

DRAFT Explanatory note on UNA-UK policy-making process

October 2011

How is UNA-UK's policy framework developed?

UNA-UK's policy programmes and priorities are set out in its periodic strategic plans. The organisation is currently in the process of developing a new four-year strategic plan for the period 2011-15.

The 2011-15 plan has been developed in consultation with the UNA-UK membership through regional 'roadshows' held around the UK. At these events, members provided suggestions on UNA-UK's vision, mission, focus areas and objectives. Input was also sought from other stakeholders – including youth members and key partners in the UN, government, Parliament and NGOs.

A first draft of the plan was approved by the Board and made available on the UNA-UK website. At UNA-UK's 2011 Policy Conference, members present discussed the draft, amended the policy content, and formally endorsed the priorities outlined. After the conference, revisions were made to the plan in light of feedback received. The revised draft was then circulated to all UNA-UK members inviting further comments. These comments were discussed by the Board and incorporated into the final draft, which is now available from www.una.org.uk/generalmeeting (or in hard copy from Hayley Richardson on richardson@una.org.uk or 020 7766 3454). This plan will be put to the membership for adoption at a General Meeting of UNA-UK to be held on 24 November 2011.

What policy areas does the draft plan include?

The draft plan outlines three major policy programmes for the next four years:

- A safer world (peace and security)
- A fairer world (human rights, humanitarian and social issues)
- A sustainable world (international development and environment)

It also sets out three cross-cutting issues that we believe should be addressed in all three programmes: gender, population and effective UN institutions.

How are policy priorities within these broad areas identified?

UNA-UK's draft strategic plan identifies three priorities for each programme, which were amended and endorsed by the UNA membership at its 2011 Policy Conference.

Each year, these broad priorities will be distilled in a strategic manner into specific objectives within an operational plan. The UNA-UK Board will be responsible for adopting and reviewing these annual plans, which will draw on the following to help steer policy matters:

- The outcomes of the most recent and future policy conferences;
- Suggestions from the membership through policy input channels that operate on an ongoing basis (i.e. between policy conferences)
- Input from the Board's Policy Advisory Group and external stakeholders, such as NGO partners and academic experts; and

The UNA-UK membership will be able to hold the Board to account at UNA-UK's Annual General Meetings.

What is the role of the UNA-UK membership in determining these priorities?

Our membership plays an active role in helping us to achieve our objectives and to identify policy priorities. There are three main channels for this:

i) Policy conferences

UNA-UK holds regular policy conferences at which individual members and those representing our branches, regions and nations come together to debate issues of concern to the UN and to identify emerging developments. The conferences are organised by a committee elected from and by UNA-UK members, and the agenda for these meetings is constructed entirely from policy positions put forward by the membership. Those issues that are adopted are presented in a national policy document.

ii) Policy Advisory Group

The Policy Advisory Group advises the Board and staff on policy matters and acts as a sounding board for policy positions and suggestions from the wider membership. The Chair of the policy conference organising committee (the Procedure Committee) will be a member of the Group, which will consist of UN experts, including from within the UNA-UK membership.

iii) Policy inbox

UNA-UK members often send suggestions for policy issues and campaign actions to the staff, either individually, or on behalf of their branches, regions and nations. In order to ensure that UNA-UK can react quickly and effectively to suggestions, we will set up a 'policy inbox' on our website to which suggestions can be sent. The inbox will be monitored on a daily basis and action taken as appropriate. While the staff will not be able to respond to every suggestion individually, they will endeavour to post a monthly overview of any action taken in response to member suggestions.

Urgent actions could include petitions or letters to ministers, while suggestions on longer-term initiatives would likely be forward to the Policy Advisory Group for recommendations to be put to the Board. The Group will work closely regional and national Board representatives. Whilst it will only meet physically three to four times a year, it will regularly communicate by email, in particular if an urgent development arises. The Group will inform the members (or branch, region, nation) of any action taken.

What happens after policy priorities are adopted?

Policy issues adopted by Policy Conferences serve to guide the work of the UNA-UK Board, staff and membership. Once formally endorsed at the conferences, those issues that are outlined in the strategic plan become UNA-UK's priorities for the next four years. As a small organisation with limited staff and financial resources dealing with ever-evolving global issues, it is vital that UNA-UK prioritises its work. Therefore, it is vital that UNA-UK members and branches support the Board and staff pro-actively in taking forward the issues they have identified as important, as the staff are unable to carry out substantial pieces of work on every issue.

As a grassroots movement, one of UNA-UK's strengths is that its members and supporters can take forward its policy objectives. Given its resource constraints, UNA-UK relies on its members, branches, regions and nations to undertake campaigning and advocacy work at a local level, e.g by lobbying MPs, organising events and raising awareness, to promote the policies agreed by the membership.

The UNA-UK staff will report on progress via the UNA-UK website, *New World* magazine and regular electronic newsletters. Members are invited to send updates on their activities, including reports on events and copies of letters sent to MPs, to UNA-UK Communications & Campaigns Officer Ben Donaldson on donaldson@una.org.uk or by post to UNA-UK, 3 Whitehall Court, London SW1A 2EL.

What about issues that are not covered by UNA-UK's existing policy?

Given the wide remit of the UN, it is inevitable that some issues of interest will not be covered by existing UNA-UK policy. Likewise, members may wish to take action in response to world events arising in between policy-making conferences – such as the 'Arab awakening' or drought in East Africa.

In both cases, members are encouraged to:

- 1) **Check the UNA-UK website** (or contact Ben Donaldson on donaldson@una.org.uk or 020 7766 3448 if you don't have access to the internet) to find out whether UNA-UK already has a position and/or has taken action on this issue.
- 2) **Send suggestions to UNA-UK:** if you think the issue is not being addressed, please use the policy inbox to send the staff your suggestions.

Will membership suggestions be acted on?

Yes – the staff will endeavour to act on the suggestions they receive. If your suggestion is not acted on, it is likely to be because:

- 1) The issue falls outside UNA-UK's mandate. According to UNA-UK's constitutional documents, the organisation is concerned with issues that relate to peace, development and human rights that fall under the purview of the UN. Issues that are, for example, concerned solely with British domestic policy or with other countries' foreign policy positions, will not be acted on.
- 2) The issue falls within our scope but is not a priority at present. Owing to staff and resource constraints, the Board has asked the staff to prioritise those issues set out in our strategic plans. While the staff will seek to act on as many membership suggestions as possible, it might be that they encourage members who are concerned by a particular issue to take it forward themselves. The staff will, of course, endeavour to support those members with resources and advice, wherever possible.
- 3) The action proposed does not take into account recent developments or is inconsistent with the UN's formal positions.