

2012

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

From the inside out

Observations on Quaker work
at the United Nations

DAVID ATWOOD



THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURES

The lectures were instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) on its establishment in 1964.

They are named after James Backhouse who, with his companion, George Washington Walker, visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. They travelled widely, but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

Coming to Australia under a concern for the conditions of convicts, the two men had access to people with authority in the young colonies, and with influence in Britain, both in Parliament and in the social reform movement. In meticulous reports and personal letters, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on the rum trade, and on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines.

James Backhouse was a general naturalist and a botanist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends in the colonies and following the deep concern that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into the Truth, and speak to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism. The present lecture was delivered at Christ Church Grammar School, Claremont, Western Australia, in January 2012.

Maxine Cooper
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

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About the author

David Atwood grew up in North Carolina, USA, but has spent more than half of his life living in Europe. He has dedicated most of his adult working life to the cause of peace. He served for nearly ten years as Peace Studies Tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham, UK, followed by a period as General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, based in Alkmaar, Netherlands.

He joined the staff of the Quaker UN Office in Geneva in 1995, where he was Representative for Disarmament and Peace until his retirement from QUNO at the end of June 2011. During this period, David also served as QUNO's Director from 2004 and Interim Director at QUNO-NY in 2007. He remains actively involved in many of the issues under consideration in this lecture.

David is a member of Geneva Monthly Meeting (Switzerland Yearly Meeting). Married to Marie-Hélène Culioli, he is also the proud father of Hannah Keilloh, who lives in the UK.

Dedication:

In memory of Adam Curle (1916 – 2006), teacher, mentor and friend.

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I wish also to acknowledge the assistance of the Backhouse Lecture Committee in providing essential guidance towards the realisation of this lecture.

David Atwood
November 2011

The views expressed here are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Quaker United Nations Office.

Prologue

I have had the enormous privilege of serving Friends in their work at the United Nations for more than sixteen years. I am very grateful to Australia Yearly Meeting for asking me to give the 2012 James Backhouse Lecture and thus affording me the chance to reflect on this extraordinary experience.

It is indeed an honour and I offer these words in all humility. I prepared this lecture in its written form at the end of my work at the Quaker United Nations Office (hereafter QUNO) in Geneva. This may be a bit too close for adequate reflection, but it is also a good time while the work is still fresh in my mind and lessons learned are more easily recalled.

The Backhouse Lecture Committee provided some initial guidance about the range of topics they felt might be useful to tackle but they generously left the specific direction of what I might say largely up to me. This made the task both easier and more difficult.

Easier in the sense that I am able to address those issues and questions most clearly on my mind; more difficult because of the choices which must be made without addressing one specific theme.

In the end, I have chosen a number of threads which I hope will build on earlier literature on Quaker work at the United Nations, provide useful insights into current work, and offer thoughts on its future.



Quaker work is deeply personal. One of the rich characteristics of being professionally employed by Friends is that, if the mix is right, the individual and the Quaker processes that define and guide the work, form a healthy combination.

Thus, what Friends get when they take on someone for a particular function is not only the role, but also the person, warts and all.

I have had enormous scope within the boundaries of the essentials of Quaker witness to move the work with which I was charged in directions that seemed appropriate. I shall always remain grateful for the confidence placed in me to captain the good ship QUNO as its Director in Geneva (since 2004), and to apply Friends' historic peace concerns to the dynamic nature that being based in Geneva provided in my work as Representative for Disarmament and Peace (from early 1995).

Two elements about myself seem important in understanding what I seek to bring to this lecture. The opportunity to serve Friends has allowed me to combine two basic parts of my own make-up that I believe have been important in shaping what I have done over these years.

The first relates to working for a spirit-led organisation. This is not everybody's cup of tea, but has been essential to me for the sustaining of my work both at QUNO and throughout my professional life.

Some 15 years ago, when I was still relatively new at QUNO, I was asked to address Switzerland Yearly Meeting on the theme of 'Faith and Action'. In looking again at what I said at the time, I can say that my personal thoughts on this theme still largely ring true today. Among them, the following:

... [I]f I think about the factors that have influenced my life, I realise that there is little point in trying to figure out which came first, the faith or the action.

While I often feel I lack the words to articulate my own faith basis, my life experience has been such that this faith/action relationship is fundamental to who I am. Thus, although most of my work over the past 35 years or so has been largely secular in nature, it is the sense that I have of the spiritual nature of this work that has enabled me to remain engaged.

I did not grow up a Quaker, but I was involved in church activities from a young age and at one point even considered entering the ministry. At that



same time I was convinced that, from a vocational point of view, working in society for its betterment was the direction in which I wanted to go.

Growing up in the southern part of the US when segregation was still a way of life, and reaching young adulthood at the time of the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam were formative factors in my life.

My real engagement with Friends began with my appointment to the tutorial staff of Woodbrooke in Birmingham, UK. The ten years that I spent there allowed me to deepen both my spiritual and my activist sides.

The six and a half years I spent as General Secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation further enhanced my understanding of the spiritual basis of working for peace, and of the power of active nonviolence—both fundamental to what I brought to the work at QUNO.

This faith/action nexus sustains me.

It continues to make it possible for me to have hope in the ability of human beings to improve how they treat each other and the planet, despite the daily evidence that may lead one to feel otherwise.

As Jonathan Dale wrote in 1996 in an article based on his powerful Swarthmore Lecture *Beyond the Spirit of the Age: Quaker Social Responsibility at the End of the Twentieth Century*, every day we are presented with decisions that

face us with ever-renewed invitations to turn our words into deeds. Whether such a practice can change the world we cannot be sure; it will certainly change us—if only because, moment by moment, our faith is being exercised as we choose between the world's priorities and what the Light shows us.¹

A second feature has been more intellectual in nature. My basic preparations in the practice of international relations began as academic ones. In the early phase of my doctoral studies in the early 1970s, I was studying many of the driving elements of global concern.

At that time these included environment, development and other issues well beyond the normal inter-state nature of the study of international relations. I asked myself, 'So, how is it that states ever agree to do anything together, driven as they are by national interest?'

Despite the Cold War, it was possible to observe much evidence of collaborative behaviour among states, including the existence of numerous international organisations. I was intrigued by the question: What had to be present to prompt such action by states to see their own interests being served by such cooperation?

This fundamental question led me to looking at the role of non-governmental organisations as change agents, certainly not a very well-developed focus of analysis among scholars in those days. And, as part of this, it led me to examining the roles Friends played at the international level through the Quaker UN Offices in New York and Geneva; and at the national level in Washington DC, through the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

The curiosity I have had about how civil society organisations can and do have an impact on the shape and direction of international policy change has continued to be a driving feature of the way I think about QUNO's work; it has shaped the 'experimental' nature of how I have undertaken much of this work.

Both of these elements broadly shape the approach and themes I have chosen for this lecture. My aim is not to provide a history of Quaker work at the UN, nor is it to elaborate on any one particular issue of concern in today's work.

Instead, my aim is to provide an insider's view, that I hope will help Friends to come to know the nature of the work done in their name at the UN. It is unapologetically a personal account and I offer it with that health warning.

What I hope to demonstrate is that, while the problems of this world are enormous and Friends and our capacities at the UN and around the world are small, we can make a difference—significant change is possible.

In the preparation of this lecture, I came across a pamphlet that I had found very helpful in the dark days of the 1980s when there was a deep fear of nuclear war. The pamphlet is entitled *Practicing the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age* by the American Quaker Dan Seeger.

The following words seem as prescient today as they did then. I offer them

as a foundation for the more ‘nuts and bolts’ look at the work of QUNO which follows:

In a sense we build castles of sand. We need them and value them ... For ... we are more properly the citizens of a different realm—a city of God, a city whose poise, balance, harmony, and peace is the natural destiny of the Creation.

... what we do for this world is done as if we were to live in it for a thousand years, and what we do for the next world is done as if we were to die tomorrow.

To practice the Gospel of Hope is to leave despair and complacency behind us and get down to work.²

1. The United Nations and multilateralism today: reflections for Quaker work

The broad range of institutions set up in the mid-1940s, that became the foundations of the United Nations system, reflected a greatly enhanced understanding of the conditions and factors that had brought about the Second World War, including international economic relations.

The very nature of those institutions was predicated on the assumption of a continuing consensus on what needed to be done. And there was great hope. But, as we all know, the UN nearly from its inception was hampered in its role and development as a peace institution by the emergence of the Cold War, which dominated and hobbled it over the first 45 years of its existence.

When that feature of international life was removed around 1990, the things that had been left undone became more obvious. The spotlight could at last be shone on conditions in the world that were fostering violence at great human cost. New steps could be taken in developing peacemaking and peacebuilding roles that were so sorely needed.

Nevertheless, more than 20 years later, we find ourselves in a world facing a broad range of challenges—ecology, security, development, health and others—all far more demanding than those of 65 years ago. Yet we face these challenges with institutional structures that, despite the end of the Cold War

and the new opportunities that that presented, are simply not keeping up. That said, a couple of orientations are helpful to keep in mind as we think about the UN system today and our approaches, as Friends, to it.

The first is that it seems to me important to put this observation on the present into a historical context. Way back in 1995 when it was the 50th anniversary of all kinds of things, I was asked to speak to European Friends on the theme '50 years of peace'. My first reaction was that it felt like anything but 50 years of peace to me, especially having had the Vietnam War as a key formative element in shaping my thinking about the world.

But as I reflected on the topic, I could indeed see that in some core ways the nations of the world had made progress—despite the profound divisions of Cold War dynamics—in building institutions that helped to reduce the likelihood of war and increase the possibilities of human flourishing.

It seems important that when we think about the UN system and what we demand of it we keep in mind that it is just over 65 years old. As human-made institutions go, this really isn't very long. It is perhaps not surprising that some of our expectations of maturity have so far eluded this rather immature structure.

Today's UN is gangly and awkward. It is unable to respond as adequately as we wish to the challenges that we feel require global responses. A large part of what it is remains a reflection of our division of the world into nation states.

Fundamentally, it is the limits of common agreement among these states about what needs to be done, and how it is to be done, which continue to hinder the UN from more fully being able to prevent violence, and to more fully ensure just treatment of the planet's now seven billion passengers.

When we think about 'pursuing peace at the UN', our thoughts today tend to reflect on the system's failures rather than its successes. These include such things as:

- failure to prevent the war in Iraq, which is now into its ninth year
- failure, despite apparent new consensus on the Responsibility to Protect, to be able to find adequate, appropriate, and consistent responses to the protection of people under attack by their own

governments or in places where ‘state failure’ leads to seemingly endless human suffering

- the fact that, despite repeated pledges, there are still tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in our world, and continuing threats of further proliferation
- recognition that, despite broad commitments, progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals is either very slow or totally stalled for the poorest nations in the world
- increasing understanding that our environment is threatened by our human behaviour and an inability to construct a global response to these realities which will have their greatest impact on future generations.

While we rightly see these as ‘failures’, they are in reality less failures of the UN than failures of the state-system which continues to dominate it. We often do not take note of the fact that the UN has been coping with a tremendous growth in the numbers of its member states (up to more than 190), all of whom seek to have a say in the work of the institutions which make up the UN system.

On the positive side, the UN system that we see today is made up of a broad range of institutions and mechanisms. These work not only on efforts to reduce the political differences between member states, but also on the enhancement of the requirements for peaceful relations among the peoples of the world—for example, through norm development and the delivery of services which help to create conditions for peace.

This work extends far beyond Geneva and New York. We can observe considerable maturing in understanding of the institutional requirements for peace to prevail.

In the immediate post-Cold War period of the early 90s, this deepening of the expression of the UN’s peace function was most fully developed through an important document, the then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s *An Agenda for Peace*. Through this document the Secretary-General sought to reflect on what was required by the international system in an era when most conflict was no longer between states, but within

states; or in places where states existed only in name. He reflected on the need to enhance the responsibilities and capacities of the UN in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding.³ There has been much work in the subsequent 20 years in strengthening the institutions and processes for this work.

In a supplement to this document in 1995, the Secretary-General also gave the first official reflection on what he called the need for ‘microdisarmament’. This was a reflection that, although most international disarmament attention had been paid to so-called weapons of mass destruction, the real weapons of mass destruction—the ones taking the toll in human lives and livelihoods of people around the world—were small arms and light weapons.⁴

Progress in all the areas outlined by the Secretary-General, while slow, can be seen over the last decade and a half.

Further examples of milestones of this post-Cold War era in deepening the peace and justice capacities of the UN system can be seen in the challenge which states set themselves in establishing the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, and in agreement to establish an International Criminal Court in 2002.

The 2005 World Summit, in underlining that peace and security, development and human rights are ‘the pillars of the United Nations system and the foundations for collective security and well-being’, took further institutional steps in establishing the Human Rights Council and the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

The *World Summit Outcome* document of this Summit also recognised the need to move beyond simple assertions of state sovereignty to reflections on the responsibilities of the international system, when states either refuse or are unable to respond to situations where the rights of their peoples are being abused or inadequately met. This so-called Responsibility to Protect (of which more later) is of considerable importance in terms of the evolution of global norms and practice.⁵

Peace is complex and must involve many different elements if real human security is to be achieved. The challenge, of course, is to turn shining rhetoric into solid action. The record is incomplete and ragged over the last 20 years.

One is regularly left with the glass half-full/half-empty dilemma. From the longer-term perspective suggested here, however, I believe it is neither unrealistic nor utopian to opt for the half-full orientation. It gives elements of hope as well as solid foundations on which to build.

A second orientation, which I believe is important in thinking about the way we Friends shape our work at the international level, has to do with the highly complex nature of our current international system.

Increasingly, as the previous few paragraphs have noted, the issues facing the planet are multi-faceted, highly interactive and inter-dependent; and they demand policy responses which cut across normal institutional boundaries and are multi-disciplinary in nature.

While our global connectedness presents many problems, it also presents many opportunities for increased understanding among peoples and societies, and for the development of new norms of behaviour.

Up against such challenges and opportunities, responses are sought from states and institutions often designed in a different era. These are subject to political tensions that may have little to do with the issues themselves but can quickly sabotage any truly multilateral effort, however necessary it may seem.

To give one example, the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament, the only permanent multilateral disarmament body which the world has, has been stymied for a decade and a half due to the inability of the states making up this body to rise above narrow national interests. This, despite regular protestations to the contrary by these same states of the need for action on a range of disarmament-related subjects that are perceived as critical to global security.

An additional element to be considered here is that we also live in a multi-stakeholder world. While the now more than 190 states remain preeminent in terms of shaping the outcomes of the UN-system, the last half century has seen a proliferation of other bodies, including international institutions, regional organisations, cities, and a whole range of non-state actors including transnational corporations, civil society organisations, and armed groups.

For better or worse, their actions make up important dimensions of our highly interactive world. Both the complex nature of international issue links

and the multi-stakeholder nature of international relations must be taken into account as we Friends seek to shape our actions towards the betterment of our world. This indeed makes greater demands on us for good analysis and clear strategy in the directions we set for ourselves through QUNO and other Quaker initiatives, but it also offers up many potentially fruitful opportunities. When chosen with insight, particularly focused work on one issue area—examples to be illustrated in this lecture—may have important synergistic effects beyond the particular issue under concern.

Further, the multi-actor nature of our world and the exciting opportunities for communication and transnational interaction also open up many avenues for potentially influential work through new kinds of partnerships. I shall seek to demonstrate each of these, while pointing out that these realities of our world put new demands on how we organise ourselves as Friends.

As Friends, we always have high hopes and high expectations. We are passionate and impatient. We want change for the better. We want it sooner rather than later. We reject lovingly those factors that prevent peaceful relations among people and prolong injustice. This is already a fairly audacious approach to the world and it has driven Friends' work for real change in the relations among nations from the start.

Friends' interest in, and engagement with, what a former director of QUNO in Geneva, Duncan Wood, called 'building the institutions of peace' is at the root of current Quaker work at the UN. It runs all the way back to William Penn and his *Essay on the Present and Future Peace of Europe* in which he laid out a plan for a world (then European) peace system.⁶

We always have expected a great deal of our precious and flawed UN system, and rightly so. As we look at the particular contribution QUNO can make, we must at the same time keep our understanding of it in the broader context of Quaker work for peace in its many manifestations at different levels in many parts of the world.

2. Some defining features of Quaker witness at the United Nations

Because of its often off-the-record nature, there has been a tendency over the years to somewhat mystify Quaker work at the UN. Although the policy settings in which Quaker UN work takes place specifically shape this work, it seems important that Friends understand that Quaker work at the UN is, at its base, no different from any socially engaged work in which Friends are involved, corporately or individually.

It is work based fundamentally on the belief that there is that of God in all; that we must value each individual and seek to reach that spark of good, vision, or willingness to risk, that resides in each person; that there is much that can be done to reduce conflict and advance the reconciling of difference by providing safe space; and that our daily work needs to be transparently based in our larger visions.

In these fundamental ways, Quaker work at the UN is an organic part of the thread of belief that runs through all Quaker work in the world. And on a daily basis these fundamentals shape the very nature of the activities undertaken by QUNO.

Making choices

On this bedrock of belief and orientation particular programs of work are built. As QUNO staff, we are often asked why we are not working on this or that issue, something that no doubt to that particular Friend seems the most important issue currently facing humanity. And no doubt it *is* important. But we are tiny against the nature of the problems facing the planet and its people, and against the institutions and interested parties that not only affect the nature of the problems but are also necessarily part of the solution. We cannot do everything.

I shall return to the questions about the discernment of priorities for work at the UN level later in this lecture. Here I wish to show a few aspects of this process that are currently part of our practice, queries which we pose to ourselves. The answers to these queries can broadly shape both the choices we make and the style of the work that we do.

By 'we' I mean those who find themselves involved in official Quaker witness at the international level, whether as QUNO staff members in New York or Geneva, or Quakers who undertake particular forms of witness at the UN at particular times on behalf of Friends.⁷ Examples of the latter are the volunteer work undertaken for many years by UK-based Friends on global criminal justice processes at the UN in Vienna, where there is no Quaker UN office; and work on the rights of indigenous peoples, guided by the Canadian Friends Service Committee and supported by QUNO-Geneva and QUNO-NY when meetings take place in those settings.

Let us look briefly at these queries as part of the elements that go to shape what we work on and how we work.

a. Is it a concern of Friends that has come to us through Quaker channels?

In our work we seek to represent Friends' concerns and to be guided by Friends. One model of how this might work would begin with an individual Friend's concern, tested in his/her Meeting, and work its way through Friends' formal and informal channels to the QUNO staff or Quaker UN Committee. Formerly, this might have been done by a Triennial Meeting of the Friends World Committee for Consultation making a specific request

to QUNO to take up a particular concern. QUNO's historic work on child soldiers, for example, began with the dedicated work by a local Geneva Friend who brought her concern to Geneva Meeting and then to Switzerland Yearly Meeting.

It was taken up by an FWCC triennial, which asked that QUNO work on this issue. And we did, with great effect, under the guidance of Rachel Brett. QUNO provided the major leadership on this question globally for a number of years until such time as this concern could be taken over by organisations with far greater capacity than ours: in this case, by the Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers.

Similarly, QUNO in Geneva has been investigating appropriate ways to act on the request for coordinated Quaker action on climate change issues that emerged from the FWCC Triennial in Dublin in 2007. This was further strengthened at the FWCC AWPS Triennial in Bhopal in 2008. While this provides something of an ideal model, it is rare and provides little specific guidance. Related to this first query is this one:

b. Are Friends working on the issue, do they have a special concern or special expertise to lend, or are they affected directly by it?

This is probably a far more regular feature of how we work. For example, our historic disarmament work is based in the long-standing concern of Friends for ending war and fostering disarmament. But the particular work we would do on this would be determined by other factors, not simply because some Friends are concerned about it.

Thus, we have been urged for a number of years to pick up the issue of depleted uranium as a disarmament and humanitarian concern. We have not done so to date because, among other reasons, we're already working on many other weapons-related issues; and the expert bodies we have consulted do not have enough clear evidence to advise on a clear way forward.

Moreover, in order to do anything seriously on this issue, we would probably need to drop something else from our list of ongoing work. On the other hand, knowing that many Friends have a concern for nuclear weapons has meant that we monitor developments very closely and keep our

eyes open for possible ways in which we might develop work in this area of Quaker concern. We also support work at the UN that is undertaken largely at other levels by Quakers, either corporately or individually.

For example, Burundi Friends are currently undertaking a range of work with implications for the work of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Burundi is one of the two first countries of focus by the PBC. Quakers in Burundi have been heavily affected by conflict in their country.

In response, they have developed particular peacebuilding approaches—Alternatives to Violence; ‘trauma healing’; local peace committees—that are of relevance to the peacebuilding challenges the country is facing. Our task at QUNO is to bring this experience and expertise to bear on the work of the PBC and into relevant peacebuilding channels within the UN System. This is being particularly undertaken right now by QUNO-NY.

As I shall note in the final part of this lecture, building the relationships between Quaker programs in different parts of the world into the themes that we take up at the international level is critical to the overall effectiveness of Quaker work.

c. Is there a niche that we can perceive, where our capacities, style of work and experience can be relevant if effectively brought to bear? Is there a need where others are not yet working, or where we have something special to contribute? Are there skills and expertise that we can call upon? Can we deliver?

Successfully navigating these waters is key to the ability, despite our size, to bring added value to political processes dealing with issues of concern to Friends. Our history as Friends is replete with examples where Quakers have been ahead of the curve.

At QUNO too, there is a long history of where careful analysis and a lot of listening has led QUNO to take actions contributing to real change. These include in Geneva, for example, in relatively recent years, the facilitation of a stand-alone agreement within the World Trade Organisation on access to affordable AIDS medicines; and the current path-breaking work on the issues of women in prison and the needs of children of imprisoned parents.

In the next chapter, I shall illustrate this by three examples from my own

work as Representative for Disarmament and Peace in Geneva.

Perhaps it is just a part of my own personal theory of change, but I believe that fundamental to successful change is an understanding that nothing is permanent, even structures which seem so immovable at any point in time.

The 2011 Arab Spring, with popular uprisings that have toppled regimes that seemed as if they were there forever (Egypt, Tunisia, Libya), has reminded us again of this historical verity. An image that I have often used in talking about this is that of a wall. It might seem firm, solid, impenetrable, but when looked at more closely, reveals tiny fissures. The drip, drip, drip of water into these fissures will slowly weaken the structure and eventually lead to its breach.

In 2010, when speaking to Friends in the Netherlands, I used this image. Afterwards, one Friend produced a postcard of the Berlin Wall at the end of its days in 1989, with a hole through it and the blue sky visible on the other side, a perfect visual illustration of the point I was making.

Our niche-seeking as Friends is something like this. Success is never guaranteed, but as Friends we press ahead. We know that patience and preparation for the long haul contribute to the pulling down of the human-created walls of oppression and violence.

d. Is there a UN institutional mechanism or structure through which we can work?

What we can do and how we can do it will to some extent be shaped by the setting in which we work. QUNO work on disarmament, human rights, and international trade has developed in Geneva, because this is where the principal institutions in these areas are located. Because the Security Council and key political institutions of the UN are in New York, QUNO New York shapes its work appropriately to that setting, their two current priorities being violent conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

But this is only a general guide in terms of shaping program priorities. In fact, we often find ourselves working with the UN and other international institutions in many parts of the world. For example, we

have been working closely with UNDP in organising regional seminars on the reduction of armed violence in East and Central Africa, South and Southeast Asia, West Africa, and Southeast Europe. This was in preparation for the Second Ministerial Review Conference of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development in late October 2011.

e. Despite our size or perhaps because of it, can we work in ways that significantly add value to shaping and advancing the consideration of issues at the international policy level?

Even as issues change, there are some constants in QUNO's style of work that enhance QUNO's capacity for influence.

The ability to offer a space for dialogue/encounter

QUNO's 'quiet diplomacy' has always provided space for off-the-record encounters among diplomats, UN personnel, and civil society representatives. Central to this are our beautiful Quaker Houses in New York and Geneva.

Here, the 'small circles and quiet processes', that Rufus Jones put his faith in, are given room to flourish. Our Quaker Houses are hospitable, welcoming places where issues can be explored, ideas exchanged, perceptions changed, directions set. This feature of our work carries over to other settings, including residential conferences, following very much in the long tradition of Quaker international conferences.⁸

Sticking with an issue

Achieving change at the international policy level is usually painfully slow. Usually it is only after years of work that real progress can be seen to have happened. We can't walk in and out of issues and expect to be effective.

The consistency of our work over time—our preparedness to stick with the issue—is a feature of how we pursue peace. And this is valued. Perhaps the best example of this feature is QUNO's ongoing work on the right to conscientious objection as part of Geneva's Human Rights and Refugees program. This work goes back decades but QUNO is still understood as a key catalyst.

The beliefs on which Quaker work is built—nothing short of striving to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth—shape our understanding of how any piece of work fits the larger picture. This means that we are

often into ‘cathedral building’—real outcomes may be realised long after our involvement has ceased. Often, we seek to get issues onto the agenda (e.g. child soldiers issue⁹) and to help bring about consistent and effective attention so that new norms and practices can be put in place.

There is no easy formula for making a decision to lay down an issue. When is the job done? Given the number of issues that could potentially engage QUNO, issues sometimes have to be left to others so that QUNO can move on to something else.

Rachel Brett, in describing QUNO’s gradual withdrawal from the child soldiers issue, said:

For a corporate concern, some form of discernment process is needed to establish whether the concern has been accomplished or perhaps that the involvement of the central bodies is no longer required. Such a decision need not, of course, preclude individual Quakers from pursuing the matter whether directly as Quakers or through other organisations.¹⁰

The size principle

Big is not always best and small is sometimes beautiful. Compared with many civil society organisations working on similar causes, QUNO is a mosquito. But we can use our small size to advantage.

We are often trusted not only because of the integrity of our work and our capacity to engage all sides, but precisely because we are small and not perceived as a threat, or having a large institutional axe to grind. This often allows us to play an intermediary role.

Thus, a QUNO initiative is seen as a useful resource rather than a disguised pitch for advancing our own interests.

This size principle also requires us to consider how we can work in common cause with others, both within our UN settings and in other parts of the world. This has meant, for example, that in the post-Cold War period QUNO has been a key partner in the emergence of at least two important global coalitions around issues of concern to us in Geneva: the Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers, and the International Action Network on Small Arms.

In Geneva, QUNO has been a catalyst for the creation of the Geneva

Forum on international disarmament and security and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform. Both of these partnership initiatives are built on the common sense of joint work, rather than the competitive market-place of civil society based on territoriality and narrow self-interest.

Some healthy tensions

I have presented the above factors as elements on which we base our choices and approach. But it is probably true to say that sometimes these factors are as much unconscious as conscious. It is also true to say that the work of QUNO in New York and Geneva is not only a product of active discernment driven by the Quaker United Nations Committees, but also of the interests, talents, perceptions—even prejudices—of the individuals entrusted with the work on a day-to-day basis.

I would like to now point to a few healthy tensions that also shape Quaker work at the UN.

a. Idealism v. pragmatism

In his 1972 Swarthmore Lecture *Building the Institutions of Peace*, Duncan Wood described that in all Quaker work there is a tension between the world we seek and the realities within which we must work:

Faced with this failure [to achieve the visions that William Penn put forward in 1693], and conscious of its probable consequences, there are two things we can do: we can concentrate on our prophetic message and commend to our fellow men a better world which is not yet but which is to be; and we can concentrate on politics, considering the next few steps which might lead us out of the morass. These are not mutually exclusive choices. On the contrary, we must undertake both at once; but we must not imagine that our Utopian dreams are a policy for today nor must we assume that our political schemes are a blueprint for Utopia.¹¹

He later returned to this theme in his 1979 Backhouse Lecture:

I believe that our Society is large enough to contain its apostles who are called to preach the full and undiluted Quaker message, alongside those who follow the dictum of William Penn that ‘true godliness does not turn a man out of this world but rather incites his endeavors to mend it.’¹²

This tension is very much a part of the nature of work at the UN, where the lofty goals of the Preamble to the UN Charter are daily confronted by harsh political realities. In the very secular and often cynical world in which QUNO finds itself, trying to effect change means being vigilant in keeping the larger visions always before us, lest engaging the ‘art of the possible’ gets reduced to accepting the minimal. Former General Secretary of the FWCC Val Ferguson once described this dilemma as ‘working for improvement while not losing sight of perfection’.

One example of living in this tension is the process currently taking place towards an Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). If successful, this new treaty will provide legally-binding standards for the trade in conventional weapons. But this will at best regulate that trade—it will not eliminate it.

Some Friends might feel that this is merely making more palatable something that we would wish to rid the world of altogether. In shaping our QUNO approach we have had to weigh up engaging with this initiative against the longer-term vision. Sometimes this work requires holding one’s nose and plunging ahead in the belief that to engage is better than to stand aloof, all the while seeking to assist in the small ways that we can to steer the process towards real security and more sustainable peace.

While the ATT is not a major feature of QUNO’s disarmament work in Geneva, we have chosen to support this work towards a new practice in international relations which would have been largely unthinkable 15 or so years ago.

b. Advocacy v. facilitation

QUNO staff are often confronted with the question, ‘So, you’re like a lobbying organisation, right?’, to which our usual response is, ‘Well, not exactly’. And it is in this ‘not exactly’ that the healthy tension lies. All Quaker work at the UN is in a sense ‘advocacy’ work, in that the issues we choose to work on will have, as part of their strategic development, outcomes or goals which we are seeking.

Thus, we engage in disarmament-related initiatives in Geneva because our ultimate goal is complete disarmament. But, having said that, our work

in Geneva and New York is more usually facilitative in nature and designed to support the processes dealing with the particular issue of concern.

Returning to the example on the Arms Trade Treaty, QUNO has chosen not to join in the active lobbying of particular governments. It has, instead, through the Geneva Forum, organised debate on the issues leading towards better understanding and the development of a common view, while supporting the general goal of the need for tougher regulation of the international trade in conventional weapons. This style of work is useful in the context of the UN, but in all our work active campaigning and lobbying by others, including Friends, are fully recognised as important parts of the total picture required for change.

QUNO's work is therefore neither straight advocacy nor simply facilitation—although sometimes it is more one than the other. For example, in QUNO-Geneva's current work on women in prison through its Human Rights and Refugees program, not only is QUNO undertaking vital research about this little investigated human rights area, but it has actively supported particular outcomes, including the drafting of language, for example, of the UN Rules for the Treatment of Female Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).

In New York, QUNO's peacebuilding program in recent years has focused its work on the organisation of encounters among key diplomats, UN agencies and departments, and civil society experts in general support of the evolution and strengthening of the UN's fledgling peacebuilding architecture.

c. Breadth v. depth

One of the defining characteristics of the work of QUNO is that it cannot be easily pigeonholed. Unlike many other organisations, QUNO is not and never has been a single-purpose organisation. QUNO's ability to play a significant role at certain moments in the history of the UN has been precisely because it has worked across a range of different issues, processes and phases of the policy cycle. These range from getting under-attended issues onto the international agenda, to supporting the development of new norms, instruments, and institutional mechanisms; to working to advance

the full implementation of multilateral agreements.

Equally important, however, is QUNO's long-standing commitment to particular issues, which brings with it vital credibility. QUNO's work on intellectual property issues in relation to the World Trade Organisation (Geneva), on particular conflict regions such as Eastern Africa or Southeast Asia (New York), on small arms and light weapons (Geneva) and on restorative justice questions (FWCC volunteers) are a few examples of this dimension.

In the development of Quaker programs at the international level, this tension shows itself in being able to answer two basic questions. When does working across a broad range of areas (there are so many potential Quaker interests) risk spreading the capacities for Quaker work at the international level too thin? And when does specialisation on ever narrower dimensions of particular issues risk reducing Quaker work to a series of specialisations without coherency across programs.

These three 'healthy tensions' have been posed as dichotomies, but are in fact not so, as I have tried to show. Others could be cited, but these three seem of particular importance in my view. The working out of the particular way through these tensions shapes not only the specific content and direction of QUNO programs, but also to some extent the influence that Friends are able to bring to the international policy level.

3. Three illustrative case histories

The broad generalisations that I have presented above are more impressionistic than scientific in nature. My goal now is to bring alive these and other dimensions of Quaker international work through three case histories. Many in the long history of Quaker work with the UN system could have been selected. However, I have chosen to focus on aspects of my own experience with QUNO-Geneva's Disarmament and Peace program since 1995. This is the work I know best. It also gives me an opportunity to share some of the specific lessons that I have learned from serving Friends through this long period.

Case One: The serendipity of presence:

QUNO and the banning of anti-personnel landmines

QUNO's involvement in the work to ban anti-personnel landmines was an unlikely turn of events. During my orientation to go to Geneva in late 1994, I was told that, of all the possible disarmament issues that I might explore, I should probably stay away from landmines as, even at that stage, there were 500 or so organisations around the world that had joined the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

Disarmament issues had long been a focus of the work of QUNO-Geneva, Geneva being the home of the Conference on Disarmament. Most recently, QUNO had played an important role in the processes that led to the successful completion of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1992. But when I arrived in Geneva in early 1995, there had been no disarmament program at QUNO for nearly two years.

One of the necessary components for working effectively in Geneva or New York or in other policy settings is to be credible, to have something to bring to the policy process. This is not automatic. Where to begin?

When I arrived in 1995, not only was there no existing program on which to build, but I also had no recent background in any particular disarmament issue area nor any reputation at the multilateral level that could open doors. A period of scoping was necessary. This included attending in Vienna the first ever Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons¹³ in the autumn of 1995. There I met key members of the ICBL and, despite advice to the contrary, found myself drawn to this new, dynamic international movement.

Several months later, while still looking to re-establish an involvement in disarmament affairs, QUNO joined the e-mail network for the ICBL (a new communication tool in the mid-90s for social movements). The ICBL leadership, at that time, noted that there was a need to test the expressed interest of a number of governments in going beyond the likely outcome of the continuing CCW deliberations. An Amended Protocol to the CCW was being negotiated, aimed at strengthening regulations on the use of anti-personnel landmines. Many felt that the outcome was likely to be too weak to make a real difference—the only solution was to ban this weapon.

The call from ICBL was for someone to pull these so-called ‘good guy’ governments together to check their credentials and intentions in relation to an outright ban on anti-personnel landmines. I immediately thought, ‘We can do that. This is exactly the kind of thing QUNO is here to do.’

And so on a damp evening in April 1996, Quaker House hosted a totally off-the-record meeting of representatives of those governments that had indicated their wish for a stronger outcome than the CCW proceedings

would produce. At that meeting the government of Canada put on the table the idea of hosting a meeting later in the year in Ottawa to see what might be done further. And the rest is history. The new Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction was signed by 122 states in December 1997 and entered into force just over a year later in early 1999.

QUNO built on this early 1996 meeting during the period leading up to the Convention signing and beyond. The ICBL and its Coordinator Jody Williams were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997. The recognition of QUNO's part in the achievement of this historic treaty led to my being invited as a member of the ICBL delegation to the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo.

But our involvement did not stop there. Creating the Mine Ban Convention was a significant event, but it would be nothing if not implemented by the states that joined it. We continued to work actively from 1999 to 2004 with a small group of governments and civil society representatives in totally behind-the-scenes activities that led to the strengthening of the mechanisms available to the Convention for helping to ensure that its goals were achieved. Today, the Convention stands as one of the most successful multilateral disarmament treaties.

Although membership is still far from universal (there are currently 157 States Parties to the Convention), the impact of the new norm is strong, with use of the weapon nearly eliminated, stockpiles substantially reduced and mine fields cleared. Most importantly, the annual number of victims has been dramatically reduced.

The achievement of the Mine Ban Convention and its impact on other multilateral disarmament processes is historically very important but beyond our scope here.¹⁴ What seems important is to note a number of key lessons from this experience:

QUNO's reputation in multilateral fields in general, and the reputation of Quaker House for off-the-record meetings in particular, enabled QUNO to contribute to an important global process even though we brought no specific expertise at the time of our initial engagement.

Taking sides can be a legitimate strategy for QUNO. In this case, QUNO took sides with victims of the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines and joined with like-minded organisations and governments to assist in the development of this new global norm.

Supporting the UN does not necessarily mean supporting existing institutions where they are clearly inadequate. In this case, we worked to support the evolution of a new institutional mechanism aimed at overcoming the weaknesses of the existing one.

Despite the number of organisations working on the landmines problem, QUNO found its niche. And when the processes became robust enough to stand on their own and needed no further substantial contribution from QUNO, we withdrew from active involvement and turned our attention to other issues.

The evolution of effective new global norms takes a long time. But once the right combination of the key factors of effective research, credible and effective organising, government/civil society partnerships and engagement by actors across the spectrum from local to global are in place, results can sometimes come much sooner than expected.

Case Two: Getting ahead of the curve and following through: engaging the small arms problem

The changes brought about in international politics by the end of the Cold War uncovered the reality that most violent conflicts were internal ones and the weapons that were leading to injury and death for many thousands of people on an annual basis were of a variety that had been more or less ignored in arms control and disarmament circles, i.e. small arms and light weapons.

I have already referred to the former UN Secretary-General's call in 1995 for attention to be paid to what he called 'micro-disarmament', a sign that the issue was becoming visible. Before I came to Geneva, I visited British Quaker Sydney Bailey, an expert on the UN, who advised me, 'keep your eyes open for this small arms question'. And so I did.

In 1994 I was appointed Associate Representative for Disarmament and Peace. In the previous section I noted that some time had to be spent

exploring just how to develop new QUNO work for this program area. When I arrived in January 1995, negotiations within the Conference on Disarmament towards a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty were already well advanced and there seemed little room at that stage for a contribution by QUNO.

Coincidentally, QUNO-NY had also taken on a new person in 1994 with a similar mandate to my own, and with a somewhat similar background. Both of us had been peace activists in the anti-nuclear days of the early 1980s and engaged with principled non-violence as a social change strategy.

Conversations between David Jackman and myself led to our beginning to explore whether there was something we might both do to engage with the emerging concern around the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

This led to this issue being a substantial element in the work I undertook during my years at QUNO.

This work deserves much longer treatment than can be given here, but there are a few dimensions which I would like to point to.

QUNO's early involvement in this issue allowed it to play a number of key roles in the evolution of policies and programs related to the small arms problem. Both QUNOs worked in organising meetings which helped to move the issue onto the international agenda in the second half of the 1990s and we were engaged with increasingly active civil society organisations.

In 1998 QUNO became a founding *member* of the International Action Network on Small Arms. QUNO-Geneva joined with the Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies (PSIS) of the Graduate Institute of International Studies in organising lunch-time seminars on aspects of the small arms problem.

This helped to put Geneva on the map as a centre for small arms concerns, one aspect of which was the creation in 1999 of the Small Arms Survey, now the preeminent research body in the world on the small arms problem.

The work with PSIS also evolved into the Geneva Forum (see <http://www.geneva-forum.org>), a joint initiative of the two organisations and the UN Institute on Disarmament Research. This has provided a major platform

in Geneva on a range of international security concerns, but especially small arms. The Geneva Forum played a key role in the steps towards the first major UN conference on small arms in 2001, which led to the UN Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (PoA).

In 2002 the Geneva Forum partners facilitated the creation of the *Geneva Process*, a regular series of meetings and working groups made up of different states and a number of UN agencies and civil society experts. This mechanism continues to play an important role in providing an informal mechanism aimed at strengthening the implementation of the PoA.

QUNO's early involvement also contributed in another way. The initial global focus on small arms approached it largely as just another arms regulation or control problem.

But closer analysis revealed that with small arms and light weapons one is dealing with more than 'supply' issues. Reducing the violent human, social and economic impact of small arms also requires greater understanding of why people choose to acquire and misuse small arms—the so-called 'demand' factors in the equation—and what policy directions would be required.

The joint work of QUNO in New York and Geneva led us to focus early on this under-attended and little understood dimension. This was natural for Quakers because our understanding of the requirements for sustainable peace includes a need to understand and address the root causes of violence and war.

In this work we were soon led to move beyond the confines of Geneva and New York to do a series of 'demand' workshops in different parts of the world. Here we tried to bring to light factors driving demand, as well as steps being taken at different levels to address these.¹⁵

QUNO's pioneering work on demand factors led naturally and directly to our involvement with the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (see <http://www.genevadeclaration.org>)¹⁶, where we have played a major role in facilitating the engagement of civil society organisations with this innovative and vital global process.

What learning can be gleaned from this experience for Quaker work at the international level?

QUNO's small arms work reinforces the general observation that a key role for Quakers can be engagement in an issue perceived to be critical to human security that is under-attended and needing to have attention brought to it. An important dimension of this role is helping to raise awareness of an issue and bring it onto the international policy agenda.

QUNO's small arms experience demonstrates the potential for Quaker engagement at all stages of the policy cycle, from issue identification and awareness-raising, to agenda development, to multilateral negotiating processes, to implementation dynamics.

Although QUNO is not principally a research organisation, Quaker investigation into a problem area can be important in deepening understanding and engagement by stakeholders.

Building alliances with others is a key element in leveraging the particular contribution that Quakers can bring to a global policy issue.

Working beyond Geneva and New York can also enhance that contribution. Engagement at other levels, particularly with community-based civil society organisations, brings vital authenticity and legitimacy to the policy process.

Both the landmines and the small arms experience demonstrate that it is actual Quaker presence at the international level that is a more determinative factor in shaping the particular face of Quaker work than demand from Quaker processes.

Although it can not be shown from the above account, one of the less than satisfactory elements of QUNO's work on the small arms issue, from my point of view, has been the general lack of success in engaging Quaker agencies and Friends more generally in this important human security area.

However, there has been useful partnership on some of the small arms demand work, and currently in relation to the armed violence/development nexus. I believe that there is a great need for further developing this. Its limits are so far based more in capacity and resources, both at the QUNO end and at Quaker agency end, than in opposition.

Case Three: Patience and partnership: defining a peacebuilding role for QUNO

It is fair to say that all work at QUNO is, in a broad sense, peace work. The various lenses that are used to define the work in Geneva and New York shift through time, but to the extent that QUNO programs address issues that undermine or hold back human flourishing, then, by my way of thinking, this is peace work.¹⁷ And Sydney Bailey's observation, that 'peace is a process to engage in, not a goal to be reached', is a profound reflection of the basis and methods that QUNO uses in working on such concerns, regardless of the topic.¹⁸

In my time at QUNO this concept of peace and of the foundational approaches of Quaker work historically at the international level has underpinned the choices I have made and the ways I have understood the relationships between different strands of the work. This also provides guidance as to how we understand the multi-faceted nature of the work in New York or Geneva.

In 1993, a change in staffing in Geneva presented an opportunity to rethink the nature of QUNO's work in the disarmament area. Despite the broad understanding that all QUNO's work to some extent can be considered work for peace, the decision was made to make 'peace' explicit in the job description for the new position.

Why? Because, the end of the Cold War appeared to provide new political space for the UN to play a more profound role in one of its original intended functions—the prevention or mitigation of war as a feature of international relations. Perhaps new openings could be found to contribute in areas of interest and concern to Friends. However, as the person chosen for this post, I recall little specificity in the concept and how this might be undertaken.

The job description, in fact, said simply,

The changing role of the UN and new opportunities in the peace and disarmament field will be reflected in the work of the Associate Representative.

So, it was up to me. How to define a specific peace direction for the work of QUNO in Geneva? One of the queries noted earlier—*Is there a UN institutional mechanism or structure through which we can work?*—became

quickly relevant to this challenge. Simply put, no international institution in Geneva defines its core mandate as ‘peace’. Nevertheless, many international institutions in Geneva to which QUNO relates clearly have something to do directly or indirectly with peace: the Human Rights Council; the Conference on Disarmament; the International Labour Organisation; the World Trade Organisation; the International Committee of Red Cross; the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees; among others.

However, from a more traditional concept of the war/peace functions of the UN, the key institutions—the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, the Office of the Secretary-General—are all based in New York.

As I sought to define what we could do in Geneva, based on the vague mandate I was given, there were times when I felt as if I were wandering in the desert. I did have disarmament work to be getting on with and I could clearly see ways in which that work—for example, the small arms ‘demand’ work—had important peacebuilding implications. There was often a sense, however, that ‘peace’ was something of an orphan in the whole way in which my program was evolving.

But it was not quite a desert in terms of actual work. During the first ten years or so of my time at QUNO, a number of specific peace-related threads were followed and we often offered support to others. For example, partly out of concern that ‘humanitarian intervention’ was too often being defined through a military engagement frame of reference, Rachel Brett and I organised a two-year long series of lunch-time discussions with a cross-section of diplomats on ‘exploring non-violent alternatives to military forms of humanitarian intervention’.

I was involved in early collaboration with the Quaker Council for European Affairs in a project that eventually became the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office in Brussels. A particularly satisfying piece of work involved a project with Quaker Peace and Social Witness in London that focused on ‘ex-combatants as peacebuilders’ and linked us with work in Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Mozambique.

I was active for a number of years in the network of Quaker organisations that emerged following the NATO intervention against Serbia in 1999, to

reflect on what Friends learned from this experience. This led to a focus on African peacebuilding questions and relations with Friends' peace programming in different African conflict settings. Despite all of these, however, I could perceive no particular peace niche for QUNO in Geneva.

The emergence in 2005 of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) represented the promise of increasing the capacity of the international system to coordinate its efforts in relation to the particular demands of immediate post-conflict situations.

This aimed to add to the repertoire of available international level responses to the realities of actual or threatened violent conflict. But it also represented a potential hook for work by QUNO in both Geneva and New York, offering the opportunity for Friends to engage the UN system in its peace roles beyond the ever highly politically charged nature of the Security Council in particular.

The story since then would take too long to recount, but two elements seem important to note here. First, the fact that UN peacebuilding structures are still primarily in New York prompted the major strategic decision by QUNO-NY to focus almost exclusively on peacebuilding and violent conflict prevention.

Because of this focus and the steps taken, QUNO-NY has carved out a clear role among civil society organisations in New York on these challenges in a relatively short period of time, which fits the classic facilitating role of QUNO.

Second, it is important to note that, although a particular direction is still not fully formed within the overall program of QUNO-Geneva, some key contributions have been made. No elements of the formal peacebuilding architecture, even with the new PBC developments, are yet based in Geneva.

Nevertheless, many international institutions have their base or an office in Geneva, undertaking work which can be considered relevant, either directly or indirectly, to the demands of peacebuilding. Therefore, with the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, the moment seemed ripe to see if there were ways in which the contributions of Geneva-based organisations—intergovernmental and non-governmental—might become

more understood as peacebuilding contributions. Moreover, could Geneva, as a key part of the UN system, become more fully an active partner in the evolving peacebuilding discourse taking place within the UN system?

So, we set to work, first bringing some non-governmental organisations together. This was to build awareness of the PBC and to use the current concept of peacebuilding employed by the UN so that organisations could see how their work might fit in. We soon developed a relationship with two other Geneva-based bodies to design a project to advance what Geneva could contribute. Major effort went into building a collaborative basis for Geneva peacebuilding work.

Today four organisations—QUNO; Interpeace; the Geneva Centre for Security Policy; and the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies—make up what is known as the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (see <http://www.gppplatform.ch>). The Platform works to consolidate the critical mass of peacebuilding resources and expertise in Geneva.

In particular, it plays a creative role in facilitating interaction with the Peacebuilding Commission, to which international Geneva can add much expertise, field experience, and a vibrant network of civil society organisations. Through a range of activities the Platform acts as a knowledge hub and an independent agent for dialogue on key peacebuilding issues.

Although still in its infancy as an institution, it has quickly become well respected in Geneva and New York and is building links to many organisations and institutions well beyond these two settings.

As with the other two case histories, here too I believe that there are some lessons.

The particular niche for a QUNO effort is not necessarily evident and finding that particular niche can take some time—even in an area so obviously of concern to Friends as peace.

The development of any particular program of work involves a process of listening and observation, experimentation, false starts and dead ends, evaluation and new beginnings.

Working in collaboration with others, as in the development of the



Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, can be an important way of realising synergies and ensuring that the overall contribution is greater than the sum of the individual efforts of different organisations. But there is also a price to be paid for collaboration in terms of energy expended in making the collaboration work—this needs to be carefully monitored.

However obvious the logic of collaboration between QUNO-NY and QUNO-Geneva may appear to be, there is nothing obvious or simple about how best to make that collaboration real.

While there are today literally hundreds of organisations working on peacemaking and peacebuilding at different levels, Friends continue to have important contributions to make. In my view, there are two areas where we have not yet really brought our fundamental belief system and long history of peace processes to bear successfully at the international level. These are our deep understandings of the critical ethical and practical nature of active non-violence, and the understanding of the requirements of reconciliation if strong foundations for sustainable peace are to be built. In other settings—usually local ones—Friends are actively and creatively involved in areas such as Alternatives to Violence Project, trauma healing, and restorative justice. There is still work to be done to make our influence on international processes more profound.

Despite our understanding of peace as a foundation for all Quaker work at the UN, defining specific priorities that make the peace component visible requires reflection, prayer and openness to change.

REFLECTIONS ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: VISIONING AND CREATING ALTERNATIVES

As we look at our broken world, with all of the human suffering that it contains, people of conscience yearn for ways to put an end to such suffering and to restore community. However limited so far, there is evidence of the maturing of the international political system with regard to the development of international norms, practices, and instruments aimed at increasing our capacity as a world community to reduce or prevent such suffering.

In the last twenty years or so, this maturation has meant a further erosion of doctrinaire positions of state sovereignty. States recognise that their interests are best served by seeking to define common positions of principle and practice, and to be bound by them.

Recent years, for example, have seen the attempt to deter and to deal with perpetrators of serious crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide, through the creation of International Tribunals and the International Criminal Court. These new instruments seek to take responsibility on behalf of the international community when states are either unwilling or unable to deal with such perpetrators themselves.

The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, co-chaired by Australia's own Gareth Evans, looked at the question of when the international community must intervene for humanitarian purposes. Its 2001 report *The Responsibility to Protect*, among other things, emphasised the importance of prevention strategies and laid out what it called the 'precautionary principles' that should guide any 'last resort' to military intervention. This report, and the steps that followed it, led ultimately to the inclusion in the World Summit Outcome document of 2005 a commitment to a Responsibility to Protect by the nations of the world.¹⁹

The period since 2005 has been one of testing how to implement this new step by the international community. The record is patchy so far. What we saw in 2011 was a situation in Libya where the UN Security Council was persuaded to authorise military support to the rebel forces seeking

to free Libya from the Qaddafi regime. With the ouster of Qaddafi, by what measure can it be said that this was an appropriate application of the Responsibility to Protect principle? At the same time, questions arise as to what to do in the face of the Syrian government's persistent attempts to crush efforts by its own peoples for greater freedom.

What these examples, among others, show is that there are many factors that influence the willingness for a collective response that go beyond the realities of the situation itself and the moral imperative contained in the Responsibility to Protect. However, if we confine our understanding of the Responsibility to Protect to the question of whether or not to intervene with military means, we can miss other approaches aimed at relieving human suffering which have nothing to do with military intervention and which call out for support.²⁰

The question of the Responsibility to Protect, particularly with reference to the issue of the collective use of force, has been the subject of prayerful Quaker reflection in many different parts of the world and really deserves a full study of its own.²¹ It is impossible to unpack this question and the dilemmas it poses for Friends in any satisfactory way here.

A few things can be said, however.

This debate is, in my view, little different from other moments in history when Quakers have taken a range of positions on confronting perceived evil on a grand scale, such as Quaker responses during the Second World War. Here, some Friends actually joined the war effort, others engaged in humanitarian work alongside the war effort, and others refused conscientiously to play any part at all.

In the post-Second World War period, there were debates among Friends when national liberation struggles were being waged and peacekeeping was developing as a tool of the UN system—debates which continue to some extent.

I suspect the following statement by Sydney Bailey would also speak to the aspirations of most Friends over the question of the use of force in relation to the Responsibility to Protect:

I would be inclined to put the Christian pacifist position this way: that we will not use outward weapons even in just causes for two reasons, one reason primarily moral and one reason partially pragmatic. The moral reason is

that human life is infinitely precious and should not be wantonly destroyed. The pragmatic reason is that it is folly to defeat evil with more evil, that wars, whatever the intention, almost always create as many problems as they solve. Our task must be to devise ways of resolving disputes without using lethal methods.²²

This having been said, it still doesn't leave Friends at ease when, for example, genocide is taking place; some kind of action seems required and all other international responses other than military action appear to have failed.²³

I feel that we are unlikely, as Friends, ever to be of one mind on this military intervention dilemma posed by the Responsibility to Protect. But it is essential in my view not to let this get in the way of engaging it as an emerging international norm in positive and creative ways.

The evolution of the peacebuilding work for QUNO in New York and in Geneva is very much about strengthening prevention approaches and institutional peacemaking and peacebuilding structures. The development of feasible alternatives and building support for such alternatives, is absolutely critical to improving the chances of avoiding pressure for military intervention, or settling for inaction in the face of horror.

The focus on alternatives is an important feature of the work of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) in Washington, DC. FCNL, rather than focusing on the debate over military intervention or not, has chosen to put its attention on what they call 'the responsibility to prevent' and calling for investment in peaceful prevention alternatives. (See <http://www.fcnl.org>).

In many other ways, Friends are indeed working on the alternatives required for peaceful change. Putting our energies as Friends into the strengthening of prevention strategies and of non-violent alternatives may well be the best kind of contribution Friends can make to this issue of the Responsibility to Protect.



4. Common work

This lecture so far has focused largely on the internal dynamics of Quaker work at the international level as seen through the lens of my own years in Geneva. In this final section, there are some larger contextual dimensions and challenges to which I would like to draw attention.

The continuing relevance of Quaker work at the UN

The presence of Quaker offices in New York and Geneva since 1948 has meant a continuous engagement by Friends with the UN through most of the more than six decades of its life. Where once QUNO was one of the few, today its New York and Geneva offices are part of a vast array of organisations, many working on concerns similar to those of QUNO, and with much larger staffs and budgets.

And yet, because of the very nature of what QUNO has to offer and its connection to Quaker communities and Quaker work around the world, the work of Friends at the UN is as valued today as ever. For example, one study that examined the particular contributions of religious groups at the UN in New York took special note of the perceived effectiveness of Quaker work at this level. Based on a range of interviews, this study concluded that



... [T]wo groups stood above the rest: Quakers and Baha'is. These faiths share some common traits that may explain their high regard in UN circles. Both hold basic tenets consistent with UN ideals—for Quakers an end to war and conflict, for Baha'is the establishment of a peaceful and equitable world.²⁴

Any number of other attestations could be given to show that Quakers continue to be seen to be making valuable contributions to the work of the United Nations. Other indicators include the level of engagement in QUNO meetings by diplomats, UN personnel and other civil society organisations, and the ability of QUNO programs to attract funding from donors other than Friends.

Of equal importance is the continuing high regard that QUNO has in the eyes of Friends around the world, and the general sense that the work of QUNO is profoundly connected to Friends' values and concerns.

At a deeper level, however, there are a number of dimensions that I feel deserve attention as we look to the future and a continuing Quaker contribution at the international level.

Discernment and Governance

One of the standard phrases of Quaker work at the UN is that this work is undertaken on behalf of the 'world-wide family of Friends'. And this assumption is also somehow built into the more legal dimension of the ability of QUNO to operate formally in relation to the UN.

The Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) enjoys 'general' status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This is the highest status given to accredited non-governmental organisations. This is granted on the basis that Quaker work around the world—and not simply that of the Quaker UN Office—is understood to support a broad spectrum of UN concerns. It is this ECOSOC status that enables QUNO-NY and QUNO-Geneva to operate officially in those settings, and other Quaker work, such as that which happens in Vienna, to be facilitated.

But the reality is that what is done on behalf of Friends at the UN is of a rather specialised nature—as this view from the inside has shown—and can feel remote from the daily concerns of Quakers elsewhere. During the first 60 years of the life of QUNO, the American Friends Service Committee

(for New York) and Britain Yearly Meeting (for Geneva) held oversight of QUNO's work in trust for Friends. Those two bodies continue to play major roles in the shaping and funding of the work of QUNO.

But the perceived need to provide Friends in the rest of the world with a greater sense of ownership of Quaker work at the UN resulted in the creation of new Quaker UN Committees in the first decade of this century. Half the membership of these Committees is now made up of regional representatives of FWCC along with its General Secretary. In the case of QUNO-NY, its work is still tightly tied to overall programming structures of the American Friends Service Committee.

For QUNO-Geneva, recent steps have led to a considerable degree of autonomy for the Geneva office, while Britain Yearly Meeting maintains its engagement through membership of the Committee and its continued strong funding support.

In an article in the *Friends Quarterly* (UK) of July 2007, dedicated to 'Quaker work at the United Nations' in 2007, former General Secretary of the FWCC, Elizabeth Duke, addressed the difficulties in helping Friends to feel connected to the work of QUNO (and vice versa).

How can 365,000 Friends worldwide know QUNO work as their own, and contribute to it their concerns, their information and their energies? How can QUNO staff and their supporters learn of the concerns and interests of Friends worldwide?²⁵

The new Committee structures are an attempt to improve this two-way communication process as well as enhance the range of voices involved in the shaping of QUNO work. Nevertheless, this remains difficult. Those who have served on the Geneva Committee (Ruth Watson, Topsy Evans, and Robert Howell) and the NY Committee (Linley Gregory and Sienneke Martin) as representatives of the FWCC Asia/West Pacific Section will, I am sure, agree.

There are many ways in which attempts are made to keep QUNO informed of the concerns and activities of Friends and to making Friends feel connected to QUNO's work. These include web-sites, newsletters, speaking engagements, visitations, electronic mail, etc. So a good effort is made all

round. But given distance and diversity, processes for the discernment of priorities for what is undertaken in New York and Geneva in the name of Friends are necessarily fragmented and indirect.

And, as I hope this essay has shown, a great deal is left to staff simply due to their close engagement with the institutional processes. All the more reason, therefore, that the structures that do exist—and principally the Quaker UN Committees—should be as robust and capable as possible.

The funding of Quaker work at the United Nations

Such has been the belief in the importance of Quaker witness at the UN that Friends have long given the Quaker presence in New York and Geneva strong financial support. As can be imagined, this does not come cheap.

The costs of staffing and infrastructure (including QUNO's most important tools for its work, Quaker House NY and Quaker House Geneva) in two of the most expensive cities in the world are considerable. Quaker resources dedicated to work at the UN must compete with other Quaker priorities.

For example, while Britain Yearly Meeting continues generously to cover some 70 per cent of the core running costs of QUNO-Geneva, staff in Geneva must now raise the other 30 per cent plus all of the costs of the activities of the office.

Increasingly, QUNO-Geneva is becoming like other non-governmental organisations in having to raise its own funds. It is important for Friends to understand this. While great care is taken to avoid having the work of QUNO be funder-led, inevitably the dependency on outside funds limits flexibility in programming.

Project funding can lock QUNO into a particular direction of work for years. Any decision to shift priorities, to build a new emphasis in the QUNO work, must come with the harsh economic realities of whether or not the funds can be raised.

Building stronger threads across the levels of Quaker work

Friends are extraordinarily active in so many peace and justice concerns, in

wonderfully diverse and creative ways. However, one of the major challenges of making Friends' work at the UN distinctively 'Quaker' is how to weave threads between Friends in local and national settings and the directions of Geneva and New York.

There are two parts to this challenge.

The first is helping Friends at other levels to understand the importance of international work as they pursue their own activities. The second is how QUNO may gain from insights and participation from other levels. This would maximise the chances of international policy level work actually making a difference in people's lives.

During the period of the preparation of this report, members of the Backhouse Committee suggested that several Australia Yearly Meeting activities dovetail with QUNO work. The activities brought to my attention include human rights work, initiatives in support of refugees, militarism in public life, and the planning of public events for an Australian version of the 'Preparing for Peace' initiative.

Additionally, the many initiatives of Australian Friends and Quaker Service Australia in the Asia/Pacific region indicate where, with a more concerted effort, the thread between QUNO and this work could be strengthened to mutual benefit. I think, for example, of the potential link between QSA projects and QUNO-Geneva's work on armed violence and development.

Here I would like to take special note of Heather Saville's study *Friends in deed: 50 Years of Quaker Service Australia*. Last year I was asked to review this book for *The Friend* in the UK. For some reason the review was never published, but I benefited greatly from having read it.

In that review I said:

Quaker work is marvellously decentralised. Most of the time, this is a real strength, in that it grows authentically and experimentally from Friends' engagement where they are. One of the down sides, however, is that we often are unaware of what Friends in other parts of the world are doing ...

And further,

Often, as Friends we are reluctant to highlight our work ... This book demonstrates the importance of both documenting our work and seeking to let others know not only about the work itself but also about lessons that have been learned.

Until I read this book, I was simply ignorant. We all produce lots of literature and other forms of communication. The problem is probably less a lack of information than a lack of deliberateness in exploring it and seeking possible links.

This remains an important challenge—for QUNO staff, for those who represent Friends on the Quaker UN Committees, and for those who lead the amazing range of Friends' programs—to seek each other out and to form or strengthen the threads of common work.

Towards a common Quaker voice for the 21st century

I should like to conclude this section with something of a challenge to Friends. In this essay, I have attempted to describe the reality of Quaker engagement at the UN. This work is not separate from other forms of Quaker witness in the world, but fully a part of it, both in its spiritual foundation and in the basic nature of the concerns engaged.

But I hope this lecture has also shown that there can be a certain disconnectedness between what is undertaken at the UN by QUNO in New York and Geneva, and the work of other parts of the world family of Friends. To some extent, this is inevitable and even necessary. In some cases, greater effort at building common work could reduce this disconnectedness. The structures of governance within which discernment of Quaker work at the UN is facilitated also have their limitations and require regular review.

One key question emerges for me:

How capable are we as Friends to find that core message for our era behind which Friends could unite and speak and act globally, with one voice? What are the challenges of our age to which we as Friends are specifically called to

respond, where greater unity among Quaker bodies and communities could increase the contribution we could make?

The marvellous diversity and creativity in Quaker work around the world demonstrates very much who we are as a people. The purposefully decentralised nature of Quaker organisation allows that work to genuinely grow from the interests and concerns of Friends where they are. But our decentralised nature also makes a coming together of Friends in unified ways quite difficult.

There are foundations for unity on which we can draw.

FWCC Triennial meetings were moments for Friends to discern common leadings and make commitments. The new structure of global gatherings of Friends, beginning with the World Conference of Friends in Nairobi in 2012, will also provide such useful moments. The challenges of ecological degradation and climate change have begun to engage Quakers around the world; the challenges of conflict in Africa have engaged Friends in Africa and elsewhere in solidarity.

There are other examples. But all such efforts are rather fragile and limited.

We are small in number as a world family of Friends and our resources are limited. And yet both in the past and now, through our individual engagement and our corporate initiatives, we can and do make a difference.

Should we not seek to strengthen what we can contribute to this age by a core theme or two around which there is unified Quaker commitment and engagement from all parts of the Quaker world, from the grass roots to the global?

One of the 'opportunities' outlined for the World Conference of Friends in Nairobi is to 'help develop a message for Friends for the 21st century'.

What is that prophetic message for our time—and how can we best organise ourselves in the coming years to deliver it?

Epilogue

What I have been able to do in this lecture is to provide a few thoughts, some of which I hope will be new to Friends and will stimulate thought and discussion. Much, much more could be said. I have prepared the bulk of this lecture at the end of my time at QUNO. I have tried to figure out how best to conclude it.

In the end, I have decided to simply borrow one of the last reflections I wrote while still Director in Geneva. These words, prepared as a farewell message included in QUNO-NY's 'In & Around the UN' newsletter for June 2011, continue to feel right to me:²⁶

As I take my leave after 16 years working for Quakers in our UN work, I have been reflecting on what has sustained me and kept hope alive for me.

One important element has been the remarkable people with whom I have been privileged to work over these years. Seeing beyond the titles, roles, institutional definitions, stereotypes and other barriers allows understanding, comradeship, solidarity and a vision of the possible to flourish. A particular dimension for me has been the many times when I have been honoured to work with and be inspired by incredible individuals struggling right at the frontline of armed violence.



Having a perspective over a good number of years has also shown me that the human determination to improve things is alive and well. Progress is possible. Years of struggle are rewarded.

This work has also taught me that size doesn't necessarily matter. No matter how formidable the structures and obstacles may seem, it is possible to make a difference. Listening and finding one's niche, along with respect and doing one's homework, can mean that it is possible to be heard, to grease the wheels of change, to see positive change happen.

I have also found hope-giving inspiration in the words of many individuals over the years. One helpful reminder to me comes in the form of a query from Stephen Cary, who had a lifetime of engagement in work for Friends:

*Do we remember that it is the spirit of our service, the aura that surrounds it, the gentleness and the patience that marks it, the love made visible that compels it, that is the truly distinctive quality that lifts Quaker service above lobbying, above pressure, above coercion, that inspires the doubtful, and reaches to the heart of the adversary?*⁹²⁷

Hold fast, be hopeful and give peace a chance.



Endnotes

- 1 Jonathan Dale, 'Rediscovering Our Social Testimony', *Friends Journal*, (7) September, pp. 15 – 16.
- 2 Daniel A. Seeger, 'Practicing the Gospel of Hope in the Nuclear Age', *Quaker Religious Thought*, 20 (40), Winter 1984, p. 25.
- 3 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping*, United Nations, New York, 1992.
- 4 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Supplement to An Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations*, United Nations, New York, 1995.
- 5 *2005 World Summit Outcome*, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005.

6 In this lecture, my focus is more on factors shaping the current nature of Quaker work at the UN than on its background and history. I commend the following: J. Duncan Wood, *Building the Institutions of Peace*, Swarthmore Lecture 1962, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1962; J. Duncan Wood, *Quakers in the Modern World: The Relevance of Quaker Beliefs to the Problems of the Modern World*, the 15th James Backhouse Lecture, 1979; Sydney Bailey, *Peace is a Process*, Swarthmore Lecture, Quaker Home Service and Woodbrooke College, London, 1993; C.H. Mike Yarrow, *Quaker Experiences in International Mediation*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1978; Wolf Mendl, *Prophets and Reconcilers: Reflections on the Quaker Peace Testimony*, Swarthmore Lecture 1974, Friends Home Service Committee, London; 'Quaker Work at the United Nations', *The Friends Quarterly*, 35 (7), July 2007.

7 As I have so recently left QUNO in Geneva, I have continued to use the third person 'we', as what I describe is so intimately involved with that recent work.

8 Former QUNO-NY Director Stephen Collett has written a useful history of Quaker conferences for diplomats. Stephen Collett, *Quaker Conferences for Diplomats: A 20th Century History*, American Friends Service Committee (unpublished manuscript), n.d., p. 35.

9 The history of QUNO's work on the child soldier issue is a classic piece of QUNO work. Rachel Brett, who guided this work, has written an insightful article on this work. See 'Child Soldiers: Implementing a Prophetic Vision through International Law', in Brian Phillips, with John Lampen, eds., *Endeavours to Mend: Perspectives on British Quaker work in the world today*, Quaker Books, London, 2003, pp. 80 – 92.

10 Ibid., p. 92.

11 Wood, *Building the Institutions of Peace*, p. 39.

12 Wood, *Quakers in the Modern World*, p. 9.

13 The official title is the ‘Convention on Prohibitions or Restriction on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effect’.

14 See my articles: ‘Enduring Legacies of the Mine Ban Campaign’, in Patricia Pak Poy, ed., *A Path is Made by Walking it: Reflections on the Australian Network to Ban Landmines 1991 – 2006*, David Lovell Publishing in conjunction with ICBL Australian Network to Ban Landmines, Victoria, Australia, 2006, pp. 18 – 27; and ‘NGOs and Disarmament Diplomacy: Limits and Possibilities’, in John Borrie and Vanessa Martin Randin, eds. *Thinking Outside the Box in Multilateral Disarmament and Arms Control Negotiations*, UN Institute for Disarmament Research, Geneva, 2006, pp. 33 – 54.

15 For a summary of some of our findings, see David Atwood, Anne-Kathrin Glatz, and Robert Muggah, *Demanding Attention: Addressing the Dynamics of Small Arms Demand*, Small Arms Survey and Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva, 2006.

16 ‘The human toll of armed violence across various contexts is severe. In the recent past, at least 740,000 people have died directly or indirectly each year from armed violence. Armed violence also has a ripple effect throughout society, creating a climate of fear, distorting investment, disrupting markets, and closing schools, clinics, and roads.’ *Global Burden of Armed Violence*, Geneva Declaration Secretariat, Geneva, 2008, p. iii.

17 I am forever grateful to Adam Curle for the insights into the meanings of peace he provided in *True Justice: Quaker Peace makers and Peace making*, Swarthmore Lecture, Quaker Home Service, 1981.

18 Sydney D. Bailey, *Peace is a Process*, Swarthmore Lecture 1993, Quaker Home Service and Woodbrooke College, London, 1993, p. 173.



19 The World Summit Outcome document, in paragraphs 138 – 139, lays out the principle of Responsibility to Protect as follows:

- That each individual state has the primary responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.
- That the international community should encourage or assist states to exercise this responsibility.
- The international community has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to help protect populations threatened by these crimes.

2005 World Summit Outcome, p. 30.

20 For examples of how the Responsibility to Protect question is evolving within the United Nations, see www.responsibilitytoprotect.org.

21 Jack Patterson, former Director of QUNO-NY, in a work commissioned by the American Friends Service Committee, provides a comprehensive overview of the Responsibility to Protect issue, an analysis of how Friends have wrestled with this question and a useful bibliography (up to 2007). This study exists only in manuscript form. Contact Jack Patterson via davidc.atwood@gmail.com. An abbreviated version can be found in ‘The Responsibility to Protect: Quakers and Genocide’, *Friends Journal*, July 2008, pp. 39 – 41.

22 Bailey, *Peace is a Process*, p. 12.

23 In his 2010 Swarthmore Lecture *The Unequal World We Inhabit: Quaker Responses to Terrorism and Fundamentalism* (Swarthmore Lecture 2010, Quaker Books, London, 2010), Paul Lacey provides a range of useful reflections on the dilemmas that Friends face in trying to address situations that call for an international response while remaining true to their pacifist principles, among these the concept of ‘just policing’.



24 Geoffrey Knox, ed., *Religion and Public Policy at the UN*, Religion Counts, Washington, DC, 2002, p. 37.

25 Elizabeth Duke, 'In Times of Joyful Harvest: QUNO and the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)', *The Friends Quarterly*, 35 (7), July 2007, p. 312.

26 David Atwood, 'Finding Hope for a Troubled World', *In & Around the UN*, QUNO-New York, June 2011, p. 3.

27 Stephen G. Cary, *The Intrepid Quaker: One Man's Quest for Peace*, Pendle Hill Publications, Wallingford, PA, 2003, pp. 265-6.

Abbreviations

ATT	Arms Trade Treaty
AWPS	Asia West Pacific Section
CCW	Convention on Conventional Weapons
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FCNL	Friends Committee on National Legislation
FWCC	Friends World Committee for Consultation
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
PBC	United Nations Peacebuilding Commission
PoA	Programme of Action
PSIS	Programme for Strategic & International Security Studies
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

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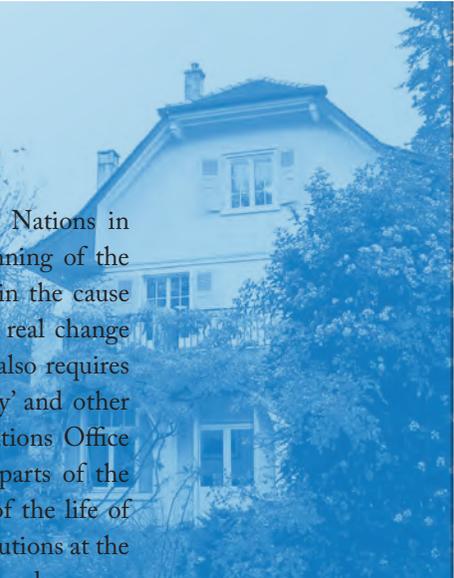
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Quakers have maintained offices at the United Nations in New York and Geneva almost since the beginning of the UN system in 1945. While much work by Friends in the cause of peace is local, Friends have long understood that real change towards a more just, peaceful and sustainable world also requires effort at the international level. The ‘quiet diplomacy’ and other approaches of the staff teams at Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva and New York, and in other parts of the UN system, have been important over the decades of the life of QUNO in the evolution of norms, practices and institutions at the international level on a broad range of concerns to Friends.

In this Backhouse Lecture David Atwood draws on more than sixteen years of experience of QUNO work in Geneva to look at Quaker witness at the UN ‘from the inside out’. In something of a ‘nuts and bolts’ account, Atwood explores such questions as how decisions are made about what issues to work on; tensions that shape choices; and other dimensions and dynamics intended to help Friends to know better the nature of the work done in their name at the UN. He draws especially on his own experience as QUNO-Geneva’s Representative for Disarmament and Peace to shed light on some key lessons about the ongoing nature of this style of Quaker engagement. Through several case histories, Atwood demonstrates how it is possible to make a difference, and that considerable change is possible.

While confirming his belief in the continuing relevance of Quaker UN work, Atwood concludes by pointing to a number of realities which, in his view, will be important for the future sustainability of that work. In particular, he offers a challenge to Friends to consider the nature and adequacy of our structures for managing that work. He also raises the question: how capable are we as Friends to find that core message for our era, behind which Friends could unite and speak and act globally, with one voice?

