



Among Friends

Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section

No 159 ■ Spring 2024



Kirsten Hills

EDITORIAL

PEACE AS A PRISM

Landscape around Borgo Basino

As I prepare this, my last issue of Among Friends, I am exploring the many sides of “peace” in my life. Peace could be a prism, an unremarkable, transparent shape reflecting a rainbow when the light shines through it. Walking around my farm these days, each day bringing me closer to the day I will have to say goodbye, I am seeking peace. The peace of letting go. As I coordinate with members of our Peace and Service Network, discerning together how to respond to

the two wars in our Section, I am seeking peace. The peace of standing up for what’s right. I also witness significant difficulty and conflict in various Friends’ communities I connect with these days, struggles to come to unity across tremendous divides. Could we find a peace of “good enough for now, safe enough to try?” I turn peace over in my hand, knowing that I will only really see the true colours shine through when I hold all the sides up to the light.

This special issue explores more sides of peace, including updates from the ad hoc groups of the Peace and Service Network sharing their work. Tracey Martin of QCEA offers a reflection on the intersection of climate justice and peace, while Rania Ma’ayeh of the Ramallah Friends School shares about the campaign to support wellbeing programming in the community in Palestine. Quaker Service Norway shares about an initiative to bring aid and support to Gaza, while Friends in Italy share about their worship space in the English cemetery in Florence. We also read very personal reflections from conscientious objectors and deserters to the war in Ukraine, poetry and a unique perspective on the biblical requirement to love our enemies. All these can be parts of a larger understanding of peace, a peace that is neither simple nor easy to see sometimes. I invite you to hold these perspectives up as facets of a greater design, a shape we create together to reflect something larger. >>

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Peace as a Prism 1
- Justice and Peace in a Time of Climate Crisis 2
- Quaker Service Norway Appeal 4
- Ramallah Friends School Wellbeing Campaign 5
- How to Annihilate Your Enemies 6
- Quaker Meeting in Florence 7
- The English Cemetery 8
- COs & Deserters from Ukraine and Russia 9
- Poetry 11
- QCEA Updates 12
- QUNO Update 13
- Woodbrooke Update 13
- Diary 14



Friends World Committee for Consultation
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

fwccemes.org

» I am walking today through a place of shadow but I will seek to overcome my fear, try to make space for a way to open towards a greater peace and stillness. After years of holding onto a dream that brought me to this Section, I am accepting that it is time to let go. I am also very sad to say goodbye to you, Friends, and this job at EMES. My work with you has brought me tremendous joy, while also exposing me to real struggles felt all across Europe and the Middle East today. I am especially trying to hold up these various, seemingly conflicting, sides to a greater Light, a light that brings hope as it shines through the darkness. I find hope in the many voices you raise together, your varied stories and perspectives reflecting the One True Source we all share. Keep making rainbows together, Friends!

Evan Welkin Communication and Networking Coordinator



JUSTICE AND PEACE IN A TIME OF CLIMATE CRISIS

A version of this article was given as a keynote talk to 80 participants at the Community of Christ European Peace Colloquy held from 15th to 17th March 2023 in Kington, Herefordshire, UK by Tracey Martin, QCEA Director

Peace is often understood as the opposite of war – but it's so much more than that. Peace is a society based on compassion and justice that seeks to address structural, physical and cultural violence. It is ongoing work and it means we need to work for peace in every aspect of our society and the challenges that we are facing.

In the past I've heard people say: "Oh I care about the climate/environment but I'm already very busy working for peace". Last year, when we were developing the Quaker Council for European Affairs new strategy, I often heard: "Climate organisations and peace organisations don't really communicate with each other". I'm pleased to tell you that even in the last year this is changing – more and more people and organisations are seeing the links and the need to work together.

While developing our strategy, we were also told that QCEA was good at making connections, bringing people together and working at the intersection between issues. We recognised that climate justice and peace are inextricably interconnected and we decided to work on the intersection between these two issues. I want to share with you why this is so – and how we can work to address the threats we face.

WHY?

1. Peace is more difficult in a time of climate crisis. When you are faced by an extreme climatic event, like a flood or a fire, your first response is fear. While disaster brings out the best in people, it can also bring out the worst. It makes people vulnerable to violence. As resources such as water get scarcer, it can increase the risk of violent conflict – it can also provide opportunities to work together to address the problems.



| Tracey Martin

2. The effects of climate change and environmental breakdown will not affect people equally – inequality is a form of structural violence and is a driver of violent conflict. The changes we need to make to become fossil free could be done in a way that reduces inequality both in Europe and worldwide.

3. Policy and action that address the climate and environmental crises are not viable if they violate the rights of others or cause and exacerbate conflict. The European Green Deal is not conflict-sensitive – it does not require Member States to implement its policies in ways that will allow conflict to be resolved peacefully. It relies on the exploitation of the resources of other countries, threatening the lives of their citizens and likely to exacerbate or cause violent conflict...

Example 1: the farmers' protests in Europe

If you are told that something bad is going to happen to you in 10 years time but you can do something about it now, and at the same time told you have to make a change that will immediately cause you suffering, what do you focus on? The frustration of farmers is understandable but it is being exploited for political gain. A major cause of the frustration is a lack of dialogue and consultation in the first place.

Example 2: the race for critical raw materials

Imagine we move to zero fossil fuel by 2050, we still have cars and mobile phones and all the energy we need. But in other countries millions of lives and places will have been destroyed by extraction and exploitation. Will we have addressed climate change? Will we have peace? The EU and other rich countries risk replicating the violent practices that underpinned colonisation and causing and exacerbating further conflict.

4. Military emissions are excluded from the Paris Agreement and responses to climate change (and to action to prevent environmental destruction) are often militarised.

Tiara R. Na'puti who opposes the expansion of military bases in Guam in the Mariana Islands said: "We need to challenge the idea that climate change can be 'securitised'... And while the military has done campaigning and branding around their capability as a sustainable industry, they are not. And the truth of the matter is that we do not have the time or the luxury to wait for them to clean up their messes because every mess that they have created is inundated by the previous one they still have not cleaned up".

In Guatemala Cristobal Pop speaks about the government response to communities in Izabal calling for action against mining activities that have polluted the lake where they fish: "A clear example was the 20-day resistance we did in 2021. They sent a large number of army regiments, J8s, helicopters, coastguards, speedboats. In other words, we are practically treated as if we were terrorists or drug traffickers when in reality we are claiming our rights".

The environmental effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine are well-documented and will take decades to address. The effects of environmental disasters such as those suffered by Haiti are leading to an increase in violence and injustice.

Addressing the climate crisis is not a competition or a war, it is not a zero sum game, it depends fundamentally on our ability to collaborate, to recognise that 'I am because you are'. Climate crisis and environmental breakdown will have global effects and therefore it needs global collaboration – you can't have that without peace.

HOW?

Transformation – a fundamental change in narratives, systems and practices – an unlearning – economy, lifestyle, relations between countries. As Christians we believe in transformation – people can change, another world is possible. It's daunting – but we can, in small ways, start behaving differently and creating environments where others are invited to do so – dialogue work.

Recognising interdependence – between people and between people and nature (even further accepting that we are part of nature) changes everything – it changes the angle at which we look at ourselves and everything around us. Becoming fossil free is vital but how we do it is just as important as what we do.

Sufficiency: what matters to us? What do we really need? How can we meet everyone's needs? The economy.

Narratives not slogans – the stories we tell about the way things could be; listening to different people's stories, how they see the world and their experiences, welcoming a plurality of stories.

Love not niceness – we don't have to please others but we need to care about them. How do we see people who want the world to stay as it is? – oil company executives; right-wing politicians; those calling for war.

Acknowledge people's fears and doubts: talk about them and engage with them. Bring them into the conversation. Make them agents of changes that will affect them – nor recipients.

Just and peaceful transition: policy and practice that is conflict-sensitive – recognise that conflict is inevitable but not a bad thing if it is engaged nonviolently, do no harm, give people a say in how change happens, recognition of existing inequalities and seek to address them.

Shout the message loud and clear: we cannot build a European fossil free future on the back of the exploitation of people in other parts of the world. It doesn't make sense scientifically – and it absolutely does not make sense morally.



QUAKER SERVICE NORWAY APPEAL FOR GAZAN KINDERGARTEN COMMUNITY

by Arnstein Finset, Clerk of Kvekerhjelp

Through the news media, we are reminded daily of how terrible the situation is for the people of Gaza. Quaker Service Norway has maintained contact with our partner in Gaza, the Palestinian Early Childhood Education Program (PECEP), ever since the war started on 7 October last year. None of the 13 kindergartens that PECEP runs have been in operation after 7 October 2023, and several of them have been destroyed in the hostilities. We hope to get started with activities as soon as possible.

What does Kvekerhjelp do in this situation?

After the kindergartens closed in October last year, the staff in the kindergartens have been without pay. A large part of the salary expenses is covered through parental allowance. After the war started, these incomes disappeared. Kvekerhjelp has therefore sent money to PECEP on two occasions, once before Christmas and once in February, to be distributed as emergency aid to the employees to compensate for the loss of income. Most of the employees have fled their homes, and many of them are now based in Rafah, the southernmost city in Gaza. It has been possible to distribute the funds from the shipment before Christmas to around 90% of the employees.

PECEP has also wanted to initiate activities for the children in Rafah who have been displaced from their homes or in Gaza. So far this has not been possible, but the management of PECEP is working on the matter. Many of the children are heavily traumatised and marked by their experiences in the war. PECEP plans guidance for parents in

the refugee camps on how best to help traumatised children and to prevent long-term trauma reactions. Kvekerhjelp gives top priority to supporting these projects as soon as they can get started.

A few days ago, the chairman of the PECEP Board told QSN that they "...are working on implementing the suggested open days project in the next period and it will include, additional to the previous proposal, meetings with mothers in refugee shelters to raise awareness with the proper ways to deal with their kids during the difficult situation of the war". Quaker Service Norway will certainly support such a programme, and thinks that counselling to parents is extremely important. If possible, this will be implemented in collaboration with the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

Quaker Service Norway has regular contact with Quakers in a number of countries in Europe through meetings in EMES (Europe and Middle East Section). EMES' Peace and Service Network has its own ad hoc group on the situation in Gaza and the West Bank. There is great interest among the participants in this collaboration for Kvekerhjelp's projects. We therefore offer the opportunity for Friends to contribute to support this work, using the details below:

Quaker Service Norway /
Kvekerhjelp
Grønland 12
0188 Oslo, Norway
Clerk: Arnstein Finset
IBAN NO8112542008081
BIC/SWIFT CULTNOK1

RAMALLAH FRIENDS SCHOOL WELLBEING CAMPAIGN



It was very helpful and we're very grateful for the money that we have received because we were able to hire a yoga and breathing instructor. Both our students and staff have suffered from heightened stress and anxiety, so the sessions were very helpful for them.

We provided like almost 18 sessions at both schools, both campuses for both teachers and staff. We've also hired a part-time counsellor. He's working mostly at the lower campus with more issues of anxiety with the little ones and without teachers who have family members in Gaza. They work at the lower campus. The counsellor has been a great help. We have around 30 students who crossed checkpoints and have family members in Gaza. The counsellor has also given individual sessions to our staff. We have also had activities to promote well-being, where people could interact together positively. They were very successful. We're now planning two more activities when Ramadan is over.

We are Marching In The Light Of God

"ekukhanyeni kwenkos'.

Siyahamb' ekukhanyeni kwenkos

Siyahamb' ekukhanyeni kwenkos"

The song is called Siyahamba and is a South African hymn. The title means we are marching In the light of God in Zulu. It is sung in Zulu, in English and in Arabic, and we're singing it to amplify our firm belief that our liberation is imminent and that without justice there cannot be peace. So this song is very significant for us, especially because of South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

We continue to ask for solidarity and advocacy to call on leaders to enforce a lasting ceasefire and to end the military occupation. We welcome the support for our school from Friends, particularly now, in the present circumstances. We believe that strengthening our educational framework is crucial for nurturing a generation that can envisage a liberated future that would work towards ending the cycle of violence.



[youtube.com/watch?v=pzON6GG3soE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzON6GG3soE)



HOW TO ANNIHILATE YOUR ENEMIES

by Edward Dommen, Geneva Meeting

“Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”, wondered Abraham Lincoln. The biblical vision of the Peaceable Kingdom illustrates the point:

The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat; the calf and young lion and fat calf will be together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will graze with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play by the cobra’s den, and the toddler will reach into the viper’s nest.

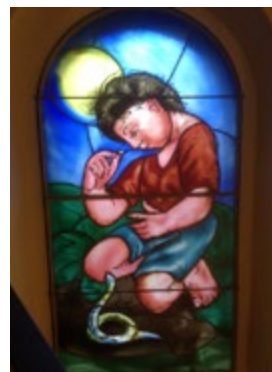
—(Isaiah 11.6-9)

All the animals including humans are living together as companions and friends. The US Quaker painter Edward Hicks (1780-1849) in turn illustrates that passage. He was a sign-painter by trade, so it is not surprising that there are at least 60 authenticated versions of the painting, shown above.

Ever since Genesis, the snake, the serpent, “the craftiest of all the beasts” (Gen 3.1), has been the epitome of deceit and wickedness : it is the hereditary enemy of mankind because it incited Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

The LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

—(Gen 3.13-15).



In his stained glass window illustrating the Peaceable Kingdom in the Protestant chapel in Martigny, the 103 year old(!) Swiss artist Hans Erni (1909-2015) thus goes straight to the heart of the matter by focusing on its closing verse: a toddler is playfully offering a treat to the snake, which plays along like a puppy.

QUAKER MEETING IN *Florence* by Kirsten Hills



| English Cemetery in Florence

The Quaker Meeting in Florence, Italy, is one Europe's youngest. The story of how the group came together and eventually found their venue for Meeting is a series of remarkable happy accidents. The worship group in Florence meets at a historic landmark in the city, which as Kirsten Hills discovered has surprising links to a Quaker past...

The formation of our Quaker worship group in Florence has been serendipitous. A chain of coincidental events brought us together, and led us to find the English Cemetery where we hold Meeting for Worship once a month.

In 2019, in the space of one week, I met two American Friends and knew of a fourth, so we created a worship group. Initially we met in one another's homes, understanding the need to find a more accessible and open space for seekers.

In 2020, as COVID restrictions lifted, we renewed our efforts to find a venue but none seemed viable. Churches were concerned about scheduling conflicts with their Sunday morning masses, and other potential locations required room rental beyond our means as a small group.

Then, in 2021, my work brought me to the historic English Cemetery (formerly the Protestant Cemetery of Florence.) It is peculiarly situated atop one of the city's busiest roundabouts. 1,500 gothic statuettes and marble tombstones stand as a testament to Florence's foreign community of the 1800s. Tourists come to pay their respects to the many thinkers, writers and activists buried here; among them the British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, writer Frances Trollope and American preacher and anti-slavery campaigner Theodore Parker.

During my visit, I interviewed Julia Bolton Holloway, the British Dante scholar and caretaker of the cemetery. Together with a group of Romanian Rom, they restore and maintain the site. I mentioned our Quaker Meeting and to my surprise Julia revealed her Quaker heritage from Coventry. She showed me a section of Quaker books in the cemetery's library, and pointed out the two simple gravestones of Quakers Peregrine Bowen and Elizabeth I. Hopkins, who are buried here. Julia kindly offered to host our Meeting at the cemetery, and everything fell into place.

We meet on the first Sunday of the month, and while we face many of the same challenges other Meetings experience, I am always thankful for the space we have, to meet and grow as a small Quaker community. The Worship Group in Florence meets on the first Sunday of the month: quaccheriitalia.com

Bologna has its own bimonthly Meeting, which has been running for more than 20 years. Once a year Quakers in Italy come together for our annual gathering.

Sixteen different nationalities are buried at the English Cemetery. Despite its name, the land is owned by the Swiss Reformed Church who bought it in 1828. For more information about the site visit florin.ms >>

The English Cemetery

by Julia Holloway



| Quaker Meeting in Florence



| Julia and Roma Friend in the English Cemetery

- » Florence's English Cemetery in Piazzale Donatello was founded in 1827 and closed for real burials in 1877, then abandoned until 2000. It had been a beautiful garden in the English style, then for many years was denuded of plants, put to weedkiller and covered with gravel instead.

I became Custodian in 2000, and was able ecologically to stop the use of chemicals and use compost instead. Romanian Roma asked if they could garden and planted wild irises, Florence's lily, which holds the soil on its hill from erosion. I discovered that the Roma were highly skilled stone masons, gardeners, carpenters, blacksmiths but that almost all were illiterate, not even able to write their names, which they wrote out for the first time as members of our Aureo Anello Associazione.

Now 65 Roma children, women and men in our project, 'From Graves to Cradles', can read and write. Romanian Roma were slaves from before the discovery of America until Uncle Tom's Cabin's immediate publication into Romanian, then were in the Holocaust's deportation to Transnistria in the Porrajmos's mass starvation in open fields. The first and second anti-slavery

novels, which Harriet Beecher Stowe next copied, were written by Frances Trollope and Richard Hildreth, who are buried here along with Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose family were mixed race slave owners in Jamaica, and Theodore Parker, the America preacher, whose tombs were visited by the ex-slave Frederick Douglass in 1887.

Our graves include those of Quakers, Russians, both nobles and serfs, the son of King William IV and his wife and servant all in equal graves side by side, and Nadezhda, who came to Florence at 15, a Nubian slave, freed and baptised with the name meaning 'Hope' in a Russian Orthodox family, dying in her 30s, many women who died following childbirth because doctors did not wash their hands. Our sculptors include Lorenzo Bartolini, William Holman Hunt, Frederic Leighton, Hiram Powers. The Torrigiani family in Florence help us with our gardening.

We hold Quaker Meeting in silence in our library. The Roma helped build the first First Day (Sunday) of every month and would welcome you.

PEACE AND SERVICE NETWORK AD HOC GROUP ON COs & DESERTERS FROM UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

by By Mikheil "Misha" Elizbarashvili, part of the PSN Coordinating Group

The following stories tell us that there are people in the Russian and Ukrainian armies who do not want to fight because of their peacekeeping motives, moral rejection of violence and other reasons. Unfortunately, legal methods of refusing to serve in the army do not actually work in Russia and Ukraine.

Therefore, in various ways and sometimes with the help of non-profit organisations, they have to flee the country, or hide with their friends and relatives. There are many families with both Russian and Ukrainian origins who flee Russia and are welcome nowhere. Working on the issue of conscientious objectors, I have met a number of Ukrainian citizens in Georgia, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine who do not want to be conscripted in the Ukrainian, or any other armies, since they do not want to fight against other individuals.

Since 2023, the EMES Peace and Service Network has a subgroup that is actively involved in promoting networking and possible assistance to conscientious objectors and deserters from Russia and conscientious objectors and peacekeepers from Ukraine. The group includes representatives of Quaker communities from Belgium, Switzerland,

Italy, Ireland, United Kingdom and Georgia. Derek Brett, who participates in the group, travelled to Ukraine as an European Bureau for Conscientious Objection observer of Vitaaly Aleksienko's appeal to the Supreme Court and the Court hearing for Andrej Vishnevetsky – conscientious objectors respectively refusing mobilisation and seeking release after having been forcibly mobilised. PSN actively participated in the assistance campaign for Yuri Sheliazhenko in 2023, including correspondence with the Ukrainian authorities to promote the protection of Yuri's right to object.

Yurii is a famous Ukrainian peacemaker and defender of C.O. rights. The subgroup is actively working on Ukrainian Conscientious objectors Slava's case to help him and his family find a sponsor to move to the USA. I, Mikheil (Misha), am a Georgian Friend and interviewed deserters and COs to introduce them to the public. Tracey Martin from QCEA and Dixie Willis from QPSW have been actively involved in networking and communication with different authorities in the European Union and NGOs to spread the message about the conscientious objection issue.

26 February 2024



| Deserter Evgeni plays piano



youtube.com/shorts/KuCwt61NX8E

Story of a Deserter from the Russian Army

Good morning. My name is Evgeni. I am from Moscow. I am 24 years old. I have always considered myself an empathetic person. I was fascinated by how much happier you become if you act with kindness and understanding to other people. During my teenage years we watched a lot of documentaries on World War II, which made a great impact on me and sparked my love for peace and compassion.

Thinking about all the orphans and widows of war, all the broken families and ruined lives made me emotional on a deep level and fuelled my desire to always be kind and affectionate to others. I made an oath to myself to always lend a helping hand and to never hurt anyone on purpose. I did an obligatory conscription service when I was 18 and thought that would be the end of any connections with the Russian army. When the Russo-Ukrainian war started I knew I had to do something. I decided to leave the country as soon as possible and therefore applied for an international passport. In August 2022, as soon

as I got my documents, I made a rushed attempt to leave the country but it proved unsuccessful due to COVID-19 regulations. Unfortunately, I did not even consider the possibility of me being mobilised; I believed that the Russian government would not be ruthless enough to send their own people to death through means of lies and propaganda. A month passed and I learned how wrong I was.

When the mobilisation started, I was spending time with my friends and family and this unexpected course of action made me scared and frustrated. The sheer shock of being in this extremely dangerous situation paralysed me and left me incapable of thinking of any plan of action. On September 30th, I came to see my parents as they were feeling very nervous about everything that was happening. My plan was to hide in a shelter in Russia, at my friend's summer house in the Moscow region and I wanted to share the plan with my family. I entered a metro station, passed through a security point and then two police officers approached me. They

asked for my documents and explained that they would take me to a police department for a document verification. Later I learned that I had been brought there because my district's military conscription office had put me on their wanted list for recruits. The same evening I found myself at a mobilisation centre which was surrounded by police so there was no chance of escaping. They didn't let me see my parents that day and after a couple of frightening hours, I was in a bus filled to the brim with recruits, not knowing yet what awaited us in the near future.

Upon arriving at the training camp I began researching how I could potentially escape my forced military service. I wanted to challenge the mobilisation decision by legal means and thus I sent a letter to the government authorities. I asked them to change their decision, but they completely ignored my request and so did my commanders. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if I were to be a part of the Russian war machine. As my vacation date drew nearer I contacted "Go by the forest" NGO, who >>

» agreed to help me escape the army. I was thrilled to know that there were still people willing to help me. Escaping from the military unit was fairly difficult, since I was in the occupied part of Ukraine. Every form of understanding, especially under these dire circumstances, goes a long way. Despite all the challenges I was forced to face in the most recent 12 months of my service and almost two years of war, I successfully escaped Russia. I went from Russia to Armenia and then to Georgia.

At the time of writing this letter I am considering moving to Europe. I've been living in Russia my whole life, and while I enjoyed some parts of it, I have always felt a strong pull towards Europe. My grandfather was a Soviet diplomat and I have fond memories of his stories of travelling to Europe

and other parts of the world. I was inspired by him knowing so many languages and being in so many countries so I started to learn English at a very young age. This led me to having a group of close friends all around the world.

I am aware that getting into a European country will pose a challenge, but I am confident that I am prepared for it. I am looking forward to immersing myself in European culture, learning a new language and making new friends. Also I am very excited about the prospect of living closer to my friends in Germany, with whom we have stayed in touch since I was 19 years old. We have always planned to reunite someday. I am not sure what the future holds, but I want to see what happens. I am confident that moving to Europe is the right decision for me. In my opinion Peace is harmony

and love between people of different nations, ages and religious beliefs." Peace is a music for our souls".

The traumatic experience of being forcefully mobilised has strengthened my belief in the importance of being humane and peaceful, standing your ground for your freedom, which I now know more than ever cannot be taken for granted. It also showed me the impact NGO's like "Go by the forest" and ACT for transformation Caucasus office can have on people's lives. I am thankful to everyone who is willing to understand me, especially Misha from Georgian Quakers, and I am committed to helping others by sharing my story and hopefully having a positive impact on any individual affected by war and on the world as a whole.

Story from an Ukrainian Conscientious Objector

The Interview of Vitaliy Alekseyenko

I am Ukrainian, but was born and spent my youth in Uzbekistan. There I had the opportunity to undergo alternative service instead of military service. At birth, I was baptised in the Orthodox Church. When I grew up, I saw that they did not live there in love, as Jesus taught. There was a lot of stress in life, in particular due to misunderstanding in my family.

The Holy Spirit directed me to seek truth and healing in Christian literature. I fasted, observed the Sabbath, and suddenly it was as if I was born again. At that time, there was no normal income in Uzbekistan, and in order to support my child I went to look for work in the homeland of my ancestors, in Sloviansk. In addition to daily routines, I looked for Christian explanations for why people break God's commandments. I have not found any church that adheres to the teachings of Jesus Christ as I understand them after my personal conversion.

Then the war came. It was a disaster: people are dying, cities are destroyed, and nature is suffering. Many people prayed and continue to pray for peace and justice in Ukraine and in the world. God in heaven surely hears our prayers, and those powerful in this world must hear too. I believe that it is necessary not only to pray for peace, but also not participate in wars. Jesus teaches us to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you.

Hide your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. Jesus Christ also said in the Sermon on the Mount: reconcile quickly with your adversary. And we should listen to these wise words. If we fail to find agreement, this animosity will not end well and a nuclear war may occur that will kill countless people. I heard Pastor Phillip Barnett telling such a terrifying dream as a warning. God save us from the tragedy! Only in a peaceful way, with God's help, by following the commandment "you shall not kill" and the commandments of love, can we achieve justice and peace. Heart and

conscience will help to overcome anger and pain of loss, reconcile and learn to live without war. Christ said: blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.

When the Russian army invaded Ukraine and began shelling Sloviansk with artillery, I decided to move to Ivano-Frankivsk. It was impossible to settle or get a job there without registering at the territorial centre of army recruitment. I went there and said that I could not serve in the army because of my religious beliefs, that I had decided more than 20 years ago not to take up arms. I asked to replace my military service with an alternative one. I was first sent to the local administration, then ordered to go to the military unit, and when I refused, they informed the police that I was evading the draft. The Constitution of Ukraine says that there should be alternative service instead of military service, but for some reason religious people with antiwar beliefs are still punished for avoiding military service.

The investigator convinced me that I had broken the law and persuaded me to take a plea deal in exchange for a suspended sentence of three years in prison. In court, I said that I was ready to plead guilty to violating the laws of the state, if the court deemed it so, but I obeyed God's law. The judge didn't like it, and I was sentenced to a year in prison. Human rights defender Yurii Sheliashenko found out about this injustice and contacted me, explained that I did not violate the law, and began to help defend my rights, because the Constitution and international treaties of Ukraine provide for the right to conscientious objection to military service and its replacement with alternative nonmilitary service. The state should not put conscientious objectors in such a position: either you go in the army or to prison. The appellate court upheld the verdict of the court of first instance.

I spent three months in prison. This is how I was punished for the fact that my Christian faith and my conscience do not allow me to go into the army to kill people. The Supreme Court released me after international attention to my

situation, speeches by members of the European Parliament, a visit to the prison by Alexia Tsouni, President of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, and the arrival of Swiss human rights defender Derek Brett in Kyiv as an observer at the court hearing and editor of the amicus curiae brief in my case.

When I was released from prison, I wanted to sing "Hallelujah!". I felt that Lord God does not abandon his children. But I was not acquitted, and a new trial in the Ivano-Frankivsk City Court led to a new conviction, though this time with a three-year suspended sentence. Appellate court refused to acquit me, but also refused to put me in jail as the prosecutor asked, arguing that public sentiment demands so and the suspended sentence is too soft. I do not understand why judges ignore the Constitution of Ukraine. But I will continue to seek justice, the acquittal. In any case, I remember the suffering of Christ, who atoned for human sins, and I am ready to suffer for belief in Christ.

It is a shame that the state failed to provide me with alternative service. With God's help, I found a Christian way of protecting my country and nonviolent resistance to Russian aggression: my job as a postman. Despite all the attacks and explosions, Ukrainian people must receive their mail, parcels and pensions, and congratulate each other with holidays by postcards. When people in every corner of the country are connected by the postal service we are united, we are almost neighbours. There is a message of love and hope in it, and it helps to overcome the pains of war.

Erik Dries



“No”

What if I said no to chaos?
 What if I said no to racism?
 What if I said no to terrorism?
 What if everything I said no to
 Was true.

I would find reality
 To bask in humanity.

A forever utopia
 Locked in my mind.

It is just a myth
 Like the epilogue of this world.

Alshaad Kara

Alshaad Kara is a Mauritian poet who writes from his heart. He won first place for the Boney Cultural Center Valentine's Day Poetry Competition 2024 and was also a winner of the Flapper Press Poetry Café Valentine's 2024 Juliet Poetry Contest. His latest poems were published in "Coin-Operated Press", "Loud and Queer Zine" and "Missives".

Francisco Javier Burgos is the executive director at **Pendle Hill** and has facilitated retreats within the complex intersectionality of spirituality, social issues, and mysticism, as well as led lectio divina sessions for many audiences. Francisco was a De La Salle Christian Brother serving in Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Costa Rica, and has been a Friend since 2004. He is a member of Harrisburg Friends Meeting and an attender of meetings including Monteverde Friends Meeting in Costa Rica, Adelphi Friends Meeting in Maryland, and Providence Friends Meeting in Pennsylvania.

Longing for Peace

“Love and faithfulness meet together;
 righteousness and peace kiss each other.
 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
 and righteousness looks down from heaven.”

—*Psalm 85:10-11 (NIV)*

Creator Spirit,
 make me an instrument of your peace
 bread in the hands of the hungry
 blanket for those who are cold
 water for the thirsty.

Loving Spirit,
 make me an instrument of your justice
 a voice that proclaims joy and hope
 an artisan of liberation
 capable of transforming the cruel reality of everyday life
 into gardens of peace and solidarity.

Spirit that dwells within us,
 make me an instrument of your love
 an open heart for listening and companionship
 a balm for those who are discarded
 for those who live under the weight of loneliness.

Spirit that dwells in the heart
 where transformation is brewing,
 make me an instrument of community and work
 a living kiss of righteousness and peace
 a soft and humble prayer carried by the fire
 that illuminates and warms all life.

Francisco Javier Burgos





ELECTIONS IN EUROPE

Elections are everywhere in 2024 and the European Union is no exception. There will be elections for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) across 27 countries in June.

Whatever the outcome, there will be a lot of new MEPs arriving in Brussels, as well as later in the year, new Commissioners at the European Commission. Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) will bring their attention to Quaker values, welcoming them and thanking them for offering their service.

Each new MEP will receive a postcard calling on them to bring compassion, integrity and respect to the work they will be doing. To support them in this QCEA will offer training and events for them and their staff as well as a webpage with relevant resources. Keep up to date with our news: qcea.org

SEWING FOR COMPASSION INTEGRITY AND RESPECT IN POLITICS

In September, QCEA will be sending postcards to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) elected for the first time (up to 58% of the total according to EU Matrix) and as many other MEPs as we can, as well as the new EU Commissioners, reminding them that their work should be guided by compassion, integrity and respect.

In order to make our message more memorable and to show that our message is coming from real people who care about what MEPs say and do, we would like to send it with a small textile gift created by... **YOU!**

Small gifts created with love and care out of recycled materials are a tangible reminder that policy and legislation is about human beings and this Earth we inhabit. You can also add a short personal message. If you are interested, find out what you need to do here: tinyurl.com/3e4few79 [PDF]

COMPASSION * INTEGRITY * RESPECT

Compassion

- * Consider the impact of your decisions on people, especially the poorest and least powerful
- * Take the well being of future generations and of the planet into account

Integrity

- * Check your facts and use them as information not weapons
- * Speak honestly and with integrity

Respect

- * Listen actively to what others are saying, especially those you disagree with
- * Speak to and about others as you would like them to speak to and about you

| QCEA EU Elections Postcard



QUNO CALLS ON BUSINESSES TO ENSURE ARMS EXPORTS DO NOT INFRINGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

As 2024 begins, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) Geneva's Peace and Disarmament programme has focused on its work on corporate responsibility in the arms trade, emphasising people at the centre of arms control discourses and ensuring that states and businesses uphold their roles and responsibilities.

QUNO is involved in preparatory processes ahead of the 10th Conference of States Parties (CSP) of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) in August. Peace and Disarmament Representative Florence Foster was invited to a roundtable discussion in Bucharest for governments and civil society stakeholders to explore the role of interagency cooperation in effective ATT implementation, the thematic focus of this year's meeting.

QUNO emphasised the importance of interagency cooperation with the arms industry with regard to meaningful human rights due diligence (HRDD) processes by both State and businesses, aimed at preventing human rights harms. The arms sector's regulatory framework is built around the responsibility of home states as licensors of arms transfers; and respect for human rights therefore currently depends on the robustness of states' human rights commitments. In addition, however, the business responsibility to respect human rights under Pillar II of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights "exists independently of States' abilities and/or willingness to fulfill their own human rights obligations", inferring that companies therefore need to go beyond what is legally required in the relevant jurisdiction or refrain from engaging in business that would otherwise be permitted under that jurisdiction.

Florence Foster also attended a Wilton Park event on "engaging with industry" building on QUNO's engagement in the CSP9.

The conference gathered a cross-section of stakeholders from state, industry as well as non-governmental organisations and academics.

QUNO continued to make the case that engaging with industry included an understanding of these independent and corresponding responsibilities to ensure HRDD policies and processes are in place and that these are preventive – aimed at preventing human rights harms – as opposed to purely defensive corporate due diligence – aimed at protecting the company itself. Importantly, with changing investor pressures towards more ethical supply chains, and increasingly robust legislative landscape and heightened public scrutiny, failure to truly address the human rights risks entailed in current business models would increasingly lead to not just reputational and financial risks but also legal risk of complicity in serious International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations.

As QUNO continues to resist all war and preparations for war and believes that the deliberate killing of others denies their humanity, its work sometimes requires creative navigation of the realities to prevent harm by engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including the economic drivers of arms exports: businesses behind the bullets. QUNO calls on businesses to ensure that exports of arms sector products and services do not infringe upon human rights protections and with that the corresponding states' obligations to do so.



WOODBROOKE UPDATE

Since our last update in Among Friends, Mandy Cooper has started in her role as Woodbrooke's new CEO. Mandy's appointment marked a shift in leadership at Woodbrooke, with Martin Ford, who served as interim co-CEO for the past year, retiring in November, and Sandra Berry stepping back after 13 years as Director in February.

We are now midway through our current course programme, which has been well attended and received thus far. The programme has featured numerous courses and sessions focused on peace, many of which were held in partnership with FWCC EMES. In February, we ran a course in partnership with FWCC EMES called 'Racial Justice Dialogues' which was led by Nim Njuguna and Jonathan Doering and based on their recent book *Enlarging the Tent*. In the course the tutors explored the ways in which racism is present in our society today and how we can work towards bringing healing and wholeness to every part of our personal and social life.

In February, we also hosted a session with FWCC EMES exploring 'Quaker Responses to Ukraine.' During this session, we heard from a diverse array of speakers representing organisations such as the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement, Friends Peace Teams Europe and Middle East, and Northern Friends Peace Board. Speakers explored topics such as conscientious

objection and supporting Ukrainian refugees, while also addressing ways Quaker communities can support individuals who are led to witness. The session was well received by participants from across the world.

We are looking forward to the second half of our current programme, which will further explore the theme of peace. At the end of April, we'll be holding a course in partnership with Quakers in Britain focusing on Quaker Conciliation. This is followed by a course in June in partnership with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network and Quaker Council for European Affairs titled 'Migration and Peace in Europe.' In the second half of the programme we are also running two courses specifically aimed at reaching a global audience. In June, we are re-running our previously successful course 'World Quaker Voices' which brings together Friends from different traditions to understand one another and strengthen our worldwide community. In October we are holding 'Being a Quaker Clerk: a course for Friends from around the world' which explores the different styles of clerking around the Quaker world.

We continue to regularly hold online meetings for worship in partnership with EMES, providing opportunities for worship for those all over the world. We also hold online Young Adult Worship, Quaker Parent Worship and Quaker Educators Worship.

DIARY DATES 2024

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

Woodbrooke & EMES offer several weekly online Meetings for Worship. Please check the Woodbrooke website for the latest information: woodbrooke.org.uk/worship

EMES NOW RUNS REGULAR ONLINE EVENTS

PEACE & SERVICE CONSULTATION

Monthly gatherings for people involved in peace and service work are held on the second Thursday of each month. More details: fwccemes.org/em/peace-and-service-consultation.

EMES YOUTHGROUP

Monthly gatherings for young people aged 14-18. More details: fwccemes.org/youthgroup. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information.

We also hold monthly gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders in the first week of each month. In January and July we run online gatherings for International Members in the Section. Contact michael@fwccemes.org for more information about these events.

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

26-28 April 2024

EMES Annual Meeting Online
michael@fwccemes.org

3-5 May 2024

Finland Yearly Meeting
suomenkveekarit@gmail.com

9-12 May 2024

Sweden Yearly Meeting, Kväkargården, Stockholm and online

FWCC WORLD PLENARY MEETING 2024

5-12 August 2024

The World Plenary Meeting will be held in South Africa and online



SUBSCRIPTIONS

Among Friends is available free of charge at: fwccemes.org

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

There is no set subscription fee for Among Friends. We depend on voluntary subscriptions. Costs of printing and distribution are rising and we hope those who are able to pay will consider an annual donation of around €15 or £13.

If you wish to make a bank transfer, please use the following details.

Euro account

For transfers or standing orders in Euros please use these account details:

Institution name: Wise
Account Name: FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section
IBAN: BE33 9672 0215 6046
SWIFT/BIC: TRWIBEB1XXX

Sterling account

Bank name: CAF Bank
Bank address: 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent. ME19 4JQ UK
Account Name: FWCC EMES
IBAN: GB73CAFB40524000025578
SWIFT/BIC: CAFGBB21XXX
Account Number: 00025578
Sort Code: 40-52-40

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

Among Friends 160 Deadline
31 July 2024