

Quaker South Asia Interest Group

18 October 2008

Present

Rob Gallagher	Chippenham Meeting
Anne Smith	Wanstead Meeting
Stephanie Ramamurthy	Muswell Hill Meeting
N Ramamurthy	Muswell Hill Meeting
Adam Zameenzad	Rochester Meeting
John Lowe	Rochester Meeting
Jennifer Knox	St Albans Meeting
Sheila Ragg	Godalming Meeting
Ruth Baker	
Penny Robbins	
Anne Allchin	Cambridge, Jesus Lane
Pat Saunders	Settle Meeting
Stuart Morton	QPSW
Martin Schweiger	Roundhay, Leeds

Apologies

Liz Schweiger, Cora Gallagher, John Connell.

Welcome

Pat Saunders welcomed Friends

News of Friends

Pat Saunders	Research into the changing environment in Bengal over the time that these changes have been mapped and is involved in fund raising for the renovation of the GUP Peace Centre.
Robert Gallagher	VSO in Bangladesh in late 1970s, met his wife Cora in Dhaka. Not returned to Bangladesh in the last 10 years.
Anne Smith	Visited GUP with Pat Saunders in 1994
Stephanie Ramamurthy	Returned from India 1977, several re-visits, keeps aware of books on north east India.
Adam Zameenzad	Writer, interest in dispossessed, from Pakistan, writes about children and others who suffer. Recently wrote about Street Children in Mexico.
John Lowe	Interest in India. Primary School teacher. Hosted by a Sikh family. 3 visits to India and once to Pakistan.
N Ramamurthy	Long term interest in Gandhian movement and Nagaland.
Jennifer Knox	Worked for 10 years for QPSW in Sri Lanka.
Ruth Barker	Convenes China group, member of Naga Group until recently.

	Brought newsletter from Friends of the Church in China which was circulated.
Stuart Morton	War Crimes '71, one of first major efforts to bring attention to the deaths and rapes associated with liberation war.
Anne Allchin	Interest in Bangladesh. On Quaker Nagaland group.
Penny Robins	Previously worked in Sri Lanka.
Abu B Siddique	Also known as Batchu. Used to work with GUP, then started higher studies at Reading University. Recent visit to Bangladesh to see the people affected by Sidr.
Stephen Petter	Bristol Quaker Meeting, several visits to India, supports Sangham a school near Dehli. Educational deprived area. Near Gohgan City. Land prices have gone up. Land was given to the school by the village. School built by British Friends. Founder died 2 years ago. School now being taken over by a commercial firm from March 2009.
Sheila Ragg	Several previous visits to Indian Sub-Continent.
Martin Schweiger	Several links to Bangladesh and has visited India and Sri Lanka.

Meeting links with South Asia

John Arriens of Cambridge Meeting has recently spoken about Nagaland, recent article in The Friend.

Rochester Meeting had links to India, previously via S K Day who died two years ago.

Chippenham Meeting, Chas Lillywhite, often visits Kerela.

Interfaith Group in Gravesend has a Minister from Kerela.

Muswell Hill has Naga workers as a special project for fund raising.

St Albans Meeting is supporting the south asia project work of Stuart Morton. 2 members supporting Khasodobir schools project, near Sylhet.

Settle Meeting has twice had a speaker from Afghanistan (See newsletter)

Stuart Morton has reviewed money coming in for South Asia work, £30,000 in last year.

Bolton Meeting is doing a walk in solidarity with Ekta Parishad, raising over £1,000.

John Miles is also active in Cirencester

Higher profile of South Asia with coverage in The Friend.

John Connell of Keighley Meeting goes from time to time to Burma to promote peace.

Hari Khurana is continuing the Delhi Meeting for worship 10am Sunday at YMCA in Dehli.

Recovery after the cyclone "People after Sidr: Struggle to get back to normal life".

Batchu was in Bangladesh from 14 September 2008 to see how those affected by cyclone Sidr have managed since. Aware that after disasters attention moves on and

we forget about those affected. Media flow of information about the damage caused by the cyclone has diminished.

People have received very diverse support, generally support has meant that they get smaller houses than they had previously. Quality of houses is also poorer than previous one. There is variation in other support being offered. Fortunately not in an arsenic affected area. The cyclone warnings did help people to go to the cyclone shelters and saved lives. Things did work better than 1991, learning from previous cyclones.

Some subsequent migration from towns to villages prompted by the relief being offered.

Normal life : A Distant Dream.

Housing not working well for the longer term. Some relief goods such as tractors and fishing boats may have to be sold to gain food for short term survival.

Need to develop confidence in rebuilding. About 200 families seen who still have no replacement housing. Can cyclone shelters be used as schools when not used for cyclones? It will take time for a fuller recovery to take place both in terms of physical infra-structure and in terms of people's confidence.

International governments have they failed to deliver what was promised in resource support. The Caretaker Government appear to be handling resources well, but there is some mismanagement with good intentions but poor skill in managing a good quality distribution programme.

Slides shown were shown of Batchu's visit to illustrate his points.

Price inflation in construction materials is a consequence of the aid money that has come in for Sidr relief. Trees grow fast, so many areas have the trees back already. Help from government, army as well as NGOs. Support seen in some good housing coming from UK based Muslim Aid.

Batchu made contact with GUP, but was not able to visit the cyclone shelters they built.

Cyclone shelters are made of concrete, different designs. Raised, sturdy buildings. Will accommodate around 200 people in each shelter. Shift in the balance between relief and rehabilitation as more emergencies are occurring putting longer term development at risk.

Stuart Morton

Strengthening Nonviolent People's Power in South Asia

Naga conciliation work, minimal publicity in the past, now Quaker name in the press in NE India in relation to Naga conciliation work.

"We are going to Dehli and not coming back without land" said a woman from Nagaland about to set off on Jandesh - The People's Victory march 2- 29 October 2007. The march did get a constructive response from the Indian Government. 3 marchers were killed in a road accident, 8 others died on march from exhaustion. All handled very peacefully, impressed the police to the extent that they asked for non

violence training

Exercises to look at the proportion of the population in different resource bands. Some can dream of food tomorrow, while other people beg and dream of food today.

125,000 farmer suicides in India in last 10 years, livelihoods disappearing as a consequence of "economic development". Many examples.

Non violence - ahimsa

- Deep respect for self, others & the planet
- LISTENING as a form of power
- Education for participation
- Responding to conflict creatively by constructing alternatives and resisting oppression

Ekta Parishad, a Gandhian inspired movement is lead by P V Rajagopal

Action based training, people from 13 to 35. If you can get 10 from a 100 you have leaders for their communities. Use of drama and Trust Games are used as a means of education.

Turning the tide : advance the understanding and practice of active non-violence for positive social change is led by Steve Whiting.

South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA) : non violence, grass roots and regional solidarity. Meeting 4 - 6 April 2006.

Non violence training

Peace education

Media - reducing violence, increasing non-violence.

Journalist workshop was used to look at South Asia identity and freer movement of people.

Plans for future include:

Broaden and deepen SAPA membership

Non violent Trainers network

Rajagopal to visit Pakistan and Bangladesh

Bus yatra of 100 South Asian young people will hold individual South Asian governments accountable for millennium goals

Quakers work through local partners, we are coming to the end of Quaker offices in particular countries. Stuart Morton is the only person formally working on South Asia issues for Britain Yearly Meeting.

Quaker Naga Conciliation Group

8 visits to Nagaland in 7 years. Typical Quaker work, impartial and quiet. Meeting with people at many levels in the community, includes Government of India. Need to talk to Indian Intelligence as well as other groups to maintain transparency. Work has

included

E-mail and telephone meetings. Some meetings held at Friends House, usually off the record. Deep listening. Confidential. Trust building and maintaining. 11 years of cease fire so far with the main militant groups.

Naga Peace Summit III, held in Changmai (Thailand) YMCA 17 - 22 August 2008. Since then 600 tribal leaders got together to make a statement of reconciliation. On 9th October a football match featured "Hope Team" (members of different factions) vs "Faith Team" (civil society groups) was held in Nagaland. Still very high risk that it can all go wrong but progress is being made.

Human Security

Concerns over climate change, and its linkages. A report about a recent visit to Bangladesh is being written for QPSW in November.

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## **South Asia Interest Group (SAIG) Annual General Meeting**

### **Convenors report**

Since the last SAIG meeting in November 2007, there has been follow up with report to MfS consultative group on the long term frame work and short newsletter in September 2008. There have been several times when it would have been good to respond as a group but it has not really practical to do so. Pat Saunders has been the convenor for at least 11 years now and has asked to be released.

Stephan Petter will take on the convening of SAIG with support from Jennifer Knox, convening the meetings and making sure things happen. As a listed Quaker Group we must communicate with members at least twice each year.

### **Treasurers Report**

Accounts have been presented and copies circulated by Anne Smith. The accounts look healthy although there are some bills to be paid. At the moment our balance is £530.02p but we have some bills to pay which will marginally exceed our income for 2007/08. Subscriptions remain at £10 for members with £5 for concessions. Anne Smith will continue as Treasurer.

Rob Gallagher has kindly offered to be our newsletter editor, he will always need copy and all members are asked to send contributions to him. We hope to send out 2 issues each year.

Martin Schweiger will continue as note taker and will send out the notes of today's meeting. Martin will send a brief report of today's meeting to The Friend.

### **E-mail group.**

Stephanie suggests more should be done by e-mail. We hope to set up an e-mail group. Stephen Petter has agreed to act as the moderator

### **SAIG Meeting 18 October 2008**

We would like to record our thanks to Batchu and Stuart Morton, our speakers today, for their very interesting and helpful talks. There were 16 people present at the meeting with links to the 5 countries with active Quaker links in South Asia.

**Date of next meeting**

17 October or 24<sup>th</sup> October 2009 subject to availability of a venue.

Venue Penn Club, London

Stephen Petter will follow this up with the PennClub.