

UN APPG briefing meeting – 3 November

For those of you who were unable to attend, here is a brief summary of the meeting of the UN APPG held on 3 November.

Introduction to the UN and to UNA-UK

Lord Hannay of Chiswick, a Vice-Chair of the APPG and Chair of the United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK), which has serviced the group for many years, gave a short introduction to the meeting. He began by observing that the UN APPG has existed for many years and continues to provide a useful forum for briefing on and discussion of UN issues. As an example, Lord Hannay noted that for its first meeting of the new Parliament, the group hosted a talk by Sir Mark Lyall Grant, the UK's Permanent Representative to the UN. He went on to explain that, following the very encouraging response from Parliamentarians after the general election in May to our search for new members, it was felt that it would be useful to hold a meeting to brief anyone interested in current issues facing the UN and also what UNA-UK can provide for members of both Houses by way of support.

Here is a summary of Lord Hannay's main points:

1. Whatever its setbacks and shortcomings – and both are not lacking – the UN remains indispensable. No organisation deploying some 100,000 peacekeepers and peacebuilding staff worldwide in a whole range of conflicts and failed states; which is at the forefront of two of the highest challenges the international community faces – climate change and nuclear proliferation and disarmament; and which is at the heart of the effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; can really be considered anything other than indispensable.
2. However, it is far from being as effective in carrying out these tasks as it should or could be. Its shortcomings are well known – lack of representivity in the Security Council, divided counsels over key issues such as Iraq, Arab-Israeli relations, North Korea and how to handle failed and failing states, a weak performance on human rights, and the unwieldy nature of 192-member negotiating forums as highlighted at Copenhagen last December. These need to be addressed and resolved, however daunting that task may seem.
3. The UN is about more than the often confusing and Machiavellian dealings in the Security Council. Think of refugees (UNHCR), pandemics (WHO), *rinderpest* elimination (FAO), nuclear inspections and safety (IAEA), children (UNICEF and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), justice and attacking the culture of impunity for genocide (ICC). That is a non-exhaustive list of what the UN does outside the direct field of peace and security.
4. The UK remains a key player at the UN, not just because it is a Permanent Member of the Security Council, although that matters a lot, but as a major aid donor – one of the few to be sticking to its Gleneagles and UN commitments on aid – and as a leader on climate change, nuclear disarmament and many other issues, to which the Strategic Defence and Security Review has added conflict prevention – a necessary and timely addition. So what members of both Houses think on UN issues does count and does matter. I hope the UN APPG can contribute to this process.

Introduction to UNA-UK

UNA-UK's new Executive Director, Phil Mulligan, took the opportunity to introduce himself to APPG members and to say a little about the work of the organisation. Having previously worked for Environmental Protection UK and VSO in Indonesia, Phil described his enthusiasm for his new role at UNA-UK, an organisation at the forefront of domestic action on international issues.

He argued that, to face the global challenges of the 21st century, we need global, multilateral solutions. The UN, therefore, in its various different guises – as a peacekeeper, aid worker, convenor of states and forum for debate – is vital. He explained that UNA-UK believes that strong international institutions and internationally-minded citizens are in the UK's national interest, and that UNA-UK therefore encourages the Government to support our aim – to create a secure, just and sustainable world through a strong, credible and effective UN.

He went on to outline our advocacy work, which focuses on encouraging the British government to use its role as an effective champion of UN goals in bilateral and multilateral fora. UNA-UK's advocacy efforts are also complemented by wider lobbying – through our networks in Parliament and a range of civil society partnerships – and by helping our member networks to build support at a local level.

Summary of UNA-UK's key policy priorities for this parliamentary session:

- The continuation of our flagship nuclear non-proliferation and multilateral disarmament campaign – Towards Zero;
- UN Millennium Development Goals – effective follow-up to the September summit;
- Review of the UN Human Rights Council;
- Scrutinising developments at the climate change conference in Cancún next month and beyond;
- Following the progress of the new UN Women agency as it begins work in January.

Summary of the ways in which UNA-UK works with Parliament:

1. Lord Hannay is an advocate of UN issues in the House of Lords and through his contributions to various APPGs.
2. By working with individual Parliamentarians, committees and APPGs on a host of issues by, for example, providing oral or written evidence, preparing briefings, drafting EDMs and organising meetings with UN representatives.
3. Our annual lobby of Parliament which aims to encourage relationships and dialogue between voters and Parliamentarians on UN issues.
4. By providing the Secretariat to the UN APPG, which has enjoyed a positive boost in membership since the May general election. We have just launched a new monthly newsletter to keep members informed about UN developments and our own activities, and we have a series of meetings planned over the next couple of months.