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In & Around the UN

An Update from the Quaker United Nations Office

Following Inclusive Two-Year Process, UN Launches Community Engagement Guidelines

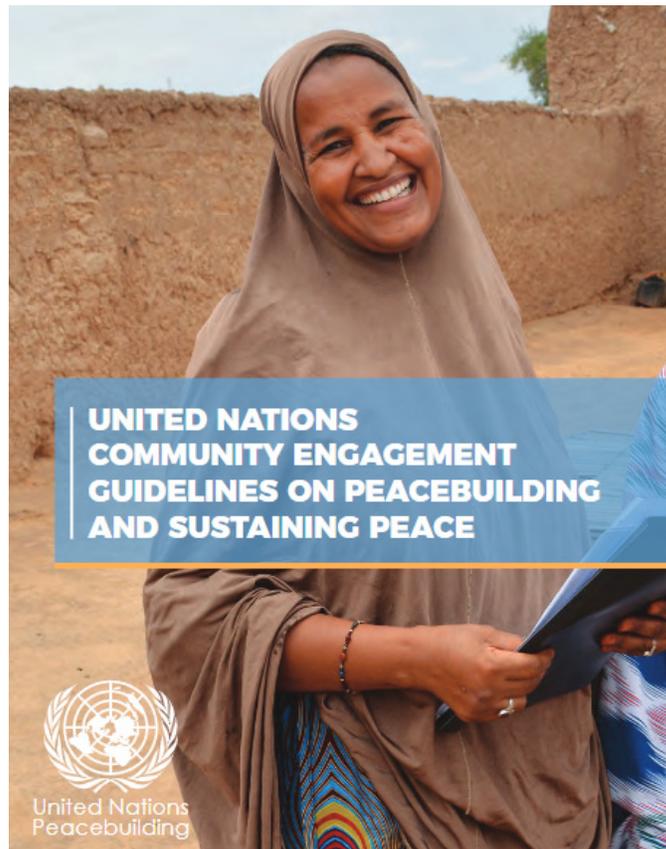
By Megan Schmidt, Quaker UN Representative

For just over two years I have had the privilege to represent QUNO on a Joint UN – Civil Society working group leading an innovative process to develop the UN’s first system-wide guidance on Community Engagement for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. The impetus for creating such a guidance came from a recommendation by the Secretary-General in 2018 when, in affirming the centrality of inclusion, he called on the UN to create this new tool to strengthen partnerships at the community level.

The Joint Working Group, which included multiple UN agencies and departments as well as three civil society organizations including QUNO, worked diligently over the past two years to conceptualize the process for and implement the development of the **Community Engagement Guidelines (CEG)**.

In my role representing QUNO I participated in a range of strategy meetings with my UN colleagues where together we led a process with inclusion at the heart. This included a survey in multiple languages to hear directly from civil society and UN colleagues throughout the world; the convening of over 40 virtual conversations to dig deeper into the issues at hand; and both in person and virtual consultations to solicit feedback from colleagues on emerging drafts of the Guidelines.

Through these processes I was



United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, DPPA.

continuously struck by the openness and honesty of participants who shared their experiences working to build peace at the community level, including the challenges they face and what more is needed for meaningful partnerships between communities and UN actors. By listening and learning to these experts, the Joint Working Group was able to develop Guidelines that were grounded in the lived experience and expertise of civil society and UN colleagues, resulting in a more impactful and useful document for the UN system.

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Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

Greetings from New York.

It has now been a year since the COVID-19 pandemic began. It's sobering to reflect on how much has changed since then, how much was lost and how much was achieved.

In New York, a time which was to have been a celebration of 75 years of the United Nations quickly turned into the year of COVID. All the major in-person events that had been planned were canceled, postponed, or went online. At QUNO, the change was equally abrupt. Within a scant few weeks in March 2020, our plans for an intense year of travel and meetings switched to making sure staff was safe and had the support they needed.

Then in the summer came the gut wrenching killing of George Floyd

and violent suppression of peaceful protests. And in recent months we have had the drama of a bitterly contested US election, including the extraordinary mob attack on the US Capitol.

For QUNO, a time of crisis has been a time to come together as a team and support one another. It has also been a time for us to reflect and focus on our core strengths. Most importantly, we found that Quaker approaches still work. QUNO is still QUNO. The heart of what we do is building deep relationships with key decision-makers at the UN, and we found that we could still do this even in a virtual world. As a diplomat told us in December about our behind-the-scenes engagement with a sensitive negotiation: "The inputs from QUNO were ... one of the most timely and best pitched in an

intergovernmental process that we have seen...this was by far the most targeted and timely intervention I've seen from civil society."

Virtual or not, building respectful relationships, listening, building bridges, paying attention to context and to the best selves of policymakers: these Quaker practices have always been at the heart of QUNO's approach — and they still work, even in these challenging times.

Thank you for your encouragement and support!



Andrew Tomlinson

Community Engagement Guidelines *(continued from page 1)*

With the completion of the document came the opportunity for me to participate in the global virtual launch of the Guidelines earlier this year. In addition to joining my fellow Joint Working Group members in developing the event, I participated as a discussant sharing QUNO's experience in the process and reflections on the way forward.

With over 200 participants, the launch provided an opportunity

to learn about the Guidelines and their use for UN staff working at the country level and was a space for engaging discussion and

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sharing of experience. Participants provided their ideas for next steps and additional tools on the subject as they joined in the virtual chat

happening alongside the panels. Now that the policy development process is over and the CEG is launched, QUNO looks forward to seeing how the UN system takes this new guidance forward. It is our hope that the coming years will be able to showcase good practice and examples of enhanced and new partnerships between UN actors and

communities as a result of the use of the Community Engagement Guidelines. ❖

Committee Spotlight: Hezron Masitsa

By Hannah Patterson, Program Assistant

QUNO is governed by a Committee of Friends appointed by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). We're excited to spotlight the insights and experiences of a Committee member with each newsletter. In this edition we are delighted to share reflections from Hezron Masitsa. Born in Western Kenya and raised by his grandparents who were early converts to Quakerism, Hezron founded and chairs Pamoja for Transformation. He is also the Chair of the Peace and Social Concerns Committee of FWCC, Africa Section.

As a Program Assistant (PA) with QUNO one of the opportunities I have is to participate in meetings of the QUNO Committee (QUNC), where I have been able to gain a

deeper understanding of how a Quaker organization is governed and form relationships with Friends throughout the world. One such committee member is Hezron

Masitsa, whom I had the joy of interviewing to hear his thoughts and insights on his faith and practice, serving on the Committee, and what he sees as the impact of Quakers on global peace efforts.

Hezron and I began our conversation by exploring how Quakerism is reflected in his daily life, which stems from being raised Quaker and watching his grandparents live their values in action, particularly the Peace Testimony, through supporting their community. This resonated with me as my grandparents also played an influential role in my Quaker upbringing and their active community involvement deeply shaped how I think about Quakerism in relation to my daily life. Hezron's childhood experiences helped him identify what he sees as Quakerism's foundational element: the firm belief in peace and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in our daily lives. He said that the vision of that of God in everyone, and a belief in humility, honesty, compassion and respect have led him to live a life based on the knowledge that all humans "deserve to be treated equally and with dignity irrespective of our identities and orientations."

Considering what Quakers have to offer the UN's peace work, Hezron spoke to the ways that the Peace Testimony, which "transcends ages and nations and inspires us to contribute to global peace," can be lived both in our communities and international engagements.



Hezron facilitates group reports during a meeting of County Quaker elected leaders.

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QUNO's Program Assistants Lead Interest Group at FWCC Section of the Americas Meeting

By Molly Burger, Program Assistant



QUNO Program Assistants hold a virtual interest group at FWCC Section of the Americas biannual Meeting.

This March, Hannah Patterson and I were given the opportunity to hold an Interest Group session at the Friends World Committee for Consultation's (FWCC) biannual Section of the Americas Meeting to present on QUNO's work in promoting peace at the United Nations (UN). This is part of a longstanding Program Assistant (PA) tradition of participating at Yearly Meetings to engage with Friends and share about QUNO's programming. This year's Meeting was particularly unique given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required FWCC's Section of the Americas to transition to an entirely online experience. The opportunity to lead an Interest Group provided us with the space to share how, in representing a group as diverse in cultures, traditions, and thought as Quakers, QUNO speaks with one voice to represent Quakers at the UN.

In preparation for our virtual

presentation, Hannah and I took turns to sharing our efforts to support QUNO's programmatic work of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, incorporating visual tools to help participants get a "feel" for how we're working in our ongoing virtual environment. As we spoke about QUNO we were excited to engage in a dynamic conversation with Friends surrounding how the values and testimonies which connect all Quakers translate into QUNO's working methods. In other words, how the ends are the means in the making. We explored how QUNO supports peaceful, just and inclusive societies through changing the structures and systems that produce exclusion and injustice and how, just as QUNO represents a diversity of Quakers, we maintain a vision of the UN whose policies and practices reflect a diversity of the world's voices.

In this presentation I touched on my own personal experience assisting

a QUNO co-hosted event that promoted an "end" of inclusion while employing Quaker "means." This event brought together UN actors and civil society to listen and learn from each other on how to strengthen partnerships amongst themselves, bringing to light the powerful results of such partnerships. As the conversation

progressed, participants

opened up, revealing that the UN, with its many resources and convening power, and local civil society, with its first-hand knowledge, are complementary pieces to the puzzle of building sustainable peace.

It is through these transformative spaces that QUNO is able to represent Quaker interests at the UN and foster change at the global policy level. Being able to share this with interested Quakers at a meeting spanning the Americas was a truly inspiring experience. Just as the discussion on strengthening partnerships progressed, it struck me how in this space the conversation too bloomed into a meaningful exchange where participants felt safe to express their thoughts. What emerged from the FWCC presentation was an understanding of how Quaker values and testimonies do not simply provide a basis for QUNO's work, but are the very reason for QUNO's longstanding success at the UN. ❖

Fond Farewell

By Rachel Madenyika

QUNO has a place in my heart. I recall graduating from Guilford College and telling my mentor that I wanted to work for the United Nations. Needless to say, I found the right fit: the Quaker United Nations Office. After completing my time as a Program Assistant, I wouldn't have imagined returning 14 years later to support Quaker efforts at the UN as a Quaker UN Representative. I would be remiss to leave without letting everyone know just how much I have enjoyed my time at QUNO.

Over the years, I have seen great things happen as we gathered diplomats and the UN community at Quaker House or met at a café to discuss issues of mutual concern over coffee. COVID-19, with its many challenges, also opened doors

that allowed me to provide safe spaces for virtual dialogues. I am proud to have been a small part of this success. Throughout my time at QUNO, not only did I learn more about myself, but I've also understood the significance of quietly advocating for policies that put people first through quiet reflections, patience and listening.

It was such a wonderful privilege to work at QUNO over the last six years. I cannot begin to thank everyone for being so generous with your knowledge, so inclusive with your work, and so open with your friendship. You have taught me many lessons that will be invaluable in the months and years to come. ❖



Former Quaker UN Representative,
Rachel Madenyika.

Committee Spotlight

(continued from page 3)

He reflected on how Quakers, divinely led by the Spirit, can share the lived experiences that have shaped the Quaker Working Methods, embracing quiet diplomacy and convening safe spaces for respectful dialogue. Hezron noted that with a variety of platforms, Friends have been able to connect with communities to amplify their voices at the UN.

Through our discussion I was able to learn more about Hezron's earlier work before he joined the QUNC. It was his experience with other Quaker organizations that brought him to FWCC, which eventually led him

to QUNO. For Hezron, "serving on QUNC has deepened his confidence in the Peace Testimony and hearing about the ways staff navigate the complex UN environment using Quaker Working Methods has emboldened him to witness about QUNO and our work."

For Hezron, "serving on QUNC has deepened his confidence in the Peace Testimony and hearing about the ways staff navigate the complex UN environment using Quaker Working Methods has emboldened him to witness about QUNO and our work."

During our conversation, Hezron spoke with such humility and grace about his Quaker faith

and practice, how this has shaped his life and the connections he sees between Quakerism and international peacebuilding. In relation to the knowledge that growth and change are inevitable and that it is in our respect for the Light in others that allows us to be vulnerable enough to learn from each other, he illuminated what it means to put our values into practice in a way that makes them feel so fundamental and clear. As a PA, learning about the history of QUNO and the work of all of those who support our efforts, it was such a privilege to speak with Hezron, who helped me see a fuller picture of QUNO's present work and what it will come to be in the future. ❖

News from QUNO Geneva

QUNO at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

At the 46th session of the HRC in March, our Human Rights & Refugees program welcomed the UN High Commissioner's report on [COVID-19 and human rights](#) and its emphasis on structural inequality and discrimination. In an oral statement we responded to this report, focusing on the human rights of migrants and drawing the Council's attention to the more than 1,000 people who have died in migration since the last session of the Council. We underlined the need for States to address the structural and systemic inequalities that lead to the loss of life, including in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As part of our recent efforts to raise the issue of racial injustice in migration governance, we had the opportunity to participate in the Panel Debate on Racial Discrimination. [Our intervention](#) focused on the importance of the recognition of the relationship between racial discrimination and migration governance, and we stressed the roles that States can play in making these links at home, in national policy and multilateral forums. We also [delivered an oral statement](#) that underlined the impact of language used to describe migrants which constructs them as threats and contributes to their stigmatization and marginalization.

QUNO's Human Impacts of Climate Change program also [submitted a statement](#) welcoming the reports of the [Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment](#) on water

and biodiversity. The statement responded to the reports and called for the legal recognition of the human right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It also asked how the HRC can strengthen its contribution to protecting both human rights and the natural world and uphold the rights of the most marginalized and vulnerable. We also [endorsed a joint statement](#) by the [Right to a Healthy Environment Campaign](#), calling for the HRC to adopt the universal right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Trade and sustainability at the World Trade Organization (WTO)

QUNO's Sustainable and Just Economic Systems program has been [closely involved in discussions on trade and environment](#) between members at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In this space, QUNO prioritizes supporting members to work collaboratively on trade policies which support global environmental sustainability and ensure a sustainable and just future for all.

The beginning of March saw the first meeting of the newly launched Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions take place at the WTO. These discussions are the first of their kind and look to complement the existing work of the long-established Committee on Trade and Environment. QUNO is one of a small number of civil society representatives invited to participate in the discussions. The newly elected Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala welcomed the

discussions as an opportunity for the WTO to deliver results for the future.

QUNO at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

The IPCC held its 53rd meeting was recently held online in March and involved over 200 participants, primarily States, IPCC Secretariat, and several observers. QUNO is the only faith-based observer of the IPCC and [made two interventions](#) during the week long session. We urged States to act beyond political and economic vested interests expressed in the room, and instead to focus on the common call to protect their citizens, and the human family as a whole, from avoidable temperature rises that would lead to unprecedented suffering and loss of life to humans and nature.

Sustaining Peace: How can human rights help?

As part of long-term work on integrating human rights and sustaining peace, QUNO's Peace & Disarmament program published "[Sustaining Peace: How can human rights help? 2016 – 2020 retrospective.](#)" This report builds on learnings from a joint project with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and highlights key developments, opportunities and challenges in integrating human rights in sustaining peace in relation to intergovernmental outcomes, policy frameworks and instruments, and UN reform processes. It also highlights areas for strengthening collaboration and coherence. ❖

