

Among Friends

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A year of COVID-19 and EMES

Whilst editing this edition of Among Friends I have been thinking back over the past 12 months. This time last year I was preparing for an EMES executive committee meeting in Cambridge; which turned out to be the last time I travelled by train and met with a group of people (who weren't my family) indoors without wearing a mask. We knew that something big was going to happen, with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in Europe and the Middle East, but had no idea that it would mean all yearly meetings would either be cancelled or held online in 2020 and that most would suffer the same fate in 2021.

And now I'm preparing again for a meeting of the EMES executive committee which is of course online - where else would it be? It feels perfectly normal to be preparing to spend the weekend sitting at my dining room table meeting with Friends from around the Section. I will be doing this in the mornings and afternoons this weekend, and then in the evenings I will be attending some sessions of the FWCC Section of the Americas section gathering. What a bonus it is to be able to attend this meeting!

The EMES annual meeting will also be online again this year - see page 2 for more details. I look forward to seeing some of you there. Last year we felt like trailblazers at our annual meeting, this year we are just doing what everyone does, although will be trying hard to make it feel like an EMES event with all the parts of an annual meeting. EMES is about bringing people together and helping them connect on common themes such as their work for



Michael Eccles Photo: Michael Eccles

peace and justice or with children and young people in their meetings. We also do our best to support Friends who are isolated or new to Quakerism. In some ways the pandemic has made this work easier. We now run several regular online meetings and gatherings each month. In the summer we began monthly sessions for the Peace & Service Consultation and in the autumn we experimented with a monthly gathering of EMES Representatives and Roleholders; which continues in 2021. These have drawn good numbers of Friends from all around the Section. Later on in December we held an online gathering for Young Friends aged 14-18; to our joy twelve young people from six countries came along. We are now running the EMES Youthgroup on a monthly basis too. You can read more about all of these gatherings on page 2.

However, we do of course look forward to meeting again in person in the not too distant future, but perhaps with a higher awareness of what a privilege it is and what the environmental consequences are.

Michael Eccles, Secretary, FWCC EMES

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EMES News

EMES Annual Meeting online again in 2021

The EMES executive committee took the decision in January that the EMES annual meeting will be held online again in 2021. The theme will be:

And truth flourishes as the rose, and the lilies do grow among the thorns... for the seed Christ is over all (George Fox, 1663):

Discerning how we rebuild and grow with hope

We will of course miss the chance to hug Friends and to have conversations in the lunch queue or in the late hours of the day. However there are benefits to holding the gathering online again; it can be larger and more diverse to include Friends who wouldn't have been able to travel and of course the carbon footprint of an online gathering, although not zero, is considerably smaller than an in person gathering.

Registrations are now open on the EMES website here: fwccemes.org/calendar/emes-annual-meeting-2021

All being well we hope to meet in Paris next May for the 2022 annual meeting.

EMES Peace & Service Consultation monthly gatherings

Since last summer we have been holding monthly online gatherings of the EMES Peace & Service Consultation, in addition to the Consultation weekend in November last year, held online. These are open to anyone involved with this work.

Read more about this work on our website here:

fwccemes.org/emes/peace-and-service-consultation



EMES connects



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

EMES Representatives & Roleholders gatherings

Since October last year we have been holding monthly online gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders. These gatherings give Friends a chance to get to know each other better and to learn more about Quaker activities around the Section. We worship together and then consider a theme in small groups.

We hope that through these gatherings Friends involved in the work of EMES will feel more closely connected with each other and with EMES.

Contact Michael Eccles (michael@fwccemes.org) for more information about these gatherings.

EMES launches a Youthgroup

In December 2020 EMES held an online gathering for 14-18 year olds from around the Section. Since then the youth group has met three more times and plans to meet monthly during 2021. Around 15 Young Friends attend each session and we have had participants from six different countries.

Read more about this work on page 5 and on our website here:

fwccemes.org/emes/quaker-youth-programmes

EMES at the FWCC

Section of the Americas Meeting

In March 2021 the FWCC Section of the Americas held its section meeting online. EMES' Clerk, Executive Secretary and Assistant Secretary took the opportunity to join parts of this gathering, held over a week. We hope that this experience will help in the planning of our online annual meeting later this year.

Exploring the overlaps between Quakerism, Buddhism and Islam: Q & A Discussion by Malcolm Brown

Kirsten Hills, Quakers in Florence, writes:

For each Quaker in the world there are at least 1,000 Buddhists and 3,000 Muslims. When we consider the difficulty we can at times have as Quakers in finding agreement, imagine the difficulty faced by the larger faiths.

Last month Quakers in Florence hosted our first discussion via Zoom. It was held by our Friend and member Malcolm Brown, who used to be a senior lecturer in the sociology of religion.

Our Meeting in Florence started just two years ago and while we are a small group, we have a range of personalities, life experiences, career paths and nationalities. It has been a delight getting to know one another better, despite spending half of our existence meeting online rather than in-person. Malcolm is one member who has a fascinating life and career, which is why he was asked to conduct the first discussion.

Born in Scotland, Malcolm spent 20 years in academia and lectured in the sociology of religion in England, New Zealand and Australia. His PhD examined how Islam is misrepresented in Western discourses and he published other papers examining racism, social enterprise and international development. Malcolm has been in Tuscany since 2018, studying at the well-respected Lama Tzong Khapa Institute, known for its study programmes on Tibetan Buddhist philosophy.

Malcolm started the discussion by outlining the overlaps between Quakerism and the two faiths Buddhism and Islam. Using a series of power-point presentations, his presentation picked key quotations from the Qur'an and drew parallels with Quaker Faith and Practice. One example was *The true servants of God are those who walk humbly on the earth and, when molested by the ignorant, reply 'Peace'* (Qur'an 25: 63) and ... *wherever you look there is the face of God* (Qur'an 2: 115). Malcolm explored the parallels with George Fox's "then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world answering that of God in everyone".

He talked about Thich Nhat Hanh's mindfulness meditation, which has some similarities to the Quaker Meeting for Worship, but differs in that it is more individual than corporate. Although Thich Nhat Hanh



Malcolm Brown Photo: Kirsten Hills

also emphasises sangha (community), and Quakers *inward stillness*, perhaps both traditions have insights that could enrich one another.

The discussion was opened up to questions, many of which focused on the differences between meditation, and Quaker worship. We discussed the role of rituals in Quaker Meeting. While as Quakers we reject rituals, and symbols, Malcolm urged us to reflect on how we might react should we find someone had removed the table at the centre of the Meeting room, or shook hands with someone before the Elders.

Malcolm did an excellent job of trying to examine the overlaps between the complex and diverse religions. The feedback we received was very positive and a more in-depth session on the separate religions was requested. One of the greatest aspects of the evening was the chance to connect with Friends across the world. Thanks to EMES sharing the event, more than 50 people attended, primarily from Europe, but Indonesia and the United States too.

On a personal level, the event raised many more questions about the faiths. It gave me a renewed energy and happiness to connect with other Friends at a time when many of us may be feeling particularly disconnected. Advices and Queries mentions the need to learn of other people's experiences of the Light, and Friends have always been active in the interfaith movement. While spirituality is deeply personal there are remarkable parallels between faiths, when we even simply scratch the surface.

Online worship

Jez Smith, Assistant EMES Executive Secretary, writes:

Before the COVID-19 pandemic Geneva Monthly Meeting, where I worship, offered meeting for worship every Sunday at 10:30 for an hour and once a month on a Tuesday lunchtime. In March, as society closed down, meeting for worship was largely moved online. Now there are two meetings for worship every week. One on Sunday mornings and one on Wednesday evenings. The latter is followed by a Spiritual Deepening session. The Spiritual Care committee (formerly elders) set the subjects and often facilitate the sessions. Most are in English, occasionally they are in French.

For some of us, meeting for worship online is a temporary occurrence, albeit one that has gone on for rather a long time. Personally, I prefer to go to meeting for worship in person even though I worship 2 or 3 times a week online. I regularly go to the Woodbrooke/EMES online meeting for worship. When the two organisations agreed a partnership of supporting online meeting for worship in early 2020, there were 3 meetings per week. Since March 2020 there have been 11. Thousands of people have attended those meetings for worship and many tens of them were newcomers getting their first taste of meeting for worship.

Woodbrooke/EMES is not the only place where newcomers try out meeting for worship. In early February, I joined Central European Quakers for their online evening meeting for worship. Familiar faces of Quakers from Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Latvia, Slovenia and Britain were joined by a newcomer from Hungary, experiencing meeting for worship for the first time. Meeting online as the Central European Gathering has distinct advantages, explains Jasmine Piercy of the Central European Gathering: "We can meet fortnightly instead of once a year, so it opens up the opportunity to know one another a lot better. I find a purity about it because no one is responsible for the door, flowers, tea, noms, property, which comes with being a place-based community. There is a purity in worship; nothing added and nothing taken away."

"I find online worship liberating and refreshing," explains Jasmine. I do it from necessity and I am part of two online groups. One started in Woodbrooke a couple of years before COVID-19 and we were there as isolated Friends or by choice. A good number are still involved. There are people lying down, relaxing on their bed, perhaps because of a physical need. There is a respect for one another and what we are there for."

Susan lives in France and is part of the Spiritual Care committee in Geneva Monthly Meeting. When the borders were closed during the first lockdown in 2020, she was able to continue participating in the life of the community thanks to the move to worship on Zoom. "I'm grateful that I can participate in worship without having to use fossil fuels to get there," Susan says, "But I am keenly aware, too, that in order to be fully immersed in the silence, to not be diverted by my coffee cup, and to be fully open to the Spirit, requires a learning process. It takes time to develop the spiritual muscles of being 'present' with Friends on a screen."

If there are new obstacles for participation in our Quaker meeting, then we should be able to find solutions. All of us in our Quaker meetings in person have had to deal with this at some point - how do we support someone who arrives unannounced at our meeting for worship for the first time?

Gretchen, in France, has been working on solving this problem. "Some new people have come to our meetings for worship and once we had a meeting where lots of people gave messages, and a newcomer shared three times," she said. "Afterwards, I explained that it was a custom to speak no more than once, and how it usually comes about, that we wait to know if we are really inspired or not and that we fight with it before speaking. From this experience we realised that we need to explain to people." Since then, Quakers in France have been developing materials to share with newcomers which can be posted on their website. As the ways in which we are a community change, it is good to know that we are finding ways to adapt.

EMES Youthgroup

Anne Janssen, EMES Youthgroup, writes

With the return home of the last group of lucky young people from the final Quaker Youth Pilgrimage in 2014, the official mechanism for support of teenagers within the Section ground to a halt after 55 years. Yes, plans were already in place for monies previously earmarked for the Pilgrimage to be made available for new initiatives to benefit our Young Adult Friends, aged 18 and over. But what of that other important demographic – teens aged 14-18? How could we in the Section offer a replacement for the Pilgrimage to young people in those formative years?

In July 2019, Friends from within the Section who were deeply interested in this question met together with some young people to discuss what could be done to fill the gap. Out of this informal gathering – and partly due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic – has come a series of online meetings for 14-18 year olds that is beginning to build a community of young people across the Section. So far, four meetings have taken place, with a total participation rate of 31 young people from six different countries. The Zoom meetings are conducted bilingually in English and German, with three adult facilitators supporting the participants each time.

The theme of our December meeting was “Quakerism and climate change, peace & justice”. We heard from Detmer Kremer a Dutch Young Friend currently living in London, who has been an advocate for social justice since working as a Quaker Voluntary Service fellow in the USA.

In January, we discussed our hopes for the coming year. How could we find ways to let our lives speak?

The February meeting marked the first session in which the speaker came from within the group of young people. The topic – Peer Support – was suggested and expertly presented by a 17-year-old from the UK and clearly resonated deeply with the other participants. There was plenty of heartfelt feedback in the Zoom chat as well as praise for the presentation. The intention is to turn the planning of these events over to the teens themselves more and more as time goes on.

Our meetings have also included games and creative activities as well as a period of worship. The young people seem to enjoy learning about “issues” but also



The session in January enabled participants to explore how they let their lives speak

relish the opportunity to connect with like-minded people of their own age group in other parts of the Section. The English speakers have even been taking advantage of the opportunity to practise their German! Those of us working on this initiative have been very gratified to see the reaction. We have the feeling that we are helping to create something with great potential within EMES. What could be more important than supporting the next generation of Quakers?

Dates have already been set for an online meeting each month this year with the exception of August. The hope of our team of four adult organisers is to be able to offer an in-person gathering for this age group as soon as COVID-19 restrictions allow – possibly in conjunction with the Northern European Border Meeting held each September. By that time, we anticipate that a strong sense of community will have developed among these young people who are getting to know each other online. Like all of us, they will no doubt welcome the chance to see their friends in the flesh after months of only virtual connection. But in the meantime, that virtual connection appears to be a vital spark, extending the support of EMES to a younger generation.

For more information about this work please see our website:

*fwccemes.org/emes/quaker-youth-programmes
or email michael@fwccemes.org*

Further Exploration of Vulnerability: an update from Borgo Basino

It was almost 2 years ago that our family joined the EMES Annual Gathering in Budapest to present our project, Borgo Basino, and for me to share with you all about vulnerability. We enthusiastically anticipated launching our folk school, ecovillage and ecotourism farm in the autumn of 2019, and then in my prepared message I shared about some of my personal vulnerabilities and some historical injustices perpetrated by the Religious Society of Friends as we explored the idea of “living in a foreign land.” There were clearly some cursory links between the two presentations, but I largely considered them parallel discussions rather than interrelated facets of a larger whole.

As we are all aware, much has changed since 2019. We did, in fact, launch Borgo Basino starting that autumn. We made dozens of presentations leading up to that launch, sharing about our goals to establish a folk school for local popular education, an ecovillage for residential collaboration, and continue the tradition of the organic ecotourism farm established by my in-laws over 30 years ago. We also cemented plans with 10 people who planned to join us on the farm, ecovillagers without land moving onto our land to become its ecovillage. 2019 was full of giddy days as we organised last minute details, established roles for sharing responsibilities and began to take on some of the formal responsibilities of the farm.

By January 2020, just as we officially made formal legal transitions and took on the management of everything from utilities to bookings, the first cracks began to show. Several members of the group who were set to join us began to get cold feet. At the end of February, Italy was one of the first countries to start restricting movement due to a novel virus. Within days, we were in very serious lockdown with police checkpoints everywhere, shortages of durable goods and all the world’s pity pointing our way. The enthusiastic excitement of connections and presentations turned to messages of concern and cancellations. 30,000 euros worth of group bookings and tours that we’d worked



*Summer campers learn about companion planting
Photo: Evan Welkin*

years to organise from March-June 2020 to kickstart our new project evaporated.

Lockdown also fully splintered the group set to join us, so as we set into months of closure we were joined by only one couple from the original ecovillage group. They were clearly in shock from the events around us and the dissolution of their group, so they largely retreated into their own shell. So there we were, our small family, another family and an intern with no income for the foreseeable future, no group to help us take on tasks and a farm to manage. We were devastated but we had also already ordered that season’s plants and begun sowing in the greenhouse so we set to work.

And indeed this is the point where, in retrospect, I return full circle to the message I shared with you all about vulnerability to contrast sharply with the buoyant enthusiasm of all we’d dreamed for our project. In my message to you all, I said:

“The Bible frequently considers the question of living in foreign land, as a challenge to unappreciated prophets or ungrateful hosts. As hosts, we are commanded to accept and welcome the other, but as visitors we are pushed to speak our truth and lead the people who have gone astray. I thought about the many instances in which I was either a visitor or a host in my life, and what that really has meant for my approach to life and to leadership. I think that we as Friends often imagine

ourselves as the prophetic visitors, the foreigners in foreign lands speaking out in the darkness, when in reality we most often bring our privilege, power and influence with us when we travel and we would do well to recognise it.”

Suddenly as the global pandemic took hold I recognised how many privileges I still had even though so much was suddenly “taken away” from all of us. I lived in a gorgeous place, and despite my dreams of sharing prophetic witness while hosting streams of visitors, I suddenly found myself a visitor in this new pandemic world order while focusing on the very basics of growing food. My children, luckily too small to go online for school, began to spend their days building forts and digging holes and getting closer with the animals. I recognised I needed to accept this new visitor of the virus who was here to stay, while also recognising that I had been living as a guest in the complex ecosystem around me.

Fast forward to last July. Two weeks before lockdown, we’d been visited by representatives of a local institute for the blind who’d found our website by chance. They were hoping to host a summer camp for visually impaired teens and were scouting possible locations during the winter months. Miraculously, the dates we had set aside for that camp happened to coincide with a moment of relative relaxation on COVID-19 restrictions, so for two weeks we hosted back to back



Meeting Japanese koi by touch in an aquaponic system
Photo: Evan Welkin

groups of campers as practically our only fixed group on the calendar.

As we hosted these children, I once again was reminded of the subject of vulnerability. Who was I to complain of lost income or broken dreams when these children could find joy as they experienced my farm in ways I’d never imagined? I remember a particular moment when I was asked about how many eyes bees have while leading a workshop on beekeeping. I had been thrust into tending the bees during the lockdown because the usual beekeeper had caught the virus early on and remained in quarantine for months. I had struggled to learn on the fly, calling him in the hospital for advice and making many mistakes as the spring bloomed and the bees needed frequent attention. When this child then asked that July how many eyes a bee had, I fancied a budding expert on all apicultural topics (despite having never really studied their anatomy) and so I quickly blurted an overly confident answer: *2, of course*

Immediately, another child interrupted me: *Actually, bees have 5 eyes: 2 main multifaceted 3 light sensing receptors between them.* I was humbled. Yuri, a child who has never seen a bee in detail, went on to explain in length and specificity quite a number of fascinating details about bees, often using language to explain anatomy or behaviour



Tactile exploration of tomato plants Photo: Evan Welkin

without direct visual references or comparisons that I found fascinating. I joked that he really should be the one teaching the workshop and there was an important part of me that meant it.

As I write this, just days before the one year anniversary of the first pandemic lockdowns in Italy and almost two years since we saw each other in person in Budapest, I must say that I have only gained a deeper understanding of what I shared with you about vulnerability as witness in troubled times. I believe that we are not experiencing a temporary situation that will *andra' tutto bene* (everything will be OK) as the Italian slogan of imminent recovery implies, but indeed imagine we are now entering our new normal of global interconnectivity and vulnerability that is here to stay. I do not know exactly what the future holds

for our society or for Borgo Basino, but I am definitely learning powerful lessons every day about the witness of accepting what or who comes and admitting my limits as a host and traditional leader in the process. I will close with a few queries:

- How can we hold onto dreams without completely losing hope when they do not come to pass as we expected?
- How can I serve as a witness for those who are most vulnerable in these times which exaggerate existing inequalities?
- What are foreign lands to phenomena, people or privileges without borders?

You are invited to learn more about our work at our website, borgobasino.org or following us on Facebook and Instagram, [@borgobasino](https://www.instagram.com/borgobasino)

News from the Central European Gathering (CEG)

Liz Coling, CEG Co-Clerk, writes:

Friends and attenders from small and geographically widespread Meetings (or areas with no Meetings) in central and eastern Europe have been getting together since 1996. Over the years, the sessions have become larger and more organised and we gave ourselves a title – the Central European Gathering. CEG now comprises Friends from Austria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

In non-COVID-19 times, the CEG has an AGM in early summer and two interim preparatory meetings in February and October. These sessions with discussion, training and social events, are important to maintain our identity as a group, despite the many kilometres separating us. EMES often sends a representative to the AGM, which helps us to link with the wider Quaker network and for EMES to know about our concerns and plans.

The unity of the CEG and its importance to members, not only those who are more isolated with no regular local Meeting, has been made very clear by the fact that, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, from April 2020 we have had two Meetings for Worship a month online, one at 19.00 CET on the first Sunday of the month and the second at 10.30 on the third Sunday.

People often stay to talk afterwards, with English being the main language used. We are regularly joined by Friends from e.g. Germany, Portugal and the UK. Anyone interested in coming along can email Pawel Milka at milkapawel@gmail.com for the link.

The CEG virtual meetings continued through the summer of 2020, even though we were freer to do other activities, and they are very likely to do so post lockdown, at least once a month. Spiritually it is important to have these fixed times when we know that we can be silent together and maybe consider the ministries posted on chat. Despite the virtual nature, there is a sense of unity that has kept many of us coming back, and encouraged new people from outside the CEG area to join in. Socially, after worship we've rejoiced over the arrival of a new baby and of a pregnancy, we keep up with what's going on in local areas, we check on Friends who have been ill, sometimes talk books, politics, climate crisis, music or food. If required, we discuss CEG business, and although online meetings are unlikely to replace physical gatherings in the future, those will be enriched by us knowing one another better, and by the continuation of virtual meetings, not through necessity but because of what they bring us, individually and as a group.

New QCEA Director

The Quaker Council for European Affairs has announced that Timmon Wallis will serve as its new Director.

Timmon is a Quaker activist and scholar, with a PhD in Peace Studies, experience in 8 conflict zones and over 35 years experience in senior management and leadership positions with NGOs working for peace and human rights.

In particular, Timmon is a former Executive Director and Sri Lanka Programme Manager for Nonviolent Peaceforce. He is well known for serving as Peace and Disarmament Manager at Quakers in Britain from 2014-2017. Timmon is expected to take up his position in May 2021.

Timmon Wallis said,

It is an honour and a privilege to be able to serve as the next Director of QCEA. I am excited to be working with such a terrific team of dedicated staff in the Brussels office. I am committed to building on the very impressive work undertaken on behalf of Quakers in Europe by Andrew Lane and his team over the past 7 years.

As we continue speaking our Quaker truth to those in positions of power and responsibility in the European institutions, I will ensure that we continue to do so from a place of humility and compassion. It is through constructive dialogue and being always open to the Spirit that we will build a more peaceful, just and sustainable Europe.

Jeremy Lester, Clerk of QCEA's Executive Committee and General Assembly said,

QCEA has established itself as a voice which should be heard in the corridors and meeting rooms where policy is decided. Andrew Lane has been for several years its Director, building up an enthusiastic and professional team. Now as he moves on, I am delighted that we have found Timmon Wallis to serve as his successor.

Timmon Wallis has worked all his life with Quaker values, be it at Quaker Peace and Social Witness, advocating in the USA for the abolition of nuclear weapons, or managing an international NGO in Brussels protecting civilians in violent conflicts through nonviolent strategies, he continued.

I look forward to Timmon steering QCEA's programmes as Europe faces the challenges of growing inequality, exclusion, and militarism. He will help QCEA to have its voice heard, encouraging Quaker values to be at the heart of the continent and its future.



Timmon Wallis

Photo: QCEA

Event on gender equality and peace

On 24 February 2021, QCEA brought together more than 50 people from different backgrounds to discuss the importance of gender equality for peace and security.

Participants included many early career staff in the EU and NATO, part of our co-organiser Young Professionals in Foreign Policy, and Quakers from several European countries. The invited speakers were representatives from the EU, Newcastle University, and the organisation International Alert. A very lively discussion was forming in the Q&A section of the event, with contributions about diverse issues such as masculinities, workplace culture, intersectionality, gender stereotypes, and more.

The event was part of a series of events organised for the launch of QCEA's report on gender and inclusivity in peace and security, which was created in partnership with Newcastle University. More events about the report and the issue of gender and inclusivity will be coming up in the future. The report is available to read for free at:

qcea.org/peace/gender-and-inclusivity/



Gender Equality & Peace event

Photo: QCEA

A Rights-Based Approach to Environmental Peacebuilding

Alice Munnelly of the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) writes:

In 1992, the *UN Agenda for Peace* established the link between the environment, sustainable development and peace. Portraying environmental challenges as a source of potential cooperation was a paradigm shift away from resource scarcity as a cause of conflict. Drawing upon these interlinkages, and our belief that conflict in itself is not negative - but rather 'a motor for change and development in society if handled constructively' - QUNO has been actively engaging in shaping policies and narratives around environmental peacebuilding.

Our current engagement in environmental peacebuilding has two main strands: challenging narratives that feed into the securitisation of climate change; and promoting the transformative nature of rights-based approaches in environmental policies.

Securitisation of Climate Change

There is a tendency at the policy level to refer to climate change as a 'threat multiplier'. This terminology is vague and can feed into hard security narratives that are state-centric and militarised in practice. Characterising climate change as a matter of national security risks impeding trans-boundary cooperation and the inclusive, sustainable development-oriented climate action and peacebuilding that is urgently required.

The 'threat multiplier' language also obscures the other risk factors – or root causes of conflict – that make some countries more vulnerable than others to the consequences of climate change. As it stands, eight of the ten largest multilateral peace operations are in countries known to be most exposed to climate change. This is unsurprising because climate-related conflicts are most likely in countries with weak governments, barriers to public participation for certain groups, slow economic development, and/or a recent history of conflict. This reality should put human rights rather than military intervention at the centre of sustaining peace – a view long espoused by QUNO and the core of our Rethinking Security event at Geneva Peace Week in November 2020.

Rights-based approaches

We believe that environmental peacebuilding should occur throughout the peace-conflict cycle - from early preventive work to peace-making, and armed violence to post-conflict reconciliation. Incorporating human rights throughout conflict prevention or environmental policies is known as a rights-based approach. For instance, the fulfillment of procedural rights, including effective public participation in decision making, contributes to 'more transparent, better informed and more responsive' environment policy. As such, when States uphold the rights of their citizens, they foster resilient and cooperative communities - in turn, this helps to reduce the risk that natural resource stress due to climate change will trigger destructive conflict.

Given that environmental challenges, including the stress on limited natural resources, are often not the sole cause of conflict, peacebuilding approaches need to account for multi-causal mechanisms as well as a multiplicity of contexts and actors. To this end, QUNO regularly engages in the Geneva Dialogue on the Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace (ECCP) – an initiative run by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP), which QUNO co-founded in 2008 – in order to exchange with colleagues from across the policy spectrum, all of whom recognise climate as a cross-cutting issue.

QUNO's emphasis on the inclusion and agency of all stakeholders in peacebuilding extends to the private sector. We have advocated for strengthened and conflict-sensitive corporate responsibility in matters of natural resource management so that affected stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and local communities, are meaningfully consulted.

Conclusion

Through promoting a rights-based approach and countering securitised narratives, QUNO works to reduce the potential for destructive conflict and to promote ambitious, effective, and fair action to address climate change and related environmental crises.

Woodbrooke Develops New Flexible Learning Models

During the past 12 months, in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown, Woodbrooke has significantly increased its online learning offer. This has made its courses more accessible to Friends, both in Britain and internationally. In addition to providing one-off courses, there is also a need to offer new opportunities for more extended learning, particularly for small groups, and individual Friends who are geographically isolated. Therefore, new flexible learning models are being developed as part of the *Woodbrooke-Where-You-Are* programme. This article looks at one such experiment, developed by Stuart Masters, who is one of Woodbrooke's Learning and Research Team Leaders.

In the spring of 2020, Stuart was approached by the secretary of the FWCC Asia West Pacific Section, Ronis Chapman, about the possibility of offering a learning programme that could be followed by Friends across the Section. In response, he developed a blended learning programme called **The Spiritual Roots of the Quaker Way**. This model offers pre-recorded presentations, written resources, and questions for reflection, combined with live Zoom sessions (or a day in a meeting house). Self-organised small study groups are encouraged to meet regularly throughout the course. The objective of the programme is to focus on important Quaker practices and concerns, and explore their roots in the early Quaker movement. It is made up of four modules, each looking at two themes:

Module 1 – Quaker Foundations

- The Early Quaker Vision
- Quaker Processes and Practices

Module 2 – Quaker Testimony 1

- Quakers and Equality
- Quakers and Peace

Module 3 – Quaker Testimony 2

- Quakers and Economic Justice
- Quakers and Ecology

Module 4 – Quakers and Christianity

- Quakers and the Bible
- Quakers and Other Churches

This programme offers a degree of flexibility. It can be run over a timescale to suit the participants (e.g. from 8 weeks to 12 months). In addition, it is possible to select one or more of the modules, rather than doing the whole course.

The programme for FWCC AWPS ran over 12 weeks, from 27 July to 18 October 2020. Over 80 Friends participated in the programme from across the Section. There were active participants from Australia, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Singapore. Individuals engaged with the recorded presentations, and read the written resources. A number of small study groups met at least once during each of the four modules. The four live sessions lasted about 90 minutes, and offered participants an opportunity to review the material covered, share reflections, and ask questions. At around the same time, Portobello and Musselburgh Local Meeting also commissioned the programme for Scottish Friends. This ran over 8 weeks, between 13 July and 7 September, with about 30 active participants. Initially, the links to recorded presentations were circulated by email, and a webpage was used to hold written resources. This limited the opportunities for communication between the tutor and participants during the course. In order to enhance the experience, therefore, all the learning materials are now held within Moodle, Woodbrooke's online learning platform, which also includes a private discussion forum. Stuart has subsequently developed two further blended learning programmes, structured in the same way:

Exploring Quaker Spirituality

This six part programme looks at the nature of Quaker spirituality, and the way it is expressed in worship, individual practice, discernment, and testimony.

Creating Heaven on Earth:

The Radical Vision of Early Quakers

This four part programme is based on the 2020 Salter Seminar. It looks at how early Quakers caught a glimpse of heaven on earth, the radical implications that flowed from this experience, and what it can teach us today.

woodbrooke.org.uk/learn/woodbrooke-where-you-are/

Diary Dates 2021

More dates are available on the website: www.fwccemes.org/calendar. Please send items for inclusion in the diary to michael@fwccemes.org

Woodbrooke & EMES offer several weekly virtual Meetings for Worship. Extra meetings have been added due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please check the Woodbrooke website for the latest information: www.woodbrooke.org.uk/worship

EMES now runs regular online events:

Peace & Service Consultation

Monthly gatherings for Friends involved in peace and service work are held on the second Thursday of each month. More details: fwccemes.org/emes/peace-and-service-consultation. Contact jez@fwccemes.org for more information.

EMES Youthgroup

Monthly gatherings for Friends aged 14-18 are held on Saturday mornings. More details: fwccemes.org/emes/quaker-youth-programmes. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information.

We also hold **monthly gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders** in the first week of each month. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information.

Other Events

At the time of printing, these events were still scheduled to go ahead in the format listed below however please check the EMES website for up to date information.

2021

8 – 11 April: Ireland Yearly Meeting, Online
office@quakers.ie

23 - 25 April 2021: Finland Yearly Meeting, Online
suomenkveekarit@gmail.com

6 - 9 May: EMES Annual Meeting, Online
michael@fwccemes.org

13 – 16 May: Sweden Yearly Meeting, Online
au@kvakare.se

21 – 24 May: Switzerland Yearly Meeting, Aarau or Online
symclerk@swiss-quakers.ch

28 – 30 May: Netherlands Yearly Meeting, Online
secretariaat@dequakers.nl

3 – 6 June: Central European Gathering, Litomysl,
Czech Republic or Online milkapawel@gmail.com

24 – 27 June: Norway Yearly Meeting, Online
kveker@kveker.org

17 – 24 July: EMEYF Summer Gathering, Finland
emeyf@qcea.org

31 July – 6 August: Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering
Online ym@quaker

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

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FWCC-EMES, Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham. B29 6LJ UK emes@fwccemes.org

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www.fwccemes.org

To receive a copy by post please contact us at the EMES office.

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IBAN: NL90TRIO0788863819
SWIFT/BIC: TRIONL2U

Sterling account:

Bank name: CAF Bank
Bank address: 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent. ME19 4JQ UK
Account Name: FWCC EMES
IBAN: GB73CAFB40524000025578
SWIFT/BIC: CAFGB21XXX
Account Number: 00025578
Sort Code: 40-52-40

For holders of UK bank accounts please send cheques or CAF vouchers in GBP to the EMES office or directly to CAF Bank using the account number and sort code above. Scottish Charity number: SC 036528

Deadline for Among Friends 151: 1 July 2021