

# Geneva Reporter

*Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva*

## The Dangerous Lure of “Climate Change and...”

Climate change continues to be a headline topic, with an increasing number of agencies – governmental and non-governmental – highlighting its links with other issues. Climate change and biodiversity, climate change and water, climate change and conflict, climate change and migration: just some of the topics on international agendas.

As readers of the *Geneva Reporter* will know, QUNO has been examining both climate change and migration (see ‘Climate Migrants’, *Geneva Reporter August-October 2009*) and climate change and conflict. QUNO expects to publish a briefing paper on these shortly, with the message that climate change and related environmental phenomena could exacerbate existing vulnerabilities that push people to migrate, as well as heightening underlying points of contention that can lead to conflict. The severity of these impacts will be determined by the affected community’s degree of vulnerability and ability to adapt. Those living in poverty, in unstable or poorly governed states, or in areas where there has been inadequate planning for adaptation to climate change, are likely to be the most vulnerable.



Bangladesh Climate Change Canvas.  
Source: Oxfam

One particular concern for QUNO is that increased focus on ‘climate change and...’ subjects (including climate change and migration, or climate change and conflict) should not draw attention away from the underlying issues. Top of the list of such issues is the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions – too much focus on adaptation strategies could sideline the importance of emissions reductions.

Similarly, focusing on new ‘climate change and...’ issues brings with it the need to establish numbers and clarify definitions, to conceptualise the new issue and propose appropriate policy responses. There is a risk that so much time and energy is spent on definitions, measures and conceptualisations that the ongoing need to address existing vulnerabilities – for instance,

what makes people live on marginal lands, or what permits states to be poorly governed – are forgotten.

QUNO does intend to voice these concerns, yet recognises that there is also merit in considering issues relating to climate change further. Climate change might, for instance, offer a new entry

point for peacebuilding work, or new impetus for work relating to migration policy in industrialised countries. In the coming months, QUNO will continue to engage both UN officials and grassroots communities on climate change and migration. We are working towards a meeting of faith leaders who can share concerns, ideas and best practice on managing the process of displacement from and into communities.

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## BMS 4: Modest Progress on Small Arms

For those facing the realities of gun-related violence on a daily basis, the pace of global action on small arms and light weapons is painfully slow. It is now more than nine years since states agreed the 2001 'Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat, and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects'. Its lofty language of commitments, even as circumscribed as they are, will seem distant and rather irrelevant to the thousands of individuals and communities that continue to be affected by armed violence in its many manifestations around the world.

Nevertheless, the multilateral level of attention remains critical, even if progress on the 2001 commitments remains intermittent and slow. Far from being lost in the flurry of disarmament-related activity this summer (including the Sixth Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the first Preparatory Committee towards the 2012 conference which will be held to negotiate an Arms Trade Treaty) the 4<sup>th</sup> Biennial Meeting of States (BMS) to consider implementation of the Programme of Action provided, as it was meant to, an essential moment of global attention to ongoing efforts being made by states, regional bodies and international organizations in tackling small arms issues.

Held in New York from 14 – 18 June 2010, the 4<sup>th</sup> BMS brought together more than 125 states for a week of attention to key areas of concern, such as border

controls and international cooperation and assistance. A one-week meeting every two years can hardly give in-depth consideration or produce major new action. Nevertheless these moments remain important ones in sustaining international attention to small arms concerns. As a measure of this, more than 200 non-governmental organizations registered to participate at the BMS.



Source: Defence Images

The Report of the 4<sup>th</sup> BMS (A/CONF.192/BMS/2010/3), agreed by the meeting and which was not a foregone conclusion at its outset, provides a useful overview of what took place. Of considerable importance is the attention given to the next steps, including a new mechanism that will begin in 2011 of a Meeting of Governmental Experts, which will provide an opportunity for more in-depth examination of some core issues, as well as

progress towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> Review Conference in 2012. This Review Conference will be key in examining how well states have done in living up to the commitments made in the PoA and identifying ways to strengthen engagement at the national, regional and multilateral levels.

QUNO remains very much engaged in this work, largely through its involvement in an ongoing Geneva-based mechanism called the 'Geneva Process', made up of States, UN agencies and expert NGOs. This informal mechanism has played a key role, particularly since 2007, in the helping to keep this vital multilateral dimension on the tracks.

The promises of 2001 still remain disappointingly distant goals. However, the BMS demonstrated that a good deal is being done by states at the national and regional levels, where action on this problem is most appropriate. 2012 will provide a better measure of what real progress there has been. In the meantime, QUNO will remain engaged with others in efforts to strengthen multilateral commitment and action in this vital area of human security.

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## Children of Prisoners on the Agenda at the UN

Quakers have been concerned with prison reform for hundreds of years. But it is only recently that QUNO has begun to focus on children of prisoners, their rights and how states protect them when one or both parents are imprisoned.

It is easy to think only in terms of victim and perpetrator when sentencing someone convicted of a crime. But the impact of parental incarceration on a child can be devastating, particularly if that parent is their primary carer.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to make the child's best interests 'a primary consideration' in 'all actions concerning children'. QUNO believes imprisoning a parent has a direct impact on children, and that states therefore have a responsibility to consider and protect the best interests of children of prisoners during the arrest, pre-trial detention, trial, sentencing, incarceration and release of their parents.

Although millions of children worldwide have a parent in prison,

such consideration is not routine. QUNO is therefore working to promote the development of international standards on how countries should protect children of prisoners.

We took a major step forward in this work in September by persuading the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to select 'Children of Prisoners' as the theme for their 2011 Day of General Discussion.

Days of General Discussion are an opportunity for experts, practitioners, civil society and children to come together to talk and to share knowledge on a topic, and may lead to a General Comment to help inform states' practice in this area, or guidelines on the treatment of children of prisoners.

The CRC selected the theme on the basis of a proposal drafted by QUNO and supported by 43 other NGOs, institutions and experts. The proposal pointed out that no other UN body has looked in detail at the children of prisoners, and that international attention is

needed to improve the understanding, shared knowledge, and appreciation of a child rights approach in this neglected area.

QUNO hopes that the discussion, to be held next September, will lead to better understanding of the issue from a child rights perspective and lead to further action at national and international levels. We will be working in the run-up to the Day of Discussion to ensure that it is as useful and successful as possible.

### Conscientious Objection

QUNO and four other NGOs submitted an Amicus Brief to the European Court of Human Rights in a case expected to rule definitively on whether conscientious objection to military service is protected under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The case of *Bayatyan v Armenia* will be heard in late November but the decision is not expected until early 2011. The full text of the Brief is on the QUNO website.

## Stalemated CD Under Scrutiny

The Conference on Disarmament (CD) closed once again this September in its usual state of deadlock and inertia. In response to the inability of the Conference to make any significant progress since 1996, a high-level meeting on 'revitalizing the work of the Conference on Disarmament and taking forward multilateral disarmament negotiations' was convened by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2010.

The meeting focused mainly on identifying ways to revitalize the work of the CD, producing four key outcomes and recommendations: That the 2011 session of the CD should adopt the programme of work which was agreed in 2009 but never undertaken; that the 2011 session of the General Assembly should include an item on the follow-up to this high-level meeting; that the Secretary-General will ask his advisory board on disarmament

matters to 'undertake a thorough review of issues raised' at the high-level meeting; and that the Secretary-General will report on this meeting and subsequent follow-up to the first preparatory committee of the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

For more information on the progress of the Conference on Disarmament and a report on the General Assembly event, see [www.reachingcriticalwill.org](http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org)



## Update from QUNO New York: The Trouble with Elections...

As 2010 progressed, staff at QUNO New York became increasingly engaged around the topic of elections. For many in the global North, elections are seen as the key milestone of democracy, the sign of a transition to a stable plural society. But the reality in many countries is that elections can be triggers for violence, vulnerable inflection points that can just as easily plunge a society into chaos, as mark a transition to stability.

We first started thinking about this topic in the context of Burundi, which faced a series of elections spanning May through September of this year. In the early part of the year we were involved in discussions with a number of groups on the ground who were working to identify warning signs of potential violence, and crowd-

sourcing technology to track both incidents of election-related violence and community peace initiatives. In June we were happy to work with the Burundi office of the American Friends Service Committee, who put together a three day high-level workshop on 'Mediating Election Related Violence'. QUNO participated in this event in Bujumbura, which took place just after the first leg of the elections, just as the opposition parties were accusing the incumbents of election fraud. It was instructive to see representatives of political parties (one of the largest of which had only just transformed itself from an armed rebel group), the electoral commission, the judiciary and civil society groups, struggling with these issues in real time.

As our engagement has developed,

we also have been thinking about the period following elections. Before and during the elections, politicians and political parties have in many cases been exacerbating the divisions in society. Hopes have been raised for change, promises made for a better world, and now reality starts to set in. People perceive themselves as winners or losers, and the need for dialogue and maintaining political space is, if anything, greater than before. In response to these challenges we have planned an event in October co-hosted with the European Union delegation at the UN in New York entitled 'The Day After: Post Election Consolidation in Africa', where we plan to begin a discussion including member states, the UN secretariat and agencies and international NGOs and think tanks on this key topic.

## Staff Changes

This September saw the arrival of two new Programme Assistants, both members of Ireland Yearly Meeting. Aoife Reaper-Reynolds will be working with David Atwood on the Peace and Disarmament programme, while Carolan Goggin will be working

with Rachel Brett on the Human Rights and Refugees programme. Since leaving in August former PA Tom Richardson has begun an MA in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University and is coordinating a project on the Basque region of Spain, while

Holly Mason-White has joined Save the Children in Mongolia as a government sponsored Australian Youth Ambassador for Development. We thank them for their time at QUNO and wish them well in their future activities.

## Recent QUNO Publications

*Agricultural trade and investment rules for the 21st Century - Report of a Session at the World Trade Organisation Public Forum, September 2010.*

*Proposed Theme for Day of General Discussion: Children of Imprisoned Parents, QUNO et al, September 2010.*

*Vahan Bayatyan -v- Armenia before the European Court of Human Rights, Amicus Brief from Amnesty International, Conscience and Peace Tax International, International Commission of Jurists, War Resisters' International, Friends World Committee for Consultation, August 2010.*

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