

**QUAKER SOUTH ASIA INTEREST GROUP (QSAIG)
NEWSLETTER – MAY 2015**

30th April 2015

Dear QSAIG Friends

I include a range of up-to-date material from QSAIG sources. Many thanks to all who have contributed.

As I write, news is coming in each day about the earthquake in Nepal. I Emailed some of Nepalese peace workers whom we had come to know through the QPSW South Asia Peace Alliance work (2003-2014) friends by Email. I include the substance of their replies below. You will see that there is an opportunity to contribute financially to work being coordinated by Subhash Kattel, the coordinator of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Nepal, and who is also working closely with War Resisters International (WRI) a regular contributor to our QSAIG Newsletter. At our QSAIG meeting on Saturday May 2nd at Britain Yearly Meeting (5.30-6.30 in QPSW space -see below) we can assess this possibility in addition to recognising the importance of funding a coordinated response through the British Disasters' Emergency Committee at <http://www.dec.org.uk/appeals/nepal-earthquake-appeal>

Stuart Morton, Convenor - Quaker South Asia Interest Group

NEWS FROM QPSW:

MINUTE about Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) WORK IN SOUTH ASIA – from committee member Tracey Martin – 2015 (date not specified). QPSW Overseas Peacebuilding Sub- Committee and South Asia

After further reflection the Overseas Peacebuilding Sub-Committee decided to withdraw the South Asia paper while we reflected further on the role of QPSW in building a global movement for non-violence and peace. The QPSW Central Committee did discuss the paper and indicated to us that at present resources were not available to pursue the work. However, we continue to maintain links with our partner in Pakistan and have heard of how they are continuing to train groups there. We continue to explore how we can effectively support initiatives to promote non-violence and peace globally.

NEWS FROM NEPAL

Subhash Kattel: 27th April (Kathmandu) “We all in family are safe. Staying in an open field under a tent. We have minimum enough food and water. No one has got sick till now. My wife, Tshering, and baby son, Siddhartha, are staying in Tshering's parents place because that is less crowded and safe place. Sadly the real casualties around the country is still unknown. From the news it seems worst. I will come to you as always when and if we need any practical support. Thank you for your kind concern about our situation.”

Ganga Garung: Community Radio Journalist. 27th April (I believe Ganga is based in the Kathmandu area, but her home district is, I believe, Ghorka District where the epicentre was. I think she must be writing from Kathmandu).

Hi ! Namaskar ! Dear Vijay - Thanks so much for forwarding the following message. Namaskar ! Dear Stuart - Thanks so much.

Ya, it's really scary and still uncertain and n not convinced to sleep at home at night. We are staying in open space at school nearby our home. Maybe today will be the last night to sleep at school. My home is closer to the school, most of my cousins relatives who are staying at school, are provided gas cylinder, utensils, food grains and water from our reserved tank. Now we have electricity from 1 pm. About the weather, it was very sunny and hot in the morning to 1 pm but now it's windy and seems we'll have rain soon and at home but outside in the garden.

After tea, we will go to school for night stay and also kitchen is the school ground so we'll prepare dinner there. FYI, last nite, we felt 3-4 smaller shakes but none of us ran."

Hope today, we ll have a good sleep at night though it's in the classroom. Anyway, getting better in my area but feeling sorry to others who lost their lives, and relatives cousins. Getting updates by radio, FB, viber, messenger and phone calls. And of course, email as I do have 3G access. And, my cousins are getting opportunity to recharge their mobiles at my home as we have solar power and inverter.

Shobha Gautam: 27^h April – a human rights' journalist writes from the USA where she is with some of her family: Thank you very much for your moral support and concern about me. This time I am in USA, but my relatives and friends are okay. Your moral support and prayers are doing better to Nepali people to cope with such situation.

28th April: Yes Stuart, we had very good memories where we had visited many places together with you. You had visited Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan Darbar Square. Now they are only in memory. Most of the historic building collapsed. Any way we all are safe. I knew from Tirtha (my nephew) that our land also little bit fall down. Because of that our house is also little bit cracked. But that is no thing Stuart seeing other disaster and killing. Now situation (in my home near Kathmandu) is going normal. People started to sleep inside of the house. All those things happened because of the prayers of all well wishers like you.

Possible work to support in Nepal: (as outlined in an Email from Subhash Kattel on 29th April)

We are also relieved by your thoughts and prayers. Thank you. By the time passes, we are recovering in my family. But sadly, the damage and casualties around the country- specifically in some districts- are breath taking. We must help our brothers and sisters in need now. The support system of the

government agencies seems very ineffective and criticized by the people for its response to the situation. There are lots of international support coming to the state for the victims. What lacks is the proper management of the support coming in. I personally as well as some friends think that we MUST go to the affected areas as soon as possible with some food and some other basics- instead of criticizing the government and other support system.

Our- with few other friends- specific plan in three phases and areas are:

1. First, to focus our urgent support in one of the badly effected villages. We are still discussing which village we go. And we will let you know when we decide.
2. Second, provide expert psycho-social counselling in that village and around. We have few experienced friends for this.
3. Third, to help the orphans to live and rehabilitate as soon as possible.

We need some financial resource for this. I invite you to gather whatever financial support you can and forward that to my bank account. Most probably, we will leave Kathmandu for the relief support to the village.

WE WILL CONSIDER HOW TO RESPOND TO THIS REQUEST AT THE QSAIG MEETING ON SATURDAY 2ND MAY.

NEWS FROM BANGLADESH:

FROM ROB GALLAGHER April 27th

Just visiting Bangladesh for a short, two-month input to a transport project in Dhaka. It involves designing and building a 'bus rapid transit' (or BRT for short) on one of the main corridors in the city, running from Gazipur in the north down to Old Dhaka and then across the river to Keraniganj in the south. If implemented, the buses will run on two dedicated lanes down the middle of the road, with bus stops in the middle which will look more like train stations. Dhaka desperately needs improved public transport – the traffic congestion has become terrible – so I do hope the project is successful.

Soon after arriving I attended a church service at the old Armenian Church in the old city. The church was built in 1787 and is still in good upkeep, though services are only occasionally held there by the Church of Bangladesh, at Christmas and Easter (observing the Orthodox dates). There was a large armed police presence outside the gates. When I first saw this two years ago I thought it was an over-reaction, but since the shootings at Christian places all around the world, not to mention at mosques, Hindu temples and Buddhist temples too, I can now see the point of it.

Generally, as a visitor to Dhaka I don't encounter any hostility and feel pretty safe moving around – my main concern would be possible robbery late in the evening, and also crossing the road in the mad traffic. But every time I come here I'm struck by the intensity of daily life here – so crowded, busy, noisy; and hard work just doing anything.

Dhaka was rocked by the earth tremors that were so devastating in Nepal. I felt the tremors twice in two days with the building shaking slightly, and the second time I quickly exited the building, along with several others from the office where I work. It did occur to me as I hurried down the stairs that I'd never make it to the ground floor (from the fourth) if it was a serious earthquake, but someone else said it's the best thing to do. The local newspapers tell of cracks appearing in a number of new high-rise buildings, and a few others that have tilted somewhat. If Dhaka is ever hit by a major earthquake, as has indeed happened in previous centuries, then the results do not bear thinking about.

Today (28th April) the city is on holiday for the city corporation elections. It's thirteen years since the last city elections; politics has prevented subsequent elections, and even led to splitting Dhaka City Corporation into two (north and south) to get rid of the incumbent mayor. People say there might be trouble in some places later on today, with people disputing the results. But there's no doubt that people are quite galvanised by the election process, even if they are somewhat cynical about the limited change that may result from it.

To conclude, Dhaka sometimes seems to me to be an experiment in urban living: how many people can you pack into an area and still keep it viable? People here are wonderful at muddling through, and no doubt will continue to do so as the city population approaches 20 million and then 30 million. However, you see so many missed opportunities to make the place better, whether it's preserving parks, floodplains, developing public transport, taming the traffic, and so on. Everyone complains, but no-one knows how to tackle the general malaise that hampers all the public authorities.

NEWS FROM INDIA:

FROM MARGARET WATERWORTH – April 27th

I am in India till 6th May so will, unfortunately miss BYM. So much has happened these last few weeks including being in a disaster zone on Saturday and experiencing the aftermath of the Kathmandu tremors. We survived- many lost their homes in Sundarbans due to high winds - cyclonic, and rains, rising river levels and mud slides. I was literally carried over the mud by the village women to their hut where we took shelter for several hours, We were supposed to be doing a n awareness programme on disaster management and there we were in it!!!! The NGO has received a QPSW Disaster Relief Fund and I am the Quaker link and was to have done a report!! Which will be rather a dramatic one when I have recovered and cleaned off the mud.

FROM JOHN GIBBS OF Bournemouth Friends' Meeting

John visited India in February. He has written down some of his observations and experiences. Some edited excerpts are below. Please contact me for a longer version.

John writes: It's good to get away sometimes, have a complete break, find new

experiences, reflect and return to view life afresh. India, I was warned, had so much poverty and associated dangers that I would not enjoy going there. But I like a challenge so off I went 1 Feb escaping the cold and drear to spend a month in the sun.

Hindu Gods: Dilip (my guide in Goa) told me about the various deities he worshipped and ended the list surprisingly with Jesus Christ. Hinduism involves attributes of God rather than an image of God; different aspects of God that help people find devotion. God reveals aspects of divinity in many ways and symbols. hadn't any evangelical intentions but had bought a copy of Mark's Gospel that pleased Dilip. He had led prayers / worship with his wife and two sons in the afternoons and often made trips to his local temple to pray. A new CV that I had compiled for him led to success with a job application so after a few days he was off to Dubai to work.

The secret of happiness: My guide at Fort Cochin was Sherif, was a splendid fellow, called round about 10am every morning to take me to many interesting places, I asked what I owed him and he replied 'Oh whatever you think is OK.' I paid him £ 15 per day. He was a Moslem, had never drunk alcohol and was happy with his arranged marriage. He would ask me, 'Are you happy John?' to which I would reply 'Yes indeed thank you'. He would reply: 'You happy, I happy'. Surely he had discovered the secret of happiness. His tuk tuk weaved in and out of busy traffic with Lewis Hamilton skills to get me around quickly.

Guys holding hands: Usually in India when a couple of boys or young men walk together one will wrap his arm around the other's neck or they will actually hold hands. It amused me, however I understand that this is not a sign that they are affectionate gays, but sincere friends. How liberating that is. In western culture females often go hand in hand without question. So far as males are concerned we seem to be quite bigoted in our outlook.

See over

ABOUT EKTA PARISHAD (UNITY FORUM) - from Tracey Martin (member of QPSW sub-committee of Central Committee)

Ekta Parishad story featured in Barefoot Guide 4: Exploring the Real Work of Social Change Barefoot Guide 4: Exploring the Real Work of Social Change was launched at the World Social Forum in Tunis on 26th March. It explores stories of social change from around the world to explore questions about how social change happens and how we can best support it. Ekta Parishad submitted a story and it is featured in Chapter 6.

QPSW's East Africa work is also featured. The guide is a useful resource for anyone involved in social change - as are guides 1,2 and 3. You can download the new guide at <http://www.barefootguide.org/barefoot-guide-4---english-final.html>

QSAIG EVENTS:

QSAIG INTEREST GROUP AT BRITAIN YEARLY MEETING: For those of you

who are able to attend Britain Yearly Meeting 1-4 May, you will be pleased to know that there will be opportunities to meet. On Saturday 2nd May (17.30 - 18.30) we have organised a QSAIG event. It is: **Peace and Justice in South Asia** - an opportunity to continue support for peace and justice work in South Asia, in particular bringing up-to-date news of Ekta Parishad's (Unity Forum) recent action in its build up to a large march in 2020 on behalf of India (and the world's) most marginalised people. Ivan Nutbrown, the staff member of Action Village India, has recently visited Ekta Parishad in India and will help to inform us of recent events and challenges that Ekta Parishad has been facing.

Liz and Martin Schweiger will also look after a **QSAIG table at the Groups' Fair at BYM** on Sunday evening (18.00-20.00). If you are able to help with this please let them (and/or me) know.

There will also be an **Special Interest Group over Sunday lunchtime in which the QPSW Conciliation Group working on the conflict in N.E. India** will update us on their work

The QSAIG website: We are grateful that Martin Schweiger has initiated the QSAIG website. This Newsletter, a number of previous editions of the Newsletter and notes of our October 2013 meeting can be found at:
<http://www.qsaig.co.uk/news-and-events>

May I remind you that our next Annual General Meeting of QSAIG is on Saturday, October 24th 2015 in Birmingham. Further details of this will be made available in due course.

In friendship

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