



# In & Around the UN

## An Update from the Quaker United Nations Office

September 2012

### Fast-moving Changes in Myanmar

The New York City summer was hot and sticky, providing a perfect setting for guests at Quaker House to focus on transitions and challenges in another tropical setting: Myanmar. During July, QUNO hosted two briefings on Myanmar offering diplomats and UN staff an opportunity to hear from Rachel Gasser of Swisspeace. Rachel had recently returned from several months work-

ing with Myanmar civil society groups inside Myanmar and her briefing explored possible avenues for international actors to support local peace processes. She emphasized that coordination is key and assistance should prioritize opportunities to build local capacity. Guests were encouraged to think about the importance of long-term commitment – not just quick, short-term projects. Finally, colleagues considered how engagement by outside actors could either support, or potentially undermine, the process of reform and rapid change taking place

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ing with Myanmar civil society groups inside Myanmar and her briefing explored possible avenues for international actors to support local peace processes.

Discussion focused on the numerous peace processes currently taking place between the government and ethnic armed groups. By Rachel's estimation there are currently

19 separate peace processes taking place, each with a different ethnic group and each at a different phase. The work is being locally led with little role for outsiders, and the scope of the endeavor is unheard of in the field of mediation.

Quaker House guests discussed the importance of local ownership and expressed an interest in finding ways that outsiders could offer support that is welcome and makes a positive contribution. Rachel recommended that donor governments and international NGOs think carefully about how to engage



Quaker House guests learn more about ongoing peace efforts in Myanmar. © Samia Abbass

within the country.

Participants in these discussions were quick to acknowledge the tremendous change that has taken place in Myanmar. This change is reflected in an array of political and legislative reforms as well as official visits by foreign ministers. For QUNO staff, we note a significant change simply in our ability to share work on Myanmar in our newsletter. While we have worked on Myanmar over the past five years, this article marks one of the first

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## Letter from the Director

Dear Friends:

Today is the opening of the 67th regular session of the General Assembly (GA): senior politicians from around the world are beginning to assemble in New York for the high-level meetings that begin next week and the opening of the general debate. This year we will be even busier than usual at this time, as we are facilitating a side event where peacebuilding organizations from around the world will be making the case for integrating a peacebuilding perspective into the development agenda that will replace the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

The disturbing backdrop to the ceremony at this year's GA opening is the failure of the international community to agree on a way to address the unfolding human tragedy in Syria. The resignation of Kofi Annan as UN-Arab League envoy in August underscored the limits of diplomatic intervention: as he stated

in his resignation speech, "as an envoy, I can't want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community." We support the efforts of the new envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, to find a way forward towards a non-violent solution, but this is challenging in the absence of a consensus among member states.

Over the years, a series of Secretaries General have tried to nudge member states into a different way of doing things: "[T]he thrust of preventive work must shift from reactive, external interventions with limited and ultimately superficial impact, to internally driven initiatives for developing local and national capacities for prevention" (*Progress report on the prevention of armed conflict*, 2006). In this newsletter, you will see several examples of QUNO's work in supporting a more proactive preventive approach to violence. These include collaborative work with Quakers working at the

community level in Burundi, activities in support of local peacemaking efforts in Myanmar, and a workshop for reconciliation practitioners from conflict-affected societies around the world. For further background, on our website is a paper that QUNO presented at an event this summer at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on the 20th anniversary of Boutros Boutros-Ghali's groundbreaking report, "An Agenda for Peace," which details the recent progress of peacebuilding and prevention at the UN.

This GA session may also see additional developments around the issue of Palestinian statehood: accordingly, QUNO has provided an update to its resource document on this topic, available on the QUNO website.

Thank you for your continuing support and encouragement.

In friendship,

*Andrew Tomlinson*

## Update from the Geneva Office

September marked some changes at QUNO Geneva as two new Programme Assistants arrived: Haifa Rashed will be working on Human Rights and Refugees and Ellie Roberts will be working on Human Impacts of Climate Change. Meanwhile, special funding makes it possible for Lynn Finnegan to continue her work on Food and Sustainability and for Helen Kearney to stay with us for an additional three months, continuing work on the children of parents sentenced to death, following her well-received publication on the topic.



Geneva team members going to the Human Rights Council side event on natural resources and cooperation. (Source: QUNO Geneva)

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## What Will Replace the Millennium Development Goals?

Discussions are under way at the UN about the framework that will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015. QUNO is working with other peacebuilding organizations to ensure that, whatever form it takes, the framework directly addresses the needs of fragile and conflict-affected countries by including peace, security, and human rights.

The MDGs, extracted in 2002 from the Millennium Declaration of 2000, set out eight concrete and quantifiable development goals, addressing issues such as maternal health and universal education. The MDGs transformed development cooperation, but were limited in scope, and in particular do not address issues such as state weakness, state/society relationships, inclusion, or reconciliation and dialogue.

Here is the challenge: no low income, fragile or conflict-affected country has attained a single MDG. Yet as other countries move out of poverty, it is in these contexts that the world's development efforts will increasingly be focused – already they represent over 50% of Official Development Assistance. The UN

System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda has rightly affirmed that “violent conflict has become the largest obstacle to the MDGs.”

So what needs to change – and how do you do development in these challenging environments, anyway?

Some pointers have recently been put forward by fragile and conflict-affected countries themselves.

These countries, coming together in a group called the g7+, recently endorsed a set of proposals called the “New Deal,” which includes a list of Peacebuilding and State-building Goals (PSGs): legitimate politics, people's security, justice, economic foundations, and revenues and services. The PSGs were specifically formulated as a foundation for progress towards the MDGs – so they're effectively a recipe for how these countries themselves think development should be done in these complex settings.

However, approaches like the PSGs that emphasize the human aspects of rebuilding societies, familiar as they are to peacebuilding actors, represent a significant evolution in thinking for the development



(Source: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>)

community and for many member states. The challenge for the g7+ and for peacebuilding organizations is to find ways to get this issue firmly on the agenda before positions harden. ❖

Geneva  
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The EU-funded COPING project, focusing on the mental health of children of prisoners, is nearing its completion, with staff now preparing for the distribution of a publication that QUNO coordinated with stakeholders earlier this year. During the June session of the Human Rights Council, QUNO Geneva supported and welcomed the first-ever resolution on conscientious objection to military service, adopted unanimously on

July 6th.

In our work on Human Impacts of Climate Change we continue to discern our role in the climate change negotiations, attending both the UN Bonn climate talks in May and the first Green Climate Fund meeting, held in Geneva in August. The completion of Steven Heywood's research paper on water, conflict, and cooperation furthers our exploration into a new and exciting area of collaborative work. Emerging from a team discussion, the paper has incorporated input from our work on human rights,

peace, and disarmament, as well as food and climate change.

Indeed, QUNO's concerns about resource scarcity, conflict and peacebuilding continue to unite all areas of our work, with linkages arising in ever more valuable and thought provoking ways. ❖

## West Africa Reconciliation Conference



Participants from Guinea, Libya, South Sudan, and Croatia share lessons learned at the Reconciliation Workshop.

Source: UN Peacebuilding Support Office

On June 5th and 6th, 40 reconciliation practitioners from 22 countries gathered for a two-day workshop at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center in Accra, Ghana. The event was organized by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center, with input and advice from QUNO and Interpeace. QUNO hosted planning meetings at Quaker House in the months leading up to the event, and QUNO staff participated in the facilitation in Accra.

Participants, all involved in reconciliation in their own societies, came from a variety of professional backgrounds: civil servants, politicians, religious leaders, justice specialists, human rights activists, peacebuilding experts, business people, women's rights specialists, psychologists, traditional leaders – all brought their own perspectives. They came from countries just emerging

from violent conflict (South Sudan, Libya, Guinea), those rebuilding but still fragile (Burundi, Sierra Leone), and those still dealing with past violence (Northern Ireland, Croatia).

During the workshop it became clear that reconciliation meant different things to different people. For some, it was about looking backwards, trying to recreate life as it was before the violence; for others, the objective was to create a new society built on inclusion and human rights. Similarly, there were those whose focus was on getting justice for victims and punishment for perpetrators, whereas for others the aim was to transform the relationship between individuals, communities, and their government. The conversations among participants were both broad (what does justice mean anyway?) and specific (what to do about ex-combatants?).

One theme that came across strongly was the common experience

of a lack of justice after large-scale violence. At a community level, formal legal processes are typically very costly, inefficient, and largely inaccessible. At the national level, international tribunals have been extraordinarily expensive and have resulted in few prosecutions (although some argued that those few prosecutions were nevertheless very important symbolically). In effect, most perpetrators are not prosecuted, and

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### How to Support QUNO

QUNO welcomes donations to help cover the cost of its work. We are happy to accept contributions towards two areas of our work:

*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.

Please make your check payable to "QUNO." If you'd like your gift to go towards Quaker House, please write "Quaker House" in the memo portion of the check. For credit card gifts, call toll free 1-888-588-2372 ext. 1, or click the "[Donations](#)" button on our web site and follow the instructions provided.

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Gifts made to QUNO within the United States are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

## Grassroots Reconciliation in Burundi

This June, QUNO was pleased to host a visit from Adrien Niyongabo, Coordinator of Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) in Burundi. HROC emerged from Alternatives to Violence, a conflict resolution program developed by Quakers and prisoners in the United States and Canada. Quakers in Burundi, recognizing the need for reconciliation and healing between Hutu and Tutsi communities, have been conducting three-day HROC workshops to help participants cope with trauma and restore relationships.

QUNO facilitated an informal meeting for Adrien with UN staff, diplomats, and nongovernmental organizations, to share his work and some of HROC's achievements. Over lunch, Adrien elaborated on the workshops, explaining that HROC aims to achieve reconciliation at the individual level as well as the family and community levels, teaching participants how to deal with trauma, process strong emotions and grief, and rebuild trust. Participants are partnered with healing companions, to provide sustained support after the conclusion of the workshop. HROC also conducts follow-up projects to continue the reconciliation process. These include activities such as raising goats, selling water filters, and establishing micro credit groups that not only give resources to struggling families, but also continue the regular participant interaction necessary for repairing damaged relationships between Hutus and Tutsis. Adrien shared success stories, such as one in which Tutsis, after participating in a HROC workshop, went to a prison to bring food to and meet with Hutus who had killed the Tutsis' family members.

Through programmatic work on peacebuilding in Burundi, QUNO has been working to connect local initia-



Adrien Niyongabo, Coordinator of Healing and Rebuilding our Communities (HROC) in Burundi.

(Source: Adrien Niyongabo)

tives such as HROC to larger UN policy discussions. Burundi is currently embarking on the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and QUNO is endeavoring to make sure that the voices of local actors who have been working on issues of reconcilia-

tion are heard in the process. Adrien was able to give recommendations to the UN participants, stressing the need for the national reconciliation processes to connect to this kind of work at the community level. ❖

## QUNO-NY Staff Update

The month of August saw a number of changes in the QUNO New York team. We said goodbye to one of our Program Assistants, Samia Abbass, and temporarily said goodbye to one of our Quaker UN Representatives, Camilla Campisi, who is now on maternity leave. Samia, at the end of her term, moved back to California in search of a more zen and yoga-filled lifestyle on the West coast, while her fellow PA Kirsten Mandala has stayed on for a few more months with QUNO.

We have also welcomed two new PAs, Olivia Ensign and Amelia Breeze. Olivia graduated from Swarthmore College with a major in Political Science and a minor in Peace and Conflict Studies. While at Swarthmore, Olivia served as Student Council Co-president, was involved in a range of student advocacy and cultural groups, and contributed several case studies to the Global Nonviolent Action Database. Prior to QUNO, Olivia interned for a number of non-profit organizations.

Amelia graduated from the Uni-



QUNO New York Staff, 2012: (left to right) Sarah, Olivia, Kirsten, Amelia, Andrew and Elisabeth.

© Doug Hosstetter

versity of Saint Andrews in Scotland with a degree in International Relations. Her other focus throughout her studies has been on grassroots empowerment in peace processes and the value of indigenous approaches to conflict resolution. She has worked with NGOs promoting

grassroots sustainable development in Zambia, India, and the UK.

The new team is all settled in and looking forward to the year kicking off with the start of the General Assembly in September. ❖

### West Africa

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impunity is the norm. This means that truth-telling mechanisms are very important in providing victims at least some measure of recognition and allowing society to acknowledge harm done.

It was also the experience of participants that the international community is not very effective in providing advice on reconciliation. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions have become common, often based on the South African model,

but few have been effective: in some cases their findings have not been published, in others there has been no follow-up. Indeed, one of the participants, a high-level government official, noted that he had learned more in two days at the workshop than he had in two years from international advisors!

Reconciliation and dialogue is one of QUNO's thematic focus areas. This workshop helped us further our thinking on this important topic and fine-tune our work going forward. ❖

### Myanmar

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ground mean we can share this information without posing a risk to partners in country. As developments continue to unfold in Myanmar we will continue to host opportunities for experts and practitioners to offer their perspectives on how international actors can best engage and support long-term peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar. ❖