



# In & Around the UN

## An Update from the Quaker United Nations Office

September 2011

### From Reaction to Intervention: But What about Prevention?

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The UN Security Council (UNSC) has long been challenged to move beyond reaction to prevention — a shift that would involve taking a long-term view that promotes preventive action, rather than simply reacting to crises as they erupt. 2011 has seen new challenges put to the UNSC as it strives to pursue this goal.

During late 2010, UNSC members began experimenting with a new innovation aimed at encouraging a more proactive approach. The practice of monthly briefings by the Department of Political Affairs has continued throughout 2011, providing regular opportunities for council members to assess situations before they reach the point of crisis. As Quakers work to support UN efforts to prevent violent conflict and the use of military force, QUNO was heartened by this development.

However, 2011 has also seen significant challenges in the area of preventive action. Following an election in Côte D'Ivoire that was assessed as free and fair, the UN was faced with Laurent Gbagbo's refusal to step down. While regional and international actors made good use of diplomatic tools, a violent stand-off ended in heavy military clashes during April of this year with UN

peacekeeping forces firing directly on Gbagbo's troop positions. Further north, UNSC members initially sought non-military means to support rebels fighting against Moammar Qadhafi in Libya. Eventually, under the auspices of UNSC resolution 1973, authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, NATO commenced an aerial bombing campaign in support of the rebels.

Both of these cases culminated in military action taken under UN auspices. For many, they raised questions and concerns about the prospect of military intervention being carried out under the banner of the UN. In particular, the experience in Libya has produced deep divisions among council members. As a result the body has thus far been unable to agree on a resolution that would pave the way for use of non-military, diplomatic tools in response to growing concerns

about widespread human rights violations in Syria.

In September, the UNSC is expected to hold a meeting on Preventive Diplomacy focusing on a recent Secretary General's report. For those working to strengthen the UN's capacity to engage in preventive efforts, in place of crisis response and military intervention, the report and meeting provide a welcome opportunity to consider these significant challenges. ❖



Gérard Araud, Permanent Representative of France to the UN and President of the Security Council for May, speaks to the Security Council on the situation in Libya. (31 May 2011, United Nations, New York, Source: United Nations Photo)

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## Letter from the Director

Dear Friends:

I'm writing these words just as the General Assembly is embarking on its 66th session, as world leaders gather for the high-level meetings, which begin tomorrow. Getting to the office now involves negotiating a variety of security barriers in the streets, and out of my office window I can look across and see the snipers on the roof of the General Assembly building.

The heightened security is a reminder of how much the world has changed over the ten years since September 11th, 2001. This September, ten years later, QUNO was privileged to lead a Service of Prayer and Meditation for Healing and Remembrance in the Manner of Friends at the Tillman Chapel at the Church Center for the UN. We hold close to our hearts the memories of those lost to us, and pray for healing for all who suffered on that day and in the years of violence that have followed.

This was a busy summer for QUNO. The work on transitional justice in Burundi, including the trip in August, has moved forward our understanding of the complexities of

supporting reconciliation and restorative processes in countries ravaged by waves of communal violence. The ongoing saga of international involvement in Libya has produced new divisions within the UN Security Council, limiting the ability of council members to agree on a response to the situation in Syria and pointing to the need for a better understanding of the path to genuine violence prevention, a key focus for us. And mindful of the key role of the Middle East in world conflicts, we have been closely following the Palestinian bid for state recognition at the UN, providing a regularly updated background information resource on our website (New at QUNO section of [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org)).

This is our first newsletter to be distributed only

in electronic form: this way we can get our news to you on a timely basis. Please make sure that we have your email contact information. We greatly appreciate the support we receive from our friends all around the world.

*Andrew Tomlinson*



The General Assembly holds a special ceremony marking the tenth anniversary of the 11 September terrorist attacks, with clerics of different faiths lighting candles to remember those whose lives were claimed on that day. From left: Rabbi Richard Marker; Imam Khalid Latif; Reverend Robert J. Robbins; and Reverend Masamichi Kamiya. (9 September 2011, United Nations, New York.)

## Letter from QUNO-Geneva

The last few months have been busy in the QUNO-Geneva Office. The Human Rights and Refugees programme has been working on the final preparations for the Day of General Discussion on Children of Incarcerated Parents, to be held in the Committee on the Rights of the Child at the end of September. QUNO has been instrumental in achieving this landmark event, which will be the first time any UN body has looked in detail at the issue. The Disarmament and Peace programme continues to engage in the Geneva Declaration on

Armed Violence and Development. QUNO has helped in organising the participation of civil society in the Declaration's regional seminars in Abuja and Zagreb, and is working towards the upcoming Ministerial Review in October. The Global Economic Issues programme work on seeds and small-scale farming strives to bring a wider range of voices into discussions on intellectual property and genetic resources, whilst also pursuing its exploration of human impacts on climate change.

QUNO has warmly welcomed —

and been inspired by — the corporate decision adopted at Britain Yearly Meeting in July to become a sustainable low-carbon community. We look forward to both the challenges and opportunities this will bring. We are well aware that concerns about climate change and sustainability will increasingly influence our work across all three of our programme areas, and may in the longer term contribute to blurring the boundaries between them. ❖

## Reconciliation and Transitional Justice in Burundi

Over the past few months, the government in Burundi has been moving ahead on setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Decades of conflict have left deep scars in the small central-African country and the path towards building lasting peace in Burundi remains difficult. A TRC in Burundi is one step forward to address the grievances that linger. However, as the transitional justice process in Burundi evolves it will be equally important to support reconciliation efforts that are already taking place at the local level.

In late August, QUNO staff traveled to Bujumbura to participate in

and commissioners for the TRCs in countries including South Africa, Kenya, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

The workshop was a good opportunity to move this conversation forward in Burundi, and discussions between the participants and the speakers were rich and thought provoking. It was also a good opportunity to begin linking together what is happening on the ground in Burundi with current activities in New York on transitional justice, particularly with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Subsequently, QUNO hosted an informal meeting at Quaker House for member states of the PBC and

sides of the conflict, and yet how rewarding and powerful the transformation of relationships through reconciliation and restorative practices can be. As one woman in Kibimba told us, “Before the war, we lived separately, but the activities we did together [through the peace committee] allowed us to be together.” In order to move towards sustainable peace in Burundi, the efforts of the peace committees and other local reconciliation mechanisms should be included as part of the TRC process. ❖



QUNO Representative Camilla Campisi with members of the Kibimba Peace Committee in Burundi.

a high-level workshop organized by the office of American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Burundi entitled “Transitional Justice Mechanisms: Lessons Learned with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.” The three-day workshop brought together around 50 participants from government, civil society, and the United Nations (UN) in Burundi, as well as experts on transitional justice

UN staff on this topic, allowing the discussion to continue.

A highlight of this trip was the opportunity to visit with a local Burundian Quaker organization based in Gitega called MIPAREC, as well as a peace committee in Kibimba that they support. Members of the Kibimba peace committee talked about how difficult their work often is in bringing together people from different

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*The Fund for Quaker House:* the endowment supports the maintenance and operation of Quaker House.

*QUNO Operating and Program Expenses:* contributions can be made toward the cost of our annual budget.

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## Palestine and Statehood at the UN

This September marks the opening of the 66th session of the General Assembly and with it the much-anticipated Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the UN. Palestine is already recognized as a state by over 120 countries, but its status at the UN is as an “observer entity” and the current initiative is designed to upgrade this status, either to that of a full member state (as envisaged in General Assembly Resolution 181) or possibly to a “non-member state observer” (the current status of the Vatican). At the time of writing, it seems most likely that the Palestinian Authority (PA), led by President Mahmoud Abbas, will first approach the Security Council to request full membership, despite the threatened veto by the United

States. If the application is vetoed, or as an alternative, the PA may go to the General Assembly seeking a resolution to support its recognition as a state, possibly including a formal upgrading of its UN status. QUNO has been following this complex process closely, and has prepared an informational resource on the Palestinian bid for statehood recognition at the UN, which is available on the QUNO website [www.quno.org](http://www.quno.org) and has been regularly updated in the run-up to September.

The context of the Palestinian initiative is interesting. This year has already seen the successful application for UN membership of a new state, South Sudan, and the UN recognition of a new government in Libya (in the form of the Transitional Rebel Coun-

cil). The comparison of these three cases (South Sudan, Libya and Palestine) makes for an educational exercise in the definition of statehood. Academic research suggests that Palestine is a state under the Montevideo definitions, and the World Bank and the IMF have said that they believe that the PA has the required institutions and economic policies for statehood. Nevertheless, achieving statehood recognition is not a technical matter but a political one. The days and weeks to come will see an epic political struggle in the deliberative chambers at the UN and behind locked doors. Only when the dust settles will the impact of all this become clear where it is most important — on the lives of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis. ❖

## QUNO-NY Staff Update

We’ve seen some changes in our office over the past few months. In July and August, we said goodbye to Program Assistants Miranda Hurst and Nadira Khudayberdieva. Nadira has begun graduate studies at the University of Oxford, pursuing a Master of Science program in Global Governance and Diplomacy. Miranda is now working towards a Masters degree in Development and Emergency Practice at the Oxford Institute of Sustainable Development.

In August, we welcomed the arrival of our two new Program Assistants, Samia Abbass and Kirsten Mandala. Samia is a Palestinian-American who graduated from Swarthmore College in 2011 with a double major in Sociology/Anthropology and Peace Studies. Samia visited Northern Ireland for a peace and conflict studies semester abroad in 2009 and a field research grant in 2010, exploring the methods and strategies



QUNO New York Staff, 2011: (left to right) Sarah, Samia, Kirsten, Andrew, and Camilla.

that grassroots NGOs employ in their work. She went on to write her senior thesis on the ways that theater can be used for positive social change. At QUNO, Samia is working on prevention of violent conflict.

Kirsten graduated from Reed College in 2011 with a degree in Political Science. She wrote a senior thesis on Islamic politics, following

seven months of study abroad in Morocco and Jordan. In 2009, Kirsten received a grant to travel to Rwanda to establish a children’s library and teach conflict resolution to youth in cooperation with the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI). She is joining QUNO after returning from another summer in Kigali with AGLI. Kirsten will be focusing on peacebuilding with QUNO this year.

This fall brings another goodbye, as Cathy Thomas is retiring from the position of Coordinator for Finance and Administration and moving to Washington State. Cathy has worked at QUNO since January 2002, managing the office’s financial and administrative tasks as well as the web site. We are indebted to Cathy for her exceptional work and dedication to QUNO over the years and wish her the best in her retirement. The search for her successor is underway. ❖