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| NAME OF COMMITTEE/WORKING GROUP/ASSOCIATED BODY:  QUAKER PEACE AND LEGISLATION COMMITTEE, hosted by Canberra RM | |
| ACHIEVEMENTS/ACTIVITIES/EVENTS  **1.Religious Freedom.** The Federal Government has put out two drafts of legislation that it proposes to place before Parliament in 2020. QPLC has been active in preparing responses to the two drafts, with help from Evan Gallagher who convened the working group on the marriage equality concern. The main points we have made are that the legislation goes too far in prioritising religious freedom over other freedoms, tends to cause more discrimination against vulnerable groups, and is unnecessarily divisive.  2. **Communication**. We have continued to (a) issue documents (especially Action Alerts and Watching Briefs) for use by Friends in their peace witness; (b) prepare draft letters for the Presiding Clerk to send to government and parliament on current concerns; (c) keep an up-to-date webpage on the YM website; (d) issue media releases from time to time. We keep QUNO and DFAT informed of our publications.  Action Alerts: US-Iran Conflict; Foreign Fighters; Climate Change and the Pacific; West Papua; ABC Legislation; Bushfire Inquiry.  Watching Briefs: The Work of QUNO; Lethal Autonomous Weapons: Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS); New Morrison Government: Protecting Whistleblowers; Social Defence; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); UN Human Rights Commission; Defence Review; Government Accountability in Australia; Death Penalty and Australia.  3. **Areas of concern**. The following responses have been made to issues:   * Nuclear Weapons. With our support, the YM Peace & Social Justice Fund offered $5000 to ICAN for funding a detailed report on why Australia should sign and ratify the Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. * Israel/Palestine. We supported Queensland Friends raising at YM 2019 their concern at the impact of Israeli policies on the Palestinians, and the question of what support should be given to the BDS campaign. As a result, YM was asked to review its investments to ensure they did not benefit from Israeli occupation. Our convener Harold Wilkinson signed a petition on our behalf in January 2020 to the International Criminal Court seeking an investigation into breaches of international law in Palestine. * Militarisation. We noted with alarm the development of military drones by many countries, and the investment by the Australian Defence Force in designing such machines. We published a Watching Brief on lethal autonomous weapons, and supported the campaign by *Safeground* against killer robots. * Human Rights. We drafted a letter for the Presiding Clerk to send urging the Australian Government to accept responsibility for the care and welfare of children born to ISIS fighters from Australia stranded in Syria. We asked the Presiding Clerk to protest against the Government’s detention of a Tamil refugee family on Christmas Island, despite a ruling by the UN Human Rights Committee about their refugee status. We have been accepted as a member of a DFAT committee on promoting abolition of the death penalty. We supported the NGO report on Australia’s human rights record, to be considered by the UN Human Rights Council when Australia’s performance is reviewed in early 2021. * Whistleblowers. We have issued a Watching Brief on the topic, and members of QPLC have attended gatherings outside ACT courts in support of these people. A Friends Friday was held in October to enable Canberra Friends to hear more of this concern. * Social Defence. We helped publicise a new book on nonviolent civilian defence by Brian Martin, and agreed to explore ways of raising this issue in future peace work. * West Papua. We issued an Action Alert about the renewed violence in West Papua. We supported Jason McLeod’s concern to protest against action against West Papuans by the Indonesia military. * Sri Lanka. We hosted a public meeting for a visiting Buddhist (Ven. Dambara Amila Thero) in August on the theme of ‘Buddhist Philosophy and Social Healing’. We are open to hosting further meetings with members of the Sri Lankan community if desired. * UN Reform. Several of our members attended a seminar in Canberra about the idea of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, which is intended to enable more democratic representation within the UN system. The World Citizens Association has called on the Australian Government and Opposition to endorse the idea.   4. **Links**. We maintain links with Regional Meeting correspondents and welcome feedback on activities at RM and local levels. A follow-up workshop on Quaker lobbying was held in Melbourne on 29 February 2020, led by Margaret Clark from QPLC. | |
| ISSUES/ANALYSIS  We are exploring ways to focus on new pathways to building peace, in the face of threats on many levels to our humanity and the planet. We see the importance of seeking a Spirit-led response by listening and learning, and discerning how our testimonies speak to us today. This is likely to involve a process of self-reflection within QPLC and Canberra Quakers, followed by reaching out to the wider Quaker community and beyond.  Following the YM 2019 Earthcare epistle, we are seeking ways in which we can work with the YM Earthcare committee to give priority to earthcare concerns.  A newly-formed Commission for the Human Future emerged from a Roundtable at ANU recently. Bob Douglas (a Canberra Friend) is actively involved along with others such as John Hewson. The aim is to identify and respond constructively to the threats facing humanity. It seeks to mobilise Australians to work together to create real security and a new narrative that serves the needs of all humans and the planet. | |
| PART B: RECOMMENDATIONS   1. That all Regional Meetings commit to a partnership with QPLC in the coming year to develop workshops, outreach and resources based on the peace testimony and designed to build more effective peacebuilding methods and action. 2. That AYM issue a public statement after the YM gathering calling on all those in positions of leadership to seek ways to promote cooperation and consensus in political, business and community life, building upon the spirit of mutual support that has been evident during the health crisis caused by COVID-19. This statement could reflect the vision of the Commission for the Human Future mentioned in ‘Issues’ above. | |
| Committee members: | Harold Wilkinson (convener), Margaret Bearlin, Ronis Chapman, Margaret Clark, Gareth Knapman, Greg Parkhurst, David Purnell, Shobha Varkey, and Shannon Zimmerman. Greg Parkhurst attends as correspondent for Canberra Meeting. |