

BLUE RIDGE VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE UNA-USA

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AMBASSADOR LUERS STRESSES CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE UN FOR WORLD PEACE, A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND SOLUTIONS TO UNIVERSAL PROBLEMS LIKE POVERTY AND DISEASE

Former Ambassador and current UNA-USA President William Luers, addressing a UVA Miller Center Forum on October 30th in celebration of United Nations Day, stressed the comprehensive role of the United States in many broad facets of world affairs today. He also focused on American involvement at the UN, noting that the U.S. needs the UN as much as the UN needs the U.S. Ambassador Luers emphasized that the U.S. cannot go it alone; we must work internationally with other countries. The UN helps us do that.

Prior to joining UNA-USA in February 1999, Ambassador Luers served for 13 years as President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. During a 31-year career in the Foreign Service, Luers served as U.S. Ambassador to Czechoslovakia (1983-1986) and Venezuela (1978-1982). He was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe (1977-1978) and for Inter-American Affairs (1975-1977).

The Ambassador stressed that we Americans need to recognize the presence of diversity in the cultures of the world, with many being very different from our own. In working with other countries bi-laterally or through the UN, we need to understand how another country thinks of itself and what its priorities are before presenting our agenda. In many countries, poverty and conditions such as poor health lead to failed states. The citizens of these countries are involved with survival. Ambassador Luers suggested that 80% of the world's nations are involved with issues very different from ours. We and the UN have to work for the interests of all nations.

Luers lamented American failure to communicate directly with countries like Iran and North Korea. He said that it is especially important to talk with our enemies in order to understand their issues and culture. We should list our agreements and our disagreements with others and then work to expand the areas of agreement and diminish the areas of disagreement. He reminded us of President Nixon's opening the door to China and Mao; while acknowledging the gulf that separated us, he began the process of closing that gap. Luers says this is what is so missing with our present government's approaches to Iran and North Korea.

Our country's present leadership focuses on military solutions to international problems rather than diplomatic and nonviolent solutions that can better lead to real, long-lasting solutions. The failure of the U.S. to take the advice of the United Nations not to go to war in Iraq is an example of the failed policy of the current Bush administration.

Ambassador Luers addressed the drop in U.S. public support for the UN in recent years. The major cause for this can be traced to the UN's response to the U.S. decision to invade Iraq. In February 2003, one month before the invasion, the popularity of the UN in the U.S. was 75% positive. Three months later, this support was under 50% because the UN opposed the invasion.

Luers discussed the Oil for Food program that has received so much criticism. Instead, he emphasized the three basic successes of the program for which it was created. It fed the people of Iraq, it prevented Iraq from developing weapons of mass destruction, and it reduced the smuggling of oil from Iraq. He pointed out the cooperation of the UN with the multi-million dollar investigation of the program, and wondered what we might learn if an equal amount of money and transparency were provided for an investigation of the U.S. Pentagon.

Luers spoke of Darfur as an example of the UN's actions as a humanitarian supplier and an agency committed to reducing genocide. He referred to the UN's enormous contributions to assistance for refugees displaced by civil wars and natural disasters.

He pointed to our country's weak position on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The weakness results from our own policies on nuclear weapons, our agreements with India, and our failure to talk directly with countries like Iran and North Korea.

Looking forward, Luers hopes for changes in the direction of our country with a new administration two years from now, one that will work well with the new Secretary-General who will replace Kofi Annan at the end of this year. He is concerned with the extent to which the current U.S. administration treats terrorism in a manner similar to the way we treated communism during the cold war. And, finally, he emphasized that the next administration must recognize that military power is not the way to deal with most of today's problems.

Several points stood out from the question and answer period. Ambassador Luers discussed the importance of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, though he is concerned that the U.S. is losing focus on our support for the goals. He suggested that providing clean water is the most realistic goal that can be accomplished by 2015. He thinks there is no chance of eliminating the veto from the Security Council. He stressed the value of expanding the Council to become more representative of the countries with large populations and economies that are now excluded, like India, Brazil, Japan, and Germany - countries that were less important when the UN was formed. The Miller Center and the UNA-USA Blue-Ridge Virginia Chapter co-sponsored this forum.

A Day at the UNA Conference by Bruce Carveth

Don't miss a chance to visit the offices of the Pan American Health Organization / WHO in Washington if you should get the chance. The UNA-USA Annual Meeting & Conference (Council of Chapters & Divisions) was held there on June 10; I was able to join about 90 people there for a day of seminars and plenary sessions. The main room of the conference center is like a little UN General Assembly chamber. Plush chairs and polished wooden desks are set in a semi-circle before the high dais. Each table has a microphone, buttons and lights, indicating when you can talk. I felt like I was transported to New York.

The opening plenary session involved a review of the membership challenges facing the UNA. Our organization has been growing (13% since 2004), all of it accounted for by student involvement. Regular membership has, in fact, declined by 1%. UNA groups like ours can apply for small grants (up to \$300) under a special project called "PeopleSpeak" to help grow their groups. The organization is also initiating the "UNA Grassroots Development Fund," through which larger projects can be undertaken.

The Future of Nuclear Weapons and How to Control Them: Among the seminars offered during the morning was a presentation on the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The presenters included Randy Rydell, an associate of Hans Blix's IAEA inspection team in Iraq, and Leonard Spector, Associate Director of the Nonproliferation Center, California. This was mostly a depressing presentation; acknowledging the successes in restricting access to nuclear weapons but also the utter failure of the disarmament side of the equation (notwithstanding the decision by South Africa to end its involvement with nuclear weapons, a decision that removed 6 warheads from the world-wide armament of many thousands of weapons). Some good news: the Bush administration has succeeded in securing a new agreement for the seizure of fissile materials on the high seas. But, of course, the US has also led in the push for modernizing and updating the US arsenal, a course that will preserve (and even expand) the threat of nuclear weapons for many years to come.

Convention on the Rights of the Child: At lunch (sandwich and chips; good cookie; floppy pickle) Norma Keller described how her UNA group in Center County Pennsylvania has used the U.S.'s

failure to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to generate interest and even renown in her area. She pointed out that this topic has worked well in attracting members because the topic is very family-friendly and provides a warm point of contact for many citizens.

Extending the Rule of Law: The afternoon session included presentations by John Washburn (American NGO Coalition for the International Criminal Court) and Ruth Wedgwood (a high profile opponent to the Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court). Their wide-ranging discussion focused on the diverse impacts of international law in our world, ranging from human rights law (which tends not to strongly affect nations) to trade laws (which do). Why are some areas of international law effective in controlling behaviors while other areas are not? Primarily, behavior is influenced when court decisions against nations (as in the International Court of Justice) affect their abilities to do business in the world or to obtain loans on the international market. My naïve question is this: how can we tie credit decisions to human rights performance?

The Blue Ridge Virginia Chapter of the UNA tries to send one or more members to national meetings like this each year. What a great way to make contact with the UN world beyond our little borders in Central Virginia.

BRVC Program Focus for 2006-07

Following Bruce Carveth's summation of the UNA Conference at BRVC's September meeting, Bruce led a discussion among the membership regarding a focus for chapter advocacy and education for the remainder of 2006 and the first half of 2007. The consensus of the membership at that meeting was to focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), directed toward the ultimate goal of ending extreme poverty.

Education and advocacy on the MDGs involves (1) educating the public and our own members about the goals, (2) urging our political leaders to increase funding for foreign aid to the amount needed to meet the goals, and (3) urging individuals to join the One Campaign.

Al Reynolds Teaches Course on Ending Extreme Poverty

Three times this year BRVC member Al Reynolds taught a course titled "An End to Extreme Poverty: Can America and the United Nations Make It Happen?" The course is based on the important and inspirational 2005 best-selling book, *The End of Poverty*, by UN Millennium-Project Director and Columbia Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. Extreme poverty refers to the one billion people who earn less than \$1 per day, about one sixth of the world's population. The target is to cut extreme poverty in half by 2015 and to eliminate it by 2025. Sachs's book provides the methodology for how to accomplish this goal.

Blue Ridge Virginia Chapter of the United Nations Association of the USA 2006-07 WINTER-SPRING CHAPTER PROGRAMS

Listed below are the monthly programs for the Blue Ridge Virginia Chapter of the UNA-USA for the winter and spring, 2006-07. All monthly meetings are held at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Charlottesville, 717 Rugby Road, on Sundays at 3:00 p.m.

December 10. UVA Professor Emeritus *Rouhollah Ramazani*, a renowned scholar on Iran, will consider the foreign policy of the Bush administration in the light of Jeffersonian principles, with particular reference to the Middle East and Iran. Prof. Ramazani, a native of Iran, presented this study, the fruit of four years work, before an invited audience at Monticello in August of this year.

January 21. *Jim Mustin* is website designer and U.S. representative for the Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services located in Burundi but serving the entire African great lakes region. They are building a training center where people of formerly hostile tribes can meet and converse, expressing grief, understanding, perhaps forgiveness, thus effecting a resolution of conflict beyond what UN peacekeepers can do.

February 18. Professor *Daniel A. Métraux*, Professor of Asian Studies at Mary Baldwin College, Editor of the Southeast Review of Asian Studies, and UNA-USA chapter member, recently spent his sabbatical on a summer Fulbright in China and on a college-sponsored tour of Cambodia with visits to Burma, Thailand and Laos. Dr. Métraux will discuss "Prosperity and Poverty in the New China" focusing on the economic, political, environmental and social crises facing China today. He will also comment on economic and social conditions in Cambodia a decade after the UN intervention there.

March 18. *Dr. John H. Bryant* has had a career in international health and has had a continuing concern for human rights, ethics, and equity in relation to health and human well-being and the pursuit of peace. Dr. Bryant and his wife Nancy have worked with the United Nations and with Millennium-Project Director Jeffrey Sachs. He is currently working with orphans in the urban slums of Africa and is extending his work to recent advances in the science of early childhood development as it applies to the care of orphans in Kenya. He is also involved in the topic of Western and Islamic ethics and the wider process of encouraging active dialogue between the West and Islam. He will talk on the Millennium Development Goals from an African perspective.

April 15. *Dr. Robert Toplin*, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, will talk on "Internationalism and Isolationism: The History of an American Debate and Its Relationship to the United Nations." Examining America's history on this issue can lead to a better understanding of why some Americans today resist supporting the UN, and this understanding may help us to make a stronger case for recognizing the UN's importance in the current political debates.

May 20. *Dr. William Speidel* will talk about American interaction with China and the world. During 1984-92, he was concurrently associate professor at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and the first executive director of the Hopkins-Nanjing Program for Chinese and American Studies, a joint graduate program for Chinese and American students located in Nanjing, China. From 1993 to 1999, Dr. Speidel was the first US Peace Corps Country Director in China. He will have just returned from a trip to China before his May 20th presentation.

Officers for 2006: President, Helen Reynolds, Vice Presidents: Wilma Hartung for Charlottesville, Daniel Métraux for Shenandoah Valley, Secretary: Al Reynolds, Treasurer: Barbara Cauthorn, Membership Chair: Josina Bakker, Program Chair: Paul Priest, Webmaster: Bruce Carveth, Founder, Wallace Irwin, Jr. Our website is www.avenue.org/una-brc/
Election of officers for 2007 will be at the December 2006 meeting.