



Annual Report

2023



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

fwccemes.org

FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section

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For up to date information about EMES please
visit our website: **fwccemes.org**

For dates of Yearly Meetings and other events please
see the calendar page: **fwccemes.org/calendar**

Note: The formal annual report and accounts, prepared in
accordance with UK charity requirements, are available as
a separate document on request from the EMES office.



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What is FWCC?

The Friends World Committee for Consultation was established at the Second World Conference of Friends held at Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, in 1937. The concept of a world organisation to express the sense of world fellowship of Friends arose as an important part of the evolution of the Religious Society of Friends in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This tentative development gained impetus from the 1920 Friends World Conference in London and the Young Friends Gathering at Jordans, England, held in the same year.

No other organisation exists which links together Yearly Meetings around the world. Authority within the Religious Society of Friends lies at the Yearly Meeting and Monthly Meeting/church level, leaving these groups potentially in isolation. Hence the vision arose of an organisation to keep Friends connected and in touch with each other across the diverse spectrum of the Society.

FWCC was established to be a channel of communication among Friends, helping us to explore and nurture our identity as Quakers so that we can discover and be faithful to our true place in the world as a people of God. The current mission statement is:

**Answering God's call to universal love,
FWCC brings Friends of varying traditions
and cultural experiences together in
worship, communications, and consultation,
to express our common heritage and our
Quaker message to the world.**

Representatives appointed by affiliated Yearly Meetings and groups gather in plenary sessions every few years. Between plenary sessions, the Central Executive Committee, which is broadly representative, meets annually to continue FWCC's decision-making processes and to guide staff. The World Office in London is the centre of worldwide communications for Friends and supports the work of the Sections. It also represents Friends within non-Quaker international organisations such as the United Nations.

In 2012, FWCC held the 6th World Conference of Friends at Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya, on the theme **“Being Salt and Light: Friends living the Kingdom of God in a broken world.”** Almost 900 Friends attended from some 52 countries.

In 2016, a World Plenary Meeting (formerly the Triennial/International Representatives Meeting) was held in Pisac, near Cusco, Peru, from 19-27 January. The theme was **“Living the Transformation: Creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of God's children (Romans 8:19).”** See tinyurl.com/5dpubkkl



These plenary meetings will be less frequent in future for sustainability reasons. The next will take place in 2024 in Southern Africa. The theme will be **“Living the spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another: *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope – Jeremiah 29:11* (New King James Version).”**

You can read more about the work of the FWCC World Office here: fwcc.world

FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section

The Europe & Middle East Section (EMES) of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) was established in 1938 and is the collective body for Quaker meetings in Europe and the Middle East. All the members, yearly meetings and groups affiliated to EMES are members of FWCC. We publish a newsletter, *Among Friends*, three times a year and send out regular news emails to subscribers. A small Executive Committee, assisted by the Executive Secretary and the Communication & Networking Coordinator, ensures communication within the Section and with other Quaker bodies and individual Friends. Each year EMES organises an Annual Meeting and Peace & Service Network Annual Gathering and regular online events for Representatives & Roleholders, the Peace & Service Network, the EMES Youthgroup for 14-18 year old Young Friends and for International Members and isolated Friends. EMES is a member of Church and Peace and is an Organisation in Partnership of the Conference of European Churches.

EMES has a 10-year strategy which *envisages a thriving, vibrant, inclusive, all-age, spiritual community of Friends in Europe and the Middle East, woven together in transformative faith and love, working and connecting with others, listening to the Spirit, actively living out our Quaker testimonies of truth and integrity, equality and community, simplicity, peace, and care for the earth and the environment.*

You can read more about EMES including our 10 year strategy on our website: fwccemes.org/emes

EMES consists of 13 Yearly Meetings, one Monthly Meeting, a number of worship groups and some isolated Quakers. There are approximately 25,000 Quakers reported in the affiliated meetings in the Section (this figure includes members, attenders and children, and is based on the information provided by meetings in early 2024). Evangelical Friends Church International, which is part of the Section but maintains its own congregations, is active in Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Serbia but has not included the numbers of people involved in its churches in this report.

Europe & Middle East Young Friends (EMEYF) is a well-established, autonomous organisation operating within the Section: emeyf.org

EMES Activity in 2023

2023 has been a difficult year for many people in our region; the war in Ukraine has continued and war broke out in Gaza and Israel in the autumn. There are small numbers of Quakers living in these countries and the effect on them is hard to imagine, but many Friends across our region and from further afield continue to work for peace. Throughout the year we held a weekly meeting for worship to pray for peace, initially in Ukraine, but after October we extended this to prayer for peace wherever it is needed. Please do join us on Tuesdays for 30 minutes of worship if you are able: fwccemes.org/calendar/ukraine-worship

A positive highlight of 2023 for EMES was the founding of a new yearly meeting in Central Europe. Friends in the Central European Gathering have been discerning for many years about when the right time would be for them to make this step, and at their gathering in 2023 they minuted:

On this 26th day of May 2023 in Gdansk, Poland, Central Europe, on the edge of the Baltic Sea, in the presence of 39 Friends in person and online, the CEG became the Central European Yearly Meeting. We are looking forward to formalising this via EMES.

In October the EMES Executive Secretary attended a gathering of Russian speaking Friends organised by Friends House Moscow and held in Tbilisi, Georgia. It was a rare opportunity for Friends in this part of Europe to meet in person, and in particular to meet with Russian Quakers, and members of the Tbilisi worship group and visit the flat that they meet in for worship.

We regularly add new stories to the news page of our website: fwccemes.org/news

War in Europe and the Middle East

The war in Ukraine continued to have a major impact on the work of EMES in 2023. We have continued to work with the Central European Yearly Meeting's Funding for Ukraine Group to fund work with Ukrainians suffering as a result of the war – this allows individual Friends to give their money to these causes. We continue to stay

in touch with the Quakers in Ukraine, many of whom have now fled to surrounding countries or further afield. We also stay in contact with Quakers in Russia, for whom the war has been very challenging. A dedicated working group of the Peace and Service Network now focuses on supporting conscientious objectors from this war, considering political advocacy, sharing personal testimonies and helping to make connections to support asylum claims for COs.

fwccemes.org/news/quaker-support-for-ukraine

At the outbreak of the war in Gaza, EMES staff and the Peace and Service Network sought to consider appropriate responses. Through coordination between the Quaker International Educational Trust, the Ramallah Friends School and Friends United Meeting, some of the remarks made by RFS Head of School Rania Ma'ayeh were used to launch a joint sterling/US dollar crowdfunding campaign to raise money for well-being and psychosocial support programmes for the school staff, students and families who were touched by the war and worsening repression in the West Bank. The campaign successfully met its goals in less than a month.

Many other initiatives and activities are ongoing, with a dedicated page similar to that made for Ukraine updated regularly on our website and a working group of our Peace and Service Network focusing specifically on this issue.

fwccemes.org/news/quaker-attention-on-peace-in-Israel-and-Palestine

The Executive Committee

The Executive Committee (EC) acts as the EMES trustees and met six times during 2023. They had two weekend meetings, one online in March and one in Berlin in September. These weekend meetings allow for more in-depth decision making.

The EC is responsible for the work of EMES and monitors progress made on the workplan and priorities agreed at each Annual Meeting. They also approve grants to the Spiritual Growth Fund and Digital Equality Fund.

Magdalena Gadomska joined the committee in May when she was appointed as EMES Assistant Treasurer. No Friends left the committee this year.

EC members in 2023:

Magdalena Gadomska Central European YM
(Assistant Treasurer) (from May)

Will Haire Ireland YM

Paul Holdsworth Belgium & Luxembourg YM

Melanie Huopp EMEYF & German YM

Annie Janssen German YM

Ethel Livermore Britain YM (Clerk)

Peter Spreij Netherlands YM (Treasurer)

Minutes of EC meetings are made available to EMES Representatives and are available from the EMES office on request.

Staff

Michael Eccles

Executive Secretary, Britain YM

Evan Welkin

Communication & Networking
Coordinator, Quakers in Italy

Representatives

All Yearly Meetings, Monthly Meetings and meetings in the Section appoint representatives to FWCC-EMES. Details of this are outlined in the EMES constitution. Representatives usually serve for three years and can be reappointed once. All representatives are invited to attend the EMES Annual Meeting and monthly online Representatives & Roleholders Gatherings.

Annual Meeting

Our Annual Meeting was held at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham, UK in May, with 50 Friends gathered in person and a further 10 Friends joining online. We had heard in February that the

Woodbrooke building would be closing later in 2023 so for many Friends this was a chance to say farewell to the building and for others it was a first and last chance to visit. We considered the theme: *Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation – and one another* (based on part of the theme of next year's World Plenary Meeting).

We were again supported by Friends acting as Zoom hosts from their homes around Europe. Many sessions were blended, including one home group, some workshops and business sessions. Friends gathered at Woodbrooke were able to see some of the historic Quaker books in the library as well as go on a walking tour of Quaker Bournville (the local area). We approved new role descriptions for our key roles alongside our usual business of EMES finances, nominations and hearing the progress made with our sustainability policy.

Read the epistle from the EMES 2023 Annual Meeting here: tinyurl.com/4dh6pyau

Plans are underway for our next AM, which will be held online in April 2024.



■ Annual Meeting

Finance

The budget for 2023 showed a deficit of £8,870. We did however receive more Annual Meeting fees than expected, and the Annual Meeting costs were rather lower than foreseen. We also received fewer applications for Spiritual Growth Fund grants than budgeted for. The result is that we ended the financial year with a profit instead of a deficit.

In 2023 many Yearly Meetings, Quaker groups and individuals sent donations for the FWCC Global Fundraising Campaign for the World Plenary Meeting in South Africa in 2024. These donations will be forwarded to the FWCC World Office. By the end of 2023 we had raised just over £35,000, surpassing our target of £30,000.

In 2022 we suffered a significant loss on our investments with Rathbones (Rathbone

Greenbank (ethical investments). This affected both the reserves of the section itself (EMES General) and of the restricted funds we are holding for the John Warder fund and for youth events (the remainder of the money for the former Quaker Youth Pilgrimage). Although 2023 was also a rather volatile year in the investment market we recovered some but by no means all of the losses incurred in 2022.

At the 2023 EMES Annual Meeting Magdalena Gadowska (All Poland Gathering) was appointed as EMES assistant treasurer.

The accounts for 2022 and the budget for 2023 were presented by the treasurer. As the accounts had not yet been returned by the examiner at the time of the Annual Meeting the final accounts were discussed and accepted by a special online Annual Meeting.

Nominations Committee

The EMES Nominations Committee consists of up to six Friends, appointed for three years in the first instance. It receives requests for nominees from the EMES Executive Committee and/or Annual Meeting (AM) in session, normally for members of the Executive Committee and for the roles of EMES Clerk, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer. Nominations Committee finds nominees by a process of Quaker discernment.

Since the last Annual Meeting, Nominations Committee met online and just before the 2023 Annual Meeting at Woodbrooke. During our face-to-face meeting at Woodbrooke, we concentrated on succession planning and how we, as Nominations Committee, can get a better sense of the gifts/skills within the Section, in order to widen the pool of Friends we think about for roles. Our thanks to the Executive Committee for making it possible for us to meet.

This year we have looked for two additional Elders, one of whom would work principally as an online presence. Since Annual Meeting 2023, we have undertaken the writing of a short description about nominations and the Quaker practice of nominations, which we would like to have translated into various languages, for use by Friends across EMES. We shall be presenting this at AM 2024.

Nominations Committee members in 2023:

Simon Best Britain YM & Woodbrooke

Mikheil Elizbarashvili, Georgia Worship Group

Solveig-Karin Erdal, Sweden YM (from May)

Vidar Salvigsen Sweden YM (until May)

Liz Scurfield Britain YM (Convenor)

Siobhan Walshe Ireland YM

Elders

In our second year of service we met regularly, eldering our first annual meeting together, and worked on setting up 'mutual support circles' alongside providing upholding at EMES meetings and events. Below these are outlined in more depth.

Annual Meeting 2023

We served as elders at the annual meeting, taking responsibility for a moment of silence during mealtimes and epilogues, as well as providing upholding to business and other sessions and contributing to the entertainment. Further, we organised a workshop on pastoral care in order to receive input from the EMES community, as part of our work around mutual support circles (see below for more details).

We enjoyed the annual meeting, including working with the 'temporary' elders during the gathering. Afterwards we reviewed our experience of the annual meeting and provided feedback to staff.

Mutual support circles

A larger project we took on in 2023 was around pastoral support or mutual care. We became aware of some need from the EMES community for pastoral care. Given our limited capacity, EMES' role and our own role description as elders, we opted to issue a message in the EMES newsletter to gauge interest in mutual support circles (i.e. where the group members provide support to each other, with Elders not present, and only facilitating the process).

We gathered feedback on this at a meeting of the Peace and Service Network (PSN), and further gauged the need from the community at the annual meeting.

The results of that workshop indicated that there was interest in more pastoral support from EMES, particularly for isolated individuals and isolated/small meetings, such as the programme previously coordinated by Julia Ryberg, but that EMES elders should focus on support to roleholders and spiritual upholding.

After the annual meeting, we continued our discussions, and eventually established three mutual support circles, each of 3-4 individuals, meeting monthly online. These groups are intended to help members mutually support one another – meeting in worship/worship-sharing, bringing themselves and upholding each other without a facilitator. We also provided materials and a few questions for groups to consider among themselves. So far these groups are going well, and we are keeping an eye on their progress.

Other activities

We met approximately once a month in 2023 to discuss our various points as well as to hear of those who might need upholding and/or developments around the section. We also have a rota so that at least one Elder is present at each roleholder's worship, PSN meetings and representatives & roleholders gatherings.

We are open for Friends across the EMES section to contact any of us via email (elders@fwccemes.org), or at EMES or PSN meetings in person or online whenever there is a need.

Elders in 2023:

Annika Hollsing Sweden YM

Jasmine Piercy Britain YM & Central European YM

George Thurley Britain YM

Peace & Service Network

The PSN continued to hold monthly online gatherings throughout the year, covering a wide range of topics including the war in Ukraine and specifically support for Conscientious Objectors in that conflict, permaculture training for refugees, and responses to the war in Gaza. 63 representatives and individuals active in peace and service activities joined us over the course of the year, with an average of 20 people or so at any given meeting. There are three ad hoc groups within the network specifically focusing on Ukrainian and Russian COs, Israel/Palestine and Network Design.



The annual gathering (previously “Consultation”) was held in October with 35 participants in Brussels and online. This was our first full year considering ourselves a “network” and so the theme centred on what it meant to be a network. We heard from network partners as well as a peace networking organisation from Colombia and Palestinian Friends just days after the war began in Gaza. We confirmed two new Coordinating Group members, Marigold Bentley of Britain Yearly Meeting and Mikheil “Misha” Elizbarashvili of Georgia Worship Group and considered how we can most effectively coordinate our work in the manner of Friends.

Our ad hoc groups have initiated a petition on behalf of persecuted Ukrainian Conscientious Objector Yurii Sheliashenko, are coordinating responses to the worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and are considering creative new ways to make the network more welcoming and strategically integrated within the work of EMES.

More information is available here:

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

EMES Youthgroup

Our youthgroup for 14-18 year olds continued to meet online each month with Young Friends from nine countries participating (Britain, Czech Republic, Estonia, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia). Usually around 6-8 young people are present each month.

We held our second in person gathering, alongside the Border Meeting, in Heerlen, in the Netherlands where eight Young Friends and three adults met to consider the theme: Active for Climate Justice. We joined some of the Border Meeting sessions, hearing their speaker and taking part in their bunterabend for fun and games on Saturday evening. We also had our own discussions, made cards for each other, played a Quaker version of Dungeons & Dragons and went out for ice cream. You can read reports of the event by two of the participants here: tinyurl.com/3nvwbn9

The youthgroup is organised by a small coordinating group which includes some of the young people who participate. We have covered a wide range of topics at these gatherings in 2023 including sessions on nonviolent communication, making food together, hearing about the work of QUNO Geneva as well as sessions facilitated by the small co-ordinating group. When it is needed the youthgroup continues to be run bilingually in German and English.



You can read more about the EMES Youthgroup here:
fwccemes.org/youthgroup

Spiritual Growth Fund

Our *Spiritual Growth Fund* continues to support meetings and their work. 2023 has been a quiet year for the fund and we encourage all meetings to consider applying in 2024 – EMES wants to help you support yourselves.

The fund aims to promote Quakerism within our meetings and also to enquirers and to support Quaker meetings around Europe and the Middle East. In 2023 we gave one grant to Central European Yearly Meeting for their travel fund to support roleholders and other Friends' attendance at their meetings.

You can find more information here:
tinyurl.com/5349p36c

Digital Equality Fund

Our *Digital Equality Fund*, set up in 2020, has continued to be available to help Friends get online, although no applications were received in 2023.

We plan to keep the fund open to applications in 2024 with the aim of supporting online participation in the FWCC World Plenary Meeting.

You can find more information here:
tinyurl.com/3493wezH

Partnerships and Communication

We continue to maintain close relationships with other Quaker organisations in Europe and the Middle East, in particular our member yearly meetings and worship groups, but also Woodbrooke, the Quaker Council for European Affairs, the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva, the Quaker Educational International Trust and Europe & Middle East Young Friends.

We continue to run online worship with Woodbrooke throughout the week, and once a month EMES hosts the bi-monthly parents' epilogue. For some Friends their online worship group is now their primary meeting.

There is more information here:
woodbrooke.org.uk/worship

We send regular news emails to approximately 430 Friends twice each month (you can sign up here: fwccmes.org/newsletter) and maintain an active and growing presence on social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), alongside using our website to keep Friends up to date.

We also continue to produce and send out our newsletter *Among Friends* three times a year. In accordance with our 2022 Sustainability Policy, this Annual Report is our only publication printed in paper format, but any materials can be printed and mailed to individual Friends by request.

International Membership

The Executive Secretary serves on the FWCC World Office International Membership Applications Committee (IMAC) that oversees and supports international members of the Religious Society of Friends around the world.

These are people who want to become members but live in an area where there is no Yearly Meeting or other Quaker body they can formally join; their membership is held through the FWCC World Office. There are approximately 60 international members in our Section. Some of these Friends are part of existing worship groups or other Quaker meetings, while others are more isolated. EMES tries to maintain contact with these Friends to ensure that they are aware of our activities and invited to our events.

During 2022 and 2023 we carried out a review of worship groups around EMES, contacting all worship groups and recognised meetings in EMES.

The review is now complete and our list of worship groups and recognised meetings accurately reflects where Friends gather to worship together.

In 2023 EMES held three online gatherings for international members and isolated Friends living in Europe and the Middle East. We also welcomed two new Friends into international membership, in Italy and Georgia, this year.

In May the Central European Gathering made the decision to become a yearly meeting at their annual gathering in Gdansk, Poland. EMES is working with IMAC and the new Central European YM and consulting with international members in Central Europe about a process to transfer their membership into the new YM. We hope this process will be completed in mid-2024.

You can read more about the international membership programme here: tinyurl.com/56xkvcp7

FWCC Central Executive Committee

The Clerk and Executive Secretary of EMES serve as members of the FWCC Central Executive Committee (CEC) along with their counterparts, and other Friends, from the other FWCC Sections and the FWCC World Office.

The CEC met four times in 2023, including for a week-long meeting near Johannesburg, South Africa at the venue for the 2024 FWCC World Plenary Meeting. Their other meetings were online.

Key issues considered by the CEC included; the planning of the 2024 World Plenary Meeting, overseeing a global fundraising campaign raising funds for FWCC work around the world and in particular to create an accessibility fund for the World Plenary Meeting in 2024 and long term planning of the work of the FWCC World Office.

You can read more about the CEC here: tinyurl.com/39pmzx35

Reports from Yearly Meetings, Monthly Meetings and Groups

Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting

Our four Worship Groups have continued to grow, with each taking on a distinct personality:

- **The Online Group** is currently focussing on pastoral concerns and community, offering several initiatives for their group and the Yearly Meeting;
- **The Gent Group** has been very active in supporting the right to Conscientious Objection, particularly in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus. We were particularly delighted to be able to agree, in early Autumn, a BLYM statement on Conscientious Objection, giving the Gent group the authority to sign publicly issued letters and documents on this topic on behalf of BLYM, thus lending authority and weight to such statements;
- **The Brussels Group** regularly welcomes inquirers and visitors and holds monthly 'Upholding groups' for the discussion of specific topics as well as a monthly shared lunch that is a great opportunity for new and older F/friends to exchange thoughts;
- **The Luxembourg Group**, though small, has welcomed some new and transferred members and is delighted to have found renewed energy and fellowship.

We have come to the end of a Triennium and have seen a change of role: Ruth Harland, Clerk for seven years has laid down her service and this role has been taken on by a Clerking Circle: Jeremy Lester, Nick Rendle and Stefanie de Koker. In our group of Elders some will continue their service but Jude Kirton-Darling has laid down her service, being heavily committed to her trade union work; the group has been joined by George Hellyer and one member of the Clerks will continue the practice begun last year, of attending the Elders Meetings.

Paul Holdsworth has come to the end of his service in our Finance group that has been joined by Jeremy Lester (representing the Clerks) and we will seek to find a third member in the first half of 2024; our new representative to QCEA will be one of our newer members, Ashley Malin, with support from our oldest Member, Richard Condon and our EMES representative will be Ruth Harland.

With the recognition of four Worship Groups in 2022, we have moved from six-weekly Business Meetings to Quarterly meetings. As these are for the entire YM, they are blended and so the Meeting for Worship prior to the holding of Meeting for Business is also blended. We are still discerning whether we wish to expand the holding of blended Meetings for Worship as there are mixed feelings about how F/friends experience such meetings, despite a general recognition of their use in terms of community building.

Our Residential Yearly Meeting was once again held in person in Chant D'Oiseau in Brussels. With the theme of 'Searching for unity in turbulent times – from our testimonies to corporate Faith in Action' we were delighted to see many F/friends from our four Worship Groups as well as Friends from other countries. We welcomed representatives from Britain Yearly Meeting, the Netherlands Yearly Meeting and EMES. We were also pleased to welcome our speaker Sister Marianne Goffoel. Our Epistle specifically mentioned:

...Sister Marianne Goffoël told us about her life and work as a Dominican nun...

Sister Marianne also shared reflections about the Catholic Church and Islam, and the "occasional tensions between heaven and earth" she witnessed in her life. Believers must be connected to both heaven and earth, she told us. So faith in the hereafter should not lead to indifference or demobilisation in the face of the world's problems, but on the contrary to commitment to the service of human beings, especially the most disadvantaged.

...We have once again considered the tensions and conflicts in our meeting. We shifted our agenda to respond to the issues and held a worship sharing session. Both longstanding Friends and newcomers spoke about conflict and community building.

...Perhaps we must accept that being in community always implies a degree of tension and conflict. We have been reminded that it is best not to focus on the problem as we move forward, but rather to aim for the space of opportunity on either side. When skiing in the forest in wintertime, it's better to focus on the spaces between the trees rather than the trees themselves. We have been given another image of what might be our goal: a tree that, as it has grown over the years, has partially enveloped the iron fencing on both its sides so that finally they form one body.

...We explored our Quaker testimonies or "SPICES" in small groups. We shared our individual experiences with each other and started to seek what might lead us into collective understanding and action...

As we begin the year 2024, we are looking forward to sharing with FWCC online as Friends from over the world meet in South Africa for the World Plenary Gathering. We aim to organise a hub in Quaker House Brussels and hope to see F/friends from neighbouring YMs at our activities that will be published in due course.

Britain Yearly Meeting

In 2023 Quakers in Britain continued to work on the simplification of structures at all levels – local, regional, and national. It was a major focus of Britain Yearly Meeting that met in London for a blended session in July, with the hope to build more transparent structures that can “...release the energy for practical ministry.” You can read the substantive minutes of BYM 2023 here: tinyurl.com/nhxcbnu2

The 2023 Swarthmore Lecture by Esther Loukin reminded us that true access for all in our Quaker communities is a work of love. You can watch the Swarthmore Lecture on YouTube here: youtube.com/watch?v=cS46oleQbfw



Photo: Mike Pinches

The closure of the historic building at Woodbrooke in Birmingham on 31 October 2023 marked the end of a long era. The spiritual journeys of many British and other Friends were nourished there, for which we give thanks.

The ongoing suffering in Ukraine remained a concern throughout 2023, with many meetings hosting peace vigils and raising funds. Some Quaker families in Britain continue to host Ukrainians in their homes. See also here: tinyurl.com/38rhurjw

Writing our new Book of Discipline is gathering pace. It is hoped to send a complete first draft text to Britain Yearly Meeting 2027 and complete final text for adoption at Yearly Meeting 2030.

In September, Quakers joined many other protestors in London Docklands outside the Defence and Security Equipment International (DSEI) exhibition centre. The conflict in Gaza after 7 October 2023 led to many letters and statements being co-signed by Quakers in Britain. See the link here: tinyurl.com/ydfz5p5b



Five solidarity actions you can take for Palestine and Israel



Responding to the current situation in Israel and Palestine

Building on Britain Yearly Meeting's 2022 decision to consider how reparations might be made for Quaker involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, a new BYM Working Group on Reparations has been set up. In October 2023, Friends House in London hosted the UK's first reparations conference. See tinyurl.com/bdhtxc5. This was organised by the UK parliament's **All-Party Parliamentary Group for African Reparations**. See also quaker.org.uk/resources/reparations

Within Britain, we have watched with growing concern the 'Stop the Boats' policy of the current government, notably in relation to new legislation intended to send new migrant arrivals to Rwanda. The response of Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network to the current progress of the UK government's new Rwanda Bill is notable here. See our condemnation of the government's defiance of rule of law at tinyurl.com/2v4t9csp

The need for Quaker Peace and Social Witness' truth and integrity work in the sphere of British politics continues to grow. See tinyurl.com/4rzav2yx. Truth will be a focus of Britain Yearly Meeting in 2024.

Finally, we look forward to joining with EMES Friends online for the EMES annual meeting in 2024.



Yearly Meeting
of the Religious
Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Brummana Friends Monthly Meeting

Dear Friends, the Brummana Monthly Meeting (BMM) membership has unfortunately been dwindling over the last few years due to the harsh situation in the country and the region. Most Meeting members are outside the country, and all the younger generation and their families are now living and working in other countries all over the world.

The financial collapse, the Beirut Port explosion, the flow of families displaced by wars in the neighbouring countries seeking safety in Lebanon, and presently the ongoing war in Gaza, have all made life hard and work difficult in Lebanon.

BMM is chugging along, albeit with meeting attendance between one and five Friends with an occasional increase when Quakers visit from abroad. The mainstay of Quakers and the Meeting in Lebanon is Brummana High School (BHS). Throughout its 150-year history the school has survived wars and challenging times. This attests to the importance of its educational role in the region (once the original mission also had a hospital that closed in the 1940s). Metaphorically, the founders built the school on a rock!

Members of the Meeting individually help to whatever extent they can in upholding the Quaker spirit and values through their lives and interactions within the community. They also serve on the School Board and QuIET, the Quaker trust responsible for the school. A few members also attend online meetings in Europe and the US.

This ancient part of the world, with its multiplicity of faiths and ethnicities, is rife with conflicts. Though diversity has the potential to spawn rich social, cultural,

and human values, foreign and domestic elements vying for power can unfortunately use diversity to stir conflicts to control this strategically located part of the world with its many resources. The injustice done to the Palestinians is a case in point.

As Friends, our hearts bleed for the situation in Gaza. We are aware that war crimes are committed by individuals or nations during wartime, and we condemn wars. We are aware that injustice exists in the world, and we strive to promote justice. However, the intentional starving of children as a tool of war is tantamount to an abdication of one's humanity. What merit over wild animals would we have left if we lost our humanity? Witnessing the great powers staying silent while the children of Gaza are starving is a cause for great concern.

Sami Cortas Clerk

Budapest, Hungary Recognised Meeting

Our activities in 2023 were...

- meetings by arrangement, usually on the 1st Friday each month, in person and/or online
- participation in the Central European Gathering in Poland: a Friend attended in person, other Friends online
- participation in EMES Annual Meeting at Woodbrooke – Éva Katona
- starting the arrangements for Central European Yearly Meeting 2024
- accepting Friends in Budapest from Warsaw and Prague meetings

Sadly, we lost one of our beloved Friends in 2023, Szilvia Imre.

Central European Yearly Meeting

In 2023, the most important issue, for which we had been preparing for several years and thinking about for even longer, was the question of changing the status of the Central European Gathering. Just a year earlier, in 2022, we were working on our draft Statement of Identity, including its geographical boundaries. The idea of separation by country borders felt wrong and we preferred to define CEG as “the area between the three seas”: the Baltic, Adriatic and the Black Seas. We thought, among other things, about what it means to be a member of our gathering and the importance of giving adequate support to potential members and attenders.

Then in February 2023, in Brno, at one of our preparatory meetings, we discussed a potential change, and finally in May 2023, in Gdansk, Poland, Central European Yearly Meeting (CEYM) became the youngest yearly meeting under the FWCC EMES umbrella.

This is a great joy for us, but, equally, a great responsibility. We recognise that the process is too important to hurry. It is fluid, open to change, especially at this early stage in the life of CEYM. Groups, meetings, and individuals in the area are invited to become part of this Yearly Meeting, and we are especially considering how CEYM will provide pastoral care for members.

We also want to appoint representatives in a more formal way, to keep in touch and build relationships with established Yearly Meetings, to learn from their greater experience and increase CEYM's visibility in the EMES region.

One of the highlights of our 2023 meeting in Gdansk was the outside Meeting for Worship, open to all, held in front of the city's torture chamber. This was the first time in recent history (or maybe ever) that Quakers were so visible in Poland.

On other matters, the CEYM is active in QCEA, and the Funding for Ukraine Group (FUG) continues to meet monthly to distribute donations generously provided by Friends from Europe and the USA, for use by organisations working with Ukrainian refugees in our area.

We continue our weekly CEYM online Meetings for Worship, but our real inspiration comes from the in-person meetings. Although these take place only two or three times a year, by maintaining these bonds, we get a real feel for what CEYM means to us. So, we are looking forward to our next meeting from 16-19 May 2024 in Budapest, Hungary, and are very excited that the 2025 EMES annual meeting will be held in the CEYM region, in Warsaw, Poland.

Kasia Kaczmarkiewicz CEYM representative to EMES

Prague Meeting

Rereading it, the general feeling of our 2022 Report was rather downbeat, so I am glad to write now that 2023 has been more positive for Czech Friends, with improved relations among us.

Prague Friends found a home in **Slow Spot**, a zero waste cooperative food shop, partially owned by one of our members. With the added incentive of being able to do some shopping straight after Meeting, the Spot feels right, so, despite it being cold in winter and quite small, we will worship there, to paraphrase George Fox, for as long as we can. Four of us coming to Meeting for Worship, either online or virtually, constitutes a high attendance.

The link with CEG/CEYM (see below), the fact that we continue to attract enquirers and seekers to Prague Meetings for Worship, and that Friends in Plzen also regularly receive queries, have been positive. These are from people of other faith groups or none, and the energy boost they and visitors from here and abroad provide has renewed our hope that we are not pursuing a pointless exercise.

A hugely important event of 2023 was our involvement at the birth in Gdansk in May of the Central European Yearly Meeting (CEYM), the welcome offspring of the Central European Gathering (CEG). Several Czech Friends were present at this moving occasion and many of us are committed to being active members of the Section's newest YM.

We didn't reduce our Meetings for Worship to bi-monthly, nor did we lessen the number of hybrid Meetings, as proposed in 2022, but continued offering them, always jointly online with CEYM Friends.

Issues such as the climate emergency and support for the Prague Pride 2023

were discussed at our monthly Meetings for Worship for Business, as well as ideas for discussion subjects for after worship, such as the work of Marcus Borg, using his book, *Speaking Christian*.

Having previously helped to fund one of our attenders, Irena Marušincová, with her PhD at Birmingham University, we are happy to be able to congratulate Irena on successfully completing it this autumn, after six long years. Her thesis focuses on communicating Quaker values to children in the Quaker community. The thesis is based on interviews with leaders of Children's Meetings in Britain and offers a comparison of the Quaker approach to the transmission of values with that of the Israeli educator and psychologist, Reuven Feuerstein. The work can be used as inspiration, both theoretically and practically, in developing programmes for children and young people in Quaker settings. It will be made available at [etheses.bham.ac.uk](https://theses.bham.ac.uk)

The war in Ukraine, while lately being eclipsed, understandably, in people's minds and the media, by the recent terrible events in Israel and Gaza, is still very much with us here in central Europe, and several Prague Friends continue to be active in the **CEYM Funding for Ukraine Group**.

Czech Friends have also been involved in QCEA – on the Nominations Committee, the General Assembly and Executive Committee, attending meetings in Brussels in person or virtually.

As always, we ended the year on a harmonious note (managing to raise some funds at the same time), with a number of us, accompanied by family and visitors, singing carols under Prague's historic Charles Bridge.

Liz Coling

Denmark Yearly Meeting

We are only a very few Quakers in Denmark (less than 20 “Friends” – and about 50 “friends of Friends”). The Meeting in Copenhagen meets once a month, on the first Sunday of every month, and the Meeting in Aarhus meets on a Saturday every second month. We publish a monthly digital newsletter, *KVÆKERNYT* (Quaker News), and we also have a Facebook group with 70 members. Both Danish and international guests are very welcome to join our meetings, and we often receive visitors. Some of the Danish Quakers are active in local peace groups and in the climate movement.



Europe and Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF)

“We have enjoyed the aesthetic experience of being physically and spiritually present together in Quaker House Brussels, the sound of the rain on the windows, and the beautiful view of the autumnal sunshine in the trees from the Margaret Fell room.” —*From Closing Minute, EMEYF Annual Meeting 2023*

This part of our closing minute represents a lasting memory of one of our community's two gatherings in 2023. Annual Meeting in Brussels was a time to connect as a community, to focus on the coming year and to appoint new role holders as several Friends' terms of service came to an end.

Our Spring Gathering 2023, held in Congénies, France, was equally a spiritually rich, nurturing and beautiful experience. Amongst the irises and tulips, we ate, talked and worshipped together, spending lots of time outside. We also enjoyed exploring the local area, including trips to the market and to Nîmes.

We greatly appreciated the chance to connect with local Friends both in Congénies and in Brussels in 2023.

Evangelical Friends Church Hungary

Dear Friends, Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am very grateful to God because I can declare together with Samuel: "The LORD helped us all the way to this place!" — 1 Samuel 7:12.

A little remembrance: at the end of February I celebrated my birthday. I became 60 years old. Also, we started our mission in Tolna on the 27th of March in 1997, and after that we were registered as EFC Hungary.

Last year, after the COVID, we finally managed to organise the EFC Hungary General Assembly and EFCI Europe Conference.

In August, we arranged the EFC Hungary youth camp and the children's days. There were about 20 youth and young adults in the youth camp for three days. They had meetings every morning and afternoon. Their main topic was how it is possible to hear God's calling for their life. Between 80-100 children attended the children's days, and my wife, Ági, was able to share the gospel with them. We also provided

them with lunch and some arts and craft activities. In the afternoon, we spent time near the River Danube and the firemen visited us and provided a so-called "foam party", which the children enjoyed very much. The children's parents were invited to church on the Sunday so that we could also talk to them about Jesus.

In Budapest, we have held children's bible study meetings every month for three years now. These church meetings are perfect occasions for sharing the good news with children and with the adults as well. Our experience is that these are quite fruitful meetings.

Also, last year was very busy for us. Our Friends, Thomas and his Mission Group from Germany visited us, and we had street mission and evangelical meetings in the church in Tolna, Budapest, Ozora and in Serbia.

Adrian Halverstadt, the director of the EFCI Council and his wife Lisa were here. Together with them, we arranged the EFCI



■ Baptism in Tolna, Nov 2023



■ Szekszárd Tower



■ EFCI Europe Guests



Europe conference in October. Before the conference, they served in Serbia, Kölked, Budapest, Pécs and Tolna. We are very grateful for them, their presence and their ministry was a big blessing for us.

At the EFCI Europe Conference we listened to different reports and made some decisions. I am grateful for our youth and that I could delegate some of my tasks and positions to them. My goal for the next few years is that I will find successors for every position and that we will build the EFC in Europe as well. Please, pray for that.

We had a guest from Burundi, Dr. Donatien, who recently worked in France as a doctor. We are planning to start EFC with him in France. This was very much supported by Adrian as well. After the conference, Dr. Donatien stayed with us for a week and served in all our churches. It was a big blessing for our mission and for Dr. Donatien as well, since the brothers and sisters encouraged him for the new French church planting.

Tim and Ethel were here at the EFCI Europe Conference as the representatives of the Quaker friends. It was useful as the church could build friendship with them.

Last year, we had three weddings and a baptism meeting (pictured).

We were in Ukraine from 29 November to 2 December where we could hand out food and clothes. Of this, you can find reports, pictures and videos on our [EFC Hungary Facebook page](#).

Before Christmas, we also handed out food and sweets with our co-workers for the poor people in Serbia, Croatia and Hungary. We also gave them Biblical calendars, prospects and Bibles.

I am very thankful for all my co-workers. They help me to build boats and ships in these hard times for the glory of God and for the saving of people.

With love and blessing, Tony & Ági Frei

Finland Yearly Meeting

In FYM there are three worship groups. The Quaker meeting in *Helsinki* convenes weekly come rain or shine, which reflects the steady commitment of a small community gathering for worship and contemplating spiritual, personal, and societal issues.

Our meeting has people of diverse backgrounds and ages, typically we are a gathering of five to ten individuals each time. This group brings together people from different walks of life, including the fresh enthusiasm of new attenders and the wisdom of older Friends. Occasionally, we are also joined by international visitors.

Our meetings are unprogrammed. Our discussions, emerging from silent contemplation and worship, often touch on how we live our values, our personal spiritual journeys, and various social concerns from AI to Ukraine and Gaza. Our doors are open to all, regardless of religious views or background.

In *Tampere*, Meeting for Worship is held weekly in the spring and in the autumn with an average of 6-7 people participating. Every MfW is a good opportunity for us to spend an hour together in silence, respecting that of God in everyone. In our tea-

time afterwards, we have very good discussions that help us to grow together in our path of life.

The Tampere group has traditionally been strongly involved in both organising and participating in the spring and autumn gatherings arranged by FYM. In 2023, both gatherings were held at the Lutheran Aito Centre outside Tampere, near the beautiful Aito Lake. Cooperation with Tampere Lutheran Church, including the association of parishes, has strengthened, which has enabled our Quaker gatherings to be organised in cooperation with other activities of the Aito Centre. The Tampere group financially supports the university studies of a young man living in Rwanda.

Northern Friends met 2-3 times in 2023. As we are few and spread out, this is our normal annual rhythm for days of friendship and fellowship. A few enquirers asked about Quaker activity in northern Finland, and one person has met with us several times, as well as regularly joining the FYM zoom worship, held twice a month. Our group continues to support **Scholarships for Street Kids**, a small British Quaker-based charity, working to provide educational opportunities for very poor and destitute children in Myanmar.

Assemblée de France, Société Religieuse des Amis Quakers

Quakers are still relatively unknown in France – a geographically scattered but committed association working as we can to be a raising agent in the dough of our society. For the most part, our Quaker witness is through individual lives rather than group actions, as the 100 or so members have long travels to Meeting. We have five recognised 'local' meetings, of which one *Nouvelle Aquitaine* is only online, as is a sixth *Amis Isolés*, which gives the many members who are nowhere near a meeting an important connection.

Paris, Nantes and Toulouse meetings all have a few children and the annual Family Week at 'Maison Quaker' in Congenies brings hope and good energies for the future. Congenies, the only property owned by the Assembly, is home to the Languedoc group and has been especially blessed by the resident friends' good energies. We urge all Friends to visit as Bed and Breakfast guests.



■ France YM 2023

The long search for a new home for the 'Maison Quaker Paris' is coming to an end, and we hope to announce our new address in the capital early in 2024. This renewal of our presence in Paris will have space for resident friends (applications are open !) and will be a new venture for the Assembly, as it will be the property of a S.C.I. – a holding company bringing together all the groups in France as co-owners. Its programme will be managed by the 'Centre Quaker International', it will be home to the Paris group of Friends, and we hope a centre for many initiatives to come.

We may be few, but combine with many to bring light into the darkness of the times.

Georgian Friends Worship Group



Georgian Friends Worship Group continues to slowly develop. One more person became an international member. He and his family are fairly active in the small group of Georgian Friends. He and his daughter joined the young Friends gathering in 2023.

The Clerk of Georgian Friends attended the EMES Peace and Service Network gathering in Brussels in October 2023 and became a member of the network's small Coordinating group. Later that year he went to Geneva and gave a talk to Swiss Friends.

It is unusual for Georgian Friends, but 2023 was full of new enquirers (visitors), most of whom were Russian citizens who had either fled Russia due to the war or escaped from the Russian army. Some of them learned about Quakers on their own, some through the Clerk of the Group. They were welcomed by Georgian Friends.

The group of Georgian Friends continues to have meetings in the apartment that is rented with the support of Friends from Cambridge.

Georgian Friends would like to express gratitude to Friends worldwide for their support and prayers.

German Yearly Meeting



German Quakers this year were busy unshuttering the windows to let the Light shine in. In a very practical way, the new kitchen and renovated refectory in our Quaker Meeting House at Bad Pyrmont are ready to offer hospitality again. The sun is shining all through!

We also started to approach controversial topics within our community, like our different responses to the recent pandemic, our peace testimony and climate justice, to name just a few. In doing this, we experienced the transformative power working in and through us.

Support for members who are facing legal challenges due to their activism, and also a visible engagement for climate justice, are among our key concerns now. For this purpose, we nominated a person to coordinate the needs and support offers.

Ireland Yearly Meeting

Like many Quakers across the Section, Ireland Yearly Meeting has been focusing in 2023 on building our community together, following the pandemic years. That challenge is increased not just by the continuing climate emergency but also by political crises and horrendous violence across the world.

This theme of building our community together was central to our Yearly Meeting in Dublin in April, when a hundred Friends, including many visitors, joined in person and online. The new technology, guest speakers and the presence of visitors, make us feel very much part of the world-wide community of Quakers, grappling with these issues. We are looking forward very much to the opportunities that the World Plenary will provide.

We know however that we are faced with the dilemma that we hold a variety of views of our Peace Testimony, and pacifism and prayer alone will not stop war. The tragedy of Palestine and Israel in recent months has increased our

deep concern, and we are also conscious of the questioning of Irish neutrality.

We are also asking ourselves what we, as a small body, can contribute to inter-church and inter-faith work. Respectful, thoughtful engagement and listening without judgement are vital for building links between those of different denominations and different faiths.

In bearing witness we are wondering how we can improve our social media presence, reaching out to those who are seeking. Our first series of Friendly podcasts has been listened to all over the world, acting as a valuable resource for the whole Quaker community, not just Irish Quakers.

Internally, like other yearly Meetings, we are looking at our governance. We need to use our resources well, as we face increasing government regulation. At the same time, we need to ensure that we do not lose the strength and inclusion of our business method.



■ IYM 2023 Assist Clerk, Pleasaunce Perry



■ IYM 2023 Dan Flynn with Florence Foster of QUNO



■ IYM 2023 JYM Clerk, Timothy Corrigan



■ IYM 2023 Plenary session

The Religious Society of Friends, Lisboa Worship Group

Our group has 44 on our contact list. Of that number we have about 14 who attend regularly with between six and eight attending on any typical Sunday Meeting. We still meet on Wednesdays as well. We have no children in our group.

The past year has been stable, growing only by a net few. We have several Portuguese on our list, but only two are regular attenders. We are mainly an Anglo-American group. We still meet by Zoom and that will not likely change. Some members have mobility issues, others live an hour or two away, and a few regular attenders live on other continents.

As for activities, we occasionally do meet in person for Worship and a dinner when attenders do come by Lisboa for a visit. We discuss a topic taken from Faith and Practice after Meeting. These are often recorded on dropbox. Otherwise, we are maintaining the Quaker presence in Portugal. For example, I was contacted by a US Quaker to visit his son held in jail in Lisboa, which I was able to do last Sunday.

In Friendship, Thomas Murray

Moscow Monthly Meeting

Meetings in the Moscow congregation take place every Saturday from 14:00. The prayer part lasts about an hour, followed by discussions of issues of concern to the meeting.

This year, our congregation member Edwin Tamm was involved in a car accident. The size of the meeting is 15 members. Of these, five are directly involved. There are also six friends of the meeting. There are four children attending the meeting.

In January, a meeting was organised with representatives of the St. Petersburg Assembly; the meeting was friendly.

Many of those who cannot come keep us in the light and send words of encouragement. In 2023, we translated children's books based on which we subsequently plan to work with children. The meeting also helps migrants from Asia and other countries to help them find a place to live.

Since mid-January, Moscow Monthly Meeting has lost its meeting space. For two years we met every Saturday and in mid-January the meetings stopped. At the moment we are looking for a place to hold meetings and ask for help and support.

Alexander L Clerk of Moscow Monthly Meeting

Netherlands Yearly Meeting

At our Yearly Meeting session in 2023, when the threat of the pandemic was over, we were happy to meet one another again after quite a long time!

Our theme was *Ubuntu and Sustainability* in preparation for the upcoming World Plenary Meeting in South Africa.

Lynn Finnegan (Ireland Yearly Meeting) and myself went into dialogue about care of creation/sustainability in a prerecorded video. Mieke van Opheusden, a young Friend actively involved in Extinction Rebellion, shared her experiences of acts of civil disobedience and demonstrations. She gave an impressive personal testimony on the importance of resistance. Hennie Jansen, aided by a book in Dutch on this theme, introduced us to the Ubuntu philosophy.

At our meetings for worship for business at Yearly Meeting, as well as later during the year, we continue to struggle with questions regarding the two houses owned by us at the Hague and Amsterdam. Should we hold on to these properties or should we sell them and use the proceeds for Quaker concerns?

Similarly, we are still trying to discern how to simplify our organisational structures and proceedings, being acutely aware of the fact that we are only a small Yearly Meeting and the work to keep it going is increasingly being done by a small number of Friends. Even though we do look to the future with hope!

Kees Nieuwerth

Norway Yearly Meeting

2023 was another year of war, marking our Society's decision to join Kairos, a Christian Palestinian movement, in their call to "end the Israeli occupation and achieve a just solution to their conflict".

Our meetings are then engaging in "boycotts, divestment and sanctions against the Israeli occupation". This was in the summer at the Yearly Meeting, as one of our members took part in EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel), but became increasingly relevant after 7 October.

Our Yearly Meeting event in 2023 was planned by a group of young adult Quakers, to bring in new voices. This was reflected in a programme filled with cultural input, reflection activities and meetings for worship outdoors and indoors. We also celebrated Kvekerhjelp, our Quaker service organisation, turning 60 years.

The autumn marked a point of transition, as we had our 20th anniversary Jønnbu gathering. Jønnbu (a place in Norway) has been a crucial camp-like family-friendly meeting point for many

Norwegian Friends, reflecting our testimony of equality in centering children and teenagers. The original organisers, a couple from Bø, encouraged the younger generation of youth and young adults to keep this work going. The (inner) torch seems to be passing!

Throughout the year, Friends have been part of demonstrations for peace, climate action and solidarity. Some of these were a movie screening with PIM (the campaign for Palestinian children in Israeli Military prisons), a demonstration for peace in Gaza with 13,000 participants in Oslo, and Norway's oldest peace magazine *Fredsviljen* continues to have one of our members as editor, and saw another year of peace work voices, some of which Quaker, spread on print and email. This year's edition focused on Narges Mohammadi, the war in Gaza and a new Nordic Peace Alliance.

We're also part of ecumenical work and inter-religious dialogue, which in 2023 was marked by respectful conversations about some faith communities' exclusion of queer people, as well as further work on a theology of religions with other churches. In both spaces our quaker representatives felt open and challenged. Oslo Meeting helped arrange the Day of Religions in the springtime, building the community of faith gatherings in the neighbourhood of Grønland. Members are also involved in planning an interfaith building, a "Faith-open house" in Oslo.

Kvekerhjelp's 60th anniversary event was marked by good guests and fellowship. Marigold Bentley took us

through her own experiences, shedding light on what has characterised Friends' work for peace. Hassan Albadri shared song and oud-playing throughout the afternoon, with his own "Call for Peace" and Kathem Alsafer's "Remember". Parfaite Ntahuba spoke about gender-based violence in Burundi, her experience meeting Quakers during her childhood, and the origins of the Friends Women's Association (FWA). The Kvekerhjelp-supported kindergartens in Gaza have interrupted all normal activity due to the brutal invasion of the region. Amidst the war chaos, though, the kindergarten in Rafah held a Children's Day event with over fifty children attending. Kvekerhjelp is continuously keeping in touch with our partners in Gaza, hoping our support will enable a future despite the destruction.

In December representatives attended the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo, where the jailed Narges Mohammadi's children in exile shared the winner's speech next to a portrait of her, smiling and hopeful.

Like last year, we're continuing the work of having digital participation in meetings, our digital andaktsgruppe continuing. Many of us are also delighted to experience another year of new children and younger Friends taking part in our communities. With this in mind, we optimistically and openly strive towards peace and sustainability, in these perhaps for many, hopeless times where the Light isn't easy to find.

Egil Mardal Johannesen & Tommy Vad Funderud EMES Representatives, Norway Yearly Meeting

Quakers in Italy

In February 2023, Friends gathered from all corners of Italy at an online meeting organised by the EMES Communication & Programme Officer, Evan Welkin.

Many Friends from the Bologna Meeting and Florence Worship Group, as well as International Members and attendees from Northern and Southern Italy expressed interest in gathering monthly. Thus, an online survey in Italian and English was spearheaded to include a collaborative design process and was launched in June for Friends in diverse geographies in Italy.

Survey responses from 19 Friends confirmed enthusiasm for a monthly online gathering with four principal aims: above all, to nurture the community's spiritual growth (60%); but also to discuss current events and organise action, strengthen Quakerism in Italy and address administrative questions, and to get to know newcomers and Friends in Italy as people (40% each).

On World Quaker Day 2023, Friends throughout Italy celebrated together at an initial nationwide gathering online. Later in November, at the Annual Gathering in Borgo Basino, Friends agreed that inclusive online gatherings would begin as monthly Meetings for Worship for Business, with opportunities to enhance spiritual concerns, support activism, and grow in interpersonal comprehension. With great joy at the beginning of December, Italy's first nationwide Meeting for Worship for Business was hosted by a newly nominated Clerk, Jeannette Law, and united a dozen Friends from all parts of Italy.

Over the course of the year, Bologna Meeting joined the March for Peace and Florence Worship group meets once a month in person at the English Cemetery. The 2024 Gathering is set for the weekend of 8-10 November.

quaccheriitalia.com



Photo: Kristen Hills

Ramallah Friends Meeting (Quakers)

We have witnessed numerous challenges in our country throughout the year, 2023. As we all strive to adjust to these fast-changing times, with an ongoing genocide in Gaza and the West Bank, and a complicit world, it is important to remember that the Lord remains in control, and as we have learned from our Muslim brothers and sisters, we continue to submit ourselves, our lives and our loved ones in the hands of Allah.

Looking ahead to the future, our unwavering goal is to cultivate hope for the new generations; a hope that is inspired and reinforced by understanding, and a sense of social responsibility. This year, our annual report is short compared to previous years. Our activities have been challenged by the catastrophe affecting our society.

Review of Year 2023 at Ramallah Friends Meeting:

- Worship & Fellowship with Kelly Kellum (FUM Director) at Ramallah Friends Meeting Center September 2023.
- Visit of Max & Jane Carter from the living letters (June 2023)
- The Meetinghouse remains open for Sunday Worship for local and visiting Friends.
- The continuing education of the Youth Empowerment Project, funded by the Friends of Ramallah Friends Meeting Quakers (FRFMQ) and implemented by the United Palestinian Appeal (UPA). This is still an ongoing project that will take another year to complete.

Essentially, we must bear in mind that each time we support one another and those in need, we are committing to working patiently and passionately toward our ultimate goal. It's an uphill battle, but we must keep the faith.

Saleem F. Zaru Clerk, Ramallah Friends Meeting

Greetings from Spain to Friends in the Section

2023 has been a low activity year, meeting regularly every Sunday by Zoom from different parts of Spain and from abroad, Argentina and New Jersey. We were also delighted to have Paul Holdsworth and Jeannette Delgado in our Meeting for Worship in January and February as they spent those two months in the south of Spain. After Silence, we have interesting afterthoughts.

We started our Facebook page, **Cuáqueros España**, where we will give information about Quakers in order to be more visible for those interested in Quakerism.

We celebrated World Quaker Day by connecting with the Barcelona worship group by Zoom, as they decided to meet in person in order to have Meeting for Worship that day. We didn't manage to meet in person this year though we expect to do it in 2024. And finally, we will be delighted if any of you feel like joining us any Sunday at 7pm CET and practise your Spanish. However, if translation is needed, no problem, it can be provided.

Carmen Alcalde & Astrid Bruhn

Sweden Yearly Meeting

Sweden YM has had an active year and worked to find ways to meet and worship together, both in person and online. The year has also included preparation and implementation of some bigger changes in our meeting. Two of our paid staff have gone into retirement and at the moment the YM relies on unpaid service and coordination of events.

The YM has upheld an ecumenical accompanier with EAPPI. In July, Friends met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a letter on our stand on nuclear weapons. During the Week of Social Action in September, along with more than hundred civil society organisations, we offered both a meeting for clearness and worship for peace on earth and peace with the earth. Quaker Service continues to support important projects and initiatives in several countries. Throughout the year, Friends have read and met in conversation circles based on the book *Being a Quaker* (Durham) translated into Swedish.

Work has been done to add new material on our [website](#) and look over our communication technologies used. We held our first hybrid mid-year meeting in November. After a long process of discernment, the property Svartbäcken retreat centre has been sold. Annual meeting was held at Svartbäcken in May and the epistle includes...

"The Inner Light and our quaker practice help us navigate the tension between tradition and renewal, physical and digital meetings for worship, paid and voluntary work, our spiritual and material inheritance... This year's theme was Svartbäcken – its history and significance. In an opening presentation we saw pictures and film fragments from the history of Svartbäcken as a hub for Swedish and international Friends' meetings. Many summer camps, retreats and yearly meetings have passed... We hope and look forward to exchanging experiences with Friends from other countries. Because, no matter which forms or paths we choose in a world in change, we walk in the Light together."



■ Lake in front of Svartbäcken

Switzerland Yearly Meeting

We are 73 Friends and 62 friends of Friends and enquirers included on our mailing list. The average age remains high (around 70).

There are three regional groups (Bern, Basel and Zürich) and Geneva Monthly Meeting (GMM) within the Switzerland Yearly Meeting (SYM). Organising the SYM Annual Meeting has been rotated between the German-speaking groups and Geneva Monthly Meeting but for 2023 the organising was handled by Friends from across Switzerland.

The 2023 annual gathering of Switzerland Yearly Meeting was held 26-29 May, again at Herzberg. It was attended by approximately 30 Friends. The program focused on two themes: how we can strengthen our Quaker community and actions we can take to address our concerns for peace, economic justice and environmental sustainability. For the latter, three working groups were formed with the intention that they would report back to future annual gatherings on their actions in each area. A taster workshop on AVP, Alternative to Violence Program, was also shared and interest has been expressed to host a group in 2024 at the GMM.

Another significant gathering was the annual retreat, held in February at Montmirail near Neuchâtel on the theme of Dreams. The event was completely held in person this year.

Geneva Monthly Meeting has been hosting a spiritual reading group that meets monthly.

There are about six regular participants, including Friends who formerly attended the GMM but who are now participating remotely from the United States. The group has been reading and discussing Quaker pamphlets or the “Quaker Quicks”, which are more contemporary, to learn and share more about our Quaker faith. Some reading has been done using Pendle Hill publications. Both the summer picnic and the annual Christmas gathering took place again in person following the pandemic and were quite well attended. Both were vegetarian for the first time.

An open house was held in June to which neighbours of Quaker House were invited to learn more about the Quaker UN Office (with which GMM shares Quaker House) and meet members of Geneva meeting. One Geneva friend invited GMM Members to her house in Morgins in the spring for a “fun weekend” and we were delighted to have four children join us. We enjoyed cooking, hiking and worshipping together in a relaxed atmosphere.

The Swiss Meetings continue to be challenged by an absence of children; to address this, a few members from Montreux and Berne have created a F(friends) of Families that meets every two months. The intention is for families

to collectively select one of the topics provided by the organisers and explore it with the children through special activities and moments of silence and relaxation. The first meeting focused on emotions and five families took part. An average of three families, with two children, each of been attending; these activities have been offered in the Aikido Dojo in Montreux.

One of the members of Berne Meeting, which is centrally located, held an open house in the summer, inviting members of the different SYM meetings to join for an outdoor gathering with beautiful surroundings.

In Geneva, Meetings for Worship continue to be hybrid though there is an average of about 12 people attending in person regularly and 3-4 online. There has been recent success in bringing more Friends together for the Quarterly business meetings. After Meeting for Worship there has been a simple potluck meal, followed by the Meeting for Worship for Business, and then a workshop or presentation by a speaker on a topic of interest. This structure has increased the attendance dramatically. The GMM has been restructuring some of the committees to try to adapt to the current reality, for example, there is now a clerking team of four.

Six Friends are meeting regularly in person in Berne. Three Friends are meeting on the 1st Sunday every

month in the Basel region. Visitors are welcome.

The Zurich group resumed physical meetings since January 2022 on the second and fourth Sundays every month, while online worship meetings via Skype take place on all the other Sundays.

There are three business meetings a year, the principle one taking place during the Yearly Meeting, which is attended by about 30-40 members and representatives of other Yearly Meetings and Quaker organisations. The two other Business meetings are held in the spring and autumn and are attended by about 10-15 members. The spring meeting focuses on planning the Yearly Meeting and acceptance of the accounts from the year before. The autumn meeting deals mainly with the budget and nominations for the next year. Folks have been encouraged to attend in person so as to enhance a sense of community.

Two publications continue to be produced several times a year, "Entre Amis" for SYM and "News and Views" of Geneva Friends, which contain much information about the activities of Swiss Friends. Similar to the multiple languages used at SYM Annual Meeting, these publications contain articles in German, French and English, reflecting the multilingualism that is both a strength and a challenge for the Quaker community in Switzerland.

Tallinn Friends Group

In 2023, we were active on multiple fronts. A significant portion of our work focused on reconciliation efforts between war refugees and local minority groups. We organised several Non Violent workshops and seminars, providing members with valuable learning and development opportunities.

As a pilot project, we held an innovative simultaneous translation workshop, which yielded excellent results for rapid communication among speakers of different languages. The project was carried out in collaboration with the Moreno Psychodrama Center. The workshop was partially supported by MFH and the Yew Tree Fund. We are deeply grateful to AFSC Associate General Secretary Jason P. Drucker, whose assistance and guidance have been invaluable.

We were joined by two new friends, and we have received numerous friend requests to join the Facebook group. We also encourage our local youth to join the EMES youth group. We had many visitors from Germany, the USA, England, and Russia. It was a pleasant surprise to meet Nora, Dean, and Julia from the USA, with whom we spent memorable days in the Old Town, visiting the Ukrainian church and cultural centre, and meeting with the former Prime Minister in the Estonian Parliament, where we discussed international relations and opportunities for peace cooperation.

It was a great honour to participate in the FHM General Gathering for Reflection and Fellowship in Tbilisi, Georgia, on 14-15 October. We continue to promote alternative service through campaigns, led by Rafael Rolan Rand, so that young people can serve in hospitals, schools, and social centres.

We continue with charity projects for Ukrainian war refugees and collecting educational materials for schools. We are seeking contacts and donors abroad to fund projects, contributing to the achievement of significant social objectives. Projects led by Liz Coling have received substantial support.

We plan to reprint essays from George Fox's "Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings" and translate newer Quaker literature. Several university libraries have shown interest in the literature.

We have received an offer from the city of Võru (a city in southern Estonia), where a local Lutheran pastor offers cooperation for Quakers in the work of the Kingdom of God.

The Tallinn Friends Group is committed to promoting peace, social harmony, and Quaker values through various activities and collaborative projects.

Roland Rand Clerk

Reports from Across Europe

Dutch Quaker Helpfund

The Helpfund takes care of transferring donations on behalf of individual Dutch Friends.

We have the possibility to donate to causes of common concern from projects the Helpfund governs. The earthquake in Turkey and Syria had our attention and we donated to AFSC, which was active in this region, and the Dutch *Kerk in Actie* (Church in Action), which has had contacts in Syria for 12 years. We supported, together with

a collection for this purpose at our yearly meeting, Friends House Moscow.

We sponsored the EAPPI observers in Israel. We sponsored QCEA, several African Friends, the Monteverde Friends School in Costa Rica and additional projects beyond those we sponsor on a yearly basis. It was good to keep in touch with European Friends and meet them in Brussels and on zoom with a monthly theme in the Peace and Service Network.

Friends House Moscow

The biggest projects we supported were *AVP Moscow*, *Meditation of friends* – meditative sessions for spiritual seekers, *Integrational Centre for Refugee and Migrant Children* in Moscow, *English Club* educational programme for former residents of orphanages, and a new programme of basic education and arts, and life skills for teens and young adults – mental health patients.

Our international activity was a Russian speaking gathering of Friends held in Tbilisi, Georgia. About 30 people participated.

We supported the participants of the Friends Peace Teams Conference held in Poland. We also helped the *School for Cultural Youth* in Prague, which runs classes for Ukrainian refugee children. We provided support for website альтернативщик.рф for the Russian COs.

Outreach was an important part of our work this year. We were active online spreading the information about Quakers including regular meetings for worship on Zoom.

We can see that the number of participants of Quaker groups in Facebook, Telegram and V Kontakte increases. The main online resource centre is the quakers.ru website.

“Desirable Foreigners. Successes of Citizen Diplomacy in Soviet Russia” by Sergei Nikitin was our main publishing project in 2022. The book was published and distributed by means of an online crowdfunding service. Online publication George Lakey’s book “How We Win”, in Russian was another important project.

**Natasha Zhuravenkova
& Sergei Grushko**

Northern Friends Peace Board

Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) seeks to support Quakers and others in learning and taking action for peace 'in all its height and breadth'. It is a representative body, with members and support from all Area Meetings in the North of Britain.

Having spent the previous three years largely meeting online, NFPB members were able to meet in-person for all of our four meetings during 2023. Gathering in Lancaster, Edinburgh, Darlington and Bolton, Friends addressed a range of peace concerns, made connections with one another and learned together from different speakers. Those not able to attend the venues could join online, with technology now being available in Meeting Houses across the country.



With continuing and new crises, we arranged online meetings for Friends to reflect together on appropriate responses to the war in Ukraine and, later in the year, to the terrible situation in Palestine and Israel. Friends had space to gather in quietness, to listen and to speak, sharing both certainties and uncertainties.

Throughout the year we continued our outreach to Quakers and beyond, working in partnership with both Quaker and non-Quaker groups. This included speakers and workshops for events, regularly-updated content on our [website](#) and social media, monthly 'Peace Round-up' newsletters and more. As well as national and international Quaker networks, we contributed to the work of Rethinking Security (who have been working on an 'Alternative Security Review'), the Global Campaign on Military Spending, and the UK's Network of Christian Peace Organisations.

Looking ahead, our work in supporting Friends in reflection and action in relation to ongoing and new crises will continue. We have a publication and other new activities being planned, hoping to engage more with younger Friends and to develop more opportunities for people to meet together, both online and at different locations on a regional basis.

With changes in British Quaker structures – both the Yearly Meeting's activities and those of Woodbrooke – and pressures on people's time and money, we aim to adapt and be responsive to new opportunities and challenges. We are grateful for, and inspired by, the time, money, imagination and commitment that Friends have made this year and for the 110 years previously since our foundation in 1913.





**Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs**

Located in the Quaker house in Brussels, Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) works to bring a vision based on Quaker commitment to peace, justice and equality to Europe and its institutions.

In the face of a world grappling with complex crises, the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) stands in favour of compassion and cooperation, dedicated to fostering peace, justice, and equality. 2023 marked a pivotal year for QCEA, characterised by significant developments and impactful engagement in a range of critical areas.

QCEA launched its publication "Storytelling from the Frontlines" in March 2023. This collection of narratives from communities around the world highlights the experiences of those impacted by the intertwined realities of militarism and the climate crisis. The publication serves as a powerful testament to the human cost of these interconnected challenges and the resilience of those affected.

In April, QCEA embarked on a renewed path with the approval of its new strategy "Justice and Peace in a time of climate crisis", which was developed based on reflections on current Quaker concerns with our General Assembly and conversations with a range of organisations and individuals. This strategic framework outlines three interconnected strands of work that serve as the foundation for

QCEA's ongoing work: climate justice and peace, migration and peace, and dialogues for transformation.

QCEA welcomed the appointment of a new Climate Justice and Peace coordinator in July 2023, who immediately delved into developing the programme's scope and work towards a transition to a more sustainable, peaceful and fossil free Europe.

August and September saw Quaker House in Brussels host the "Loving Earth Exhibition", a captivating community textile project that celebrates the beauty and resilience of our planet and what we can do to protect it. The exhibition featured a diverse array of artwork, workshops, and events, fostering a sense of interconnectedness and inspiring action to address climate change.

QCEA remained actively engaged in promoting just and equitable migration systems. Working alongside partners and networks, QCEA actively contributed to advocacy on the EU Pact on Migration, calling for policies that prioritise safety, equity, and responsiveness to the needs of migrants. Furthermore, QCEA organised two quiet diplomacy events, reflecting on the meaning of borders and providing a platform for open dialogue and understanding.

Recognising the vital role of civil society in shaping a more just and peaceful world, QCEA became a signatory of the Manifesto for Civil Society in EU (CS4EU) campaign. This initiative advocates for increased access and space for civil society organisations to engage with policymakers, ensuring their voices are heard and their contributions valued.



■ QCEA roundtable

QCEA conducted a comprehensive communications survey in 2023. This insightful assessment focused on identifying ways to enhance QCEA's interactions with its key audiences, ensuring that its message resonates effectively and inspires action for a better future.

Following the survey, QCEA made the decision to introduce a new bimonthly

online newsletter "QCEA Digest" bringing the latest news from the organisation and the EU.

Finally, QCEA began to prepare for the EU Elections. We are planning a project to call for compassion, integrity and respect in politics. As we embark on a new year, QCEA would like to thank Quakers in EMES for your unwavering support throughout 2023!

Quaker Service Norway

Quaker Service Norway (QSN) is an independent organisation with its own board, consisting of nine members, who all work voluntarily. QSN has no employees. QSN is closely connected to Kvekersamfunnet (The Religious Society of Friends, Norway) and often holds its annual meeting at the same time and place as the annual meeting of the Quakers in Norway.

QSN works for and with people living in conflict areas. Together with grassroots organisations, we try to build peace and strengthen dignity and equality. QSN supports projects in Burundi, Rwanda and DR Congo, as well as in Gaza.

Kindergartens in Gaza

After QSN lost its main funder, NORAD, in 2021 we had to reduce our support to fewer projects. However, with the support of many Quaker organisations and private donors, it has been possible to continue supporting its main project, Palestinian Early Childhood Education Programme (PECEP), which provides preschool education for 5 year-olds in 12 refugee camps in Gaza and peacebuilding projects in Rwanda, Burundi, and DR Congo.

Everything changed for our partner, PECEP, in Gaza and the kindergartens

in the 12 refugee camps when the bombardment of Gaza began after the horrific attack by Hamas in Israel on 7 October. Many kindergartens have been completely, or partially, destroyed and the children and their families, PECEP employees have fled from the bombing. Now, there is no safe place in Gaza and many thousands of Palestinians have been killed and maimed and many are missing. We have been able to keep in touch with our partners, but it is difficult due to unstable internet connections and lack of electricity.

We have been able to send financial support to the kindergarten employees, to help them buy food for their families. Food and water is scarce and is now very expensive. They do not receive wages as the kindergartens are closed.

A highlight for the children in Rafah was when our consultant arranged a Children's Day for more than 50 children. Games, singing and gifts of small toys were a welcome relief in the midst of a brutal war. Most of the children of Gaza are traumatised, and Quaker Service Norway will continue its support PECEP in whatever way possible. Although at the moment we do not know how that will materialise. The war must end.





■ Gaza, Palestine



■ Rwanda



■ Burundi

60 year anniversary

In October QSN celebrated its 60th anniversary with a seminar in Oslo. Marigold Bentley, from the UK, who has been involved in Quaker peace projects for many years, led us in a reflection on how we learn from the past to guide the future. Parfaite Ntahuba told us of the gender-based violence prevention project in Burundi which she leads and QSN supports. A panel gave insights into the work of QSN over the years.

Peace building projects in Africa

In October, Arnstein Finset (chairman of QSN) and Leo Zjerveld (board member) travelled to Burundi to take part in the Quaker Peace Network gathering. Arnstein took the opportunity to visit projects in Rwanda as well as in Burundi. QSN continues to support peacebuilding projects in Burundi, Rwanda and DR Congo.

In Burundi, QSN supports Friends Women Association (FWA) and “Action on Gender-Based Violence” project. Volunteers are trained to support women vulnerable to gender based violence and to run trauma healing workshops for victims of violence.

In Rwanda, QSN supports Friends Peace House (FPH) and Help Increase The Peace Project (HIPP). FPH runs Alternative to Violence Projects (AVP) in prisons and communities and HIPP runs peace clubs and peace building workshops among youth.

In 2023 QSN also supported Initiatives for Community Reconciliation (INIREC) for a project aiming to prevent and reduce conflicts and electoral violence in elections in DR Congo in December.

Penny Heymans & Arnstein Finset

Quaker Service Sweden Kväkarhjälp

We have supported an integrated development project in Bangladesh for more than 30 years. The project has been very successful and has spread to quite a few villages.

It involves groups for teenage drop-outs, for women, men and seniors as well as school possibilities for young children. Civil rights have been implemented and many early marriages and domestic violent situations have been avoided. However, this year, after auditing and finding some differences in the local leadership, the donations from the Swedish Mission Council have been suspended for the time being. A catastrophe for the beneficiaries but we

hope to find ways to support them soon again.

Support for the Ukrainian refugees have been sent to Central European YM and also through Misha in Georgia.

Through local Friends we have also supported AVP in Zimbabwe and also a peace library and food security programme in Burundi. Our donations to Gaza have always gone through Norwegian Kvekerhjelp and we hope the situation will improve so the support can reach those in need.

Annika Hollsing Clerk QSS

Quäker Hilfe

Quaker Aid is the aid organisation of the German Quakers. It was founded in 1963 as an independent association and is closely linked to the German Yearly Meeting. There are currently eight Friends on the board. In addition to advising and deciding on applications for financial support, the individual members are available as contact persons for one or more of the projects supported and report on them at our board meetings. In 2023, we funded a total of 11 projects in nine countries. Our funding priorities include:

I. peace work and non-violent conflict transformation

This includes helping people in situations of war and violence and reconciling former enemies and to prevent the emergence of war and violence by reducing hatred and prejudice and building just and democratic structures. We support AVP workshops and training courses in Cape Town, South Africa and Nepal.

II. improvement of living conditions (social, economic, ecological)

This includes projects that work in partnership with local people to improve the living conditions. In addition to the projects of our partner Rural Service Project in Kenya, with whom we have been continuously associated for over 50(!) years, we are supporting partners Quaker Bolivia Link and AVP Bolivia financially with a new project involving the provision of greenhouses to improve the nutritional situation of prisoners in a prison in Bolivia.

III. arriving in life

This includes projects that support people of all ages in finding their place and their way, especially refugees from war, violence and the climate emergency. In addition to three projects in Germany, which provide psychotherapeutic and psychosocial counseling for people traumatized by flight and torture and help refugees to learn



■ Quäkerhilfe supports PECEP kindergartens in Gaza

German and integrate into school, we also support projects for refugee children in Russia, for asylum seekers from Ukraine in Georgia, and, more recently, a project to support women in Palestine. Together with Quaker Aid Norway, we have supported PECEP in Gaza since 2000. PECEP has set itself the goal of supporting preschool children and providing them – who suffer particularly from the traumatising violence caused by the state of siege and the repeated bomb and rocket attacks – with spaces to learn and play.

IV. general projects for peace and (climate) justice

Quaker aid and peace work aims to combine concrete help for people on the ground with lobbying the powers that be. Quaker Aid is not content to simply alleviate people's suffering, but tries to bring political and economic decision-makers together with the people who are affected by their decisions. This is why we

have been supporting the invaluable work of QUNO (Geneva) for human rights and climate justice for many years. In 2022, we have also supported the activities of Posledni Generace (Last Generation Czech Republic), a group of Czech climate activists.

Like other aid organisations, we are experiencing a downward trend in donations while at the same time the need for support in all our areas is growing – this is particularly true for the support of refugees in view of the increasingly restrictive refugee policy in our country and in the EU in general.

Today, in January 2024, our thoughts are with the children of Palestine and Gaza, who – like their parents and grandparents – find themselves in an unimaginable situation for all of us and whose lives are threatened by the Israeli army's bombing raids and food blockade, which violate international law.

Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET)

Brummana High School (BHS) in Lebanon has entered its 150th year. The school was established in 1873 by a Quaker, Theophilus Waldmeier, a German-Swiss Missionary and Quakers have supported the school through the years since then.

BHS is the only Quaker school in Lebanon and one of only two in the Middle East. It has survived invasions, civil wars, regional and world wars, occupations, bombardments, famines. But these last years have been some of the most challenging with inflation at 210%, unemployment at 60%, poverty levels at 80% of the population, the Beirut port explosion, a huge influx of Syrian refugees, the COVID pandemic and now the war in Gaza and much tension on the Israeli/Lebanese border.

Lebanon's infrastructure has disintegrated, shortages are everywhere and power cuts are a daily occurrence. Yet life goes on and education represents the glimmer of hope on all parents' horizons, representing the chance for their children of a prosperous, poverty free future, life with dignity and of the foundations of democracy.

BHS is a leading and dynamic educational force in Lebanon. Sports, the Arts, the model United Nations programme, botanical garden and the exchange programme with Sidcot School have flourished and the celebrations of the school's 150th anniversary have lifted spirits. 1,250 students aged 3 to 18 benefit from the holistic education the school provides

with its emphasis on individuality, respect for others, tolerance of all faiths and peaceful resolution of conflict. The result is that the school consists, unusually in Lebanon, of children from all faiths and socio-economic backgrounds. There is no shortage of students but many of the children require financial support to continue their studies. Due to this increasing demand for financial aid in the longer term, the Board of Governors and the Trustees of the Quaker International Educational Trust (QuIET) created an endowment fund to provide bursary assistance to students in need of financial support.

BHS is governed by a Board of Governors in Lebanon and QuIET is responsible for the land, buildings and the school's Quaker ethos. QuIET has Trustees from the UK, USA and Lebanon. Within the school grounds, is the Quaker Meeting House, and the small Brummana Meeting uses the school's premises. The Friends of Brummana High School Group helps to provide BHS with financial support and to inform Friends about the school. QuIET enjoys a good working relationship with Friends United Meeting in the USA and raises funds in Europe for Ramallah Friends School (RFS) in Palestine. This fundraising for RFS has been particularly important in 2023 given the war in Gaza and unrest on the West Bank and the impact this is having on the school.

For all Lebanon's difficulties, BHS is testament to the power of education to

change people's lives and, God willing, to provide for a better, more peaceful, happier future: [link](#)

Quaker representation at the United Nations in Geneva remains firmly on track. The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) is a Quaker voice at the United Nations in New York and Geneva and has been active at international meetings throughout 2023.

The Geneva office runs four programmes and its Representatives at the United Nations (UN) meet regularly with diplomats, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders for off-the-record meetings or quiet diplomacy aimed at enhancing peace and justice.

QUNO's Human Impacts of Climate Change (HICC) programme works across a range of international processes, including the climate change negotiations, the international climate science body, and the UN's Human Rights Council.

Quakers are the only active, independent faith-based observer at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and are often called the 'ethical voice in the room'.

As expert reviewers and active in negotiations, QUNO protects IPCC findings from political efforts to weaken scientific language on urgent, healthy, equitable, rights-based, and available-at-scale climate action.

**QUNO**

Quaker United Nations Office

Quaker United Nations Office Geneva

QUNO's Human Rights and Refugees (HRR) programme works with, through and for international law and multilateral processes that honour the inherent dignity of every member of our human family.

Progress can feel slow and hard, especially in the current global context, but coordinating with other NGOs, QUNO led a call for the UN Human Rights Council to establish a monitoring mechanism to track deaths and other serious human

rights violations at international borders. This was joined by over 200 organisations and echoed by the Special Rapporteur for human rights of migrants.

QUNO's Peace and Disarmament (P&D) is rooted in its collective resistance to all wars and preparations for war, and an understanding that peace is fundamentally linked with human rights, social and economic justice, and political participation. Its work in 2023 continued focusing on highlighting interlinkages

between human rights and sustainable peace and the negative impacts to people and communities where arms are present.

To address these concerns, QUNO facilitated regular informal conversations on arms-related risks to human rights and related responsibilities of the arms sector with diplomats and expert discussants over the years.

It also participated in a panel, 'A Rights-Based Approach to Conflict Prevention', at the 10th anniversary of Geneva Peace Week and facilitated a panel, 'Promoting Human Rights and Inclusive Societies', in New York.

In 2023, QUNO's Sustainable and Just Economic Systems (SJES) programme continued to tackle the complex challenges posed by plastic pollution and inequitable economic systems. Anchored in its mission to reshape economic paradigms.

SJES emphasised reimagining economic models, scrutinising the nexus between trade and environmental sustainability, highlighting the issues around environmentally harmful subsidies, and championing retrospective justice.

QUNO Geneva director Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge says their programmes aim to add Quaker values to global conversations and agreements...

"Quakers have a deep commitment to peace on earth and our programmes are grounded in Quaker values. We build on over a century of Quaker engagement with the multilateral international institutions, initially with the League of Nations and now with the United Nations. We look forward to growing our collaboration with FWCC Europe and Middle East Section as we respond with hope and determination to the global poly crises of war, inequality, climate and economic injustice" she said.



■ QUNO Geneva Staff at its annual meeting in May 2023



WOODBROOKE UPDATE

2023 has been an important year for Woodbrooke. There have been significant changes from the transferring of responsibility of the Woodbrooke Centre to Bournville Village Trust (BVT) and the induction of five new Learning and Research Staff, to the search for a new CEO and the introduction of our Working with Meetings and Woodbrooke Places initiatives to name but a few.

Among these changes, there have been a number of achievements this year for us as an organisation. We have had over 4,400 bookings from 38 different countries on our wide range of 216 courses and sessions. 37 of these sessions were workshops in which we delivered learning directly to Quaker communities across Britain and Ireland as well as in America, Australia and Canada. Our Centre for Research in Quaker Studies also had great success in supporting eight students complete their PhDs with the University of Birmingham.

Throughout the year, we continued to hold regular online meeting for worship sessions in partnership with FWCC EMES, providing opportunities for worship for those all over the world. We also held regular Young Adult and Quaker Parent Worship with Quakers in Britain and established an Educators Worship with Quaker Values in Education. In total we held 633 worship sessions where we were joined over 14,300 times.

Our two annual lectures provided insight into current issues relevant to Quakers and Quaker theological thought. In April, the Swarthmore Lecture was given by Esther Loukin, co-founder of the disabled-led organisation Reasonable Access. Esther

looked at how we can bring about change in broader society, including reflections on what established systems could achieve and what they cannot. Shortly after in May, Rachel Muers delivered this year's George Richardson Lecture on the topic of 'The Seed and The Day of Small Things'. It was our most well attended George Richardson Lecture with over 200 people registered to watch.

Throughout October and the start of November, we ran the once-a-decade British Quaker Survey. We received over 4,600 responses to the survey which, following ones we ran in 1990, 2003 and 2013, gathered basic information about who Quakers are and what we believe. We are planning on holding a worldwide survey of Quakers in 2024 at the FWCC World Plenary.

At the end of the year, we announced the news that Mandy Cooper is taking over as the new Woodbrooke CEO. Mandy brings rich leadership experience and passion. Mandy's appointment marks a change in leadership at Woodbrooke with Martin Ford, who was interim co-CEO for the past year, retiring in November and Sandra Berry stepping back after 13 years in post as Director early in 2024.

Over the year, our partnership with EMES has continued to grow and foster new opportunities. Following the success of our previous European Quaker Voices courses, we launched a new course in partnership with the FWCC called World Quaker Voices which we ran twice in 2023, covering the themes of community, worship, history and experience.

Youth Empowerment Project

Summary

The second half of 2023 witnessed one of the worst escalations in the history of Palestine in the form of a brutal bombardment and heightened siege of Gaza, the effects of which immediately radiated throughout the West Bank. Even before these events, the daily struggles of living under occupation in the West Bank continued to mount due to expanding restrictions on movement, the escalation of Israeli forces' arrests, detainments, and deadly raids carried out against the Palestinian population, and a disturbing increase in attacks perpetrated by illegal settlers.

The UPA-Friends Center and its volunteers transcended these immense challenges as the project entered an exciting new phase: the completion of the leadership training course and selection of three participant-created initiatives, which will start in 2024. The leadership training and development of youth-led projects were particularly

oriented toward the overall program's sustainability, teaching long-term skills and inculcating the guiding principles and characteristics of leadership in participants. This period's volunteer exchange addressed an exceptionally difficult situation: the emotional well-being of children in Jenin camp. In this exchange, volunteers from across the northern and middle West Bank exemplified the qualities that inspired this project: unity, resilience, and creativity, as they held a day of festivities for the children of Jenin camp.

Activities

Jenin Camp, home to almost 24,000 Palestinian refugees in the northern West Bank, has historically faced significant economic marginalisation and occupation violence. It experiences some of the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the West Bank, and consequently some of the highest school dropout rates. The effects of occupation are felt particularly acutely by children in the camp.



■ Participants in Volunteer Exchange #4



■ Volunteers pictured with children holding balloons

2023 was a difficult year for Jenin camp. The steady increase in settler-perpetrated violence and restrictions on movement in the first half of the year culminated in a devastating raid carried out by occupation forces in July, killing 12 Palestinians and displacing hundreds. The attack caused severe damage to infrastructure, including homes, schools, and the UNRWA health centre. Families reported that their children were terrified of leaving their homes for weeks, highlighting the desperate need for mental and psychosocial support for children.

After a discussion with representatives from the camp, the UPA-Friends Youth Center decided to organise an activity centred around the children of Jenin camp that would bring joy and respite from the the pervasive atmosphere of fear in the wake of the raid.

Staff planned the event for a Friday because volunteers' schedules were limited on weekdays; however, the fact that public

transportation does not run on Fridays unfortunately made it difficult for volunteers to travel to Jenin. The UPA-Friends Youth Center supported volunteers by organising carpools and reimbursing taxi fare. The ongoing security concerns in the areas surrounding Jenin and UPA's dedication to participant safety led UPA to restrict volunteer participation to just volunteers from three locations: Ramallah, Nablus, and Jenin.

Despite these restrictions, 32 volunteers representing these three cities gathered in Jenin camp, and after meeting one another, split into seven groups to conduct interactive, energetic, and entertaining activities for around 150 primary school children from the camp. These included face painting, musical games, balloons and water play, and a clown performance held by one of the volunteers. Finally, the children gathered for a storytelling session held by one of the volunteers, during which other volunteers distributed educational gifts to the children.



Nadia: making an impact

20-year-old Nadia travelled over an hour from Nablus to participate in the volunteer exchange at Jenin camp. A third-year student at An-Najah University, where she studies social service, Nadia described her motivation this way: “I want to make a positive change, leave an impact, and start with myself to bring about positive differences and development.”

While she is a long-time volunteer, her decision to join UPA's programming stemmed from her knowledge of the organisation as being unique in its collaboration across various institutions in different cities, which she values as a young person who wants to make new connections with other like-minded people throughout the West Bank. She noted that she was able to “discuss different cultures and traditions and participate together in games during volunteering,” with her new friends. These are all things that added to Nadia's experience as a volunteer.

At Jenin she saw herself bringing lightness and relief to the children at the camp as a way to help them set aside the challenges they face due to occupation and frequently violent incursions into their spaces. During the initial phase of the activities, Nadia decided to take on the responsibility of

managing balloons with a few of her cohort and noted that her favourite parts of the day were singing together, and taking a group photograph with the team of volunteers after their work was done.

Nadia has a keen interest in continuing to work as a volunteer. She hopes to find new ways to explore and familiarise herself with environments outside her own and to do good work for other communities.

Leadership Training

UPA successfully held its planned six-week leadership training course during the third interim period, equipping 43 youth from Ramallah, Jenin, and Bethlehem with the interpersonal skills necessary to effect positive change at the local level. UPA collaborated with the Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society and Partners for Sustainable Development to advertise the training in the south and north of the West Bank, and relied on an advertisement and online application form to recruit participants in Ramallah.

The expert trainer selected during the second interim period developed a robust curriculum for the course based on the survey results obtained from 12 youth centres in the area, as well as a focus group and needs assessment. The topics selected included teamwork skills, design thinking principles, critical thinking, analysis skills and planning, and project implementation. The resulting curriculum was taught in each of the three locations in a six-week period, which culminated in the participants' submission of 9 youth-developed projects to UPA's Community Connect pitch competition.

Although UPA enlisted 60 participants (20 in each location) for the leadership training, only 43 individuals were able to participate due to unsafe travel conditions caused by the prevailing political atmosphere and

ongoing violence throughout the West Bank. In response, UPA organised an additional training session in Ramallah for 20 participants in the hopes of including more youth in the project. Two days before the session was to begin, the devastating bombardment and heightened siege of Gaza started. Considering the immediate repercussions inflicted on Palestinians in the West Bank in the form of travel restrictions, settler violence, and incursions by Israeli forces, UPA ultimately had to cancel this training.

SHADI: initiating programs of his own

Shadi from Al Jalazon Refugee Camp is 25 years old. He is a young man who studied music and programming, works now in the field of electricity, and volunteers on a regular basis, including for UPA. Volunteerism has always been one of his passions because of how it permits community engagement. Shadi wanted to do more—not simply to show up and participate, but to be someone who could initiate programs of his own.

Shadi commends UPA for its grassroots approach and how it dedicates itself to assisting young people in developing their own initiatives. With regard to the training, Shadi praised the trainer for his effectiveness in communicating

material and for using activities to convey information instead of simply lecturing at the participants, something that he found surprising.

Next Steps

In the upcoming reporting period, the Youth Empowerment Program will continue conducting its successful volunteer activities and will initiate the three youth-led community projects that were selected via the pitch competition.

YOUTH LED Community Projects

In the coming months, the UPA Friends Youth Center and the selected winners of the pitch competition will begin implementing the three youth-led community projects, utilising the lessons learned in the leadership trainings to carry them out successfully.



Under the care of the Ramallah Friends Meeting
Funded by Friends of the Ramallah Friends Meeting
Implemented by UPA



Church and Peace

Nonviolent paths to peace

Committed to the hopeful **vision of a just and nonviolent world**, Church and Peace has joined calls and initiatives for various peaceful protests to break the spiral of violence, for a ceasefire and peace negotiations in Ukraine and Russia, and also in Palestine/Israel. Many members have organised **activities** to mark one year since the most recent Russian invasion of Ukraine.

If you want peace, make peace

In events and **conferences in the Netherlands**, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and online, we dealt with various aspects of peace work which are central to the work of our members: from reflections on nonviolent strategies and methods of civil defence, to Christian pacifism in the face of current wars, to the importance of ethical banking, to racism in the church and how we can overcome it as well as its painful consequences. These gatherings offer a welcome and welcoming space of encounter, discussion, discernment, as well as encouragement and common worship.

We are looking forward to meeting again in the fall of 2024: Join us for the European conference in Brussels from 24-27 October or for the German-language regional meeting in Karlsruhe from 29 November – 1 December!

With churches in Europe for peace

In June, General Secretary Lydia Funck took part in the **General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches** (CEC) addressing the theme “Under God’s Blessing – Shaping the Future”. Speakers reminded the participants and delegates, in particular, that nonviolence is a central task of the church. Church and Peace was invited to partake in the “Pathways to Peace” initiative, which is an endeavour to promote paths to peace in Ukraine; it will shape the work of the CEC in the coming years.

Prayer and advocacy for human rights

Conscientious objection to military service is a human right that we have once again advocated for this year. For example, as part of the action weeks for the International Day of Conscientious Objection to Military Service in May.

Since February 2022, we have been praying online every Friday evening with 40-60 participants for peace in the world, for peacemakers and conscientious objectors. A warm invitation to you to **join the prayer!**

Farewells

After 18 years at the international office of Church and Peace, we are saying farewell to our trusted administrator Helga Amelung. She as well as our General Secretary of the last seven years, Lydia Funck, will be venturing into new career paths in early 2024. They both leave lasting marks in the network of Church and Peace. We wish them God’s blessing!

Bank account & how to contribute to FWCC-EMES

The work of FWCC-EMES depends on contributions from the Yearly Meetings in the Section and from individual donations. Contributions for the general work can be made using the bank details below.

For payments in Euro please use these account details

EMES account at Wise

Account Name: FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section

IBAN: BE33 9672 0215 6046

SWIFT/BIC: TRWIBEB1XXX

For payments in Sterling please use these account details

EMES account at CAF Bank

Account Name: FWCC-EMES

IBAN: GB03 CAFB 4052 4000 0255 78

SWIFT/BIC: CAFBGB21XXX

Sort Code: 405240

Account Number: 00025578



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION