

## Quaker South Asia Interest Group Annual Meeting.

Held on Zoom on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020. 10.30am to 3pm with an hour's break at 12 noon.

### Those attending for some or all of the time:

Peter Squire	Judith Baker	Ivan Hutnik	John Miles
John Smithson	Pat Saunders	Annie Murray	S A Wahab
Liz Watson	Mike Watson	Penny Robbins	Abu Siddique
Liz Schweiger	Anne Smith	Stuart Morton	Willimonia Morton
Rob Gallagher	Cora Gallagher	Joya Hutnik	Martin Schweiger
Stephannie Ramamurthy		Ram Ramamurthy	Fran Wilde
Martin Wright	Ginnie Wollaston	Gerald Conningham	
Mian Akbar Hussain (Barik)		John McConnell	

We opened with a short period of silent worship.

The Annual General Meeting was held and separate minutes made.

### Presentation on Bhopal by Mike Wright and Annie Murray

We were reminded of the explosion in 1984 that has been followed by a swathe of problems.

Prior to the explosion there had been serious contamination of the ground water and for many years afterwards dangerous chemicals have been left lying around the site once occupied by the Union Carbide plant. The site has not been made safe and a chemical cocktail continues to leach into the ground water with contamination being identified upto 5 Kms from the site.

Union Carbide was sold to Dow Chemicals which in turn has sold out to Dupont.

Three organisations have developed in response, Bhopal Medical appeal, International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal and Action for Bhopal.

Legal action raised a pitiful amount of compensation for the survivors.

A curative petition is now before the High Court in Dehli but it was grinding on very slowly even before Covid-19 provided further reason for delays.

The UN has been approached to take action on Sustainable Development Goals.

There may be opportunities to press for action by the company as it sets itself up as an exemplar of Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG). The company website make great claims to its work on providing clean water around the world.(see:

<https://www.dupont.co.uk> )

The Government of India seems reluctant to do much and that may be because they wish to be seem as business friendly or because the residents of Bhopal are largely low caste Hindu or Muslim.

A very moving film was shown: <https://youtu.be/hh7z9KoS-qw>

We can consider product boycotts and encouraging other campaigns to pick up aspects of the Bhopal situation such as human rights and the environment.

We are asked to write a letter to the company asking for action to be taken:

<https://actionforbhopal.org/send-a-letter/>

### Reflections on Sohagpur School, Reflections by Liz and and Mike Watson

This school was setup by British Friends to serve poor and orphaned girls in Sohagpur near Itarsi in India in 1875. The school does receive some help from Friends in Philadelphia and from some Dutch Quakers but it is very short of resources. Ten years ago the government ceased paying the teachers salaries so all new teachers are on salaries lower than the government school teachers and sometimes these are not paid at all. The fabric of the building is deteriorating.

There are now only 3 boarders and about 140 girls at the school. Educational standards have fallen. The Governing Body is considering the options for going forward and has considered a Teacher Training College, using the hostel and its large site in other ways, such as hosting weddings, to raise funds. The mission remains to serve the poor.

The problems are made worse by the negative opinion of the Government of India to NGOs. Consideration of options to support the school are being made by Asia West Pacific Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation together with Indian Friends.

See: <https://friendsschoolsohagpur.com>

### Presentation on JaiJagat 2020 by Ginne Woolaston and Fran Wilde

Initiated by Ekta Parisah JaiJagat fetured a walk from Dehli to Geneva with an initial additional walk in India. Unfortunately, the walk was halted in Armenia by Covid-19. A much smaller group did get to Geneva.

The walk highlighted 4 pillars:

- Eradicating Poverty
- Stopping Social Discrimination
- Mitigating Climate Change
- Reducing Conflict and War

There were many organisations involved in some support. The UK group of Quakers began to focus on climate change and food.

We are recommended to look at: [www.madrascafeunlocked.co.uk](http://www.madrascafeunlocked.co.uk)

We discussed the question of partnership with JaiJagat, considering what it would look like. QSAIG needs to be and be seen as neutral, not seen as an element of any one project or simply focussed on one country in South Asia. QSAIG can support some of the funding applications but not be a rubber stamp on all applications. We know that applications to some funding bodies such as the National Lottery would be difficult for some Quakers to be associated with even if the project itself was seen to be very worthwhile. Work on peace and justice is of great interest to Friends.

We ask Ginne and Fran to develop the ideas on partnership and then come back to QSAIG for further consideration and discussion.

PS: How to pronounce JayJagat

'Jay' as in Blue Jay

'Jag' as in jug of water

'at' as in 'at'rocious

(Supplied by Norman Smith)

The West Bengal Institute for Indian Mother & Child was introduced to us by Abu Siddique (Bachuchu). He has been doing some policy and research work with them. Through that work he has been able to draw our attention of the actions of the Government of India to exercise very strong control over all NGOs, forcing them to use a deposit account with one particular bank in Dehli. Some NGOs such as Amnesty International have been forced to close in India. The actions of President Moni and his government are a cause for concern for those seeking to work with the Indian poor.

### Gonno Unnayan Prochesta (GUP)

We had hoped for a presentation about the current work of GUP from Monzu and Showkat Khondoker (current Chief Executive and Chairman of GUP) but they did not join us. However S.A.Wahab did join us and was able to tell us that a lot of emphasis is now on Micro-credit and

economic development. They did have a seminar 3 years ago in Road Traffic Accidents which was well attended. Unfortunately funding for the Peace Centre and some of the other activities is now greatly diminished and help is needed. We can only suggest that the drive for additional funding has to come from GUP itself and build on what is already being done by the present leadership of GUP.

Even if there was not a severe financial short fall within Britain Yearly Meeting because of the Covid-19 pandemic we are unlikely to be a major source of funds for GUP but can support them in their efforts to secure funding.

The meeting finished with a period of silent worship and closed at 3.15pm.

The date of the next annual meeting has yet to be determined.

Martin Schweiger. Convenor / Clerk at this time  
24/10/2020

Follow up actions for Friends to consider:

- 1) Contribute to the QSAIG Newsletter
- 2) Contribute to the QSAIG Website
- 3) Write to Dow Chemicals about Bhopal.
- 4) Support any of the work presented at today's meeting.
- 5) Put your name forward to act as QSAIG Convenor.