**QSAIG Meeting on Zoom**

10am on Saturday 24th April 2021

**Apologies**: Subash and Tshering (from South Asia Peace Alliance), Erica Cadbury

**Present**

Abu Siddique (Bachchu), Waheed Ahmed, Syed Nurul Alam, Judith Baker, Joya Bannerjee. Cora and Rob Gallagher, Ivan Hutnick, John McConnell, Meryl Titus, Stuart Morton, Janet Perry, Ram & Stephannie Ramamurthy, Pat Saunders, Anne Smith, Norman Smith, Joihn Smithson, Ginnie and Nicholas Wollaston,

**Welcome**

We started with a short period of silent worship.

All present were invited to introduce themselves.

**Jai Jagat – Ginnie and Nicholas Wollaston**

The International Walk from India to Geneva was halted in March 2020 because of Covid-19. However 120 French walkers did get to Geneva. Because of Covid things are now in a state of transition. In India a lot of work is going on with migrant workers and encouraging people to stay in the villages, developing nature based solutions to problems. See: <http://jaijagat2020.co.uk>

Our commitment to Food sustainability can be seen here:

<https://jaijagat2020.co.uk/meals-for-justice-and-peace-jai-jagat-2020-uk/>

The European end of Jai Jagat now has a core of 4 people organising it. Walks from Norway to central Europe were planned but Covid may prevent those from taking place. Attention is being focussed on COP26 and Build Back Better.

Attention is being given to the Tinsley Incinerator which is producing a lot of toxic pollution. The management is in the hands of Veolia and campaigners are demanding a more environmentally friendly management company when the contract is renewed.

In India there has been a large scale farmers strike against some agricultural reforms that threaten the incomes of most small scale farmers.

Other work is being done on recycling, growing food at home, performance poetry and work with young people.

Ginnie has also shared this fim made with Ekta Parisha (Ramesh), which shows so graphically the impact of coal mining in India - with graphic film footage that is very powerful. Very well worth watching.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8y4PM041UQ&t=6s>

**Bhopal – Merryl Titus**

Schools are being run by Friends Mission. There are difficulties because the Government supports the salary of teachers in government schools but not those who teach in other schools.

**Friends Rural Centre, Rasulia – Merryl Titus**

Sohagpur day scholars-199

In Hostel 4.

Itarsi-2 schools.

Girls School-340

Boys School - 300 Students. Sohagpur has girls school

Activities like Milk Dairy, Agriculture and Plantation are going on. And the case was filed for the property of Friends Rural Centre but now the case is in our favour.

**GUP  (Bangladesh) (S A Wahab & Syed Nurul Alam & Bachchu)**

We were pleased to see friends from GUP who are currently fasting for Ramadan.

COVID-19 and Response of GUP

Bangladesh has been facing severe adverse effects from the outbreak of pandemic COVID-19 from the viewpoint of social and economic outcome. All activities of GUP were ceased from 26th March 2020 and continued till 10th May 2020. Based on the special permit issued by the Government of Bangladesh, all non-government organisations started their activities from 10th May 2020 in small-scale following the health rules. Accordingly, GUP also started its official activities from 10th May 2020 and loan collection activities from 1st June 2020. Considering the pandemic situation and economic condition of the community people, GUP distributed free food items to 1,300 families along with the Upazila Administration. The total cost of the food items was Taka 2,20,000. Furthermore, GUP distributed food items worth of Taka 2,50,000 among the jobless 300 families of Khalia and Rajoir Union.

In addition to the food distribution activities, GUP distributed COVID-19 related 10,000 leaflets to the community of Madaripur, Shariatpur and Gopalgonj District to develop awareness against the impact of COVID-19. GUP also provided hand sanitisers to each of 3 local mosques of Rajoir and Khalia Union to develop awareness for health and maintain safety measures. Affectionately all workers of GUP contributed Tk. 1,00,000 equivalent to one day salary to the Honourable Prime Minister’s relief fund through PKSF.

Now we are in the 2nd phase of COVID 19 infection in Bangladesh and in the lockdown situation. We are trying to build up awareness among the community people of Khalia Union of Rajoir Upazill, Madaripur district through our health activities under ENRICH Programme.

Normal programmes from GUP have has to be minimised because of Covid so there is a difficulty in collecting from the microcredit programmes and there are concerns for staff safety.

**Nagaland - Judith Baker**

There was a report on what is happening in Nagaland. There are many sensitivities so information was limited but we are asked to offer prayer and solidarity to the peoples of Nagaland and all who are trying to bring about peace and reconciliation.

**Street Children in Myamnar - John McConnell**

Scholarships for Street Kids in the UK – see: <https://www.s4sk.org.uk>

Hope for Shinning Stars in Myamnar.

Offer a spectrum of education and social protection. The 2008 constitution was written by the military. The military wanted proportional representation but were surprised that a much higher proportion of people voted than they had expected and the NLD was elected. The recent coup by the military is to protect the elites and their financial interests.

Groups attract suspicion and violent responses from the military. This makes schooling difficult. Some of the military are complying with orders in order to protect their families. The project seeks to provide family support and less education is possible. The level of harm is great and there are many refugees. There is a lot about learning to care and drawing on reserves of kindness.

We can only hope to uphold all the people of Myamnar at this time.

Margaret Waterworth – West Bengal

Had technical problems but did sent us this note in the CHAT:

TDRO - trickle down and ripple out Irish NGO has a web site <https://tdroa.org>. providing english and environmental studies work sheets to their children in 5 schools by sending the worksheets with the food distribution.

Margaret also kindly sent this wonderful email after the meeting:

Thank you very much for today's QSAIG MEETING.  It was heartening to see so many familiar faces, and a great coming together of the group, whilst learning so much more about Quaker interests and work in Asia that is still going on.

I apologise for my poor connections today. My technological help set me up, and then went shopping!

In response to the request for information about Pakistan I have contacts in Jelum along with a number of people who run the Pakistani Community Centre attached to the Mosque in Willesden.  North London, Borough of Brent. I have been to Pakistan several times, and am in touch with the Principal and Head of The Little Angels School for Disabled Children where we have tried to arrange exchanges /resources, ideas with MENTAID, a school for disabled children in Kolkata.  So far we have not been able to send teachers in either direction - immigration problems.

I can ask them to give me a report about how they are managing to run the school in Pakistan, and how people in general are coping with COVID on a daily basis in Jelum and nearby villages.  Would that be helpful?

I also tried to mention, in response to QPSW concerns about how Quakers engage in work abroad, that in my experience, with schools in West Bengal, where we started up bicycle mobile libraries, that the schools recognised I was part of their imperialistic past i.e. I had white skin and spoke English. One young teacher who was asked to give a vote of thanks, at the launch of the first mobile library said ( translation) - ''We recognise that Madam is from our imperialistic past, which we now reject, ( great laughter from the audience) but she has come with good will and we have enjoyed working with her and telling her what we need. It's been a joint venture to get this library up and running and we will make sure it is successful.

And for my part I felt so involved and cared for during the setup process. I just explained how mobile libraries could work in rural areas, and they did the rest. Along the way it was good to admit that the imperialistic past had wreaked havoc in West Bengal i.e the famine and partition.  1943 - 1946. and before the Mutinies and other military put downs, of the 1890's.

It was also good to see you and Liz looking so well, and in fact everyone else. Also connecting with Stephannie and Ram too, as Ram was a great support to me, and helped me to undertake my first trip to India with the Commonwealth Institute (as was) in 1986. Amazing, and lifelong valuable memories.

Yours in Friendship

Maggie W

QPSW has issued this minute

*4.4****Working where welcomed***

*We acknowledge the historic and current privileges held by Quakers in Britain and the reinforcement of power imbalances if we intervene in others' struggles for justice without mandate or invitation, however well meaning. This is especially important in international settings where our programmes must only operate where welcomed and where the contribution we make cannot be better provided locally.*

There are problems with this because who can or should provide the welcome, so often there may be differences of opinion between government and people and between different sections of the same community.

We may need to think about “walking with” or “accompanying” as the way we seek to support and work with communities in South Asia.

Time prevented us from considering this minute adequately so we will include it in our next agenda and invite Tracey Martin from QPSW to join us for this item.

Request

Articles, news, information and photographs wanted for both the newsletter and the website. Please share them with Rob Gallagher and Martin Schweiger.

Next Meeting

Saturday 23rd October 2021

Location. To be determined. May be a mixture of physical gathering and others joining by Zoom.

Agenda will include:

* Objectives of QSAIG
* Reflections on the QPSW minute for QSAIG.
* Feedback from Britain Yearly Meeting.
* AGM
* Sharing of news from work in South Asia of interest to Quakers