

Quaker South Asia Interest Group

6th November 2004

Friends House, London.

Welcome and opening worship.

Present

Pat Saunders, Ram & Stephanie Ramamurthy, Liz & Martin Schweiger, Nina Munshi, Stuart Morton, Peggi Preston, Tim Edwards (tim@lifecycle.demon.co.uk), Nick Lewer, Anne Smith, Ruth Baker, Deborah Padfield, Judith Tucker, Laurie Flynn (vlmflynn@hotmail.com) Sheila Ragg, Stephen Kemp

Apologies

John Miles, Barbara Bowman, Penny Robbins, Janet Ganguli, Candine Tissdall, Robert Gallghan, John McConnell, Lisa and Vas Shend'ge, Ruth Todd , Jenny Knox, Peter Jackson, John Lowe.

News of Friends, reports of visits to South Asia.

Brief report on Martin & Liz Schweiger's visit to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Mentioned meetings with Jenny Ingham in Columbo and Podi at his Green Centre with its peace & development work on the Columbo - Kandi Road.

A meeting in Dhaka bringing together some of Aatur Rahman's friends and Md Wahab, the current director of GUP. Dolly provided an evening's hospitality and they were able to gain an update on the work of GUP. During the time spent 'up country' numerous health projects were visited including an impressive outreach programme for sex workers in Saidpur, northwest Bangladesh..

Stephen Kemp spoke about Alternatives to Violence (AVP) in India. For one reason or another few Quakers are still involved. Workshops were run earlier this year. Contact in Kerela is called Tarpan, who was a Probation Officer, now Assistant Director of Social Welfare in Kerela. He wants more workshops and these may be run by Giri, who is based in Australia.

Ram was in India recently and is about to go again. Contact with the Ghandi Peace Foundation. Marjorie Sykes lecture to be given by the wife of Dr Arams on 4th or 5th February 2005 at Shanti Ashram. Ram is also now involved in an HIV trust working in India. There are thought to be more than 2 million people with HIV infection in India.

Judith Tucker keeps in touch with John Dalton in India.

John McConnell was in Burma when the Prime Minister was arrested along with 40+ senior politicians. John is heavily involved in peace and reconciliation work in Burma and in Thailand.

Pat Saunders has written in the QSAIG Newsletter about her work on water in Bangladesh and hopes to do some research on the history of flooding in Bengal in the new year.

Child Relief and You (CRY)

Indian charity for children. CRY was founded in 1979, the International Year of the Child. Ripan Kapur, its founder, believed that everyone should do something for under privileged children. Professional management. Mixture of fund raising and work with over 200 grassroots organisations which have funding problems.

Nina Munshi told us about poor health , child labour, bonded labour, child marriage, disadvantaged girls and the sex trade. Evening education initiatives are used as a route into full time education.

One ex-bonded child labourer has become Pradan (Head of the Village) and has changed the situation so much that there is no longer a need for CRY to work there. There is some opposition to the work of CRY from vested interests who feel threatened by empowerment of the poor. CRY does advocacy work and is involved in networking with like minded agencies.

CRY is setting up a UK office, which will have an outreach to the Indian community in England.

Nina will be its full-time worker. If you wish to support CRY's work please contact her at cryuk.London@crymail.org

Current work in South Asia

Stuart Morton advised us about the work of QPSW. He has a budget £20,000 to work with. Indian Civil Society article made available for the QSAIG newsletter.

Working in Sri Lanka, Nagaland in North India with a 50-year civil war.

Gandhi Peace Foundation in Delhi works with Ekta Parishad about whom Stuart told us at our last meeting.

23 South Asian peace activists met in Bangladesh earlier last year.

Very weak links to Pakistan, (Ram visited about 10 years ago) South Asia Partnership- Pakistan hosted Stuart's visit in June this year. Tasleem Masher, a young staff member, who has an interest in Quaker work. Provided a link and support. Many ideas and over 70 introductions! Strong focus on the word "peace". The Paris Group of donors asked Governments to prepare a Poverty Eradication Strategy and in doing so they are supposed to consult Civil Society and NGOs. In the past this happened but not in the most recent process; the NGOs see this as another example of the democratic space being squeezed. NGOs feel a real need for outside connections

Human Rights Commission in Pakistan, a leading NGO, included a retired Brigadier, who was keen to know who Stuart represented particularly as he (Stuart) came from a religious organisation. He said: "We have paid a huge price for religion in our country".

Stuart took ideas from Pakistan to a meeting in Delhi with Rajagopal of the Gandhi Peace Foundation and with a Nepalese human rights journalist. The idea of a non-violent training programme emerged.

8 or 9 people from South Asia will go to Ekta Parishad in Orissa later in November; six from Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh will also be there. Hari Khurana from Delhi will also attend. GUP in Bangladesh will also take part.

Work in Nagaland is proceeding quietly and the present time may provide further opportunities for good Quaker work to be done.

Bhopal : Twenty Years After 2/12/1984

Tim Edwards from International Campaign for Justice has married a woman from Bhopal so now very involved. He presented a video which detailed many aspects of the initial release and the plight of the people over the last 20 years.

Many technology risks were transferred with unproven technology. In 1982 a total of 91 hazards had been identified none of which had been acted on in the 2 years before the disaster. A report by an American Union Carbide engineer shortly before the accident said the plant was in disrepair.

Support Groups now formed in India, USA and UK.

For details see web site : <http://www.bhopal.net>

27 tons of gas released. 10 meter high curtain of gas, blew straight into the centre of Bhopal City. In 1975 Union Carbide applied for a licence to produce hazardous chemicals, the licence refused. The magistrate was released from duty and another magistrate appointed who then issued the licence. Indian Government is complicit in what has happened and in preventing a proper investigation.

Union Carbide initially denied any problem, then denied the toxicity. Did not release the data on the chemicals in the gas cloud. 4 months later there was a release in USA and the company released

information within 48 hours. Indian government took onto itself the sole right of representing the victims. Long and complicated legal fight for justice.

Union Carbide has sold out to DOW which has a large amount of property in India.

The site is still heavily contaminated and pollutants continue to leach out of the site affecting an ever wider area around the plant, so people are being made ill now who were not exposed to the original gas cloud. Average compensation is in the region of 10p per day.

Women survivors are increasingly organised and vocal. There will be a number of British media programmes around the anniversary date.

Peace Building in Sri Lanka - Community Perspectives

Nick Lewer (Bradford School of Peace Studies). Nick previously worked with Oxfam and Cordaid. Sri Lanka is used by Bradford Peace Studies as a field work site.

Focus on Sri Lanka, February 2002 cease fire between LTTE and Government, but in the east there is an ongoing conflict between elements of the LTTE. Norway had been trying to act as intermediaries. Current problem means that the LTTE are again talking about a separate state.

What level of intervention is being tried, what international, national or regional system will you upset?

- Walking around conflict : withdrawing, ignoring
- Working in conflict : conflict proofing, quick impact, do no harm
- Working on conflict : peace building.

Conflict analysis is a crucial element of peace building.

Galtung's work describes:

Type of violence	Seen as :	May be ended by :
Direct violence	Injury and death from violence.	Change in conflict behaviour.
Structural violence	Poverty and neglect as a result of violence.	Organisational and structural change to prevent poverty
Cultural violence	The attitude that allows direct and structural violence	Change in attitude

In Sri Lanka foreigners are not targeted for violence, but local people are. So foreigners role is mostly that of witness.

LTTE are fundamental to resolution of the Sri Lanka conflict. Will the LTTE reform or do they just want a parrallel system of government? LTTE is still recruiting child soldiers.

Lot of bogus peace organisations, set up in a brief case or empty office. People afraid to criticise in case that stops the peace process. Most people not convinced about non violence. Singalese may feel that all the aid is going to the Tamils so there is some anger.

Military have been mostly out of the equatuion, but in the east they have recently been supporting Kamar function of the LTTE.

Nick has been working in Sri Lanka for 15 years. He notes that there are some people who go around from conference to conference. Bradford Peace Studies now offer a diploma run in rural centres. Want people with experience in conflict resolution. Not asking for a first degree. Currently working with police colleges.

Mary Anderson did survey and concluded that more harm than good could arise from courses. "Do no harm." should be the guiding rule. "Road NGOs" just drive up and down the open / safe roads in conflict zones. Vehicle surround by those who speak English and it with these people that the NGO then chooses to work. Will this destabilise the village? Whose agenda is the NGO working to? Easily creates power differences, criminal activity and exaggerate the existing inequalities.

What inspires people to keep going? This is fundamental to relations; rather more important than the "log frames" and other formal detail asked for by so many donors. How does the inspiration keep going? Academics cannot always explain what is happening!

Friends used to reach out to diplomats this was valuable in the past and should be considered in future.

QSAIG Business Meeting

RECAST Consultation

RECAST is the process of examining the structures of BYM. Will QPSW and Quaker Life see the informal listed groups as a source of support? Problem is that the informal listed groups are all different so there will be problems in seeking a common way of working with them.

A letter was sent to QPSW Representative Council thanking them for supporting Stuart Morton's work. We know that it has been received but we have not had any response. We hope for better dialogue in future, although so far we do not know how we, or the other listed groups, will link to QPSW. The RECAST minutes are available on the BYM web site.

Newsletter

Copy all arrived late, need to keep the numbers of pages down. Aim to keep to 8 pages or less but not to worry too much if it is slightly more. The list needs to be kept under review to cut out those who neither pay subscription, or attend meetings and want a postal copy. *Please send in copy early.*

Treasurers Report

Income is not enough to sustain meetings, particularly if we continue to meet at Friends House which is relatively expensive. Last year we received a donation of £100 from outside the group from a friend of Marjorie Sykes. Costs arise from printing and postage for those who do not get e-mailed versions of the newsletter.

Officers 2005

Convenor	Pat Saunders
Treasurer	Anne Smith (who is nominated to act as a signatory for the bank account)
Note Taker	Martin Schweiger
Newsletter Editors	Deborah Padfield & N and Stephanie Ramamurthy.

Date of next meeting

5th November 2005

MS to ask Leo Bashiam from Christian Aid. *This is now confirmed, although Leo will have left Christian Aid by then and will speak from a personal perspective.*

Martin & Liz will either provide or find accommodation if desired.