

**CELEBRATING THE 54TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
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This Oct. 24, the world will commemorate the 54th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. As a Non-governmental Organization (NGO), the United Nations Association (UNA)–USA annually commemorates this auspicious occasion. Here in Hawaii, as one of 177 UNA–USA chapters nationwide, we will join in this celebration. (Note: the UNA–USA is the nation’s largest foreign policy organization, building public support for constructive leadership in a more effective United Nations.)

In recognition of the unprecedented aging of populations taking place throughout the world and the challenges it poses to communities at local, regional and global levels, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2000 as the “International Year of Older Persons.” Building on the theme of “a society for all ages,” the year has been dedicated to work to advance the United Nations Principles for Older Persons adopted by the Assembly in 1991: Independence, Participation, Care, Self-fulfillment and Dignity.

The UNA hosted its annual U.N. Day celebration in New York, where the contribution of Astronaut John Glenn as a consummate “older American” embodying the highest principles of older persons was honored and recognized. I was privileged to share our ALOHA spirit with Astronaut Glenn by presenting him with a lei from Hawaii. It brought a big smile and warm response. He said, “Hawaii is very beautiful from out in space.”

In September, I participated in my first United Nations NGO meeting—a gathering of over 700 NGOs from all over the world to hear from the many experts that make up the United Nations and its agencies. We made new friends among the NGOs and shared information. The assembly was opened with addresses from by Secretary General Kofi Annan and Queen Noor of Jordan.

As an elected member of the UNA–USA’s national regional steering committee at the National Headquarters in New York, I participate in goal setting for the national organization, where I am privileged to work with dedicated leaders who volunteer like myself to further the cause of the United Nations. Though not a perfect organization, the United Nations stands as the only global forum for international dialogue. Sometimes it is difficult at the local level to stimulate interest in international issues because of economic and social conditions prevailing in Hawaii’s community, but I look to the inspiration of SGI President Ikeda, who annually sends a message of peace to the General Assembly! This helps me renew my commitment to work with fellow UNA members to foster the cause of the United Nations. One of our great challenges is to move the United States Congress to pay the \$1.8 billion long-standing debt to the United Nations!

This year, my division was at a crossroads with dwindling membership and participation on the board. The national director joined us for a strategic planning session and Hawaii’s UNA is on course for the 21st century!

As the century comes to a close, the United Nations has declared 2000 and beyond as the decade of the Culture of Peace, hopeful that the new millennium can bring us out of the dark and violent times that marked the 20th century. I am hopeful.