Change on Saturday February 4, 2017 at its Dobbs Ferry campus. We are hoping to have a good turn-out of high school students and teachers.

I also encourage you to attend the annual Members Day /Mid-Atlantic conference on Friday February 17 with the theme *“The U.S. and the UN: New Leaders, Pressing Challenges”*. I hope you have already registered, as the conference has been fully booked. It normally attracts over 800 people, including many students and a lot of UNA-USA members. It will feature panels on the Refugee Crisis, Sustainable Development Goals and a political panel on Turmoil and Terror and the Role of the UN in Addressing

Conflict Prevention. We hope that you will be able to attend.

Please mark your calendars for two events coming up in the spring. Our International Women's Day program will be held at the Greenburgh Public Library from 2:00 to 4:30 pm on Sunday March 5, 2015. Moreover, the Board is planning to hold our annual meeting on Sunday May 7th at the Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation in White Plains from 4:00 to 6:00 pm. We are working on the theme and speakers and will inform you of details by email and in the next newsletter. Of course, we will be electing the Board of Directors at our annual meeting, so your participation is very important.

—*Marcia Brewster*

A Statement from UNA-USA National Headquarters

The United Nations Association of the USA, together with the Better World Campaign, issued a statement in response to proposed legislation to withhold funding for the United Nations:

Members of Congress and the incoming Administration have an opportunity to work with the new Secretary-General to achieve real reforms that will strengthen the United Nations' ability to carry out its life-saving work around the world. Withholding funding for the UN will significantly jeopardize America's influence and ability to steer the international agenda—potentially allowing other nations to take the reins.

Conditioning funding to the United Nations to persuade the Security Council to reverse its vote [on Israel, as discussed below] will not work. Such a step will be welcomed by our opponents and undermine U.S. foreign policy and Israeli objectives while crippling vital UN operations. The reduction of American

influence that goes along with refusing to pay our dues will make it nearly impossible to garner support at the UN for the American position on North Korea, Iran, and Syria.

It is critical to remember that the initiator of December's Security Council resolution against Israel was not the UN, but 14 of its member states. In this case as in select others, the UN was the stage, not the actor.

Although imperfect, no other organization has the reach and impact of the UN. Each year, the UN provides food to 80 million people in 80 countries, assists over 60 million refugees and other people fleeing conflict, vaccinates 40 percent of the world's children, and keeps peace through 120,000 peacekeepers—the world's largest deployed military force.

Despite these many benefits, U.S. funding for the UN amounts to only 0.1 percent of the total federal budget. Working with our allies through the UN means that the U.S. can share the burden of solving global challenges—and doesn't need to go it alone.

Cutting funds for the UN is also out of touch with the wishes of the American people. A new poll by the Better World Campaign shows that bipartisan support for the UN remains high—88 percent of Americans support active engagement at the UN.

For decades, such an action has also been rejected by Republican and Democratic Administrations. In 2005, eight former U.S. Ambassadors to the UN, including those for Presidents Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, and Bill Clinton, signed a letter stating, "Reforming the United Nations is the right goal. Withholding our dues to the UN is the wrong methodology. When we last built debt with the UN, the United States isolated ourselves from our allies within the UN and made diplomacy a near impossible task."

We appreciate the important role played by

Senator Lindsey Graham, the bill's sponsor, in supporting full UN funding since 2009, and we look forward to working with him closely on this and other initiatives.

We know from experience that staying engaged is the best way to advance American interests. Full UN funding is essential to ensure that the U.S. has the power to effect change.

Opinion: The UN, the U.S., and Israel

Senators Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Ted Cruz, R-Tex., submitted a bill, S. 107, on Jan. 12, 2017, to prohibit all voluntary or assessed contributions to the United Nations. The proposal comes in response to a resolution passed by the UN Security Council, S/RES/2334 (2016), on Dec. 23, 2016, which denounced Israel's policy of building settlements for Israeli citizens on lands that are expected to be part of a future Palestinian state (and also condemned acts of violence, provocation, destruction, and incitement by either side and urged joint efforts toward a negotiated solution). The United States, which holds a veto in the Security Council, abstained in the vote, allowing the resolution to pass, 14-0. The proposed legislation would withhold funds until the resolution is repealed.

Separately, and unrelated to the Security Council vote, news reports indicate that the Trump administration is considering two executive orders. One calls for curtailing contributions to the United Nations, associated agencies, and other, unnamed international organizations by at least 40 percent. The second calls for reviewing and possibly abrogating international treaties to which the United States is a participant. As of this writing, the president has not signed either of these orders, apparently owing to resistance from professionals in the national security bureaucracy.

In general, with regard to the Trump administration's executive orders so far, it is important to note that they have reportedly been written by Stephen Miller, a political operative and speechwriter, and Steve Bannon, the former head of Breitbart News and currently a White House strategist. It appears that neither has any understanding of how the government actually functions, and few if any of the executive orders have been properly vetted by legal or subject-matter experts. Several deal with issues that cannot legally be addressed through executive orders. (Four federal courts—in Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, and Washington—barred implementation of parts of Mr. Trump's immigration order in a matter of days, and that is an area in which the law allows for wide discretion in executive orders.) In the case of these two orders, they include calls for curtailing contributions to the International Criminal Court, of which the United States is not a member, and for reviewing at least two multilateral treaties that the United States has never ratified. Nevertheless, they paint a sobering portrait of the administration's intentions.

The legislative measure regarding the West Bank settlements is misguided for a number of reasons. For one thing, as the statement from UNA-USA observes, the United Nations as an entity did not pass the measure, the member states did. An act that defunds UN activities such as support for refugees, food assistance, vaccinations for children around the world, or verification of Iran's compliance with its recently negotiated nuclear restrictions is not a fit retaliation for a vote that did not come out to one's liking.

Secretary of State John Kerry gave a speech on Dec. 28, 2016, defending the vote. His key argument is that the only viable, long-term hope for peace is the two-state solution. Majorities on both sides tend to agree with this notion, but they are increasingly losing faith that it is possible. Obviously, if both sides

believe that the only path to peace is impossible, that is not a good sign for the future. And with every passing day, short-sighted decisions are narrowing the options for the future. One side cannot gradually annex the other side's territory while waiting for an opportune time to discuss the fate of that territory. Countering recalcitrant Palestinian policies and practices will be fruitless if Israel, at the same time, engages in policies that eliminate the basis for peace. Both sides have to take responsibility for preserving and advancing the two-state solution.

Some argue that the settlements are not the cause of the conflict, which is of long standing. That is true, but also irrelevant. The settlements have become a central part of the conflict, and they are perfectly capable of preventing a solution. Furthermore, they do nothing to further Israeli security, serving instead as provocations and potential targets for attack.

People also argue that the Security Council resolution does not address all the issues that are contested between the Israelis and the Palestinians. That is also true, but neither does it preclude anything. The resolution was not a peace settlement, nor was it about setting the conditions for a peace agreement. It was about ending actions aimed at making a future peace agreement impossible. That includes violence and incitement by Palestinians, and it includes actions by the settlers' movement for whose votes Mr. Netanyahu and his coalition partners aggressively compete and whose actions they condone, if not encourage.

Kerry argues that the main obstacle to peace is not that the two sides' visions of the final solution were too far apart. The main obstacle is mutual lack of trust and deep public skepticism: Speaking of past negotiations, Kerry said, "Both sides were concerned that any concessions would not be reciprocated and would come at too great a political cost." Progress, he added, would require each side to acknowledge the other side's most basic needs.

Helping parties overcome mutual mistrust is one of the things the United Nations does. UN technical experts can help set up institutions. UN observers can assure that parties are following their commitments. UN peacekeepers can keep them physically apart. If one party is skeptical of the UN, then UN peacekeepers can be used in combination with other forces—U.S. troops if need be. The United Nations is not there to be a cause of conflicts or to aggravate them.

Likewise, a decision by the Trump administration to curtail funding to the United Nations would not further U.S. interests abroad, but would undermine them. The UN brings countries together in a ready-made forum to address both emergencies and everyday issues, and to pool resources for addressing them. Funding for the United Nations amounts to only about 0.1% of the U.S. federal budget (yes, that's one one-thousandth). That money, combined with contributions from other countries, is used to vaccinate 40% of the world's children, to assure that 80 million people have food, and to help 65 million refugees and displaced people (more than the world has ever seen at one time). The UN is in the front lines fighting al Qaeda affiliates in West Africa, verifying Iran's compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, and leading the international response to health crises, such as Ebola and Zika. Moreover, according to a poll conducted by the Better World Campaign, 88% of American voters support active engagement at the UN, and 67% support paying our dues on time and in full. Dismissing the United Nations as "just a club for people get together, talk and have a good time," as the president has described it, is a grave disservice.

—Scott C. Monje

Advocacy Corner

With a bill to defund the United Nations pending in the U.S. Congress, it is more

important than ever that we continue with our main assignment as the United Nations Association: educating our citizens in foreign affairs and in the importance of the UN. We cannot hide our heads in the proverbial sand and choose not to be involved in an ever shrinking world. There are states as well as non-state actors that may not have our best interests at heart, to say the least. There are humanitarian crises that must be addressed. Many people, seeing the misery in World War II and Rwanda, the starvation and disease in different parts of the world, say never again, and yet the Syrian people are suffering. We cannot turn our backs on them. The United Nations is trying to provide humanitarian assistance within Syria and assist the refugees who have fled it, two of the important jobs we rely on the UN to do. Let us do our utmost to educate our citizenry so that they will support the United Nations, know what is happening in our world, and be able to protect our democracy.

One way we can continue to educate and stay abreast of current topics in foreign policy is the Foreign Policy Association's *Great Decisions* series, which is about to begin a new season. After its successful debut at the Harrison Public Library last year, we are prepared to tackle eight new topics. Our first session was on January 17, 2017, at 1:30 P.M. and the topic was "Brexit," Britain's secession from the European Union, a union established after World War II to preserve peace on the continent. How will the European Union, the United States, and the rest of the world react and be affected? Will more members, such as Greece or Italy, secede? Will the EU, one of the pillars of democracy and an important ally to the United States, be able to withstand the winds of nationalism, isolationism, and antiglobalization? I was delighted to have as our speaker Mr. Gerton van den Akker, Chief of Staff and Head of Coordination of the Press and Information Section at the European Union delegation to the United Nations.

Other Topics are:

Trade and Politics, February 7, 1:30–3:30
Prospects for Afghanistan and Pakistan, March 7, 1:30–3:30
Saudi Arabia in Transition, April 4, 1:30–3:30
Geopolitics: U.S. Foreign Policy and Petroleum, April 19, 6:30–8:30
Latin America's Political Pendulum, May 9, 1:30–3:30
South China Sea Conflict, May 23, 1:30–3:30
Nuclear Security, June 7, 6:30–8:30

It's not too late to sign up. We have a briefing book that has information on each of the eight topics. The book can be purchased at a special discounted rate of twenty dollars, and it will also be on reserve at the library for those who do not wish to purchase it. Each topic is covered in an article of about 10–12 pages, and we encourage the participants to read the article before the session. Also, there are additional suggested materials easily accessed at www.greatdecisions.org. At the back of the 2017 book, you will find the opinion ballot highlights from the 2016 session. We can see how our opinions matched those of people throughout the United States. The results of the opinion ballot may also be accessed at www.fpa.org as a downloadable PDF. For those who wish to purchase the book, it will be available for sale at the Harrison Public Library, 2 Bruce Avenue, Harrison, NY.

When we gather at the Library's Community Room, we usually start the session by seeing a film on the topic at hand prepared by the Foreign Policy Association. Sometimes we also have a prominent guest speaker. Then, we break up into discussion groups to discuss questions raised by the issue, and lastly, we privately mark our anonymous ballots, which are then sent by the library staff to the Foreign Policy Association to be tallied. The results are sent to Congress, the executive branch, and other government departments. When we have our discussions, we are in a safe space. We discuss only the issues, and all opinions are respectfully heard. This has enabled us to hear

many different sides of an issue and make fully informed choices. I've made many new friends through *Great Decisions*. I look forward to seeing you at the Library as part of our upcoming *Great Decisions* discussion group.

—Joan Katen, *Advocacy Cochair and Great Decisions Moderator*

Adopt a Future

The Westchester Chapter of UNA-USA will help the Southern New York Division of UNA-USA raise \$30,000 for a class of 40 students at Gambela Primary School in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Kakuma has about 200,000 mostly Sudanese refugees. Adopt a Future is a collaboration of the United Nations Association of the USA with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Funds raised will be matched dollar for dollar by a donor from Qatar. Former Kenyan ambassador Bob Jalang'o (now from Westchester) points out that the student-teacher ratio for students among the 700,000 refugees in Kenya is 168 students to one teacher. Gambela Primary School has 1,736 boys and 1,176 girls. Ambassador Jalang'o notes that early marriage accounts for the greater number of boys in school.

—George A. Garland

Save the Date!

UNA **Members' Day** at the United Nations headquarters will be on Friday, Feb. 17, 2017, from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. Registration is necessary.

Our **International Women's Day** event will be held at the Multipurpose Room in the Greenburgh Public Library on Sunday, March 5, 2017, from 2:00 to 4:30 P.M. Program to be announced.

UNA-Westchester's **annual meeting** will be on Sunday, May 7, 2017, from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. at the Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation in White Plains. Keynote speaker will be Ambassador Bob Jalang'o, former ambassador of Kenya to the United Nations.

Board Members, Officers, and Committee Chairs

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Ex officio: George Garland, Jeanne Betsock Stillman.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (this can also be submitted online at www.unausa.org):

_____ Please renew my membership

_____ Please enroll me as a member of UNA-USA at the following level:

- | | | | |
|--|---------|---|------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (one-time payment) | \$1,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Member | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patron | \$ 500 | <input type="checkbox"/> Introductory (first year only) | \$25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor | \$ 100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Student | FREE |

In addition to my membership dues, I would like to contribute to:

- Westchester Chapter \$ _____
- Lee Bloom Memorial Fund \$ _____
- National Office \$ _____
- Total enclosed \$ _____
- My company matches employee contributions. (My company's matching form is attached.)

Name _____ (Please print)

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Tel: _____ E-mail: _____

Please make your check payable to UNA-USA.

Or Charge payment to your Credit Card: VISA MC American Express

Number: _____ Exp.Date: _____

Signature _____

Return this, with your payment to UNA-USA, to:
UNA-USA WESTCHESTER CHAPTER
35 Heath Place
Hastings on Hudson, NY 10706