

# UNA-Westchester Global Connection



**United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) Westchester Chapter**  
<http://www.unawestchester.org> October 2016

## UNITED NATIONS DAY 2016

### *One Humanity, Shared Responsibility: Responding Locally to the Refugee Crisis*

**YWCA of White Plains and Central Westchester\***  
515 North Street, White Plains, NY 10605  
**Sunday October 23, 2016**  
3:00–5:30 P.M. (Registration begins at 2:30 P.M.)

**Keynote Speaker:**  
**Bela Hovy**



**Refugee Experience:**  
**Munira Oković**



**Program highlights:**

- Welcome from cosponsors and local leaders
- Keynote address by **Mr. Bela Hovy**, Chief, Migration Section, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- Experiences of a Bosnian refugee: **Ms. Munira Oković**
- Q& A discussion
- Call to Action: Welcoming Syrian Refugees to Westchester County: **Mr. Andrew Courtney**
- Model UN Mini-Simulation: All Welcome!
- Reception with refreshments

**Cosponsors with UNA-USA:**

- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
- The Links Incorporated
- Rivertowns League of Women Voters

- YWCA of White Plains and Central Westchester
  - Harrison Public Library
- Please register:** [www.unawestchester.org](http://www.unawestchester.org) or contact [unawestchester@gmail.com](mailto:unawestchester@gmail.com)

**\*Directions:** From 287 East: Take exit 8E, turn right on White Plains Rd., continue on to North Street. YWCA is opposite White Plains High School.  
From 287 West: Take exit 9S, merge onto Westchester Ave., turn left on Bryant Ave/Bryant Ave Bridge. YWCA is on the left on North St.

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<b>Editors: Scott C. Monje, Marcia Brewster</b>	

## *Letter from the President*



Dear Friends,  
From my vantage point attending some of the side events connected to the United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants, it is clear that a variety of governments, NGOs, and private sector partners are committed to

raising awareness about the plight of displaced people and helping them resettle in a safer locale. However, a more important objective is to reduce the root causes that lead to people becoming so desperate that they have to leave their homelands. Many of the featured speakers from countries of Europe, North America, and affected recipient countries like Jordan and Kenya affirmed that solutions lie in stable governments and economic opportunities in the countries from which they are fleeing. A number of private sector companies and NGOs pledged their support to the Sustainable Development Goals and to investing in vulnerable countries.

For its part, UNA-USA has proposed a new initiative, “Adopt-A-Future,” in which UNA chapters all over the country are partnering with schools in refugee settlements to provide the type of support that the individual school needs. In consultation with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNA has agreed to concentrate this initiative in Kenya, and UNA-Westchester plans to contribute to at least one of these schools after UN Day. We will also hear about the “Call to Action,” an opportunity for Westchester residents to welcome a group of Syrian refugees who will be settling here.

According to an op-ed by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the UN Summit marked the first-ever gathering of top leaders to discuss refugees and migrants. It adopted a consensus

agreement, the “New York Declaration,” which “sets a principled and pragmatic approach for addressing the challenges of people on the move while upholding our most cherished values.” The 22-page outcome document from the High-Level Meeting (visit [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)) includes; the Declaration to address large movements of refugees and migrants; Annex I, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework; and Annex II, Towards a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration.

At the same time, a U.S.-led Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, hosted by President Obama along with Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico, and Sweden, raised billions of dollars and obtained commitments. The White House announced the results: 52 countries and international organizations attended and increased their current financial contributions to UN appeals and international humanitarian organizations by \$4.5 billion over last year, doubled the number of refugees they resettled or admitted legally in 2016 to 360,000, improved access to education for one million refugee children globally, and gave legal work to one million refugees globally.

In the end, the twin summits provided a complementary framework for both refugees and migrants, with funding to support resettlement programs. President Obama, meanwhile, offered a warning to his fellow leaders; “I believe history will judge us harshly if we do not rise to this moment.”

The first week of the General Assembly session also resulted in a large increase in the number of countries that ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (31 ratified the agreement on September 21; China and the U.S. had ratified it earlier in the month). Currently, there are 187 signatories to the Paris Agreement. Of these, 60 states had also deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, or approval by September 23, accounting in total for 48% of the total global

greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement will come into force when 55 countries accounting for 55% of global emissions have ratified it. India, which accounts for another 4.5% of global emissions, has pledged that it will ratify the agreement on October 2. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, stated that the agreement should come into force by the end of December, only one year after the agreement was negotiated, by which time the threshold of countries accounting for 55% of emissions should be reached (*Washington Post*, September 25, 2016). We are excited about these developments at the UN and about the United States commitment to playing its part in these important international efforts.

The United Nations Association has an important role to play in supporting the work of the United Nations and the contribution of the United States to the organization. Our UN Day celebration for 2016 also recognizes the need to address the refugee crisis here in the U.S.A. and at home in Westchester County. I hope to see you and your guests at our celebration of the 71st anniversary of the founding of the United Nations on October 23.

—*Marcia Brewster*

### *The Crisis in Yemen*

The cold war between Iran and Saudi Arabia has fractured Yemen and fueled a deep sectarian conflict resembling those in Syria and Iraq as the two regional powers struggle for influence in the Middle East.

In September 2014, the Houthi rebels, a Shia offshoot minority found primarily in northern Yemen, felt disadvantaged by the new arrangements proposed by the recently elected president, Abdarabuh Mansour Hadi. The main goal of Hadi's proposal was to reconcile the country's many tribal and regional factions, but it left little room for the Houthis. Unhappy with his proposals, the Houthis seized control of

several strategic cities, including Sana'a, the capital. They forced the internationally recognized president to resign and later to seek exile in Saudi Arabia. In order to restore Hadi's government, a Saudi-led coalition force intervened in March 2015, launching a campaign of air strikes against the rebels and later landing a ground force to support the Yemeni army. Since then thousands of Yemenis have been killed or injured, and over 2.8 million displaced.

The United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other NATO countries have supported the Saudi coalition. The U.S., which was already the major supplier of weapons to the Saudis, is providing intelligence and logistical support. In the separate fight against terrorism, U.S. drone strikes were regularly conducted against Al-Qaeda leaders in Yemen and, as of today, these contribute to the growing number of civilian casualties.

The Houthis, because of their religious affiliation, have been accused of being proxies for Iran. The Houthis are an offshoot of Shia Islam, although different from the Persian Islamic doctrine. They are part of the Zaydi Shia movement, a minority in a Sunni-majority country, and are concentrated in northern Yemen, close to the Saudi border. They repeatedly fought Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former Yemeni president and opposed his regime throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The tensions between the Houthis and Saleh led to insurgencies from 2004 to 2011. Following massive demonstrations in Yemen, which were part of the larger Arab uprising of 2011, Saleh was deposed in a peaceful transition mediated by the United States and the Gulf states. In the most recent fight, however, Saleh—and the elite units of the Yemeni military that are still personally loyal to him—have sided with the Houthis against President Hadi.

Saudi Arabia views the Houthis as a serious threat, perceiving the group to be a hostile neighbor threatening its southern border. It also

considers Yemen to be in a strategic geopolitical location in its fight with Iran for regional dominance. Separately, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State oppose both the Houthis and the government forces. Both of these terrorist organizations have claimed responsibility for numerous deadly attacks, and they have benefitted from the general chaos.

Since 2014, these multiple conflicts have torn the country apart. Yemen's economy has collapsed, leaving it in even more extreme poverty than it was before the civil war. The suffering of the Yemeni people has reached unbelievable levels of humanitarian distress, as people are deprived of water, food, and electricity and are in dire need of medical aid. The humanitarian aid arranged by international organizations often cannot be delivered because of the ongoing fighting. The United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recently expressed deep concern regarding the devastating impact that the incessant bombings are having on the civilian population. A UN report on the human-rights situation in Yemen highlighted numerous allegations of violations and abuses committed by all sides in the conflict. Among the violations, the report mentioned the devastation caused by Saudi air strikes against the city of Saada, which is located in the Houthi heartland in northern Yemen, close to the Saudi border. The air strikes also resulted in the destruction of a hospital run by Doctors Without Borders, an international nongovernmental organization. Throughout the country, both the coalition forces and the Houthi rebels continue to hit civilian infrastructures, resulting in unconfirmed numbers of civilian casualties, in violation of humanitarian law.

Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary-general, is once again urging the Yemeni parties to cease all hostilities immediately and return to talks in order to find a political solution to the conflict. He has condemned the

escalation of violence in which, as usual, civilians are paying the heaviest price.

—Smahane Nounouh

### ***EPA Grant Received for Model UN Mini-Simulations***

In May 2016 the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed to fund a national project proposed by UNA and our Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (AKA) partners, "The Road to Paris Leads through the Classroom." The purpose of the project is to use mini-simulations of a Model UN program to raise awareness among students about how the United Nations is confronting the issue of climate change. Our team received a grant of \$2,275, which is to be used to spread this "mini-sim" experience to middle and high schools in Westchester. Our task is to engage educators in workshops, training them to train other educators, and in that way maximize the number of students that we will reach. Middle and high school teachers will receive professional development through this project and then return to their schools to engage students in the climate-change mini-simulation.

Since the official partnership between UNA-USA and AKA was launched, prior to the receipt of this grant, the three AKA chapters in Westchester County (Zeta Nu Omega, Pi Iota Omega, and Xi Chi Omega) have agreed to work with the Model UN mini-sims that UNA had launched in late 2014. The project was designed to extend the valuable concept of the United Nations to students who do not have the opportunity of taking part in any of the traditional Model UN conferences held each year. A special computer app provides a wealth of material for teachers, including background information on topics of interest, briefing cards pertaining to individual countries, and guidelines for conducting simulated meetings of the UN General Assembly.

The app can be downloaded at the Apple store or on your mobile device at: <http://www.unausa.org/global-classrooms-model-un/model-un-mobile-app>. There are currently five topics on the app: Globalization, Zombie Pandemic, Eradication of Extreme Poverty, Climate Change, Gender and Science, and the Situation in Syria.

To get the program started, UNA-Westchester, through Vice President Brenda Smith (who is also a member of AKA Zeta Nu Omega chapter), invited Troy Wolfe, the director of UNA-USA education programs, to give a demonstration on how to use the Model UN mini-simulation app at the conclusion of the AKA meeting on March 14, 2015. In attendance were members of the UNA-Westchester board of directors, and AKA members who were interested in learning how to use the app so that they, too, could become trainers. Once the program was introduced, teachers from Mount Vernon High School, Nellie Thornton High School, and Woodlands High School expressed an interest in receiving training so that they could become “turnkey” trainers and involve their students in the mini-sim and Model UN programs.

The first joint UNA-AKA exercise was held in December 2015 between students of Mount Vernon High School and Woodlands High School of Greenburgh on the topic of climate change. Students from the two schools met at Mount Vernon High School to engage in a spirited and meaningful debate regarding the issues of climate change and global warming. Mr. Demetrios Mihailidis, a social-studies teacher and adviser to the Model UN/UN Club at Mount Vernon, invited the Westchester chapter of The Links, Inc., to participate in the Model UN process through a collaborative effort that produced an engaging and enriching experience for all.

Students were encouraged to talk through issues and learn from each other. Woodlands students became familiar with the complex

process of a Model UN through the guidance of Mount Vernon students. Reports from students of both high schools were extremely positive.

The adults in the room simply watched as the events unfolded, allowing students to grow academically as well as personally through self-discovery. It was truly inspiring to witness. Mr. Mihailidis observed, “... [M]any kudos must go to Kiana Graham, a senior at MVHS. She did a marvelous job as the chairperson of the conference. She ran the meeting smoothly and efficiently, as a true UN representative.”

Students researched specific and relevant information regarding how global warming affects an assigned country. The goal was to expose students to the solution-making process and give them a platform to express themselves. Once students conquered their initial nerves, they were able to relax and truly enjoy the moment. One Woodlands senior mentioned that it was, “interesting to discuss global topics with other high school students, who were very knowledgeable about global issues.” During the program, all those involved gained a sense of confidence that was palpable and infectious. Mr. Mihailidis and Mr. Christopher Vaccaro, the advisers from MVHS and Woodlands, have worked together on various projects in recent years, leading the partnership between their two schools to grow tremendously.

Now the program needs to be expanded to a larger number of schools in Westchester. First, we will hold a Model UN mini-sim on the situation in Syria at our UN Day celebration on October 23. This will be followed by a mini-Model UN for high school students to be held at the Mercy College Rotunda on Saturday, November 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. It will be facilitated by the award-winning Model UN team from Mercy and will be on climate change. High school students who are interested should contact UNA-Westchester intern Smahane at [snounouh112@gmail.com](mailto:snounouh112@gmail.com).

—*Brenda Smith and Marcia Brewster*

## *Refugees at the UN and in the US*

Refugees are a recurring theme these days. They were a central topic of discussion at the UN General Assembly in September, and they will be a topic of UNA-Westchester events in the coming months. Why are so many people showing concern over the plight of refugees? Because there are more refugees, displaced persons (i.e., refugees who have been dislodged from their homes but have not managed to escape their countries), and asylum seekers today than at any time in recorded human history. They are estimated to number more than 60 million. That's about one person for every 122 people in the world. Three countries contribute about half of the total: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia. Others have added significantly to the flow: South Sudan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, Colombia, to name a few. Bordering countries have taken in many of these refugees (at least 1 out of every 4 people now living in Lebanon is a refugee), but these countries often lack the resources to deal with them properly, often leading the refugees to seek other places farther afield.

In today's political environment, many have come to see refugees as a threat. That is really not the case in this country. The recent threatening image stems largely from Europe, where refugees traveling by way of Turkey and North Africa have at times streamed across borders in the hundreds of thousands without accounting or control. It is possible for terrorist organizations to seed their members into such a chaotic flow of humanity, and it has happened in a small but notable number of instances.

The flow of refugees into the United States is a very different matter. Individuals must apply in advance to enter the United States as refugees. All applicants are vetted by the United Nations, the State Department, the Department of

Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Counterterrorism Center in a process that regularly takes up to two years. (There is an enhanced screening process for refugees from Syria.) Public officials, worried about being precise, will state that they cannot absolutely guarantee that not a single terrorist will slip through the multiple levels of the screening process. While that is technically true, the fact remains that every other method of entering the country imaginable is easier than coming as a refugee. The notion that a potential threat from refugees should be highlighted, as has been the case, is simply unfounded. The United States has been one of the world's largest recipients of refugees for decades, and the country does not face a refugee threat.

—*Scott C. Monje*

## *UNA-Westchester Education Assets*

The UNA's Southern New York State Division held an education retreat on August 13, which included a discussion of the education-related assets of the various chapters that make up the Southern New York State Division. So, what were some of the Westchester chapter's assets?

For many years, UNA-Westchester sponsored a high school essay contest dedicated to UN-related themes, which unfortunately had a fairly low response rate. In keeping with the times, the chapter switched to a video contest, which attracted a much higher response. The theme for this year's video contest is "Girls Speak Out."

The chapter's flagship program is "Peace Makes the World a Better Place." In this program, volunteers introduce third-grade students to the UN and the concept of peace keeping. In operation in the Yonkers school system for the past 12 years, the program discusses issues such as peace and war, refugees, and clean water. As many as 17

schools have participated in a single year. The chapter is currently developing an online version of the program, so that UNA chapters around the country will be able to adopt it for their own schools. And, by the way, we are always happy to welcome new volunteers! Just get in touch with Karen Rockwell El-Badry rockwell150@aol.com.

Each year, UNA-Westchester representatives attend the annual meeting of the Westchester–Lower Hudson Council for the Social Studies. They staff a booth making UN-related material available to the teachers attending the meeting, and in some years they participate in presentations.

In our most recent project, UNA-Westchester is assisting in the organization UN mini-simulations (or “mini-sims”) at area high schools and providing necessary training to the mini-sim facilitators. See the related article, “EPA Grant Received for Model UN Mini-Simulations,” on page 4 of this issue.

### ***Save the Date!***

A UNA-Westchester **social event** will be held at the White Plains Women’s Club on Friday, November 11. Details will be sent to members later.

In honor of **Human Rights Day**, UNA-Westchester’s Young Professionals will host a program on Sunday, December 11, 2016, 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. at the Harrison Public Library, 2 Bruce Ave., Harrison NY 10528: “*One Human Family, Shared Responsibility: Responding to the Crisis In South Sudan*”

UNA **Members’ Day** at the United Nations will be on Friday, February 17, 2017.

Our **International Women’s Day** event will be held at the Greenburgh Public Library on Sunday, March 5, 2017.

UNA-Westchester’s **annual meeting** will be on Sunday, May 7, 2017.

### ***Board Members, Officers, and Committee Chairs***

Marcia Brewster, President,  
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Brenda L. G. Smith, Vice President. Partnerships  
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*Ex officio:* George Garland, Jeanne Betsock  
Stillman.

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION** (this can also be submitted on line at [www.unausa.org](http://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.)

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Return this, with your payment to UNA-USA, to:

UNA-USA WESTCHESTER CHAPTER

35 Heath Place

Hastings on Hudson, NY 10706