

# Geneva Reporter

*Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva*

## Women in Prison

QUNO is pleased at the steadily increasing attention that is being given to the issues of women in prison and children of prisoners.

On 25 March, the UN Human Rights Council adopted without a vote, a resolution (10/2) inviting Governments, relevant international and regional bodies, national human rights institutions and NGOs to increase attention on the issue of women and girls in prison and their children, with a view to identifying and addressing the gender-specific aspects and challenges of these issues. The resolution went on to emphasize that priority should be given to non-custodial measures when sentencing or deciding on pre-trial measures for pregnant women or the sole or primary carer of children, taking into account the best interests of the child. Finally, it requests the UN Secretary General to report to the Human Rights Council's March 2009 session on latest developments, challenges and good practices regarding the conditions of women and children in detention, and the

High Commissioner for Human Rights to report on the implementation of the resolution.

It is expected that for the latter report, Governments, National Human Rights Institutions and NGOs will be invited to submit information by the Office of the High Commissioner. With good input, these reports can be a real resource providing a wealth of information and analysis about the issues and how to address them, good policies and practices, and the experiences and challenges in different countries and regions.



*Cover photo from the recently released UN Office of Drugs and Crime Handbook on Prisoners with Special Needs, which Rachel Brett helped develop.*

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## Making a Difference on Global Economic Issues

It seems very fitting that QUNO should be thinking about how to address global economic issues at the very time when the world is grappling with the same questions. The financial crisis, the threat of climate change, the recent food crisis – all these are prompting reflection amongst world leaders and civil society alike about the institutions and principles for global economic governance.

QUNO's Global Economic Issues (GEI) programme has made its mark on international economic policy through its trade-related work, in particular in the areas of 'intellectual property,' migration, and issues of concern to least developed countries (LDCs). These projects having reached the end of their cycle, and with Caroline Dommen, the new GEI Representative on board, the GEI programme has begun a scoping exercise to determine where it should devote its energies in the coming years.

There are any number of issues on which we could start working immediately: climate change, food security, accountability of private business, trade governance, water scarcity,

migration. . . all these are important. With trade talks stalled, new global challenges looming and smaller budgets available for this kind of work, it is essential that QUNO ask the right questions about what the key issues are, and what contribution from QUNO would really make a difference.

We will aim to work on topics that provide scope to effect real, deep and lasting change. We will seek to work in areas where we will be complementing, not duplicating, existing initiatives. In our choice of issues we will be guided by consideration of what we can achieve within our small resources, from our Geneva location. Last but not least, we hope to choose issues on which we can build synergies and partnership with other parts of the Quaker community worldwide.

A parallel consideration guiding our work is the wish, within QUNO, to develop activities that cut across the different programme areas. In other words, in the scoping exercise we will try to look at economic insecurity or environmental problems also through the lens of

their impact on peace and security, or consider how a human rights approach can guide economic policy responses to global challenges. In this regard, Caroline Dommen was invited to publish an article on how human rights could reshape governance of trade, in a book entitled '*Rebuilding Global Trade: Proposals for a Fairer, More Sustainable Future*' (available at [www.globaleconomicgovernance.org/rebuilding-global-trade-after-the-crisis](http://www.globaleconomicgovernance.org/rebuilding-global-trade-after-the-crisis))

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In the process of the scoping exercise, QUNO is partnering with others to explore issues of interest. So far, these have included a meeting on services providers' migration (with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, in February), a discussion on responses to the financial crisis (with Oxfam International, in March), and a discussion around 'intellectual property' and food (in April).

### Staff News

**David Atwood** undertook a research visit on small arms management and conflict prevention initiatives in Kenya and South Sudan in early March.

**Rachel Brett** and **Laurel Townhead** (former QUNO Programme Assistant)

participated in an expert meeting in Bangkok in February, preparing draft UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Alternative Measures which the Thai Ministry of Justice will be bringing to the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Vienna in April.

**David Atwood, Adam Drury** and **David Jackman** (QUNO consultant) organised a civil society meeting at Quaker House on the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, to coincide with the meeting of the Core Group of states, which took place on March 23rd.



## Conscientious Objection at the Human Rights Council

The question of conscientious objection to military service continues to receive attention in the UN Human Rights Council. The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, reporting on her mission to Turkmenistan, highlighted the lack of provision there and the consequences for conscientious objectors. This came up again in the report of Turkmenistan's Universal Periodic Review (See the last edition of the Geneva Reporter for more information about UPR). Turkmenistan's response that alternative service can be undertaken in construction, medical and other activities within the Ministry of Defence, while a useful first step, is inadequate for those whose conscience requires a completely *civilian* alternative service.

Colombia, too, responded less than adequately to the UPR recommendation on this subject, stating that the Constitutional Court had decided that the obligation to do military service outweighed the constitutional provision on freedom of conscience and religion. Although this is true, it fails to take account of the status of ratified human rights treaties in

Colombian law. Colombia has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Human Rights Committee has held that conscientious objection to military service is protected by the Covenant, so the Government should be seeking to implement their international legal obligations and not evade them.

Uzbekistan, meanwhile, simply stated that "Currently there is an ongoing work on introducing amendments and supplements in the Law 'On freedom of conscience and religious organizations'".

By contrast, Serbia indicated that some of Slovenia's recommendations had already been incorporated into the Draft Law on Alternative Service, although they rejected the proposal "to invalidate the exception of those who have held weapon permits from the right to conscientious objection" as being "in absolute collision with the arguments of the institution of conscientious objection". This fails to take account of the possibility of a person changing their religion or belief, or even of

being willing to shoot, say, rabbits or pigeons but not people.

The most positive response came from Israel, whose Ambassador stated that in response to the recommendation they would promote "granting the right to those who object to serve in the army on conscientious grounds to serve instead with a civilian body independent of the military, such as in the form of the newly established and strengthened Public Commission for National-Civil Service". It will, of course, be important to see how this commitment is translated into practice.

Slovenia's willingness to take up issues of conscientious objection to military service in the UPR process, as well as the continued attention to the issue by the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, are valued complements to the work of the Human Rights Committee when considering state reports and individual cases under the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

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### For Further Information

QUINO works closely with range of organisations on conscientious objection, including:

#### **War Resisters International**

An international network supporting and connecting people who refuse to take part in war.

<http://www.wri-irg.org/>

#### **European Bureau for Conscientious Objection**

A Europe-wide organisation promoting the right to conscientious objection.

<http://www.ebco-beoc.eu/>

#### **New Profile**

An Israeli organisation supporting conscientious objectors within Israel.

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<http://www.newprofile.org/english/>



## New Momentum in Nuclear Disarmament

The last 18 months have seen a resurgence of disarmament language in global nuclear thinking. President Obama's recent comments in Prague illustrate this, as do the new 'International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament', Ban Ki-Moon's 5-point plan for nuclear issues, and calls for nuclear disarmament from dyed-in-the-wool Cold War Warriors like Henry Kissinger. Not just non-proliferation, but *disarmament*, aimed at 'Global Zero', as the eponymous new international campaign says. The Conference on Disarmament has heard a lot about this, but done little as it waits for the US government to formulate policy and issue its diplomats with (hopefully) new instructions.

However, in May the Preparatory Committee for next

year's Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference will provide another forum for nuclear disarmament diplomacy. However, the NPT's disarmament elements have always been somewhat neglected, and if the regime is to retain relevancy and moral authority, there will need to be real progress in this area at next year's conference.

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*"A consensus NPT agenda that avoids the difficult issues is unlikely to lead to real progress."*

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Last year's PrepCom went relatively smoothly, and there is reasonable hope that this year will meet what Susi Snyder, Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, describes as the "classic definition of a successful PrepCom – a consensus agenda and consensus

recommendations toward the Review Conference". However, a consensus agenda that avoids the difficult issues is unlikely to lead to real progress, and Ms. Snyder also notes the importance of concrete disarmament proposals, like the UN Secretary General's 5 point disarmament plan, "which could be emphasized and supported" at the PrepCom.

The Chair of the PrepCom, Ambassador Boniface Chidyausiku of Zimbabwe, has been extremely positive on NGO involvement, and the opportunity is an important one. The ongoing shift in nuclear attitudes is the result of years of pressure and hard work, which states and civil society should look to maintain at the PrepCom and beyond. If it does not engage the hard issues, the NPT risks dangerous unravelling but if it does, it can drive progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

### Recent Publications

- **International Standards on Conscientious Objection to Military Service**, by Rachel Brett. Now available in German, as well as English, French and Spanish.
- **Joint Oral statement on Conscientious Objection to Military Service**, by Friends World Committee for Consultation and Conscience and Peace Tax International. Delivered to the Human Rights Council by Rachel Brett, 16th March 2009.
- **Joint Oral statement on Arbitrary Detention**, by Friends World Committee for Consultation and Amnesty International. Delivered to the Human Rights Council by Rachel Brett, 6th March 2009.
- **The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development: An International Newsletter**. Issue 5, February 2009. Available in English, French and Spanish at [www.genevadeclaration.org](http://www.genevadeclaration.org)

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