

The United Nations Association of San Francisco

A History and Development of the Organization

Short Version

Abstract

Throughout the decades, no matter the cause or the war, the United Nations Association of San Francisco (UNA-SF) has been a space where everyday people can come together to participate in meaningful dialogue around the policy issues that affect the current times. It accomplishes its work by serving as a platform through which strategic partnerships can target systemic peaceful solutions.

San Francisco has been a beacon for organized internationalism dating back at least as early as the 1920s with the League of Nations Association (LNA). In 1945, after the rise of internationalism that swept the United States as a result of the devastation of World War I, the LNA renamed itself the American Association of the United Nations (AAUN). Then, in 1964 the AAUN changed its name to The United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA). Throughout the decades, all three Associations have had active San Francisco chapters.

Regardless of the organization's formal name, its legacy has been to work in parallel with the United Nations for the past 75 years. To understand this history, it is important to look at the timeline of the organization's development, the history leading up to the founding of the first UNA, and the United Nations Conference on International Organization. Then, a discussion about the work of the UNA-SF Chapter will commence through the lens of 6 themes: People, Participation, Policy, Partnership, Platform, and Peace.

Organization Timeline of Development

(1914-1918) World War I	(1939-1945) World War II		
		(1920-1946) League of Nations	(1945-present) United Nations
		(1923-1945) League of Nations Association	(1943-1945) United Nations Association
		(1945-1964) American Association for the United Nations	(1964-present) United Nations Association of the USA

The Nomenclature “United Nations Association” has existed in 3 forms:

- 1) *(1943-1945) United Nations Association:* A partisan taxable organization based out of New York with local chapters, namely in San Francisco
- 2) *(1945-1964) United Nations Association:* The informal name of the American Association for the United Nations
- 3) *(1964- present) The United Nations Association of the United States*

Before the United Nations (1920-1945)

As many of us know, the United Nations (the International Organization) was preceded by the first worldwide intergovernmental organization¹, the League of Nations in 1920. However, both the League of Nations and the United Nations were birthed from civil society associations including but not limited to the League of Nations Association and the United Nations Association. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, both had local chapters as early as 1925

¹ "League of Nations," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations.

and 1943 respectively. The LNA and UNA worked in parallel between 1943 and 1945, hence their eventual merger.

It was in 1943 that the first United Nations Association was founded in New York as a taxable partisan organization that could uniquely advocate for specific bills and candidates, unlike its predecessor, the LNA.² It played a critical role in the founding of the United Nations with its campaigns as well as providing the experimental grounds where President FDR and civil society leader Clark Eichelberger tested the theory and practice of what a formal international organization could look like.

Furthermore, during this time the San Francisco Chapter of this United Nations Association was active in hosting a Bill of Right Anniversary Luncheon at the Palace Hotel, where the UNA was represented. The Palace Hotel would again be visited in 1944. This time, by Clark Eichelberger: the most prominent champion of the LNA, UNA, AAUN, and UN Charter. Eichelberger frequented San Francisco as the West Coast hub of international activity.

Moreover, during this time the UNA was a vehicle for supporters of this international organization for peace, to make their voices heard. The San Francisco Chapter garnered local public support for these endeavors as a citizen's movement for internationalism. These sentiments would serve as the foundation for all of its future work and organizational iterations. As UNA historian and author of The UN Association-USA: A Little Known History of Advocacy and Action states, "The real work in formulating that body was just beginning"³ and San Francisco would become the host for the formal transition from a theoretical body to a practical institution.

² James Wurst, *The Un Association of the USA: A Little Known History of Advocacy and Action* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2016). Pg 13

³ Ibid. Pg13-14

The United Nations Conference on International Organization

San Francisco

In 2015, during the 70th Anniversary Celebration of the signing of the UN Charter, San Francisco Chronicle, author Stephen Schlesinger wrote a distinguished article about the history of why San Francisco was chosen for the conference. In his piece, “San Francisco Left Its Mark on the World With Role in Birth of United Nations” he writes, because of the city’s ‘international elan’, proximity to Asian and Europe, as well as its picturesque cityscape and seascape, it was selected as the perfect location for such a momentous undertaking.⁴ The excitement, challenges, triumphs, and outcomes of this glorious occasion are made palpable with Schlesinger’s enchanting literary artistry.

The American Association for the United Nations (1945-1964)

On January 27th1945 the League of Nations Association (housed with the United Nations Association at the International Centers) renamed itself the American Association for the United Nations to garner support around the monolith that was becoming the United Nations⁵. At the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in Georgetown, Washington D.C. in February of 1945, the AAUN board set out its priorities for the San Francisco Conference. The priorities were as follows:

- 1. To make the Charter and the activities of the United Nations known and understood by the people of the United States.*
- 2. To advocate and support those policies by our Government which will make United States membership effective in the United Nations.*
- 3. To study the means by which the United Nations can be strengthened to meet the needs of an ever-changing world.*

⁴ Stephen Schlesinger, "San Francisco Left Its Mark on the World with Role in Birth of United Nations," San Francisco Chronicle, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/article/San-Francisco-the-birthplace-of-the-United-6336655.php>.

⁵ Wurst. Pg 19

4. *To cooperate with UN associations in other countries in building a strong public opinion in support of the United Nations.*⁶

The AAUN would be represented by Clark Eichelberger at the Conference as an advocate for the inclusion of education, human rights, and trusteeship into the Charter.⁷ After the Conference, the AAUN would continue its work well into the 1960s with the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt as a champion for the national expansion as well as inclusion of local chapters and divisions, such as San Francisco.

An International Procession (Summer, 1945)

The San Francisco Conference, formally known as the United Nations Conference on International Organization, commenced on April 25th, 1945 and ended on June 26th with the “unanimous adoption of the UN Charter”.⁸ FDR had planned to attend the San Francisco Conference; in his last days, it was one of his top priorities. On April 12th, 1945 President FDR died and President Harry Truman stepped into office just a few days later. “Within his first hour as president, he had ordered the San Francisco Conference to proceed”.⁹

The two-month-long conference hosted dignitaries from around the world as well as domestic representatives. The members of civil society, considered consultants, represented an “impressive cross-section of US political, social, and economic life, including”.¹⁰

- *The American Legion*
- *The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen*
- *The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America*
- *The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*
- *The National Council of Jewish Women*
- *National Lawyers Guild*

⁶ Ibid. Pg 23

⁷ Ibid. Pg 23

⁸ Ibid. Pg 25

⁹ Ibid. Pg 21

¹⁰ Ibid. Pg 22

- *Southern Baptist Convention*
- *World Government Association*
- *The YMCA*

The groups filled roles of consultants during the conference and were made up of representatives from all over the world and were treated equally with other country representatives. San Francisco and its inhabitants had much to be proud of during the summer of 1945 and the city has never been forgotten for its hospitality and contribution to the founding of the United Nations. Though the involvement of the San Francisco Chapter in the Conference is not explicit, it was at the very least a launch point for the well-documented work of the AAUN/UNA-USA San Francisco Chapters that is to follow.

The United Nations Association of the USA (1964-present)

The work and leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt grew the organization's membership and called for a "Plan of Work" across the nation that would characterize the later history of the AAUN.¹¹ Following the UN Charter and during Roosevelt's work in 1954, the Articles of Incorporation of the San Francisco Chapter of the American Association for the United Nations, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization were submitted. They stated:

The specific and primary purpose for which the corporation is formed is, through educational processes, to study the fundamental basis of permanent peace and the machinery necessary for the development of this peace and, through the use of educational activities, to keep the [members of the Association and the] American people informed of United States cooperation in official international organizations... and informed of developments and activities within the United Nations and United States policy relating thereto.¹²

¹¹ Ibid. Pg 69 & 75

¹² "Articles of Incorporation of San Francisco Chapter of the American Association for the United Nations," ed. State of California (California: Office of the Secretary of State, 1954). Pg 1

It was affirmed by 30 original signatory members and submitted to both the State of California and City/County of San Francisco on the 31st of August.

According to the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, housed at the George Washington University, "In 1964, the American Association for the United Nations merged with the U.S. Committee for the United Nations to create a new organization known as the United Nations Association of the United States of America [UNA-USA]".¹³ To this day, the United Nations Association of San Francisco has functioned under its Articles of Incorporation to guide its activities and work. UNA-USA is a project of the Better World Fund and works in collaboration with the UN Foundation.

People. Participation. Partnership. Policy. Platform. Peace.

A Survey of 75 Years of History

People.

Peoples, who compose civil society, have influenced the creation of and current decision-making of the UN. Its decision-makers are permanent representatives of member nations who are bound by the UN Charter to protect the rights of peoples, including indigenous peoples.¹⁴ The people of the United Nations Association have carried its legacy throughout history into what the UNA-SF is today. Though we may never know all of the members that belonged to the UNA-SF over the past 75 years, the UNA-SF is certainly a place where civil society can come together and share common goals about international cooperation. Its current board consists of intergenerational, ethnically diverse, and gender diverse individual members including first-generation immigrants as well as leaders of diasporas. Furthermore, it embodies the practice of cross-cultural communication as a core value of the UN.

¹³ "American Association for the United Nations," The George Washington University, <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/aaun.cfm>.

¹⁴ "Charter of the United Nations," United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

The people who came to the forefront during the first critical decade after the UN Charter signing were members or leaders within the AAUN-SF, such as the Who's Who of San Francisco, especially women socialites¹⁵, doctors¹⁶, lawyers¹⁷, writers¹⁸, academics¹⁹, business leaders²⁰, and civil society proponents²¹. Alongside its members, mayors of San Francisco²², other communities' AAUN leaders²³ as well as the UN Secretary General, US Ambassadors, and other UN Officials²⁴ were consulted with and hosted by the AAUN of San Francisco.

The United Nations Association appealed particularly to women and youth throughout its history. Many of the articles by the Chronicle about the United Nations Association were featured in sections of the newspaper with advertisements, pictures, and other articles that appealed to women. That and its appeal to youth through student-focused campaigns such as sponsored pilgrimages, essay contests, Model UN program, and Young Professionals Program support the idea that the UNA-SF has been a grassroots civil society movement fostering inclusion of all people regardless of identity.²⁵

Participation.

The participation of peoples that supported and worked with the UNA-SF is the backbone of its strength. Over the past 75 years the UNA-SF has sponsored hundreds of informational and educational events, international conferences, programs and meetings, flower festivals, dialogues and panel discussions, professional seminars, benefit concerts, fashion events, art exhibitions, film festivals, dance performances, luncheons and dinners, membership drives, academic

¹⁵ "Around Town," *Mill Valley Record*, March 14 1946.

¹⁶ "Regional, Local Un Groups Name Officers," *SF Chronicle* 1959.

¹⁷ "Bar Chief to Speak Here Disputes Injuries," *SF Chronicle*, Jan 24th 1956. & "Brinton in Race for Assembly," *SF Chronicle*, 1957 Dec 13 1957.

¹⁸ "Optimists Hear Report by Un Man," *Mill Valley Record*, October 14 1954.

¹⁹ "Uc's Monroe E. Deutsch Dies at 76," *SF Chronicle*, October 22 1955.

²⁰ Frances Moffat, "Who's Who," *ibid.* 1971.

²¹ "Anne Breyer Dies at 62," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 30 1971.

²² "Mayor Get \$500 to Aid Hungarians," *SF Chronicle*, Nov 20 1956. & "United Nations," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 28 1964.

²³ "Reception Set for Visitor from Australia," *SF Chronicle*, October 27 1956.

²⁴ "Ambassador's Visit," *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 1 1964. ; "Un Refugee Chief: Plight of 40,000 Dps Told," *SF Chronicle*, Oct 16 1957. ; "Who's Who," *ibid.* 1971.

²⁵ "A Goals That's Never Reached," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 18 1970.

trainings, cocktail parties, young professional mentorship programs, collective narrative Global Cafés, and UN (Day/Week) anniversary celebrations – as just a few memorable occasions. In 2003 the United Nations Association was party to the working groups that renovated the UN Plaza Civic Center.²⁶

These participatory events in addition to continuous board meetings to coordinate such efforts make up the bulk of the work the UNA-SF as it continues to the present day. San Franciscans participated with the United Nations Association over time because of the city's rich history of advocacy and education around issues that are of importance to everyday people. The root policies of the LNA and UNA revolve around the creation of a global body of governance that would prevent the next large-scale global conflict such as the first two World Wars. However, the conflicts that subsequent generations have had to face grow complexity every day. Nevertheless, members of the United Nations Association of San Francisco come together in person at the War Memorial Veterans Building and online via social media platforms to discuss, think critically, and grapple with these issues. The San Francisco War Memorial Veterans Building is where the UN Charter was signed and henceforth the birthplace of the United Nations.

Policy.

Over the past 75 years, the UNA-SF has educated the public on issues that are of critical importance to international peace. For example, The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, US leadership and effective membership in the UN, the role citizens can play in foreign policy, funding for the UN, instituting Alcatraz as a peace memorial, taking a stand against the Vietnam War, world disarmament during the Cold War, US-Cuba relations, the funding of peacekeeping operations, the status of women in the third world, human rights in Bosnia and Syria, racism and conflict, nuclear nonproliferation, conserving the agricultural base, environmentalism, breaking the cycle of global hunger, the US healthcare system, African solutions to African problems,

²⁶ ROMA Design Group and the San Francisco Department of Public Works, "Gateway to the Civic Center: United Nations Plaza Remocations," in *Presentation of Findings* (San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Board of Supervisors' UN Plaza Working Group, 2003).

gentrification, school shootings, immigration, human trafficking, integration of refugees, and homelessness – to name a few. It is evident from the breadth and depth of these policy issues that the UNA-SF is courageously committed to stimulating ideas for international peace.

Partnerships.

The UNA has embraced partnerships as shown through the name changes and mergers that took place in 1920, 1945, and 1964. The first UNA folded into a coalition of organizations housed at International Centers in New York and San Francisco. These partnerships held the center for internationalism even when institutions were malleable. Some of the organizations that the UNA-SF has partnered with for its numerous activities conducted over its lifetime including but, not limited to: The American Association of University Women San Francisco Bay Branch, The Red Cross, League of Women Voters, San Francisco Consular Corps, International Rescue Committee, Council in American Islamic Relations, National Council of Jewish Women, USNC-UN Women of the San Francisco Bay Area, UNEP, UNHCHR, University of California Berkeley Law School Human Rights Center, American Association of Junior Leagues International, San Francisco State University Gen UN, IGMUN, American Legion Post 315, Grace Cathedral, United Religions Initiative, The Living New Deal Organization, Nobel Peace Prize Committee, Global Forum for the Survival of Humanity, Rotary, League of Women Voters, Kiwanis Club, YWCA, Masonic Temple, First Unitarian Church, UNA Chapters: (San Diego, Marin County, Beverley Hills, Monterey Bay, Mid Peninsula, and Sonoma County) and various agencies and commissions of the city and country of San Francisco, universities, tech companies, and student groups.

In recent years, the UNA-SF's inarguable purpose has been to promote partnerships around achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Each of its programs and conferences is brought to the public by the proactive collaboration of similarly minded people and entities. The list is long for the organizations that have partnered with the UNA-SF but the crux of the issues stands; that cooperation on a local, national, or international level fosters inclusion, equality,

human rights, and peace.

Platform.

With partnering comes strength, and with the support of individuals who are willing to show up and gather around issues that affect them, a platform emerges. That is, the United Nations Association has always been a platform for thought leaders and likeminded individuals to come together and strengthen their convictions through organizing, educating, and advocating.

The current platform of the UNA-SF aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals delineated by the United Nation in 2015 – to conglomerate worldwide cooperation for these global goals.²⁷ With its ongoing series of education and advocacy programs, the UNA-SF puts the Sustainable Development Goals front and center. Most notably, it brings women to the negotiating table for initiatives from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and continues to make the protection of the universal rights of children a priority. It emphasizes climate action to prevent the sixth extinction, promotes human rights wherever questions are raised about basic human needs and inalienability, and elevates rule of law to facilitate equality, justice, and transparency.

Peace.

The UNA-SF, as the local chapter that shares the birthplace of the United Nations, strives to be a model chapter for the Bay Area and the nation. Providing leadership around the organization of civil society for inclusive peace, its mission is to:

Inform, inspire and mobilize people who live in the United States to support the principles and vital work of the United Nations and to strengthen the United Nations system. As a Chapter of UNA-USA, UNA-SF educates people within its jurisdiction about the invaluable work of the United Nations, raises funds locally, and carries out local education and advocacy activities related to the United Nations. Moreover, UNA-SF

²⁷ Sustainable Development Goals; Wikipedia

*recruits, retains, and engages members within its geographic jurisdiction in order to build a strong constituency of UN supporters.*²⁸

It has not faltered from this platform of peace through the participation of peoples and partnerships around policies that affect contemporary society.

The passion of the founders of the UNA-SF, as well as its predecessors and the United Nations, is founded in the desire to outlaw war through multilateral agreements. Today, through the Sustainable Development Goals, the UNA-SF is a leader on the West Coast as a hub of international activity, which has characterized the city for over a century. It works diligently to bring peoples together around its 17 Sustainable Development Goals that encompass the greatest global peace strategies of the millennium. To the UN and the UNA-SF, peace will come once there is no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, significantly reduced inequality, responsible consumption and production, climate action, respect for life below water as well as life on land, justice, strong institutions, and most importantly partnership for these goals. The UNA SF will continue to work tirelessly, as it has always done, to achieve these core principles.

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²⁸ UNA SF Bylaws

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