

EPISTLE

The General Assembly of the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA)

The General Assembly of the Quaker Council for European Affairs met in blended format on Friday 31st March and 1st April 2023. We commenced our session with a period of Silent Worship.

Martin Touwen, Clerk of the Executive Committee, updated us on the work of the Committee.

Nominations Committee have reported the continuing difficulty of finding names for Executive Committee and as the terms of office of some members is drawing to a close, this has become rather urgent. This brings to our attention the need to find names for very specific pieces of work under very specific timeframes. Another piece of research in this genre is the financial recording of the Environmental Sustainability of QCEA and the carbon footprint of our work.

The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust have extended funding to QCEA for a further 12 months while we finalise our new Strategy document. The Trust have also given us a grant to support an anti-racism reflection process.

We received a report from the Joint Executive and General Assembly Governance and Statute Review Committee. We had a very long discussion on Corporate Governance, how we ensure we are complying with Belgian Law while at the same time maintaining our Quaker way of discernment in conducting our business in these times of strict regulation.

Tracey Martin our Director outlined recent developments under the headings: repair, recovery, regrowth.

On Saturday we met in small groups and discussed the strategy under the following headings:

- Migration and peace - through a peacebuilding lens
- Climate justice and peace - through a peace lens.
- Dialogue for transformation - complex problems are only solved by listening to different views.

What kind of change will we focus on?

Transformative change is a new way of working for us. It is a long slow process of providing safe spaces to listen to different viewpoints.

We have had an opportunity to raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the strategy, which we have now accepted.

We recognise that we as members of the GA will also need to develop our understanding of what a transformational dialogue actually sounds like and to practise this ourselves so that we are also 'patterns and examples'.

We know that European Quakers have many concerns. We can't work on them all. We have tried to identify those where we can bring a distinctive voice and approach and where there is potential for change in European institutions and perceptions in Europe more generally. However there are

some key issues for Quakers where we will keep a watching brief in Europe and where we will add a Quaker voice individually or through networks where we can. These are:

- The right to conscientious objection
- Long-term work towards lasting peace in Ukraine
- Challenging the arms trade and increased militarisation

We have received impressive presentations from our staff team on their work since the last GA.

Staff recognise the need to rebuild institutional memory and to this end the team have been active in engaging within the civil society space, such as with the Conference of INGOs and the Human Rights & Democracy Network. Events have also been hosted at Quaker house with a range of local and regional organisations.

We heard that the 'Storytelling from the Frontlines' publication was launched in March 2023 with an online event and that dissemination is ongoing. We value these powerful testimonies collected from different contexts, which illustrate the intersection between climate change, climate justice, militarism and human rights.

We recognise that there is substantial deficit in the current budget and QCEA is in urgent need of additional funding to implement its strategy. We are excited by the direction of QCEA as outlined in the strategic plan and by the energy of the staff team in supporting us to develop this.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Martin Ford

Clerk QCEA General Assembly

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