

UNA-Westchester Global Connection



United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) Westchester Chapter

<http://www.unawestchester.org>

October 2011

Celebrate the United Nations' 66th Anniversary!

**“Westchester Helps Bridge the Development Gap:
Committed Leaders Improve Water, Education, and Health”**

Sunday, October 23, 2011, 4:00–6:00 P.M.

Community Unitarian Church*
468 Rosedale Avenue
White Plains, NY 10605

Featuring

Dr. David Winder
CEO, WaterAid America
Water and Sanitation

Dr. Cream Wright
Former Global Chief,
UNICEF Education Program
*Gender Issues in Education and
Development*

Ms. Clare M. Effiong
Founder and Director, Esther's Aid
Poverty and Children's Health, Rwanda

The moderator for the discussion will be **George C. McKinnis**, World Community Service Chair, District 7230 of Rotary International. Entertainment will be provided by **Solar Punch**, a band that uses music for environmental activism. Cosponsors include Bronxville Rotary Club, the Community Unitarian Church, Westchester County Human Rights Commission, and World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women.

United Nations Day 2011 has as its theme: “The United Nations: In Everyone’s Interest.” UNA-Westchester’s program will focus on what Westchester residents are doing to support the UN’s efforts in water and sanitation, girls’ and boys’ education, and the health of HIV-AIDS orphans in Africa. Our speakers will address their work and their contributions to these efforts and will suggest how we can all work together to improve the lives of people around the globe. Our panelists bring to the program a vast amount of experience with social and economic development throughout the world. The panel discussion will be followed by a question-and-answer session.

Refreshments will be served following the program.

***Directions:** The church is located **near Exit 25 of the Hutchinson River Parkway**: Take the Hutchinson River Parkway to Exit 25 for North St. Follow the sign to White Plains (LEFT if you are traveling NORTH; RIGHT if you are traveling SOUTH) onto North St. At first light, turn LEFT onto Rosedale Ave. Go one block and look for sign. Turn RIGHT onto Sycamore Lane.

Also, an Author Event: Brigid O’Ferrell will speak on her new book, *She Was One of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker*, at Donnelly Lecture Hall, the Heimbold Visual Arts Center, Sarah Lawrence College, October 11, at 6:00 P.M.

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Editors: Marcia Brewster, Scott Monje

Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

For those of you who missed our annual meeting on May 15, it was a great event, with an inspiring speaker (Gillian Sorensen,

Senior Adviser to the UN Foundation and former UN Assistant-Secretary-General for External Relations), a wide-ranging discussion and a reception at the Community Unitarian Church. Awards were presented to students who won the high school essay contest and to Mr. Demetrios Mihailidis, a long-term supporter of the UN and UNA. “Mr. M” is adviser to the United Nations Club at Mt. Vernon High School and has partnered with our chapter in educating students on the history and continuing role of the United Nations. We also recognized the Peace-Keepers organization of Mt. Vernon for its work and honored our long-standing Board member, Lee H. Bloom. Detailed information and photos can be found on our Web site.

We have two new members of our board: Mr. Audley-Seymour Foster, an adviser in the Permanent Mission of Belize to the UN, will serve on our membership and education committees. Mr. J. Yuhanna Edwards, a Mt. Vernon city councilman, will assist with education and advocacy. Mr. Patrick Sciaratta, executive director of Friendship Ambassadors Foundation in Greenwich, CT, was elected to the nominating committee. Other board members were re-elected at the meeting, and I am gratified to have such a committed and cooperative board. I encourage members to stand for election or join a committee.

The main concern now facing the UNA is the threat of a serious decline in U.S. congressional support for the United Nations. An anti-UN bill on the House floor (H.R.2829) proposes to drastically cut our contribution to the UN and to make contributions voluntary,

rather than assessed. (See “Advocacy Corner.”) I urge all UNA members to write to or visit your congressional representatives during their Columbus Day recess (October 13–30) and ask them to vote against this destructive legislation. We need a strong showing during this important time to demonstrate grassroots support for the UN. Show your support for UN funding.

I attended the national annual meeting of UNA-USA in Washington in June. This was the first time that all of the chapter and national leaders met with our new colleagues from the UN Foundation. A report of that meeting is included in this newsletter.

Our United Nations Day event this year (on Oct. 23) features excellent speakers who represent the best efforts of our Westchester neighbors to work in parallel with the United Nations in important development efforts in the areas of water and sanitation, education, and health. Please show your support for their efforts and for your UN Association by attending and bringing a friend. A reception with entertainment and refreshments will follow the program. Come and enjoy the day.

—*Marcia Brewster*

Advocacy Corner

Good news! The Senate has approved UN Funding for FY2012. Please request the support of your representatives for full funding for the UN. The bill in the House against appropriate UN funding is H.R.2829. Please tell your member of Congress to vote “NO” on H.R.2829.

I recently attended a conference on water resources issues at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) chambers, which made me understand even more directly the importance to the developing world of the partnership between the US and the United Nations. This partnership is reflected in a bill before the Senate—S.641, “The Senator Paul Simon Water for the World Act of 2011,”

currently in the Foreign Relations Committee. This bill would facilitate US partnerships with developing nations in an effort to provide clean water and sanitation to 100 million of the poorest people in our world. An educational video by the Chronicles Group, notes, “Dirty water and a lack of basic sanitation are undermining efforts to end extreme poverty and disease. Four thousand children die each day from severe diarrhea caused by poor sanitation and hygiene.”

Women and girls in many countries spend much of their day fetching water, often walking 3–5 miles a day and facing grave personal danger. Let’s make the world’s women more secure, supply them with life-giving water, give them time to acquire an education, and save them from diseases that come from poor sanitation and a lack of clean water. Please call or write your senators and ask them to support S.641.

If you do contact your representatives, I hope you’ll let me know because I want to thank you personally. I’ll either send you a note or call, whichever you prefer.

Together we CAN make a difference.
—Joan Katen

UNA-USA Annual Meeting

The UNA-USA’s national annual meeting took place in Washington, DC, June 11–14, 2011. Before the first regular session, I had an opportunity to meet informally with members of the Council of Chapters and Regions (CCR) Steering Committee and Patrick Madden, UNA-USA’s new executive director.

The new national structure comprises 12 geographic regions, with 125 local chapters and 12,000 individual members. Our Mid-Atlantic region consists of New York State and New Jersey. Only 50 to 60 chapters, however, can be called thriving. To promote

development, UNA-USA will provide chapters with a Web site template, access to the speakers’ bureau, liaison with the membership coordinator, and training on advocacy for the main campaigns.

Overview of changes to the organization

The first formal day of the meeting covered changes that would come about as a result of the new alliance between UNA-USA and the UN Foundation (UNF). Presentations covered Global Classrooms and Model UN and UNF campaigns, such as “GirlUp” and “Nothing but Nets.” UNF will make Model UN materials and informational videos available to schools and seek to tie it to the UNA brand.

Presentations on GirlUp and Nothing but Nets were quite upbeat, and our chapter should consider whether to participate actively in those campaigns. GirlUp aims to unite 10- to 14-year-old girls to change the world. So far they have projects in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, and Malawi. Nothing but Nets hopes to eliminate malaria deaths by 2015 by distributing mosquito nets.

One structural change under way is the integration of UNA Young Professionals (YP) into the UNA structure, replacing the separate entity Young Professionals for International Cooperation (YPIC). This targets UNA members between the ages of 21 and 40. Each YP group will form a part of a chapter or division and be represented on its board of directors. We are currently searching for someone to chair Westchester’s Young Professionals group, so please pass the word around. The application is on our Web site.

Leaders of UNA and UNF stressed that the new organization will be more effective in building support for the work of the United Nations among the American people. UNA has the advantage of a grassroots membership with outreach in each chapter’s locality. UNF has a close relationship with the UN and will

be representing UNA in New York. Madden has decided to move most of the UNA staff to Washington, DC.

Building chapter membership was a key topic. With greater resources, UNA can grow chapters and build leadership. To increase their financial resources, chapters will now receive 50% of their members' dues.

At a signing ceremony, chapter presidents signed their charters, formally affiliating themselves with the new UNA program of the UNF. The next step is to revise our by-laws in line with the new relationship. David Finch will chair our chapter's revision committee. Formal adoption of the revised by-laws will be on the agenda of the chapter's next annual meeting. Changes will be minimal.

Focus on Issues

The second day of the meeting focused on issues. Addressing the group, Susan Rice, US ambassador to the UN, noted the importance of galvanizing the large, somewhat silent majority of Americans who support the work of the UN. She noted the major U.S. priorities at the UN and the current difficulties in getting Congress to support the UN's work. UNA and UNF have an important role to play in countering arguments and misinformation circulated by the UN's opponents.

All the speakers emphasized the need to expand our outreach to young people and others who have not been directly involved with the UN in the past. Everyone talked about the need to use social media effectively.

The meeting then broke into workgroups focusing on specific issues. There were also skill-building and training sessions.

Day on the Hill

The third day was spent visiting our representatives in Congress. Several of us met Rep. Nita Lowey and her staff. Lowey, a

strong UN supporter, was on board for our issues. Three members of our New York team visited Nan Hayworth, whose district includes parts of Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester counties. Although she has opposed some aspects of UN funding, she voted in favor of the main UN funding bill.

A number of us also met with Nydia Velázquez, who represents parts of Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. Velázquez offered insight about what is possible, and what is not possible, under the current House leadership.

A few of us also stopped by the offices of Senators Schumer and Gillibrand. Both are supporters of the UN. It was good to meet their staff and to have the name of a person to contact when we have issues to raise.

—*Marcia Brewster*

Teaching about the United Nations

The year 2011 has been an active one for the United Nations, from the authorization of NATO airstrikes on Libya to the celebration of South Sudan as its newest member and the threat of U.S. financial withdrawal over the issue of Palestine. Secondary teachers who are looking to enhance their lessons about the UN should turn to the *Choices Program* from Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. It provides a structure that is easy to adapt as well as activities that challenge students to use research, reasoning, and analytical skills that will result in a meaningful experience.

The United Nations: Challenges and Change, a unit of the *Choices Program*, presents the role of the UN in international politics as well as the complex relationship it has with the United States. The unit is planned over a five-day period but can be modified as needed. Two informative sections are provided along with study guides and follow-up questions that allow students to take notes and reflect on their reading. A comparison chart between the

League of Nations and the UN and activities, such as the collaborative writing of a new charter, allow students to expand on their newly acquired knowledge. Students then engage in a role-playing exercise during which they represent one of more than 20 countries and resolve a humanitarian crisis taking place in a fictitious state. The culminating activity brings the American position vis-à-vis the UN into a debate format. Teams of experts research three possible options in an effort to convince undecided U.S. senators about UN reform and the future of U.S. relations with the UN. Additional pages contain primary source documents, a list of key terms and issues, supplementary resources, guidelines, and assessments.

The *Choices* series contains 38 units divided into three categories: Current Issues, World History, and U.S. History. Material is available in print (PDF or booklet) or E-text format. Each includes a teacher resource section as well as a student activity section. The Online Extension gives teachers access to video clips (Scholars Online) and additional activities, especially in time of crisis (Earthquake in Haiti in January 2010, Quest for Democracy and Arab Spring 2011). *For more information, visit:* www.choices.edu/un.

—Claire Heskestad

Long Summer Ahead and No Plans? Volunteer Abroad!

Teachers looking for challenging experiences in exotic locales during the summer months increasingly do so by investing their time and personal funds in volunteering abroad. There are many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) around the world that are looking for professionals with an education background. Considerations include time availability (programs run from a few days to months), costs (most programs require volunteers to pay for their travel and accommodations plus a fee to help sponsor the organization), health risks (immunizations and antimalarial pills are

required in most of the developing world), and political stability (check with the State Department Web site for travel warnings).

After travelling to Cambodia with Teachers Across Borders in July 2010 to train national Social Studies teachers, I spent two weeks in Haiti this past August, volunteering at a camp through the Colline Foundation. Located in Léogâne, about an hour south of Port-au-Prince and at the epicenter of the earthquake, the Colline Académie, a private bilingual primary school, is in the process of being rebuilt. Our mission was divided between painting classroom walls and organizing activities for about 60 children aged 2–13.

Accommodations in a building under construction in the hills above Port-au-Prince were Spartan, with intermittent power and running water. We slept on foldout cots under the stars on the rooftop terrace and travelled in the bed of a beat-up pickup truck or a minibus without shock absorbers. Volunteers came from across the U.S. and belonged to all ages and walks of life, from recent college graduates to experienced professionals, many with Haitian roots. Speaking French or Creole was a clear advantage when communicating with the teachers, children, and parents we met. We were able to witness firsthand the slow cleaning and rebuilding efforts still under way. We also experienced the rich culture, from old forts and colorful wall paintings to fried plantains and Kompas music. Haiti is a fascinating country with a troubled past, a challenging present, and a hopeful future. One does not need to travel far to offer help, it is only a short four-hour flight from New York.

—Claire Heskestad

Palestinians and the United Nations

Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of Fatah and of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and president of the Palestinian Authority, went to the United Nations on Sept. 23, 2011, and requested that it accept Palestine as a full

member state. (The UN currently recognizes it as an “entity” with “observer” status, a unique category with few concrete benefits.) That action raises a series of simple questions that often go unaddressed. Why is he doing this? What outcome does he expect? What does it mean for Israel, Palestine, and peace in the Middle East? Few questions about the Middle East have simple or straightforward answers. Here, however, is a brief attempt. Note that this is an effort to describe the situation as viewed by Palestinians, not an endorsement of any position.

Under the Charter, UN membership must be recommended by the Security Council and then approved by the General Assembly. In the Security Council, nine out of 15 members must vote yes (with all five permanent members either voting yes or abstaining); in the General Assembly, two-thirds of the members (129) must vote yes. Success in this case was never likely because the United States announced in advance that it would vote no in the Security Council. While the Obama administration favors Palestinian statehood and UN membership, it has always insisted that negotiation between Palestinians and Israelis is the only way to proceed. Apart from that, any U.S. government will stand by the Israeli government of the day in times of tension, if only for reasons of domestic politics. If the United States does veto the request, the Palestinians may seek a General Assembly vote anyhow, to measure the strength of their support. They may believe that a strong showing will bolster their position in future negotiations with Israel. It is feasible that the General Assembly could elevate Palestine’s status to that of “non-member state observer,” a category that currently includes only the Vatican, but success in a UN vote would do little to change the situation on the ground.

Presumably, Abbas hopes to send a message, to show that he has options other than endless, fruitless negotiations. For over three decades

the PLO tried war and terrorism in its quest for an independent Palestine, and then it gave up in failure. For two decades after that, while Hamas and others set upon the terrorist path, the PLO’s Fatah tried direct negotiations with Israel. The very existence of the Palestinian Authority shows that this has not been entirely in vain. Nevertheless, in Palestinian eyes, this process has stalled as well. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu now says he accepts the idea of a Palestinian “state,” but he has defined it in terms identical to the amorphous “autonomous entity” he favored previously. At the same time, Palestinians fear that Netanyahu uses negotiations to stall for time while an ongoing program of constructing Israeli settlements on territories claimed by the Palestinians makes eventual independence meaningless. Netanyahu did agree to an unprecedented ten-month moratorium on settlement construction (2009–10), but it included so many exceptions that the pace of building never slackened and he has refused to renew even that. (It is worth noting that Netanyahu’s governing coalition depends heavily on settler votes.)

Now, Abbas’s legitimacy is sinking as Palestinians come to perceive the path of negotiations as a stream of Israeli demands and Palestinian concessions without results. Palestinian youths, in particular, view the erstwhile revolutionaries of the PLO as aging, corrupt, compromised bureaucrats (or, even less charitably, as Israel’s Palestinian police force). If the Arab Spring comes to Palestine, it could easily turn against both Israel and the PLO. By turning to the UN, Abbas is trying to show both the Israelis and the Palestinians that he has more options, but he is trying to do it in a way that does not involve a return to the doomed path of war and terrorism. With the UN move and a tentative alliance with rival Hamas, Abbas may be hoping to startle the Israeli government into returning to the bargaining table. No doubt, he also hopes to alter his bargaining leverage by drawing more of the international community and

international institutions into the issue. As such, his move is less a stratagem than an act of desperation.

Abbas's plan is not without risks. Israel could react defensively, canceling existing agreements; withholding funds (Israel collects Palestine's taxes); annexing parts of the West Bank; or striking militarily at Hamas, Fatah, or both. In the United States, Congress has already reacted by threatening to cut off funding for Palestinian institutions and for the United Nations itself. (Israel actually opposes both these moves.) Within Palestine, youths could be provoked to take action—especially if the move fails—either through violence or by mimicking the Arab Spring' street demonstrations. Any resort to violence would probably undermine the Palestinian cause internationally and would surely elicit a violent Israeli response. This raises the risk that the PLO's rival, Hamas, or other rogue elements could play a spoiler role by carrying out or inciting violence on purpose. (A unity agreement between Fatah and Hamas—signed in May 2011 and intended to strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position vis-à-vis Israel—is yet to be finalized. Hamas opposes the UN move and may believe that opposition will strengthen its position vis-à-vis Fatah if the application fails. So far, it appears that Hamas's opposition has cost it support in Gaza.) Spontaneous violence between Palestinians and settlers cannot be ruled out either.

Israel has protested that an independent Palestine cannot be created by a UN resolution. It can only result from negotiations, and its borders, too, must be set by mutual agreement. This is, indeed, the surest way to achieve the outcome. Ironically, Israel was created by a UN resolution and formed its borders through victory in the Middle East war of 1948. Major subsequent border changes have been unilateral (e.g., the annexation of the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem). If Israel had

waited for negotiations with its neighbors, it is likely that it would still not be a state. This is a lesson that the Palestinians appear to be learning once again.

—Scott Monje

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Directors: Doris Benson, Lee H. Bloom, J. Yuhanna Edwards, Karen Rockwell El-Badry.
Ex officio: Margaret (Molly) Bruce, Phil Reynolds, Jeanne Betsock Stillman, Catherine White.

Our Mission: *The UNA-USA is dedicated to educating, inspiring, and mobilizing Americans to support the principles and vital work of the United Nations, strengthening the United Nations system, promoting constructive United States leadership in that system, and achieving the goals of the UN Charter.*

Our Vision: *A world in which humanity is spared the scourge of war, human rights are honored, the natural environment is protected, and the United States is a constructive member of the United Nations for the well-being of all humankind.*

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

____ Please renew my membership

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

- Lifetime (one-time payment) \$1,000 Member \$40
- Patron \$ 500 Introductory (first year only) \$25
- Sponsor \$ 100 Student \$10

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

- Westchester Chapter \$ _____
- National Office \$ _____
- Total enclosed \$ _____
- My company matches employee contributions. (My company's matching form is attached.)
- Please send me information on making a Planned Gift.

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 Am. 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