**Quaker South Asia Interest Group**

Saturday 8th October 2022 10am

Meeting Held on Zoom

Participants

Judith Baker, William Knox, Abu Siddique, Aaina Siddique, Norman Smith, Rob Gallagher, Stuart Morton, Willemina Morton, Maggie Waterworth, Fazlul Huq, Merryl Titus, Subhash, Pat Saunders, John McConnell, Judith Baker, Adrian Glamorgan, Mian Akbar Hussein, Mossaraf Hossain, Liz Schweiger, Martin Schweiger.

Apologies

Rukhsar Sultana, Ginnie Wollaston, Ivan Hutnik, Steve Petter, Gerald Conyngham, Jennifer Know, Jeanne Openshaw and Penny Robbins.

The meeting started with a short period of silent Worship.

William Knox shared with us information about the activity of QUNO. He has reported in May to Asia West Pacific section of QUNO. QUNO does a lot of quiet diplomacy with diplomats from different countries. New Director from South Africa with a lot of energy. Several different programmes including Human Rights and Refugees, Importance of refugee vulnerability in transit, Give voice to youth and COP 27 which will start shortly. Look at the process of engaging the military and business in climate change. QUNO has produced a tool kit on how to engage children in climate change: <https://quno.org/resource/2021/4/how-be-hero-all-our-children>

Include areas that diplomats easily overlook. That makes QUNO staff specialists in some areas such as explosive weapons in populated areas, human rights in relation to arms control, social justice and human process in sustainability.

The next QUNO meeting will be in November so if there are issues you want raised, please forward these to William before the end of October.

Judith Baker

There is a blog available about work in the Naga Lands. (see: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/blog/colonialism-museums-and-the-return-of-ancestral-remains>

We heard about delicate and sensitive work being carried out at the Pitt Rivers Museum with the aim of repatriating human remains to the Naga Lands. Lots of questions being raised about where they should go to and what type of burial is appropriate. It is all part of the Naga Reconciliation Peace Negotiations. These have been complicated by the killing of some Naga men by the India Military. The men killed were civilians but shortly afterwards the Indian soldiers were found to be trying to dress the dead men in military uniforms to make it appear that they were militants. The Indian armed forces are acting under a Special Powers Act which it is thought needs to be repealed.

A priority remains to stop the fighting between different groups of Naga people. Also issues remain over inequalities and the need to empower youth.

Aania Siddique

Aania is an anti-racism ambassador. Much of her work is focussed on the Bangladeshis in the UK who are over represented in racist incidents and in inequalities. Data shows that Bangladeshi are often subjected to multiple inequalities.

(see: <https://ready.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/16627/2019/01/SUMMARY-OF-RACIAL-AND-ETHNIC-IDENTITY-MODELS.pdf> )

Merryl Titus spoke from Bohpal in India. We heard about 2 years of Covid impact which has resulted in many difficulties for many people. However there was good news from Sohagpur School which inspite of shortage of funds has new has 3 classrooms. The new class rooms were opened on Quaker Day 2022 (2nd October) an event that was well supported. The pandemic has reduced the number of children coming to the school but it is expected that numbers will pick up again. See: <https://friendsschoolsohagpur.com/>

Fazlul Huq told us about the legal aid programme in Madariapur which was started with Quaker support. The work has been copied else where in Bangladesh. The government should fund legal aid. The legal system is slow and very costly. Fazlul talked about moving towards dispute resolution with community involvement as it is quicker, cheaper and fairer. There was a positive move to involve the Union Parishads (Local Councils) but these have increasingly been affected by political interference. The work in Madariapur has developed the 3 M system – the Madariapur Model of Mediation. There is now a legal aid training centre in Madariapur with a capacity of 50 to 54 at a time.

Funding remains a problem.

Rob Gallagher joined in from Dhaka where he is on his first visit for 21/2 years. He is working on a revised transport strategy for Dhaka. There is a large pool of talent available. For 30+ years reports have been written but not acted upon. Traffic is currently horrendous with buses posing particularnproblems. There is a suggestion that there is a need to get more involvement in the planning and implementation from those involved in the traffic problems.

Subhash took time out from celebrating a festival in Nepal to talk to us about the peace work he is doing. We thank his family for allowing him to be with us for a time. He runs Alternatives to Violence Programmes (AVP) and has done so since 2008. Workshops take place in schools with a focus on alcohol and drugs. In seeking to create an experience of peace there is a need to stop teachers beating the children!

There is a lot of work to do on land and agrarian reform. Land related injustice is linked to poverty and needs to be addressed. Nepal is at a cross roads as it moves from being a feudal state to a more equal society. This is not helped by the government seeking to give land to corporate companies which use the peasants as cheap labour.

Other issues include war resistance international, conscientious objection and war profiteers. Continues to support South Asia Peace Alliance. Work will now focus on a few schools but staying with them in the longer term with training on AVP and learning about decision making.

John McConnell spoke about the work of Hope 4 Shining Stars in Myanmar. The situation is very complex and there needs to be continual problem solving making sure that the organisation remains agile. Previous experience in Sri Lanka at a time of conflict has been very useful. (See: <https://www.s4sk.org.uk> )

Md Mossaraf Hossain told us about Muslim Aid. (see <https://www.muslimaid.org> ) The headquarters is in the UK.

They work in Thailand, Bangladesh and other countries. In Bangladesh there is work with the Rohingya population and there is a vocational training programme in Saidpur. (*Which happens to be where Martin and Liz (Schweiger) first met in August 1974*). There is a lot of work on micro-finance. Heavily involved in post flood emergency work and seeking to restore livelihoods.

Abu Siddique is currently working on a programme evaluation for a project based in Kolkata. He is in touch with Gonno Unnayan Prochesta (GUP). The project has been affected by the loss of both Ataur Rahman and Nasir who were so active in driving the work of GUP.

The new Executuve Director is Monjul Islam. The main work is now based on micro-credit. There is now less dependence on foreign aid. The Peace Centre is not active at the moment and one of the challenges is to restore the awareness raising work previously being done. Batchchu will be visiting Bangladesh from 2nd January 2023. He will try to contact Rukhsar Sultana who was unable to join us today.

Pat Saunders raised questions about the rising sea levels as they affect Bangladesh particularly in the south and west. Currently available maps are not adequate.

Adrian Glamorgan sent the following in the CHAT:

* Friends, delighted the AGM could gather so many Friends together. I’ve been attending the FWCC Central Executive Committee in Nairobi and having various events today - and go back into meetings at the same time you return from your break! FWCC Asia West Pacific looks forward to possibilities between our Section and QSAIG, and I'm delighted to invite you to join a talk on Saturday 5 November 8am Berlin time (I'll confirm that) with Palmo Tenzin, from a Tibetan independence group, who will be talking about the Third Pole - all for our FWCC Asia West Pacific Climate Action Network, which has increasingly been focusing on disaster resilience and Quakers. Our next event will be on the first Saturday of February 2023, with Quaker Jane Sloane from the Asia Foundation, about Gender Inclusivity and Disaster Resilience. Later in 2023 I plan/hope to spend 2-3 months visiting South Asian Quakers to learn more about how the Spirit prospers amongst us. Will send details.

Finally, I may try to detour to Woodbrooke and Euston Road in early May 2023, in which case I would be delighted to meet with Friends who are members of QSAIG. Warm regards to you all, In Friendship, Adrian

Stuart Morton sent the following in the CHAT:

In a Woodbrooke day workshop on Inclusion and Diversity we were introduced to a report and YouTube video on the links between climate justice and racism. It is produced by Greenpeace and the Runnymede Trust (a major justice charity in the UK). The site is: [www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-racism-report-summary](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-racism-report-summary)

Date of Next Meetings:

1st April 2023 – half day Zoom session. Main topic will be consequences of climate change on women. Any suggestions and thoughts on this very welcome. We may also wish to consider the issue of reparations.

7th October 2023 – Annual Meeting and AGM. Hybrid with Zoom and a face to face meeting probably in London. Anne Smith to make enquiries of Westminster Meeting House.

Message received from Maggie Waterworth after the Zoom Session:

*Dear Martin and Liz,*

*I will not be able to attend this afternoon.*

*I did try to send you all a chat in response to Subhash's work but somehow lap top froze!*

*Firstly, I wanted to wish him Shubho Bijoya as he is in the middle of Puja season.*

*And to say that we are also trying to bring together parents hopes, and aspirations, for their children and what their children see as their future through drama in the Sundarbans project with TDRO (Trickle down and Ripple out). A project in partnership with local government schools and people in The Republic of Ireland. Children write the script on issues like environment, land rights, careers and so on and perform for their local communities/villages.*

*Followed by discussions led by the children.*

*Children speak in English and Bengali.*

*We are involved with 5 schools from classes 5 to 8 in the Basanti District and villages around Jharkhali. about 1500 children take part in the speaking and listening sessions (TDRO method) group work and peer to peer learning.*

*No textbooks and no rote learning.*

*.Our local partners are West Bengal Forestry Commission , WB Primary and Senior Schools Board, based in Kolkata, school Heads and Principals, and Panchayat leaders locally.*

*With Vikramshila we are using creative writing stories on-line now, all developed during COVID when we conducted ZOOM sessions with teachers and with 16 english medium schools under West Bengal Board. I have written stories to replace the ones in the text book that up to now have worked alongside the rote learning method and are fairly imperialistic (Where the bell tolls for example). The stories are all relevant to daily living, health, hygiene, who works for us, our land or soil.  Task sheets are included and then the children write their own stories/poems/ playlets. Getting and keeping the relevant language is essential.*

*WB Chief Minister is trying her best to keep the BJP (Mr Modi's party at bay) so far she is doing well. She is in charge of the Education system in WB so far.*

*She has given land and registration books to 20,000 Rohingyas from Bangladesh. She is building schools and encouraging them to integrate with the local communities. They are mainly in rural areas.*

*I am hoping to go to Sundarbans late November.*

*Thank you for a really informative meeting and allowing me to keep in touch with all the work that is going on.  It is so uplifting.*

*In Friendship Maggie and best wishes to the whole QSAIG group.*