

WATCHING BRIEF: WB 19-3 QUAKER UNITED NATIONS OFFICE

As Quakers we seek a world without war. We seek a sustainable and just community. We have a vision of an Australia that upholds human rights and builds peace internationally, with particular focus on our region. In our approach to government we will promote the importance of dialogue, of listening and of seeking that of God in every person. We aim to work for justice and to take away the occasion for war.

May 2019

Quakers have for many years had a presence at the United Nations to contribute to its multilateral peacemaking role. This Brief outlines the current work of QUNO and how Australian Friends can keep in touch.

Overview

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) works to promote peace and justice at the United Nations and other global institutions. It has two locations – Geneva and New York – and its work is rooted in the practices, insights and concerns of the global community of the Religious Society of Friends. It is the vehicle for Quaker representation at the UN, on behalf of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) that has consultative status there. Its main areas of focus are:

- Peacebuilding.
- Prevention of violent conflict.
- Human Rights and Refugees.
- Climate Change.

QUNO's Contribution

In the latest QUNO annual report, Andrew Tomlinson (New York) and Jonathan Woolley (Geneva) say that the world needs integrated thinking beyond fragmented approaches. QUNO is exploring collaboration among its programs to achieve a more holistic approach. QUNO's quiet diplomacy on the range of issues mentioned above is appreciated and effective. Building trust is achieved by bringing people together from a range of backgrounds including diplomats, UN officials, NGO staff, academics, experts and practitioners.

QUNO has made a difference in several ways in recent years – its work on child soldiers led to the topic getting onto the UN agenda for the first time; its attention to disarmament has helped underline the destabilising impact of weapons; and its work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) led to a global commitment to foster peace, justice and inclusion in development initiatives. Its publications, drawing on expertise in different fields, has brought policy makers important information and insights on peacebuilding, conscientious objection to military service, human rights of children of prisoners, climate justice, food security, equity and sustainability. It engages young people from around the world through year-long appointments as Program Assistants, and through an annual summer school in Geneva about the UN and its agencies.

Areas of Work

(a) Human Rights and Refugees. QUNO seeks to bring the concerns of marginalized groups to the United Nations. Its recent focus has been on migrants' human rights, and the children of those incarcerated and/or executed. There is a special focus in 2019 on the World Congress against the Death Penalty. QUNO helped to develop the recently agreed Global Compact on Migration and is working for its implementation (Australia has so far refused to sign up to this). The other area of ongoing work is closing the gap between international norms and national policies on conscientious objection to military service.

(b) Peace and Disarmament. QUNO aims to integrate peacebuilding and human rights on the ground throughout the UN system. It wants to see the periodic reviews of member states on human rights include peacebuilding potential. It will continue to offer informal spaces for dialogue on nuclear disarmament to build trust as a prelude to the 2020 Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference.

(c) Climate Change. QUNO seeks to strengthen rights-based climate policies to protect vulnerable communities, has published a toolkit for urgent action, and done a review of the IPCC report on global warming. It is encouraging global recognition of the right to a healthy environment, and will use its quiet diplomacy in the negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. QUNO supports Quaker Earthcare Witness (North America) as an accredited body at UN climate negotiations.

(d) Peacebuilding. QUNO has a focus on supporting the UN Secretary-General's 2030 Peace Agenda, through ensuring that the voices of civil society are heard in relevant meetings and agencies. It is a co-facilitator of the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform. It provides opportunities for dialogue on the links between the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the prevention of violent conflict. QUNO hosts annual peacebuilders' retreats to enable communal reflection, and uses its informal meetings at Quaker House to help build diplomats' peacebuilding skills.

(e) Other. QUNO works with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in dialogues with Swiss and Chinese academics on peacebuilding approaches; sends

representatives to the UN Crime Congress; and enables Canadian Friends Service Committee to promote national action plans on Indigenous Rights.

Australian Friends and QUNO

Over the years a number of Australian Quakers have worked for QUNO or attended meetings or summer schools arranged by QUNO. In addition, Australian Friends have enabled Aboriginal and Pacific Island representatives attend UN meetings to speak about their concerns. Yearly Meeting Committees (notably QPLC) exchange information with QUNO of matters of mutual interest. There is an allocation of funds for QUNO in the Yearly Meeting budget (\$3000 is allocated for 2019). Aletia Dundas (NSWRM) is the FWCC Asia-West Pacific Section member of the current New York QUNO committee.

Further Information

The QUNO website gives fuller details of its work – see www.quno.org

Canberra

May 2019