

**Statement by Chair of UNA-UK Board to AGM
6 March 2010**

This is the fifth (and last) occasion on which I have reported to membership about UNA-UK's performance over the previous year, together with a few thoughts on how the UN as a whole has been faring over the same period. This year the context is somewhat different, since the Annual Conference, to which Sam Daws and I usually report, will be replaced this year by the planned UN Forum outreach conference on 12 June, which I hope you will all find a valuable innovation, though no substitute for regular meetings of conference, the next of which will take place in 2011. Since the UN Forum would not provide a very suitable occasion for our reports (as we hope to attract a good number of non-UNA members to the Forum) we felt that it made more sense for us to report to this AGM (which we are in any case required by law to hold). We will be ensuring that our reports are made available to those who cannot come to the AGM.

I think that, without any undue lack of modesty, we can claim that UNA-UK has, over the last year, deepened and strengthened its role as the leading source of independent information, analysis and advocacy on the UN in this country. That role has been recognised and appreciated by the UN Secretary-General, by the World Federation of UN Associations and by the leaders of the UK's three main political parties. The campaign to ban cluster munitions, in which we played a prominent role both within and outside Parliament, is about to lead to the UK's ratification of the Dublin Convention, which looks as if it should enter into force later this year. We gave strong support in Parliament to the changes in our domestic law which were needed

to block a loophole that has enabled those accused of genocide and crimes against humanity to escape prosecution. We have also supported the changes in Britain's laws against bribery which are currently going through Parliament and which experience has shown were much needed if we were not to lag lamentably far behind other developed countries. Throughout the year we have pursued two major campaigning initiatives, the first aimed at securing effective action against climate change by "sealing the deal" at Copenhagen, the second directed at strengthening the disciplines on nuclear non-proliferation and at pressing for multilateral nuclear disarmament, which has been the focus of our continuing "Towards Zero" campaign. This is a record of which I believe we can be proud even if a huge amount remains to be done on both these major themes of our work.

We have also seen considerable progress on all three of our main networks – our nations, regions and branches, UNYSA and the Young Professionals Network. Several branches have developed major activities in important UN policy areas – for example UNA Westminster on peacekeeping and UNA Edinburgh on nuclear non-proliferation; we have UNYSA groups at forty universities and schools and have collaborated with UNESCO to produce two major teaching resources on the UN's work; the Young Professionals Network has gone from strength to strength and has been championed by the Foreign Secretary. While we are doing better than many comparable organisations we are still not doing as well as we would like to be on the question of overall membership so I do hope that a renewed effort on that front, backed up by Rich Nelmes' expertise at headquarters, will bear fruit before too long.

We have continued to make solid progress on the financial front. For the fifth year in a row we have secured a modest end of year surplus enabling us to continue to build our reserves. This is in large part due to the meticulous approach of our headquarters staff and our Management and Finance committee, so ably chaired in recent years by Rod Fielding, to monitor expenditure and secure value for money in all aspects of our operations.

Indeed the situation has improved remarkably compared to six years ago. Then, at the time Sam Daws became Executive Director, UNA-UK was in deficit and the UNA Trust had less than £10,000 in unrestricted reserves. At the close of this financial year we estimate that UNA-UK will have reserves of more than £110,000 and the UNA Trust unrestricted reserves of nearly £400,000. On top of that we have been able to make considerable inroads into paying down our mortgage on the 3 Whitehall Court lease.

Thanks largely to Sam Daws' skill and perseverance and the excellent work put in by the whole team on putting together the impact assessment we published last year, we have received two major multi-year commitments from charitable foundations - £500,000 from the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust over five years and a further £250,000 from anonymous donors administered by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust over a similar period, for our project work. These two grants are already enabling us to strengthen our work, in particular our "Towards Zero" programme.

Another piece of positive news on the financial front in that the UNA Trust has benefited from two substantial legacies from Ruth Wenban-Smith and Elnora Ferguson. The first memorial lecture honouring Elnora, an initiative of UNA Central Region, will, we hope, be held in November of this year.

But no-one surely can remain unaware of the financial pressures that the economic downturn has placed on voluntary sector organisations. One sign of the coming challenge is that in the year ahead financial support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – which in recent years has been running at near £100,000 per year – will be under considerable pressure as a result of the general cut-back in the FCO's discretionary spending, following the financial crisis and the impact of the fall in sterling's exchange rate. But it is vital that we secure at least some government funding for the year ahead.

Fortunately, we have succeeded in diversifying our funding over recent years and we do not face the future unprepared. To use a metaphor currently in vogue in political circles, UNA-UK has built a secure roof while the sun shone. We are now well placed to weather a future economic storm, but we must not become complacent. We must redouble our efforts to find new, and substantial, sources of funds in the years ahead, if we are to maintain, and hopefully increase, our current ambitious programme of work.

None of these achievements would have been possible without really tremendous efforts by the tiny permanent staff in Whitehall Court. There have been quite a few changes there, but no reduction in quality and commitment, indeed if anything the contrary. Carol Hodson is making a real impact already on the governance side of things. Natalie Samarasinghe is proving a worthy successor to Veronica Lie as editor of New World and has already produced two excellent numbers. And Tim Kellow was able to help organise the successful nuclear policy conference last December before he left. This performance reflects a lot of credit on all concerned and is a real team effort. We must never take it for granted.

I wish I could be as up-beat about the UN as a whole as I have been about UNA-UK. But honesty compels me to say that the last year has been a tough period, in which setbacks have been as numerous as achievements. The greatest disappointment was the semi-failure (or very partial success, if you prefer that characterisation) of the Copenhagen Climate Change conference last December. The two largest peacekeeping missions, in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Darfur, have not made much progress although they have avoided the disasters frequently predicted for them. Somalia continues to defy effective treatment. The cause of human rights, from Burma to Zimbabwe, from Sri Lanka to Gaza, has barely, if at all, advanced; and the Human Rights Council has continued to under-perform, even if the criticism directed at it in a carefully orchestrated campaign by the Government of Israel following publication of the Goldstone report was, in my view, grossly over the top. The earthquake in Haiti brought personal tragedy to the UN itself, as well as

to millions of Haitians, and revealed once again how difficult the international community finds it to respond as rapidly and to coordinate as effectively as is needed when such disasters strike.

Should we be dismayed or discouraged by all this? I do not believe so. If the UN's effectiveness has been challenged, its indispensability has not. Nor has the final word been spoken on any of these issues. 2009 may have been a tough year but much remains to play for in 2010 and beyond.

The first challenge has to remain climate change. The Copenhagen Accord is indeed a step forward, but it is an inadequate one and, if not completed, could well prove to be unsustainable. We need, I believe, a twin-track strategy to deal in parallel with implementation and completion. On implementation Britain and its EU partners need to ensure, by their actions, and not just by their words, that they remain on course to achieve the 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 to which they are committed; they need too to boost their performance on renewables and on research; and to commit serious money to such developing country priorities as have now been endorsed, for example on checking deforestation. As to completion we should continue to press for a legally binding framework to be agreed by the end of the year; we should continue to offer to go beyond the 20% reduction target if others are ready to do so; we should promote a longer term target figure for, say, 2050; we should firm up the commitments made to help developing countries move towards low carbon economies, including through technology transfer; and the EU should put

forward a robust international framework for monitoring and verifying commitments which have been entered into. In promoting an agenda of this sort, we will I think need to recognise and take into account some of the lessons of that chaotic meeting in Copenhagen. A global outcome must remain the objective; but we surely need to put to better use meetings of a more restricted nature such as the G20 to shape up the building blocks of such a global outcome. And there is an urgent requirement to repair the damage done to the scientific analysis underpinning the effort to reverse climate change by some sloppy, if probably pretty marginal, citations.

Not far, if at all, behind that major challenge, is that of nuclear proliferation and multilateral disarmament. Two major conferences, one on nuclear security in Washington in April, the other the quinquennial Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review in New York in May, lie just ahead of us. The task is to reverse the regression of the last ten years and to set an entirely new direction of travel based on President Obama's Prague speech pointing the way towards a world free of nuclear weapons and on the agenda set in last September's Security Council Summit meeting. To achieve that there will need to be a continued diplomatic effort to deal with North Korea and Iran's nuclear programmes, backed up by additional international sanctions; there will need to be a serious commitment by the five recognised nuclear weapon states to a whole range of disarmament measures and policy assurances with a new US/Russia agreement as a first step down that road; there will need to be a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty; there will need to be a toughening up of non-

proliferation disciplines, matched by improved internationally guaranteed access for all countries which wish to develop civil nuclear energy programmes to enrichment and reprocessing services. This is an agenda not just for 2010 but for many years ahead. With it the world could become a much more secure place; without it a much more dangerous one.

There are, naturally, plenty of other priorities for the UN this year and in the years ahead. Time does not permit mentioning them all, although the 2011 review of the functioning of the Human Rights Council must be prominent among them and something which UNA-UK will be discussing actively with the government to ensure that sensible improvements are promoted and that the field is not left clear for the spoilers, whose activities have been so lamentably effective in the past. There are other institutional changes too that should be pressed, not least the enlargement of the Security Council. Policy responses to day-to-day challenges and institutional changes have to go hand in hand if substantive improvements are to be achieved; too often each of these two has acted as a brake on the other. That, I believe, is what UNA-UK should be working to alter.

I would be remiss if I concluded this report to our membership without mentioning the decision which Sam Daws communicated to the Board this morning that he intends to give up his job as UNA's Executive Director not later than the middle of September this year. There will be other occasions, nearer the time of his departure, when we will have the opportunity to say rather more about the huge debt that UNA owes to Sam

for his unwavering commitment to its future and for the skill and determination with which he rescued it from a serious financial crisis when he took over and brought it to its present relatively robust state of health; but I would not wish to let this first occasion pass without registering our heartfelt thanks to him and the team who have worked with him. He will be a hard act indeed to follow. The Board has already established a search committee which will advertise for and sift through candidacies for Sam's successor. Our aim will be to ensure that a worthy successor is in place before the time Sam has set for his departure.