

Among Friends

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Published by the Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation
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Dear Friends,

In August I made my first visit to Palestine. I was there just over two weeks and do not come back an instant expert on "The Situation", although like many others I return shocked and angered by the horrendous denial of human rights, the violence, the aftermath of violence, the deep sense of hopelessness. But no, what I want to concentrate on here is to share with Friends across Europe and Middle East Section firstly my impressions of Quaker life and work in Ramallah, and secondly a brief reflection, celebration even, of the work of the Spirit in the "Holy Land". Jenny Foot of Lancaster Monthly Meeting was my travelling companion. You will find her account of our stay and our involvement as volunteers on page 4. I was grateful for her companionship, resilience and constant good-humour. I also want to give special thanks to all the Friends in Ramallah, and many other local people too, for the warmth of their welcome.

Right in the centre of old Ramallah is the old Meeting House, standing in a walled garden. It has been damaged and fallen into disrepair over the years. "The Investment in Hope" project is based on a bold vision to restore the building for use by Quakers and by the wider community as a centre for peace, justice and



Girls at Inash El Usra (photo by Maggie Foyer)

reconciliation. The project is supported financially by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting but there is still some way to go and Ramallah Quakers would love to feel they have the support of more Friends from Europe. When we visited we saw the gleaming new roof, a partially restored meeting room, new walls round the garden but a way to go in restoring the annex and the outdoor space. Now I have visited I can understand what a precious resource this can be. It was wonderful to stand there and imagine the building project finished and the real long-term project in full swing. With a permanent, resident membership of the meeting of only 3 or 4 people it is hard to understand where the energy is coming from, or will come from in the future, in order to sustain this project. They need all the help Friends can give.

The Quaker group may be tiny but I found the reputation of Quakers in the town to be huge by comparison. Everywhere I went I met people proud to tell me they were graduates of el Friends School. Quaker education has been available in Ramallah for over 100 years. The two schools are under the care of Friends United Meeting in the USA. Originally separate Boys and Girls Schools, nowadays they are co-educational for the full age-range from kindergarten to university entrance. The schools are of course private and tend to serve the elite. Academically they have a good reputation. They have become part of the very fabric of Ramallah and the influence of an education based

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Insert 1: Quakers Uniting in Publications
-Young People's Experience of Quakerism
(not included in UK mailing)

Insert 2: QUNO Geneva Appeal leaflet

on Quaker principles which has been provided for generations of young people should not be underestimated. Even though nowadays the majority of the teachers and pupils are Muslim and there is little which is overtly Quaker in the curriculum, I still gained the impression that, through Friends United Meeting and the Director and the way he goes about his work, the Quaker ethos remains and continues to be valued.

At a very different point in the social spectrum, The Friends Play Centre in the Ama'ari refugee Camp is equally valued. See pages 4 and 5 for more information in contributions from Jenny Foot and Violet Zaru.. The life of the play centre, like every other aspect of life in Ramallah, has been seriously disrupted by curfews etc in the last 2 years in particular, but the children come bouncing back as soon as they are able. It will be a relief to all concerned when they can move into their new premises and acquire much needed new equipment.

Engagement in the world in the Quaker name is also happening in Ramallah at a different level through American Friends Service Committee. I was not able to visit any AFSC projects during my brief stay but I met some of the workers and was impressed by what I heard both of the project work in Ramallah and further afield in the West Bank and Gaza and of the sensitive networking and peace work taking place across the Middle East. I could see that the local relationships with Quakers were important – through the Director of the Schools and the location of the office in Swift House and through occasional advice and support given by the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting. I was told by AFSC workers (some local Palestinians, some “Internationals”, and mostly not Quakers) how much they would value a closer relationship with FWCC/EMES and I hope to work on this with them over the coming months.

I don't want to over-emphasise the Quaker influence nor fail to mention the ever present sense of the presence of God in every day life in what is after all predominantly a Muslim community. We heard the call to prayer 5 times a day, starting soon after 4.00 am, and from about 3 or 4 local mosques simultaneously. Surprisingly we actually enjoyed it, even though not all the voices were mellifluous! The call always includes words which roughly translated are: God is great, God is great. Let us pray for our prophet Mohamed and all his descendants and friends



Meeting House without roof (photo by PYM)

and let us pray for the prophet Abraham and his descendants in the name of God the merciful and most compassionate..... So every time everyone is reminded to pray for all the children of Abraham ie not just Muslims but Jews and Christians too.

What I want to celebrate is the many people in Palestine and in Israel with real commitment to seeking peace: all those who recognise that ordinary people can make a difference; the Jewish people prepared to demonstrate against the building of the Security Fence; the people of all faiths and none who stand in silent vigil; those who recognise how important it is to break down the barriers, the apartheid walls, in our minds which prevent true encounter with others; the Peacemaker Circles where Muslims and Jews along with Christians, Buddhists and others sit down together to hear one another's stories, to recognise a deep common humanity and spirituality; the Sulha movement, using traditional Middle Eastern methods of reconciliation to seek the healing of the family of Abraham.

I went to the Holy Land and met God – not in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem nor in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, not in the glory and splendour of a remote deity, but in every human encounter; God in the fear and dread in the eyes of the young Israeli soldier at the check-point, in the shocking cartoons of broken hearts drawn by the anguished, orphaned Palestinian teenage girl; God in the glimmers of understanding and respect in ordinary human hearts; God in the early morning call to prayer and in the depth of Quaker worship; above all God as the source of that wonderful strength which people draw on enabling them, through all the pain and suffering, to continue to give out love and live lives of peace.

Bronwyn Harwood

Epistle from Moscow



To All Friends Everywhere:

More than thirty five people of different ages came together from various parts of the world for the gathering of Friends in a snowy suburb of Moscow from 28 - 30 October 2003 in order to deepen our understanding of the Quaker faith, and to exchange our experiences of the Testimonies.

In our first session, the Testimonies were placed in a historical context. We saw how early Friends gathered as communities seeking to live more closely with God, helping each other in the process, and how the Testimonies arose from their cumulative experience of personal and corporate faithfulness.

During the section on the Testimony to Truth, two Friends demonstrated different ways of speaking difficult truths in love. The Testimony to Peace came

alive for us when three Friends shared with us different forms of their peace witness: one Friend worked with conscientious objectors, another has worked in peace education in many cultures, and a third Friend demonstrated Russian/Chechen reconciliation through the relief of suffering. The Biblical roots of the peace testimony were read aloud both in Russian and in English.

Quotations from *Advices and Queries of Quaker Faith and Practice* and from John Woolman challenged us to examine our attitudes to discrimination and deepened our understanding of the Testimony to Equality.

In small groups we shared our spiritual stories with each other and a session on interfaith dialogue broadened our perspectives. We shared our memories of Moscow Monthly Meeting and our visions for the future of Friends in Russia.

With joy we met for worship every day and we closed each evening with a spiritual epilogue. Some of our Friends enjoyed meditative walks in the snowy woods. The tea breaks gave us an opportunity for deep conversations.

We promised not to forget each other and we ask Friends everywhere to hold us in your prayers as we struggle with the challenges of our developing community.

With love, peace and blessings, the Epistle Committee: clerks Galina Orlova and Sergei Grushko

Reminder: Trees for Africa!

Did you as a Yearly Meeting, Monthly Meeting or individual Friend already make a contribution to enable us to plant trees in Africa as compensation for the CO-2 emissions caused by our joint journey to New Zealand for the up-coming Triennial? See the previous issue of *Amongst Friends* for the full details.

So far we have received contributions from Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. Donations should be marked 'Trees for Africa' and sent to:

Quaker Hulp (NL)
Giro Account 220644
Bergen op Zoom
The Netherlands

Contact person for money transfers:

Martin Touwen (e-mail:
pnm.quakerhulpfonds@zonnet.nl)

Contact person for the project:

Kees Nieuwerth (e-mail: k.nieuwerth@wxs.nl)

For Friends in Britain, BYM is collecting contributions from individuals and Meetings through Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

Please, with a little help from our Friends....we can plant trees in Africa

Kees Nieuwerth.

Impressions of Ramallah: August 2003

Jenny Foot

First impressions: vibrancy, good humour, noise, colour. Men sitting on little stools outside their shops, talking, playing cards, drinking little plastic cups of strong black coffee, calling out: 'Where are you from? Do you know where you are going? Do you need help? You are welcome ...' Yellow taxis everywhere, taxi drivers calling out, trying to catch your eye, hooting, honking, looking for a fare. On the crowded sidewalk, women, heads covered with gracefully draped scarves and wearing the traditional long dark coat, moved quietly through the throng doing the shopping for the family, looking after the little children, balancing bags and holding babies as they went. In all that crowded and noisy throng, nobody ever bumping against another – a tangible feeling of safety and respect.

I was there having responded to an email from Jo Jaffray, asking if anyone was interested/free at short notice to take part in a pilot scheme with some of the young people in Ramallah during the summer. Jo had set up two projects: one to support the Friends Play Centre in the Ama'ari Refugee Camp and the other to work with girls aged between 6 and 18, in a girls Home. Three of us, all women, had offered our individual and differing skills, such as they were, and arrived, not knowing each other, with fairly vague and disparate ideas of what we could do and how we would do it!

In the event, we 'gelled' very quickly, and on learning that the girls in the Home run by the Ina'ash El-Uhra Society (a foundation to support the empowering of Palestinian women) wanted to learn as much English as possible, we threw all our collective knowledge of action songs, word games, fun and role plays together. We linked that with drawing and juggling and making friendship bracelets and hacky sacks – and we were in business! We worked and played, shared in the midday meal, laughed and sang with 24 lovely open, friendly, intelligent and co-operative students. Towards the end, one of the older girls asked me what I thought of them: I replied that after 28 years of teaching in a secondary school in England, I had never enjoyed working with a group more!

By the time we left the hugs and tears we shared were very real. The knowledge that these young people, open, full of fun and eager to learn, face a difficult and

uncertain future, and had already experienced too much trauma and tragedy in their lives, was for me painful and remains so – and is not to be forgotten.

The other project was with the Ama'ari Camp Play Centre. The Play Centre has had a difficult time over the last years, premises have been destroyed, much of their equipment lost or taken, and it must have taken amazing courage, love and dedication to the young children to keep it going. New premises being built by UNRWA, are promised, but who knows when that will be ready? At present the centre has two very small rooms, which had recently been broken into and toys and equipment taken, but which opens onto a small play area. The two play leaders, both local Palestinian women, care for up to 50 under 6's a day. How they do it is difficult to imagine – but they certainly need as much support as possible. The centre enables young mothers to look for morning work in Ramallah – the money is desperately needed, as there is 70% unemployment in families in the camp. We spent just three mornings with the children. We had taken playdough, which was a great success, finger puppets and paper and paints – sponge painting was really popular and I have never seen so many pictures produced so fast in my life! But when the children left at the end of the morning nobody took their paintings with them. Perhaps the now is all you can cope with when you don't understand the past and have no idea of the future? And hope is a word with little place in their young lives so far.

I have tried to put some of my experience down in words. We were only in Palestine for less than three weeks – but I find it has a place in my heart of which I am daily aware. It is not only the terrible sadness I feel that two peoples are hurting each other so much and for so long without being able to find a common humanity and respect, it is also a response to the warmth, hospitality, friendship and generosity I experienced there.

We all should hold fast to the UN's vision of a permanent settlement, the realisation of the vision of the two states of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders. Inshallah.

Some ways to support Quaker work in Ramallah

Investment in Hope

Contributions to help towards the renovation of the Meeting House as a centre for peace, justice and reconciliation can be sent to the General Secretary's office, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, Pa, 19102. Dollar cheques should be made out to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting – earmarked "Ramallah Monthly Meeting Project". Web-site; www.pym.org

Hardship Fund

EMES continues to collect money for use by Ramallah Friends quietly and without fuss as they see families or individuals with a specific need.

Friends Play Centre, Ama'ari Camp

Friends continuing support is clearly needed. Donations can be sent to the EMES Section Secretary for transfer to the Play Centre.

Friends Schools

The schools have a good web-site with an interesting discussion forum for young people anywhere to connect with students of the schools: www.palfriends.org

Friends wishing to contribute to the work of the schools can send donations to:

Brian Morphy, Executive Secretary, QuIET, Yew Tree House, Church Street, Bloxham, Banbury, OX15 4ET. E-mail: brianmorphy@onetel.net.uk

QuIET is an incorporated charity which is mainly concerned with the Friends School in Brummana in the Lebanon. It receives donations for both Brummana and Ramallah Schools. Ramallah Friends Schools urgently need support for the bursary fund.

American Friends Service Committee

AFSC has an informative web-site which will give much more information on the breadth of their work than we have been able to include here: www.afsc.org/middleeast.

Some further useful contacts/websites:

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel

Ecumenical accompaniers monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, support acts of non-violent resistance alongside local Christian and Muslim

Palestinians and Israeli peace activists, offer protection through non-violent presence, engage in public policy advocacy, and stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation. The programme is co-ordinated by the World Council of Churches and Friends should contact the WCC in their own country for further information. In Britain the programme is coordinated from Friends House in London: www.wcc-coe.org/palestine

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees: www.unrwa.org

Peacemaker Circles Israel:
www.peacemakercommunity.org

Stop the Wall campaign: www.stophthewall.org

Jewish Friends of Palestine:
www.jewishfriendspalestine.org

Bat Shalom (Israeli and Palestinian women working for peace): www.batshalom.org

Tent of Nations Project, Bethlehem:
www.tentofnations.org (opportunities for volunteers)

Extract from a letter from Violet Zarou

Dear Friends

The Friends Play Centre that serves 50 refugee children is our contribution to peace. 'I have many flowers,' he said, 'but the children are the most beautiful flowers or all.' (Oscar Wilde)

... Our aim is to serve body, mind and soul - to prepare the children to be cornerstones for peace. We pray God to make us worthy of the children we serve.

Thank you to the volunteers who came and to all the Friends in Europe and Middle East Section who continue to support us with their prayers and donations. What you have done and are still doing for the children will always, always be remembered

With love and prayers for peace

Violet Zarou

Vienna Worship Group works at 'Outreach'

For sometime the Vienna Worship Group has been pondering over how to reach out to the public in Vienna, with two intentions in mind: first, to make it known to society at large that there are ways of looking at things in our troubled world, in other ways than with threats and weapons and second to increase our numbers within the group. So the members decided to launch an 'open house' once a month and did for the first time between 6 and 9 p.m. on September 29th in our new meeting place at Stadiongasse. The weather, that evening was not exactly favorable: it was raining, grey and wet. Twenty people arrived from a variety of backgrounds: artists, singers, 'human rights' worker, International NGO workers, dog walkers who meet Jalka walking their dogs, a thinking crowd all interested in finding out about the 'people called Quakers'. We were six Quakers among twenty visitors and we answered questions put to us. There was great interest in 'getting to know' and the few of us managed to

convey to the visitors our thoughts, approach and work the Quakers do in Vienna and world wide. We acquainted them with 'corporate worship', the silence, the sense of community, and our business practices and the sense of the meeting; the possibility of direct and daily communication with God not only above us, but within us and among us. The three hours vanished in an interesting manner and at the end of the evening we had a short meeting for worship with the visitors. I went home thinking this was the best evening I have had in Vienna in all the 32 years I have been here.

Hamsa Eichler, Vienna Worship Group

Vienna Worship Group meets on the first and third Sunday of each month at: Stadiongasse 5, apt 2. Contact Jalka on 0699 88 257 099 or Hamsa and Ewald Eichler on 43 2236 22 498.

News from FWCC

At the 21st Friends World Committee for Consultation Triennial in January 2004, the Interim Committee will recommend the following Friends for appointment as General and Associate Secretaries of FWCC to take office at times to be agreed in 2004.

Nancy Irving is recommended to be General Secretary. She is a member of Olympia Monthly Meeting, North Pacific Yearly Meeting. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Lewis & Clark Law School, in the past Nancy Irving worked in organizational management and as a lawyer. She has served Friends in many ways in her local meetings: most recently as Interim Associate Secretary for FWCC Section of the Americas and staff for the FWCC Section of the Americas-sponsored Peace Conference held in January 2003 at Guilford College, North Carolina, USA.

Joseph Andugu is recommended to be Associate Secretary. He is a member of Central Yearly Meeting (Kenya) and currently worships with Friends in Nairobi. A graduate of Kenya Highland Bible College he has also studied Bible at Friends Theological College, Kaimosi, and Christian Education at Westhill College in Birmingham, England. In the past Joseph Andugu was a pastor, the Deputy Principal of Friends Theological College, and the Western Kenya Regional Coordinator for the National Council of Churches of Kenya. He is currently serving FWCC as the Executive Secretary of the Africa Section.

In the mean-time David Brindle is back in the USA and Annis Bleeke has returned to help out as interim Associate Secretary.

Learn about the UN at the UN in Geneva

**Quaker United Nations
Summer School
4-16 July 2004, Geneva**

Do you have an active interest in international affairs?

Would you like to study the UN at first hand?

Do you want to meet people from all over the world?

Are you aged 20-26?

Yes?... Then write today for an application pack to:

Helen Bradford (QUNSS),
Friends House, Euston Rd, London, NW1 2BJ, UK.
Email: helenb@quaker.org.uk

Deadline for applications Monday 15th March 2004

Intern Opportunities at the Quaker UN Office - New York

The Quaker UN Office funds two Program Assistants (PAs) each year to serve from September through August. These are entry-level positions for college graduates who are interested in international affairs and the UN, and who have a commitment to Friends (Quaker) principles of peace, non-violence, and equality. The positions provide those individuals selected with an informal extension to their education in international issues, while they assist other QUNO staff with program and administrative tasks. This is a year for first-hand observation of international organizations and the study of issues on the multilateral agenda. Graduates of our Program report it has been a valuable experience, applicable to their subsequent life work.

Program Assistants receive a subsistence grant to cover accommodations, food, and miscellaneous expenses. The current rate is \$16,810 (US) per year

The deadline for the return of both the application and the references is February 06, 2004. Applications received after this date will not be eligible for consideration.

How to apply: candidates may request the application package and reference forms from the QUNO office by email or letter. Details are also available on the website.

Quaker United Nations Office, 777 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017 Phone: (212) 682-2745 Fax: (212) 983-0034
quony@afsc.org & http://www.quno.org

EMEYF Spring Gathering 2004 France Invitation



Peeling an Onion to Build a Community

European and Middle Eastern Young Friends Spring Gathering, 4-10 April 2004 Brittany, France

How does your identity fit with your community? How can we communicate and overcome conflict? Come to a beautiful part of France and enjoy exploring these issues in many different ways. Young Friends over 18 years old. Children under 5 welcome, childcare available.

For more information contact:
Judith Kirton-Darling, rue des Francs 53, B-1040
Brussels - judithkirtondarling@hotmail.com
Apply Now

Junior Yearly Meeting 2004

Junior Yearly meeting is an annual Quaker event for 16 - 18 year olds in Britain, which is held over the period of five days from the 14th - 18th April at Royal Russell School in Croydon, Surrey. It is organised and run by young people, supported by a team of over twenties. The event enables young Quakers to convene within a trusting and safe environment. It is a chance to meet others between the ages of 16 and 18, and to strengthen ones identity as a Quaker.

Next year's theme is "It's not fair!" - exploring justice in our daily lives and the wider world. What's happening? Do we care? And what can be done?"

IN 2004 there will be up to 4 half-price places available

to young people attending JYM from mainland Europe. The deadline for nominations is Friday 28th November 2003. After 31st December, places cannot be guaranteed.

Do please get in touch if you have young people aged 16 - 18 years, who you feel would benefit from such an event.

Contact: Children & Young People's Section, Quaker Life, Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ, email: Janetf@quaker.org.uk, tel: 020 7663 1013 or fax 020 7663 1070 as soon as possible for an application form.



Quaker Youth Baltic Friends Meeting 2004 Pilgrimage 2004

England, The Netherlands &
Northern Germany
16 July - 14 August 2004
For Young Friends 16-18 at
the time of the pilgrimage

The Pilgrimage will trace some of George Fox's journey in Northern Europe. It comprises 14 young Friends from the Section of the Americas and 14 from Europe & the Middle East and two adult facilitators from each section.

Applications are now open for Young Friends who would like to join the pilgrimage and also for leaders who must have experience with working with young people.

Cost approximately GBP 600. Closing date for applications 5 January 2004. For more information including an application form please contact:

Richard Waldmeyer, 60 Clifton Avenue Hartlepool
TS26 9QW England Tel +44 (0)1429 235046
e-mail waldmeyer@ntlworld.com



Quaker Council for European Affairs

QCEA - Study Tour to Brussels and Luxembourg 3rd - 11th April 2004 If you are excited, interested or left cold (?) by the idea of Europe and the European Union then now is the time to come to Brussels and Luxembourg to see how it all works. Learn about, discuss and reflect on what Europe means to you. Our study tour will include visits to the Parliament, Commission, Council of the European Union, NATO; European Court of Justice; meetings with MEPs; NGOs. You will learn about the issues we Quakers work on: peace-building, economic justice, human rights and governance as well as many other issues at stake in tomorrow's Europe. The study tour cost will be finalized very soon. We would like to know whether **You** will be participating as soon as possible. Bursaries may be available. If you would like to know more please contact: Study Tours Quaker Council for European Affairs: Quaker House, Square Ambiorix 50, Brussels B-1000, Belgium studytours@qcea.org The Application form will be posted on our website very soon. Check www.quaker.org/qcea

The next Baltic Meeting is due to take place in Nida Lithuania, 16 – 20 September 2004. The theme will be: **Quakers East and West**

We need to know more about each other, and to inspire and be inspired. Political and material conditions in East Europe are often sad, but spiritually there is a strong religious feeling which will be good to meet and answer. Nida is a lovely place in a fine and not remote country, situated on the Kursk Lagoon. The accommodation is in traditional Lithuanian-style forest villas. The famous German writer Thomas Mann had his summer residence there.

The meeting is being arranged for the East by Lithuanian Friends. They also aim to introduce us to the district and its culture. QCEA will be represented. The working language will be English. Prices for participation cannot be precisely known until early 2004. Participants should make their own travel arrangements.

Contact for Friends in the West: Hans Aaen, Engtoftevej 25, DK-3520 Farum, Denmark. Email: hans.aaen@teliamail.dk

Contact for Friends in the East: Algimantas Rekllys, Rimvydo st. 13-28 Kaunas 3028, Lithuania. e-mail: jalga@pikcomp.lt or rekllys@hotmail.com

Among Friends is the newsletter of Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation.

Also available at:

<http://www.quaker.org/fwcc/EMES>

We want **Among Friends** to reflect the diversity of Quaker life and experience across the Section and welcome articles, photos and news of forthcoming events.

Contributions towards the costs of production are also welcome.

Deadline for **Among Friends** 94: 1 March 2004.