



newsletter

of the Maine Chapter
of the United Nations Association



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RALPH BUNCHE SYMPOSIUM - OCTOBER 25, 2003

The United Nations Association, Maine chapter, plans to sponsor an event commemorating the Ralph Bunche Centennial on the occasion of UN Day, 2003. The event, a symposium about Bunche the man and the international civil servant, will be held on Saturday October 25th from 2:00 to 4:00 PM in the First Universalist Church in Yarmouth and will be co-sponsored by the Church.

Dr. Ralph Bunche was born on August 7th, 1903. The centennial of his birth will be celebrated across the country under the aegis of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies and the City University of New York.

All members of the United Nations Association of Maine and of the First Universalist Church are invited to participate in the event. Participants in African-American studies programs in Maine colleges and universities and members of the NAACP, Maine Chapter, are also invited to attend.

Discussion at the symposium will be led by two retired senior UN officials who worked with Dr. Bunche in various UN peace-keeping activities, Messrs. John Olver and UNA-Maine board member Bruce Stedman. They will be joined by Gerald E. Talbot, a student of African American history in Maine and the first black to be elected to the Maine State Legislature. Brief bio-summaries of the panelists are below.

Refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the symposium. Interested members of the general public will be welcome.

UNA MEMBERS - MARK THE DATE AND PLAN TO COME!

John A. Olver served in the UN Secretariat from 1946 in various administrative posts of increasing responsibility at headquarters, in Geneva and Rome. He joined the UNDP in 1968 as Director of Finance and retired in 1980 with the rank of Assistant Secretary General. During his UN service, Olver also served as Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations Emergency Force in the Gaza Strip (1957) and in a similar post in the United Nations Operation in the Congo (1960). In those two peace-keeping assignments he worked closely with Dr. Bunche. Following retirement, at the request of the UNDP Administrator and with the agreement of the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, Olver planned, established and managed a newly-authorized UNDP program of assistance to the Palestinian people which today is the largest external source of development assistance to the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

R. Bruce Stedman followed a similar career path, working in the UN Secretariat and Headquarters (apart from assignments to peace-keeping missions) from 1946 to 1968, serving in central administrative services, the UN Technical Assistance Board and the UN Development Program. He was assigned as UNDP Resident Representative in Kenya in 1968, transferred to Ethiopia in 1973 as Resident Representative and Regional Representative of UNDP and then returned to Nairobi to the post of Deputy Executive Director of the UN Environment Program in 1975, retiring from the service in 1977 with the rank of Assistant Secretary General. Stedman's contacts with Dr. Bunche began in 1948, when he served as administrative officer on the Mission of the Mediator on Palestine. Bunche was Deputy Mediator and, following the assassination of Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, became Mediator. Stedman succeeded Olver as CAO in the Gaza Strip in 1957 and in 1958 was assigned briefly as CAO of the UN Mission to Jordan, assignments which were carried out under Bunche's oversight.

Gerald E. Talbot, a native of Maine, attended high school in Bangor, served in the US Army and worked for Guy Gannett Publishing as printing compositor on the Portland Press Herald, until he retired. Talbot never met Ralph Bunche but they shared similar ideals and goals, both being strong advocates for civil and human rights and against race discrimination in the United States. He participated in the March on Washington in 1963, served as president of the Portland branch of the Maine NAACP for three separate two-year terms, was a member of the Governor's Task Force on Human Rights in 1968 and with the US Commission on Human Rights. Talbot was elected to the Maine State House of Representatives in 1972 and served three terms. He was the first black legislator in the state's history. He accumulated a large collection of documents and memorabilia relating to the African American Experience and the history of his own family whose roots in Maine go back to the 1700s, which formed the basis of the African American Collection at the University of Southern Maine. Talbot received the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from the University of Southern Maine in 1995. He is presently co-authoring with Harriet Price a book on black history in the State of Maine.

Directions to the First Universalist Church of Yarmouth

From the north or south, drive on I-95 to exit 16; bear right onto Route 1 north. At the first traffic light (near the Mobil station) turn right onto Portland Street and after several blocks you will be facing the church. Turn left and then right into the parking lot. From the west, drive east on Route 115, which becomes Main Street in Yarmouth. Drive past the Town Hall, Library and North Yarmouth Academy and you will see the church on your left.

UNITED NATIONS ALIVE

By Thurston Holt

In Washington D.C. early on the morning of June 26, en route to the UNA-USA Day on Capitol Hill, I heard over the taxi radio the news of an Israeli-Palestinian cease fire. Good omen.

I met with US Rep. Tom Allen, Senator Susan Collins' legislative aide, Jane Alonso, and Senator Olympia Snowe's legislative aide, Chris Ingram. They were cordial and pro-UN. We talked about the fact that after 19 years of absence the United States is rejoining UNESCO (the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), a major body, as soon as Congress appropriates the needed \$71.4 million. We discussed continuing support for the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and the US International Leadership Act.

This Act seeks to strengthen US expertise in multilateral diplomacy, establish a democracy caucus at the UN, and deny the chairmanship of any UN body to countries subject to UN Security Council sanctions or determined by the US Department of State to be sponsors of terrorism. UNA-USA did not have a position on the Leadership Act but to me the denial provision is an interference with the UN.

We rejoiced that US arrears are paid up. I urged that US dues, now 23 percent of UN operations and 27 percent of UN peacekeeping, be paid — in contrast to the past—on time.

After the meetings, I wandered down a hall in the Russell Senate Office Building, looking for an exit. A young man helped me. When I reached the street and paused, there at my left was the same young man, lighting up a cigarette. He introduced himself as Tony Correale. We chatted. It turned out he had been Secretary-General of a Model UN at New England College in Henniker NH, where he is a student. Tony has been to a Model UN in Switzerland.

I returned to the Capital Hilton for the opening of the two-day Forum on the United Nations and two-day UNA-USA Biennial Convention that was to follow. In recent years a forum has been held only in 1989

and 1994, so this was big, attended by more than 500. Speakers and panelists were from academe, the UN, US Department of State, UNA-USA, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media, businesses and foreign embassies.

Where do we go from here and how can we improve? was the forum spirit, in accord with what Secretary-General Kofi Annan had said after the UN Security Council did not prevail during the Iraqi crisis: "It's too late for pessimism."

At the banquet that first evening, US Ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, told us there is now a substantial harmony of values between the US and the UN. He was proud of how the UN in the winter of 2001 overcame a famine scare in Afghanistan. He quoted Secretary of State Colin Powell: "HIV/AIDS is the greatest challenge in the world." Thirty million Africans have HIV.

After his speech, the ambassador hung around talking to a handful of us. He told us his daughter had been a Seeds of Peace counselor and is now an intern in Zambia for the World Food Program. At the end of about 45 minutes he said, "This reminds me of my first post: Saigon. We'd work about 11 hours, turn on TV for the news, critique the Vietnam War for two or three hours, then do the same thing the next day and the day after that."

The forum breakout sessions were tantalizing because I had so many from which to choose. Here is what fascinated me:

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, South Africa, was reportedly messy at times, but participants were so restless about implementing the 1992 Rio Earth Summit goals and the Millennium Development Goals (attached) that they established 20 partnerships of governments, international organizations, businesses and NGOs to carry out the goals. They formed the Commission on Development to coordinate the partnerships, monitor progress and report results. The March 2003 Kyoto Water Conference was an implementation milestone.

The Ted Turner United Nations Foundation/Better World Fund is celebrating the completion of its first five years. Funded with Ted Turner's gift of \$1 billion, it already has awarded more than \$575 million for UN efforts and established program partnerships with nearly 80 organizations outside the UN. These organizations chip in.

UN Wire is a UN Foundation jewel. It is a daily news service, www.unwire.org, providing free news about world affairs and the UN.

Panelist Andrew Strauss, professor of International Law, Widener School of Law, proposed a citizen-elected UN Assembly to balance the present UN General Assembly of nations. Thus, the UN would become bicameral. My suggestion of a second UN legislature of NGOs instead, was rejected as being undemocratic. When one of us pointed out there would probably not be enough interest among world civilian voters, the professor countered that there is widespread civilian interest in the campaigns for election to the European Union Parliament.

Idriss Jazairy, Ambassador of Algeria to the United States, was a big hit. He said to us, "I have a love affair with the UN, but I believe the UN has a split personality. Too often overwhelming power carries the day and multilateralism becomes a shell." He favors a values-driven UN that is trusted and empowered. An ideal he has: a mosaic of cultures for mutual enrichment. He ended with, "Standard weapons in our area are weapons of mass destruction."

Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, with her red hair, lime green dress and sparkling presence, addressed the luncheon that wound up the National Forum on the United Nations. She praised the UN World Health Organization (WHO): "It handled the SARS epidemic crisis with no competing for commercial advantage," she said.

Her take on HGOs was, "I would like to see more transparency. When people talk about NGOs, they sometimes speak of 'the growing power of the unelected few,' but NGOs are very valuable and the UN should defend them. I am against government financial aid to NGOs because it injures their independence."

"The UN needs civil support. In my travels I have found belief in the UN but skepticism." She concluded with, "I'm encouraged."

My favorite quote was by Jeff Laurenti, executive director Policy Studies, UNA-USA: "the UN has a crucial role in the survival of four-fifths of the world."

The cab driver who took me to my Holiday Inn one evening was from Ghana. He told me he was proud of his fellow Ghanaian, Kofi Annan.

CHARLES WEITZ - AU REVOIR!

The Board of Directors sadly said goodbye to an old friend and colleague, our longest-serving director, Charles Weitz, at its meeting September 5th. Charles has served the UNA-Maine with diligence and devotion for eleven years, and was a moving force behind our successful Model UN programs, among a great many others. We give him and his lovely wife, Gretchen, our very best wishes for their new life and digs in Madison Wisconsin, where they will be near their daughter.

NEWS BITES FROM THE UN WIRE

(Editorial note: Once again we publish here a few items gleaned from the hundreds on the UN Wire, thought to be of special interest to members.)

5/23/03 Treasure hunters and indiscriminate looters continue to tear into Iraqi archaeological sites, stealing urns, statues, vases and other artifacts that often date back more than 3000 years, to the Sumer and Babylonian civilizations, the New York Times reported today.

7/16/03 The US House of Representatives voted yesterday 216-211 to block \$50 million in funding for the UNFPA (Fund for Population Activities). According to the Washington Post, yesterday's vote makes it unlikely that UNFPA will receive any money from the US government in the next fiscal year, which begins on October 1st. Last July, the Bush administration withheld \$34 million in funding that had been approved by the Congress, citing allegations that the agency supports forced abortions in China. Yet, an investigative team from the US administration went to China last year and found no evidence that UNFPA permitted or endorsed abortion or forced sterilization.

8/14/03 The United Nations is wrongly viewed by some in the United States as irrelevant, bureaucratic and a threat to US sovereignty, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright writes in the September-October issue of Foreign Policy. "The United Nations authority flows from its members; it is a servant, not master," Albright writes. It is not a bloated bureaucracy. The UN Secretariat has reduced staff by 25% in the last 25 years and spends just \$1.25 billion per year, she says, equating the sum with what the US Defense Department spends every 32 hours. "The United Nations may seem useless to the self-satisfied, narrow-minded and microhearted minority, but to most of the world's population, it remains highly relevant, indeed," she writes.

9/9/03 Secretary General Annan yesterday called for "radical reform" — in particular in the Security Council, which "must come to be broadly representative of the international community as a whole and of the geopolitical realities of the contemporary world." The membership of the UN has nearly quadrupled since its inception almost 60 years ago, but the Council's structure, consisting of five permanent members with veto powers and 10 rotating two-year members has remained unchanged. Serious reform, Annan said, would mean expanding its membership. "It could be an increase in permanent membership as well as in ordinary elected membership," he said.

Annan said he has an "uneasy feeling that the system is not working as it should," which is why he has urged 191 heads of state and government to attend the next session of the General Assembly for the opening debate.

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