

Quaker South Asia Interest Group
Room 3 Friends House
4th November 2006

Those attending

Robert Gallagher, Cora Gallagher, Anne Smith, Martin Schweiger, Liz Schweiger, Tom Lowe, Pat Saunders, Stephanie Ramamurthy, Peggie Preston, Ruth Baker, Martyn Grubb, Deborah Padfield and Stuart Morton (QPSW staff member for South Asia)

The meeting started with a period of worship followed by introductions.

Stuart Morton showed us pictures on an overhead projector by way of illustration as he informed us about his current work. Has felt supported by SAIG over the last decade. When Stuart started the main focus of BYM South Asia work was in Sri Lanka. Since then work has been taken up in Nagaland from where a request for help had come. (This may be the only request to BYM direct from a “liberation” movement) There has also been a strengthening of nonviolence work in the Region. We need to seek inspired people with whom we can collaborate. Invitation to joint a Foot Tour through Madhya Pradesh in 2002 was an inspirational experience for Stuart. A workshop was held in 2003 at Gono Unnayan Prochesta (GUP).

In the **Naga Conciliation work**, the importance of building trust was emphasised and that Quakers are no threat to any of those party to a conflict.

The political leaders at national and state levels in India invariably welcome the opportunity to share perspectives with the Quaker team, as do Naga people groups. A Cease fire between the Major liberation group and the Gov of India is now in its tenth year. The Naga Conciliation Group meets about 4 times a year.

Networking for Peace. Since 1920s Quakers have had links to Gandhian movement. In India’s post Independence period Quakers ran courses for diplomats. The work is built from existing relationships.

There has been an increase in suicides in different parts of India, particularly in Orissa, mostly farmers in severe debt. Naxalite groups are now active in many parts of India, all indicators of the negative response to growing inequalities within the population.

Theatre of the Oppressed. Performances can be opposed by the local power groups. Ekta Parishad, the key people’s movement in India with whom QPSW works, uses links to media to spread knowledge of the people’s realities..

South Asia Peace Forum Consultation Meeting, Mirabel Hotel, Dhulikhel, Nepal 4th -6th April 2006. Developing a peace alliance with groups in six countries of South Asia. . Secretariat in Delhi for SAPA (South Asia Peace Alliance) has been established with the help of QPSW. Nasir from GUP has been positively involved for a long time in peace work. Next meeting will be in Nepal, not Pakistan as visa seemed likely to be refused to the Indian delegates.

Now need to raise the profile of this South Asia work in Friends Meetings in Britain. A small pack of information on QPSW South Asia work will be available for any Quaker meeting who requests it.

Pat Saunders reminded us about the GUP Peace Centre in Rajoir, Bangladesh.

Images of growing inequalities and air pollution struck her on her last visit.

GUP has lost Aatur Rahman and also some of the sources of funding, so it has had to cut back some of its activities. Peace Centre was an essential element of the GUP programme.

The buildings are now in very poor condition. Wahab (Director of GUP) is now looking for

funding for a replacement of the Peace Library. If refurbished it could be named the Ataur Rahman Peace Library. There is an ongoing issue about sustaining the library as well as building it. It will cost £11,000 to replace the library, a book lined training room. In the subsequent discussion we noted that there are problems in maintaining libraries in tropical conditions, for the fabric of the building and the material. Must also consider the cost of recruiting, training and maintaining a librarian. Do we need assurances about how it will be developed and maintained? What languages will be used in the material within the library? Stuart Morton will be seeing Nasir shortly and will raise these questions with him.

Pat to put the relevant questions to Stuart within the next couple of weeks. Core costs are always hard to raise and core costs for peace centres even more difficult. Christian Aid wants the centre renamed "Peace and Development Centre". Government of Bangladesh is pressing NGOs to have greater transparency and accountability.

Business Meeting

Is this the time to lay QSAIG down?

We have struggled to find people to run and service the group.

If QSAIG is to continue we will have to find a boost of some sort.

What is the role for the group? (There is a separate China Group, so QSAIG just looks at South Asia.)

Some Friends think that if Quakers cannot fund South Asia work they should not go out to seek other donors to do it. Representative Council has been laid down and in future we will expect 2 or more QPSW conferences a year and QSAIG may have something to contribute to those. New General Secretary expected in January in 2007 so there may be more changes in future.

QSAIG: Our constitution says that we have to meet regularly and have at least 2 communications per year.

Today 13 people are present, our membership is about 40 people. (Not all have paid their subscription).

We have a balance of £472 and will have to pay £50 for the room we are using today.

Do we value the group and what are we willing to do to sustain it?

Tension between the work done to sustain the group and the value of having the QSAIG.

Positive contributions of QSAIG

Interest in the South Asia community in the UK could be developed.

Valuable updating about the general situation and work in South Asia. The work on human rights is very interesting.

Nice to know the group is here.

Possibility of acting as a conduit to local Quaker Meetings.

Some of the contacts made with speakers who have been to talk to the group have helped make a personal contact for Stuart Morton.

Value of a bridge between members with an interest and the work in Friends House.

Is there a value in an informal e-mail group?

Value of being listed in the Book of Meetings because it allows those seeking us to find us.

The work load of the newsletter is considerable and the minutes of the meeting may now be sufficient.

Some people cannot take part when it is out of London. (NB Same is true vice versa)

Decided to simplify the newsletter which will appear twice a year .One issue will be a record of the annual gathering. Deborah Padfield indicated a willingness to collate **the second newsletter, which will appear in September so copy must be received by 20th August 2007**. Deborah will not issue a reminder requesting information or articles for the Newsletter, In future this will appear only alongside the subscription reminder.

Anne Smith has a list of the QSAIG addresses. Stephanie has a list of email addresses but Anne will continue to send out copies to those who do not have email. We need more members.

Tom Lowe told us about Adam Zameezad from Rochester Meeting as a possible future speaker.

We agree to :

A meeting on 27th October 2007 in Leeds. Invite John McConnell.

A newsletter in September 2007

The minutes will be sent out with paper copies to those not on e-mail

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Dear QSAIG Member

May we circulate your contact details to other QSAIG members? YES () NO ()

Please send copy for the newsletter to Deborah Padfield by 20th August 2007

Please remember your subscription of £10 per person per year (£5 concessions) unless already paid.

Please send this form back to :

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