

Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee

PART A: REPORT

Achievements/Activities

The committee has continued its regular monthly meetings (via zoom). We use briefing papers to raise awareness among Friends and others. All such documents are placed on the AYM website as well as being circulated to RM correspondents and others on our mailing list. *Action Alerts* (for urgent response) have been issued on – National Plan to End Violence against Women, Sri Lanka crisis, and Immigration Detention, National Anti-Corruption Commission; *Watching Briefs* (longer-term analysis and comment) have covered – State Capture, Ukraine, Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty update, and Anti-Protest Laws; and *Flutters* (short summaries) on – post-election government ministry, UN report ‘Our Common Agenda’, Global Index 2022, and the Death Penalty.

Members of QPLC take part in public action in support of steps on climate change, protection of whistle-blowers, freedom of speech for journalists (e.g., Julian Assange), and refugees. Many Friends joined other webinars organised by other groups on alternative defence options for Australia and on Myanmar. QPLC offered support for the Independent and Peaceful Australia Network (IPAN) to apply to the Peace and Justice Fund for funds to enable publication of its report on the national enquiry into the Australia-US Alliance. The report was presented to Parliament in Canberra in November 2022, along with a major conference on ‘Charting our Own Course’ conference. We also joined protests at the extravagant expansion of the War Memorial and the embedding of arms manufacturers as sponsors of exhibits and sections. We supported a public gathering against war on 21 September 2022 (the International Day of Peace).

In preparing for the third on-line Yearly Meeting (July 2022), QPLC held a preparatory session in April, involving many Friends from around Australia. This was followed by a Friendly School session at the beginning of YM 22 called ‘Caring for Humanity in Interesting Times’. The YM peace session included a wide range of reports from RM correspondents, as well as AVP and the Peace and Justice Fund. A draft statement was prepared for YM to send to the incoming government urging a more consultative and civil approach to public debate in Parliament and beyond. QPLC also supported YM endorsing plans for public witness by Friends and others on the importance of the Parliament enacting effective Integrity legislation.

QPLC offered an on-line opportunity for Friends from around Australia to link up in a webinar on 30 April 22 to discuss the forthcoming federal election. Locally, the committee has run a series of sessions at the Meeting House on the fourth Sunday of each month on current peace/justice issues.

QPLC has been gravely concerned about the ongoing war in Ukraine. The AYM Presiding Clerk, at our suggestion, signed a joint letter from peace agencies supporting a peaceful settlement. In early April, two QPLC members visited the Russian Embassy and discussed the crisis with the Ambassador. Later in the year a letter was sent to the Australia defence minister opposing participation of troops from Australia in training Ukrainian soldiers.

QPLC has maintained links with various agencies, including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (on human rights in particular), the UN Pacific Forum on Human Rights, the Australia Palestine Advocacy Group (APAN), the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), and the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC). QPLC is also exploring ways to enhance its peace work and is seeking funds towards employing a peace worker.

QPLC lodged a formal submission to the Government’s Defence Strategic Review. This was an opportunity to raise the great concerns of Friends for reversing the arms race, re-affirming the importance of nuclear disarmament, and seeking a re-balance of priorities within the government from defence to diplomacy. It also encouraged the government to carry forward its stated commitment to

sign the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty and to recognise the climate emergency as a major factor in foreign policy.

QPLC sent correspondence to the Federal Attorney-General about the refusal of two States to accept a visit from the UN Committee on Torture to see detention facilities. We also supported stronger moves to raise the age of criminal responsibility, and to remove children from adult detention facilities.

IPAN

IPAN's report *A People's Inquiry: Exploring the Case for an Independent and Peaceful Australia: Charting Our Own Course* was publicly launched on 24 November 2022 at Parliament House. The report (<https://ipan.org.au/read-or-order-the-report-of-peoples-inquiry/>) is the result of two years' work and nearly 300 submissions by individuals and organisations across Australia. The report, which was tabled in the Australian Senate in November 2022, received some publication support through the Peace and Social Justice Fund.

Following this, IPAN held a two-day national strategic planning meeting in Melbourne in February 2023, with representatives of all IPAN state/territory groups. Margaret Clark (AYM Representative to IPAN) attended by zoom. Passionate discussions covered a range of topics and campaign ideas. Information about IPAN activities is on the website <https://ipan.org.au>. Friends are encouraged to visit the site and consider joining.

APAN

Friends in Australia have had a longstanding connection with the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network (APAN), and have been represented at its national meetings each year. In May 2022, following a request from APAN, QPLC met with Jessica Morrison to discuss Quaker involvement in work for peace in Israel/Palestine. APAN had decided to give greater prominence to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, and QPLC agreed to seek further ways for keeping Friends informed about possible action on this and other issues of human rights and justice for Palestinians. At that meeting, QPLC supported VRM in making space available in the new Melbourne Meeting House for APAN to have its office, and Jessica Morrison now works from there several days a week. Ramallah Quakers continue to be a presence in Palestine/Israel supporting peace workers. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has joined many other organisations including APAN in using the word 'apartheid' in relation to policies of the Israeli government.

The AGM of APAN was held via zoom on 7 November 2022, attended by 60 people including several Quakers. The President for ten years, Bishop George Browning, stepped down amid much acclaim for his tireless work of advocacy on behalf of APAN and the rights of Palestinians. A new president, Nasser Mashini has taken over the role, with Claire Moore (former Senator) as vice-president.

Issues/Analysis

A vital challenge for peacemakers is the continuing militarisation of our world, and the resulting diversion of precious resources needed for meeting the real needs of people and the planet. QPLC welcomes ideas for ongoing action by Australian Quakers to confront this with resolute proposals for reducing tension, encouraging dialogue, build on people-to-people links across borders, and entering the public debate more vigorously.

PART B: ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

None.

Committee members: Committee members: Convener: Harold Wilkinson; Margaret Bearlin, Margaret Clark, Ronis Chapman, Gareth Knapman, David Purnell, Shobha Varkey. Correspondents: Greg Parkhurst, CRQ; David Swain NSWRM; Taisoo Kim Watson, QRM (2024); Peri Coleman, Sally McGushin, TRM (2023); Beverley Polzin, VRM; Ruth Watson, WARM.

Contact: CQPLC@quakersaustralia.info