



Friends World Committee
for Consultation

EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

Europe & Middle East Section

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Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held in person at L'Enclos Rey in Paris and online from 20 - 23 May 2022

Dear Friends, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, lieve vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, draží přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, Kedves Barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa.

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting 2022, meeting in Paris and online.

Our annual meeting this year saw 80 Friends gather together from the Europe and the Middle East Section and further afield. This was our first annual meeting together in person since the start of the coronavirus pandemic and also our first blended annual meeting, with attendees both in Paris and on Zoom. 40 of us met in Paris and 40 Friends participated through zoom. For those of us in Paris it was joyful to be physically together for eating, walking and talking with each other after two long years of Covid-19 restrictions. It was the first time that many of us had travelled in a long time.

There were technological challenges to our new ways of hybrid Quaker working but we were nevertheless able to create a rich shared experience. Our staff worked hard and creatively to ensure the most gathered experience for us all, both online and in person. Cultivating joyful relationships enables us to do our work. If we are to sow and nurture the seeds of peace, we need fertile soil. We became a gathered community.

Our theme for the annual meeting spoke directly to us:

From Crisis to Connection: working creatively to heal our fractured world

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

We met in the long shadow of the war in Ukraine which has fallen over Europe and the rest of the world. We recognise the on-going suffering in other parts of the world which could be forgotten at this time. On Sunday morning we joined in Meeting for Worship with Quakers in Kiev. We heard first hand accounts of the work being done by Friends across Europe to support those affected by the war, notably in Georgia, Estonia, Czechia and Poland. We listened to the fears. Our prayers are with all those involved. We uphold the Quaker organisations who are working both through social activism and methods of quiet diplomacy to help end conflict and support those affected.

We were inspired and challenged by our speakers to create peace on earth, to dare to dream of turning weapons into spades, and to challenge the mistaken notion that the military option is the only option. We were reminded by Tim Gee, General Secretary of FWCC, that all our striving for peace and justice have roots in the faithful and joyful fellowship of the worldwide Quaker family. We were prompted by Bainito Wamalwa, clerk of FWCC Africa Section, to remember that we have a prophetic task of personal and collective transformation in this age of global uncertainty and instability. We must work creatively and not be fooled by false or simplistic solutions. Karina Knight Spencer from Stop Fuelling War/Cessez d'alimenter la guerre, and speakers from QCEA reminded us to recognise the complexity of the situations we are facing. We need to listen, reflect and work on long-term solutions. We need to remember that we are on a journey towards the promised land which will not be achieved in the next two or three years.

Wrestling with huge global issues of peacebuilding and climate justice can lead us to question what we can do, or what EMES, as a networking organisation, can do to make a difference.

The words of Pierre Lacout were shared as ministry,

*“Words split apart. Silence unites. Words scatter. Silence gathers together.
Words stir up. Silence brings peace. (Pierre Lacout, God is Silence).”*

The home groups helped us to know one another in that which is eternal. If we are to help heal a fractured world, we need to heal ourselves, our families and our communities. We can also be fractured and in conflict with one another. We are mirrors of what is happening in the world. Conflict can be transforming if we are willing to face it and work through it with courage and integrity. We were advised to `breathe in the moment, to see and to smile`.

We leave the annual meeting feeling renewed and grateful to have been together. We are part of a precious global community of Quakers, with an important `voice` - both spoken and silent in expression. Our fellowship and discernment supports our individual and collective work and helps us to reimagine our world. In these troubled times, we are reminded of our Quaker history and practices. We need to be courageous and draw strength from our Quaker community if we are to act in response to the promptings of love and truth in our hearts.

In Friendship, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävydessä, en amitié, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u prijateljstvu, draudzībā, a barátságban, sōpruses, w przyjaźni, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.

Signed

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