



Geneva Reporter

Quaker United Nations Office Geneva

Water, Conflict and Cooperation

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It is increasingly common to hear that climate change will lead to conflict over natural resources. QUNO is critically examining this position in a forthcoming publication that will explore possibilities for cooperation over natural resources, in a form of 'environmental peacebuilding'.

"Countries have not tended to go to war over water," Ed Davey, the UK's Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change recently noted, "but I have a fear for the world that climate instability drives political instability." This is an example of an increasingly common position in public discourse: that climate change will inevitably lead to an increase in violent conflict over scarce natural resources.

QUNO is critically examining this type of position in its work relating to human impacts of climate change.

If any resource is susceptible to conflict, it is water. Water is vital for drinking, washing, agriculture and industry. A large proportion of the world's freshwater is shared between nations, with 214 major river systems shared by two or more states and 19 countries receiving more than half their water from outside

their borders. As climate change affects glacier melt and drought patterns, many countries are likely to find decreasing water resources creating problems for their growing populations and economies.

However, the assumption that this situation will inevitably lead to 'water conflict', as countries try to secure the dwindling resource for themselves, is flawed in two major ways.

Firstly, by framing the problem in terms of conflict and security, we are encouraged to look to the same framework for solutions. For industrialised countries, this may include further securing and militarising of borders to keep out people fleeing climate-related conflicts. Countries threatened by resource scarcity may believe they need to act pre-emptively to secure resources from their 'enemies'.

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Conscientious Objection to Military Service

UN Human Rights Council Adopts First-Ever Resolution on Conscientious Objection

On 6 July, the UN Human Rights Council adopted its first-ever resolution on conscientious objection to military service.

The Human Rights Council is made up of 47 States, and its agenda can cover all human rights issues. The Human Rights Council replaced the former Commission on Human Rights in 2006.

The resolution recalls that the Commission on Human Rights recognised the right of conscientious objection to military service. It requests the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to publish a report every four years on new developments, best practices and remaining challenges regarding conscientious objection around the world, and calls on States to review their laws, policies and practices on conscientious objection to military service.

These reports will ensure that developments at international and regional level, including the case law under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, will be brought to the attention of a wide audience, including all governments. The first report will be available for the June 2013 session of the Human Rights Council.

Meanwhile, the European human rights system is also increasingly recognising conscientious objection. Since the European Court of Human Rights Grand Chamber's ground-breaking judgment in July 2011 (*Bayatyan v Armenia*) recognising conscientious objection to military service as being protected under the European Human Rights Convention, the different Chambers of the Court have produced a series of judgments on the subject against Turkey as well as Armenia.

These have clearly established that the failure to provide for conscientious objectors to military service, including an opportunity for such claims to be considered, is a violation of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Further, the

cases establish that trying conscientious objectors in military courts is a violation of the right to fair trial, even if they are incorporated into the armed forces against their will, and that ill-treatment of conscientious objectors is a violation of the prohibition on inhuman and degrading treatment. Although the Government of Turkey has not yet introduced legislation on conscientious objection, some Turkish military courts are taking account of the European Court's judgments and recognising some conscientious objectors.

For more background and information about conscientious objection to military service see Rachel Brett, *International Standards on Conscientious Objection to Military Service*, November 2011, available in English, French, German, Russian and Spanish.

This and other QUNO publications on conscientious objection are available at www.quno.org or by contacting QUNO.



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Highlights from QUNO New York



One highlight of our recent work focused on the conflict in Somalia and looked at the need to promote dialogue and engagement with all stakeholders. QUNO hosted colleagues from the Life & Peace Institute, Nairobi, and the Kroc Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame who spent two days meeting with UN Member States, agencies, and NGOs. The delegates presented their recent report, *Somalia: Creating Space for Fresh Approaches to Peacebuilding*. The report emphasises the need for linkages with civil society, and argues that long-term solutions to the conflict in Somalia will require opening space for actors from the national, regional, and international levels to engage with civilians.

Another highlight, within our Peacebuilding programme, was a co-hosted event with the EU Delegation for the release of Conciliation Resources'

report, *Consolidating Peace: Liberia and Sierra Leone*. We also organised a smaller lunch meeting with colleagues from Conciliation Resources at Quaker House to discuss cross-regional approaches to peacebuilding in West Africa. The meetings featured key themes such as the role of civil society engagement in peacebuilding, as well as the need for reconciliation efforts within larger peacebuilding processes.

In the midst of these activities, we have been joined by Elisabeth Halliday as our new Office Coordinator. We are also looking forward to welcoming incoming Programme Assistants, Olivia Ensign (Swarthmore College) and Amelia Breeze (University of St. Andrews), and we will be sad to say good bye to our current Programme Assistants Samia Abbass and Kirsten Mandala when they leave us later this year.

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Secondly, climate change does not drive political instability, as Ed Davey claims, but is only one of a constellation of factors that can lead to violent conflict. Rather than causing conflict in a previously peaceful situation, climate change can act as a 'trigger' or 'multiplier' in situations where the basis for conflict already exists due to economic, social, cultural or historical factors.

Instead of assuming the inevitability of conflict, it is possible to see water scarcity as an opportunity for cooperation, with States and communities working together rather than competing.

Creating truly participatory methods and institutions to share diminishing water resources can be seen as a form of 'environmental peacebuilding', allowing connections to be made and understand cooperating over the most vital and necessary resource of all.

QUNO's forthcoming report on water and conflict will examine this idea in more detail. It will argue for a new way of framing the issue to emphasise the possibilities for cooperation, and present examples from across the globe.



News in Brief

In April, four QUNO staff participated in the **World Conference of Friends in Kabarak, Kenya**. Lynn Finnegan, Helen Kearney and Jonathan Woolley (QUNO GE), and Andrew Tomlinson (QUNO NY) spent 10 days alongside 850 Friends from 51 different countries, who together represented an immense diversity of experience. QUNO staff were appreciative of the space the Conference offered for meeting and listening to other Friends, and for hearing what Friends worldwide expect from QUNO. They observed the brave examples of Quakers' engagement for peace in many countries around the world, leading Jonathan Woolley to note that 'in our work for peace, we can genuinely say that we are working for Quakers worldwide.'

Rachel Brett delivered the Swarthmore Lecture at Britain Yearly Meeting in May. The lecture and accompanying book are entitled '**Snakes and Ladders**.' They describe specific work and achievements, such as outlawing the use of

child soldiers, advocating for conscientious objection, and promoting the rights of women in prison and children of prisoners. The lecture and book provide insights into how Quakers work at the UN, and the ways this work has profound and continuing effect on people's lives. For more information on the book and how to listen to the lecture, please visit www.woodbrooke.org.uk/publications.php?action=publication&id=88 or write to us at QUNO Geneva.

Several QUNO staff also participated in **Britain Yearly Meeting**, alongside a thousand other Friends. The themes of peace and ecojustice ran through the gathering, further strengthening QUNO's commitment to working towards these aims at the international level.

In July, QUNO held its 58th annual **Summer School**. This brought together 25 young people from countries as diverse as Nepal, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran, Finland, Rwanda, Zambia, UK, Brazil and the USA. During the two weeks, they learned about the work of QUNO, visited the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva.

A **Geneva Summer School alumni group** now exists, to facilitate contacts amongst previous summer school participants and between them and QUNO. If you are one of the 1450 people who have participated in one of the Summer Schools since 1955 and would like to join the group, please drop us a line, by post or by email at quno@quno.ch

QUNO's **2011 Review of Activities** is now available in English, French and Spanish. Copies can be downloaded from www.quno.org, and hard copies are available on request.

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