

## Quaker South Asia Interest Group

5 November 2005

held at 12 Montagu Place, Leeds, LS8 2RG

The meeting started with a period of quiet worship.

We ask Stephanie to send our greetings to Peggy Preston and Janet Ganguli who are prevented from joining us today because of health problems and Caroline Tisdall who is now in Lahore following her recent marriage.

We learnt about Quaker related activity in Nagaland, Bombay and Delhi. Quaker Central Committee have approved the expenditure of £20,000 per year on strengthening the movement for non-violence in south Asia. The work is overseen by a group of ten including Andrew Clark who previously served as QPS General Secretary. There are several partnerships, one per country.

Bangladesh - Gonno Unayan Prochesta  
Nepal - Institute of Human Rights and Communication in Nepal  
India - Ekta Parishad  
Pakistan - South Asia Partnership Pakistan  
Sri Lanka - Peace and Community Action.  
Afghanistan - Contacts via American Friends Service Committee.

A workshop in India featured Pada Yatra (walking tours) which helped some participants to see how to learn from the people, a means of re-connection and re-inspiration. The "Theatre of the Oppressed" which features on the 2006 Quaker Work Calendar was particularly helpful.

Stuart Morton and Steve Whiting from QPSW will be travelling to India next week to participate in a training workshop being organised jointly by Ghandi Peace Foundation and Ekata Parishad.

The history of conflict in Nagaland is long and complex. There is a recognition by the Indian Government that the situation is unique. The 3 million population are divided into 66 tribes who are not all in harmony in this oil and mineral rich land. Friends were invited by the largest of the militant groups to get involved after a workshop on non-violence in Bangkok. In order to visit the permit requires a party of four which has cost and logistic implications. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is aware, and supportive, of Quaker involvement. All Quaker involvement has to be carried out in confidence with trust and respect. We all hope to hear more about the work in due course.

Stephanie drew our attention to :

- Simon Risley's article in the Friend wanting to encourage interest groups. Stephanie has been in touch about QSAIG.
- Janet Ganguli's book "Under and Indian Sky". £5. (Barbara Bowman considers the book to be inspirational).
- The need for all QSAIG members to introduce at least one other member.
- The need for all QSAIG members to make a contribution to the newsletter. Feed back on the newsletter would be very welcome.

We thank Deborah Padfield for her hard work on the newsletter.

Pat Saunders drew our attention to John McConnell's work in Burma and Thailand. Some of the Thai work has involved working on non-violence with Buddhist Police involved in dealing with an Islamic Separatist Movement in south Thailand. At one point 2 police officers were tortured and killed by militants and he helped to deal with fear and anxiety.

Pat is about to travel to India and Bangladesh to undertake research. She wants to do work which the people of Bangladesh will find helpful. She would also like to see some Quaker support for a part of Bangladesh that will be affected by sea level rise over the next few decades.

Bronia Veitch shared some of her experiences in Thailand in 1975, the year before many students were killed in cold blood. The tonal language had been a challenge to learn.

Willemina Morton told us of her experience accompanying Stuart to India. This had been a very good learning experience and she is still reflecting on the experience. She was particularly impressed by the young people who were taking their situation so seriously.

Dr Sangeetha Viswanathan shared with us her personal and moving account of visiting Sri Lanka for 2 weeks to help in the post tsunami situation. This provided her with many insights into both her self and the plight of those caught up in the tsunami. We were able to see some very good pictures of the children she saw.

A letter from Barbara Clay was read out giving a brief history of Judith Tucker's interest in health care in India which started with a year travelling around seeing different health facilities.

Britain Yearly Meeting provided a fair for special interest groups and we were able to share news of QSAIG with many Friends. A lecture on environment and climate change given by Bob Bradnock of the Geography Department of King's College was excellent and was very well attended.

Anne Smith provided a Treasurer's Report. In brief for the year to 4<sup>th</sup> November 2005 QSAIG income was £236 - 28 and expenses came to £247 - 78. The closing balance was £275 - 35. It was recommended that someone outside QSAIG be found to verify the accounts as a safe guard for our treasurer. We thank Anne for her work in maintaining the books in such good order.

#### **Officers for 2006**

Convenor : Pat Saunders

Treasurer : Anne Smith

Newsletter : Stephanie Ramamurthy

Note taker : Martin Schweiger

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

4<sup>th</sup> November 2006, venue to be somewhere in London.