



Geneva Reporter

Quaker United Nations Office Geneva

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Sustainability: Inspiration for QUNO from Britain Yearly Meeting Gathering

Three QUNO Geneva staff attended the Quaker Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) in Canterbury, UK in August, and were inspired by the energy and strength they found there. A session on QUNO work relating to climate change was particularly moving.

At YMG British Quakers made a corporate spiritual decision to become a low-carbon sustainable community. There was a palpable sense that people are already doing much in their own lives and communities, but often feel powerless in the face of national and international policies that don't match this awareness and commitment around climate change issues. What can Quakers do to engage with these processes? It was within this context that 120 people participated in one of QUNO's YMG workshops, on 'The human impacts of climate change – what Quakers are doing at the UN'. This was energising both for attenders and organisers, with many thoughtful questions on how QUNO can apply its unique working methods to the international climate change negotiations. Is there perhaps a way forward where Quakers could help break the deadlock, supporting not the outcomes but the *process* of the climate talks?

QUNO Geneva has been working indirectly on climate change for years, addressing the underlying vulnerabilities that will be exacerbated by it, including



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climate-related displacement, agriculture and sustainability. The spiritual depth that came out of the workshop has prompted us to enter into a process of discernment, asking ourselves how we can best respond to the concerns of Quakers around the world on this issue.

We need to respond by drawing on our unique strengths. We have long been providing a space for off-the-record informal meetings in Geneva, using the power of quiet diplomacy to facilitate UN processes, and are exploring the possibility of supporting climate negotiations using similar methods.

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REDD - Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation

Forests are central to life on earth. A new initiative taking shape within the UN climate change regime that aims to reduce forest loss should therefore be welcome. But the mechanism gives rise to concerns.

As disappearing forests account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has recognised that any effective climate change mitigation strategy must involve forests. The UNFCCC is in the process of incorporating a mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, known as 'REDD'. This aims to help tropical forest countries reduce deforestation and sustainably manage and enhance forest carbon stocks. REDD is at the crossroads between international law concerning forest governance, climate change, Indigenous Peoples' rights and biodiversity. It therefore has the potential to help meet climate, biodiversity and human rights objectives.

REDD itself is not yet functioning, but several experimental projects are running and many developing countries are getting 'REDD-ready'. The Norwegian government announced a US \$2.6 billion commitment in 2009, and it has been predicted that global financial flows from REDD could reach up to US\$30 billion a year.

All positive, one might think. Yet many voices are raising concerns about the governance and equity of REDD. As it is managed under the climate regime, it risks viewing forests through the single lens of carbon, and so being governed by climate considerations alone. The amount of funds available under REDD could drive investment in plantation-style projects, where biodiversity and human access to the land is marginalised.

This raises concerns regarding the livelihoods and wellbeing of indigenous and forest dependent communities. At the 2010 climate conference in



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Cancún, States adopted safeguards relating to participation and Indigenous Peoples' rights under REDD. It is, however, unclear whether these safeguards will become binding obligations.

If they do not, REDD could undermine indigenous groups' enjoyment of the right to lands they traditionally use and their right to participate in decisions affecting them.

Whilst QUNO is not yet working directly on issues relating to REDD, it is following discussions in this area. The UN-REDD Secretariat is in Geneva and, as we face the urgency of climate change, we know as Quakers that while new mechanisms to address climate change are to be welcomed, the end does not justify the means. Being concerned about REDD is not necessarily being 'anti' sustainability – rather it is recognising that sustainability must incorporate human dignity, equality, human rights and peaceful solutions into our efforts to address climate change.

REDD is high on the agenda for the upcoming UNFCCC conference in Durban in December. It is crucial that this and other measures are implemented and assessed with regard to their impact on human rights, wellbeing and dignity.



News from QUNO New York

On September 23, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered his speech arguing the case for Palestine statehood to a tightly-packed UN General Assembly hall.

Abbas called for an “independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all the land of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, which Israel occupied in the June 1967 war”.

The speech met with applause from most member states but not from the US and Israel. Demonstrations took place the same day, in New York City, Ramallah, and cities across the Middle East, and a live broadcast of the plenary session was shown on huge screens in major West Bank cities. Abbas then formally presented the application for statehood to the UN Secretary-General.

The application is currently up for review by the UN Security Council: the United States has said it will veto the proposal. It is unclear how long the deliberation process will take – the United States is hoping to avoid an isolated veto by persuading Council members to abstain or vote against the proposal, while the Palestinians are attempting to secure last-minute support.

With the focus of the Israel Palestine discussion shifting to the UN, QUNO-New York has been following the process closely, and has prepared an information resource on Palestinian Statehood, which is available on the QUNO website and is being regularly updated.

Engaging with civil society: voices on armed violence in the Balkans

In September, QUNO was involved in organising a seminar on armed violence reduction in Zagreb, Croatia. This seminar was of particular significance in this region of Europe where the wounds of war are yet to fully heal, and formed part of the lead-up to a Ministerial Conference on Armed Violence and Development in Geneva in November.

The Zagreb regional seminar on best practices in armed violence reduction in Europe took place in September, under the auspices of the Croatian Government and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). This seminar was the last of five regional seminars held prior to the 2nd Ministerial Review Conference of the Geneva Declaration meeting in Geneva on 31 October-1 November 2011. QUNO’s engagement in facilitating civil society participation is significant in this process that initially only included governments.

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development is a diplomatic initiative aimed at achieving reductions in the global burden of

armed violence in conflict and non-conflict settings. The regional seminars were designed to provide opportunities to discuss programmatic experiences, to share best practices and to make contacts among practitioners, from civil society and government.

QUNO identified a group of 15 non-governmental professionals who participated in the Zagreb seminar. All of these except one (from Albania) came from the former Yugoslavia. Their organisations represented a wide range of activities, including collecting weapons, demining, community safety, gender-based violence, and dealing with the past.

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The issue of armed violence has a special significance in a region that has not fully come to terms with the consequences the Balkan wars of the 1990s or even the legacy of World War II. As explained by Vesna Teršelić from the Croatian organisation Dokumenta, it is still difficult to get a comprehensive picture of war crimes and war victims. Yet, despite bureaucratic and political obstacles, civil society organisations (CSOs) are tackling head-on the harsh consequences of a turbulent past, for instance by fostering reconciliation between Serbs and Croats in Eastern Slavonia or by providing psycho-social counselling for individuals with war experience.

In addition to the seminar, QUNO organised two events for CSOs, in which participants expressed the desire to better integrate the armed violence

dimension in their work and to learn from others' experiences. However, several participants noted that cooperation between governments and civil society remained uneven across the region. Inter-institutional as well as regional cooperation also needed to be enhanced.

The Zagreb seminar has once again demonstrated the originality and relevance of civil society's contribution to a complex topic. CSOs in the Balkans now face the challenge of determining what is needed from a regional standpoint to promote an armed violence reduction agenda. In order to do so, QUNO advised them to reach out to those working in, for instance, peacebuilding or restorative justice, in order to explore possible linkages on all aspects relevant to armed violence and development.

BYMG - Continued from page one

QUNO's engagement on this and other sustainability issues is being deepened by the appointment in early November of our new Programme Assistant in Human Impacts of Climate Change.

As QUNO continues to be a link between Quaker sustainability concerns and the UN, staff are extraordinarily heartened both by the support

for our work and the clear need for it to be part of the overall efforts of Quakers in Britain and around the world. We know there are many parts to constructing a just and sustainable future for all of humankind, in which we can be resilient in the face of the challenges that arise and are pleased to contribute our small pieces to the puzzle.

News in Brief

A recent panel discussion co-hosted by QUNO triggered a lively debate on the link between biodiversity and intellectual property. QUNO is working to bring food security concerns to the centre of the international intellectual property agenda. Read more at <http://www.quno.org/economicissues/index.html>

In September, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child held a Day of General Discussion on Children of Incarcerated Parents. QUNO was instrumental in achieving this landmark event, which was the first time any UN body has looked in detail at the issue. See attached briefing paper.

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QUNO welcomes the arrival of three new Programme Assistants: **Helen Kearney** (Human Rights and Refugees), **Lynn Finnegan** (Global Economic Issues) and **Steven Heywood** (Human Impacts of Climate Change). Read more at <http://www.quno.org/aboutUs/staff-Geneva.htm>

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