



Journal Letter from QUNO – Geneva

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Dear Friends,

Flying out to Geneva at the end of August, less than a month after being offered the placement at QUNO and fresh from the World Gathering of Young Friends in Lancaster, I felt somewhat swept up in a current of events beyond my control – living life adventurously indeed! Two months later I am eventually beginning to feel that I have my feet back on the ground and am settling in both to work at QUNO and life in Geneva.

Within the first few weeks of being here I was thrown into the midst of the editing process of an Occasional Paper (OP) which David has been writing on tackling the demand for small arms. This is a joint project between QUNO and the Small Arms Survey, providing evidence from case studies of the necessity of such an approach and suggesting how this can be incorporated into the Review Conference of the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (PoA) in July next year. Unfortunately this process has demonstrated for me the frustrations of the gap between the academic research and policy-making communities. However, work continues to make this a concise, accessible document to inform diplomats and shape the outcomes of the Review Conference. QUNO will play a vital role in furthering the practical implications in various ways, including workshops to be held in New York in January at the preparatory committee for the Review Conference, where the publication will be launched.

September also introduced me to the dubious pleasure of attending the last of this year's sessions of the Conference on Disarmament. Notorious for its failure to agree on a programme of work for about the last 9 years, this year was no exception and concluded without any real changes. Still, at least they do keep talking, even if it is mostly behind closed doors. This is important in itself in the current climate amid the larger crisis of multilateralism.

However, such experiences confirm my sense of relief that the focus of most of QUNO disarmament work is on the small arms side! Despite the disgraceful deletion of the whole section on disarmament from the final outcome document of the World Summit in September, affirmation of the PoA did get squeezed in under peacekeeping and transnational crime. Meanwhile, in the run-up to the 2006 Review Conference of the PoA the real agenda-building work of the Geneva Forum, where governments and NGOs can discuss these issues face-to-face, is inspirational.

The recent meeting in New York of the General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament saw the passing of three new resolutions on small arms and light weapons, dubbed “the real weapons of mass destruction”¹. Of particular interest is one resolution entitled “Addressing the Humanitarian and Development Impact of the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons” ([A/C.1/60/L.34](#)). Linking disarmament and international security issues with human rights and development, this was adopted after a vote of 160 member states to 1 against – no prizes for guessing which state

¹ By Bangladesh, see www.reachingcriticalwill.org/political/1com/FCM05/week5.html#16

that was! This came about as a result of a process that had been fostered by QUNO over the last year, and such moves are particularly significant in the approach to the PoA Review Conference, demonstrating what we hope is genuine desire for continued momentum in this area.

My first two months here in Geneva have certainly taught me a lot about the reality of work with the disarmament community here in Geneva, however frustrating that can often be! As our beautifully warm and sunny autumn finally succumbs to more seasonal temperatures, the learning curve looks set to continue: as I write this I am surrounded by documents on depleted uranium; the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the annual conference on which starts next week; not to mention reading for what I hope will become a tangent of QUNO small arms work concerning post-conflict psychological trauma and the needs of survivors in relation to establishing sustainable peace processes.

I'll keep you all updated!

Best wishes,
Sophie