



Geneva Reporter

Representatives roundtable: QUNO & Covid-19

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QUNO Geneva's four programme Representatives meet in the Quaker House garden

The emergence of Covid and the subsequent, ongoing pandemic have changed our world. We asked QUNO's programme Representatives to discuss how their work has been affected and to share their thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Laurel Townhead, Representative for Human Rights & Refugees

The impacts of Covid were felt first in our work in the Human Rights Council (HRC) with increasing measures introduced to keep the session going until it was clear that a lockdown would happen and the meeting had to be suspended. The cancelled meetings are easy impacts to describe briefly, but the bigger initial impacts for me were questions about if and how multilateralism could meet this challenge and in particular what a suspension of parts of the work of human rights mechanisms would mean for protection of human rights.

So much of how we work is based on relationships and we build most of these through face to face contact. Sustained distancing, greater restrictions on observers, and virtual meetings in place of physical meetings are all significant challenges to this. On the substantive side of our work, cross border migration has been changed forever and there is no clear picture yet of what migration and migration governance will look like as borders begin to reopen. People who are seeking international protection are no safer than they were before but the regular routes to safety are far fewer. A lack of regular pathways for migration pushes people who feel compelled to migrate into unsafe channels. This is one of the many complex challenges that Covid-19 has exacerbated in relation to ensuring rights and safety for everyone regardless of migration status.

More concretely I think that the disproportionate impacts of Covid, and the responses to it, on marginalized people have brought the deadly consequences of inequality and discrimination into sharper focus. Arundhati Roy describes the pandemic as a portal through which we can drag that inequality and discrimination or not. I think the global mobilization of the Black Lives Matter movement is a sign of a strong desire not to go back to a "normal" that perpetuates this inequality and discrimination. Given the Quaker belief in that of the sacred in every person and the inherent and equal worth of all of us, this solidarity is a welcome buttress in this turbulent time. My hopes are that there will be more listening to and learning from the experience and expertise of people who are directly affected by human rights violations.

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Representatives roundtable: QUNO & Covid-19 (continued)

Joachim Monkelbaan, Representative for Sustainable & Just Economic Systems (SJES)

The pandemic situation was painful for the SJES programme, which was well coming up to speed after launching in March 2019. Before its cancellation, we were preparing for the twelfth ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO), where we had hoped to get more clarity on ways forward for multilateralism and there was very promising progress to be made on sustainability and trade.

The confinement period gave us the opportunity to explore some of the challenges that we would like to address in our work. The unsustainable way in which part of humanity is living while other parts can hardly survive, for example, indicates grave injustices. Violence continues to cause untold suffering and costs at least 12% of global GDP, and in many countries social and political polarization, fragmentation and increasing mistrust of political figures and media are observable.

When you open the newspapers every day, you can see that the level of economic uncertainty is higher than ever and that the calls for an economic recovery that delivers on sustainability, wellbeing and social justice are getting stronger. What the pandemic lays bare is indeed how interconnected and complex the world has become. Covid has accelerated

many trends and vulnerabilities that were visible when the year 2020 started. The current crisis needs to be used to transition towards a different kind of multilateral trading system—a system which contributes to fairly shared prosperity, exemplifies policy coherence, and has a positive impact on humans and the environment. Loan forgiveness for developing countries needs to be scaled up (including by private lenders) as they don't have the financial and borrowing capacity of advanced economies. Commitments to jointly, efficiently and justly transition to low-carbon, sustainable economies need to be discussed in all global institutions, foremost the WTO, the G20 and the International Monetary Fund.

The expression “build back better” is used a lot at the moment. Now is indeed an opportunity to demonstrate courage and vision by building new economic systems that are better, smarter, greener, and properly funded—not through austerity, but through taxes, including progressive wealth taxes, financial transaction taxes and carbon taxes. The pandemic may have made the need for implementing remedies such as the ones listed above more urgent, but it was clear to many that this work was necessary anyway.

Florence Foster, Representative for Peace & Disarmament

QUNO's work is deeply inter-personal. Technology quickly stepped in during the pandemic, keeping essential UN processes on “life support,” but leaving innovative and creative thinking on the back burner. While not surprising, I was taken aback by the limitations of the digital and how I value face to face interaction, reading body language and the spontaneity of a corridor discussion. The transition has been an odd one, as our programme touches upon diverse processes that have taken different approaches and at different speeds. This means a lot of “feeling our way” with different stakeholders and their own comfort zones. Who is OK to meet in a restaurant? Would someone rather walk and talk in a park or simply keep it to a phone conversation? How and when do we welcome people back to Quaker House? QUNO has always been a safe space and we as representatives of that space strive to embody that.

But a more significant consideration that the pandemic has brought into sharper focus for our programme is the obvious need to “rethink security” and expand beyond hard security and disarmament narratives. While overarching discussions around security are not new, Covid has provided a moment to reconsider our conceptions of security by shining a spotlight on the failures of States to prioritize the true wellbeing of their societies. Despite global military

spending having seen its largest annual increase in a decade, no weapon or army was able to protect us from Covid. Instead, the chronic underfunding and devaluing of our health, education, and social security systems left us out in the cold while world leaders invoked militarized language of being “at war” with an “invisible enemy.”

As we begin to rebuild momentum, we seek to understand how best to connect these broader security concerns to our existing projects and areas of work. There is so much pain and grief (and we are not out of the woods yet) that it can sometimes be hard to conceive the work we were able to do as silver linings. However, going online has allowed us to bring geographically diverse actors into our conversations and we have also been able to support many non-governmental organizations and partners by continuing to facilitate meetings to share experiences and strategies. Despite all of the challenges of the past several months, the pandemic has shown how change can happen fast, and how adaptive we can be for a common purpose. We have seen great kindness also. I hope that we can take some of that spirit forward and imagine the unimaginable to repair the somewhat broken world we inhabit.

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Representatives roundtable: QUNO & Covid-19 (continued)

Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for Climate Change

The pandemic is, in many ways, a microcosm of climate change. It emphasizes the need for urgent action on climate change, since both create health crises and lives are saved by urgent action and resilient societies. If we seek to learn from this pandemic, humanity will have a better chance to recognize our shared vulnerability and mortality and to transform the economic, political and social systems that drive human-induced environmental destruction. A pandemic experience is traumatic and the economic consequences are an evolving tsunami. But Covid also gives humanity, this “locomotive without brakes,” a moment to question—how can we be a more resilient, sustainable and fair society and avoid future shocks. Why would we rebuild at similar, or even higher levels, the very activities that are destroying nature, on which our and our children's lives depend?

Countries that, in the last decades, have prioritized sustainable economic systems, transparent political processes and fair social systems have been more resilient

during the pandemic. Government and cultural reactions to Covid have revealed our society's weaknesses and strengths, and the critical question to ask is, what can we learn? The lessons are powerful for resilience and prevention, regardless of the crisis—sufficient investment in public services, fair taxation for sufficient public finance, transparency and accountability in decision making to maintain public trust, quick action to save lives despite scientific uncertainty (precautionary principle), respect of human rights in policy decisions, and protection of nature for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

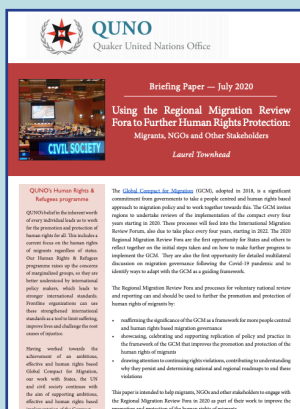
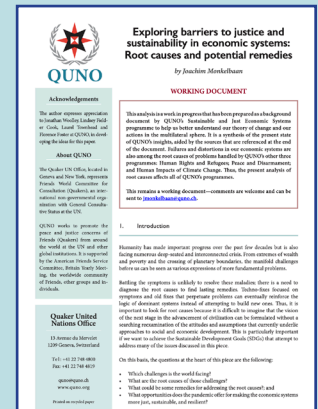
This is an unusually difficult time for multilateral efforts, not only because of the pandemic restrictions to human interaction, but more broadly geo-politics where powerful countries are turning inward, if not also actively hostile to international approaches to global concerns. My hopes, though, stem from the above. Pandemics, environmental crises caused by humans—these challenges to our lives and livelihoods can be more effectively and fairly healed when we work together.

Recent publications



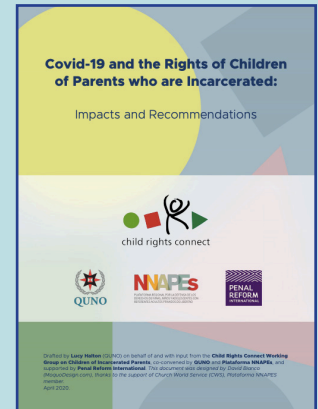
Briefing Paper: Key Human Rights Concerns for Children of Parents Accused or Convicted of Association with Designated Terrorist Groups *Lucy Halton (August 2020)*

Working Document: Exploring barriers to justice and sustainability in economic systems: Root causes and potential remedies *Joachim Monkelbaan (July 2020)*



Briefing Paper: Using the Regional Migration Review Fora to Further Human Rights Protection: Migrants, NGOs and Other Stakeholders *Laurel Townhead (July 2020)*

Covid-19 and the Rights of Children of Parents who are Incarcerated: Impacts and Recommendations *Lucy Halton, with Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children of Incarcerated Parents (May 2020)*



All publications are available at: quno.org/recent-publications.

Sustainable & Just Economic Systems

In July, the SJES programme hosted a meeting for diplomats and other stakeholders in the garden of Quaker House on ways forward for trade and environmental sustainability in the WTO. A growing group of countries want to establish a working group in the WTO on trade and environmental sustainability. Uniquely, such a working group would offer opportunities for civil society participation. We will host another garden meeting in September on ideas for transforming economic systems to be more sustainable, equitable, and resilient. The aim of that meeting is to offer a quiet, safe, off-the-record space to a group of experts and practitioners to re-imagine economic models and paradigms. The need to reframe economic assumptions has become particularly important with the pandemic, which has led to rapid implementation of measures that until now might have seemed unacceptable. In this context, we see paths opening up for realizing innovative ideas on economic models.

Peace & Disarmament

As the denial of human rights is both the cause and effect of destructive conflict, the connections between these two areas may seem obvious. But at the UN and other multilateral institutions these pillars have regularly operated in separate silos. Our ongoing focus has therefore been on highlighting and strengthening the links between human rights and peacebuilding. Currently this has translated in supporting the integration of human rights into the UN's Peace Building Architecture Review 2020—which takes place every five years. QUNO facilitated a break-out session on the topic within the regional consultation of the Review in February, which included a broad set of actors from the human rights community. Now, we continue to support member states as they start the formal process which should conclude in resolutions on Sustaining Peace by the end of the year.

Human Rights & Refugees

Drawing on the input and expertise of members of the Child Rights Connect Working Group on Children of Incarcerated Parents (which we co-convene) we published a briefing paper on [Covid-19 and Rights of Children of Parents who are Incarcerated](#). We worked further with the Working Group on an oral statement to the UN Human Rights Council that highlighted the role that NGOs play in supporting States to uphold the rights of children of incarcerated parents. This statement also recommended the development of UN guidance on the rights of children of incarcerated parents—a recommendation that the representative of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime agreed with and called for support for.

Human Impacts of Climate Change

In early September we held two meetings, a dinner for delegates from the Human Rights Council, and an online meeting for climate change negotiators. Nine diplomats attended the QUNO socially distanced dinner to explore support for each other on related, though sometimes politically competing, resolutions. A week later, 18 climate change negotiators came together for a virtual quiet diplomacy meeting, reflecting all political negotiation groups. Encouraged to speak from the heart, they spoke of lessons learned from Covid to strengthen global efforts on climate change, and also ways to better support each other in the pandemic crisis. We were encouraged by the positive responses to both meetings. As one negotiator said of the virtual experience, “I found the ‘quiet’ setting even better than the other virtual meetings I have attended. At the other events, participants just reiterate their country/group positions. You provide the opportunity for opening up and participants did so...I would strongly encourage future sessions.”

QUNO welcomes new Programme Assistants and staff

In September, QUNO welcomed the arrival of our three 2020-21 Programme Assistants (PAs). **Najmah Ali**, PA for Human Rights & Refugees, joins QUNO from London South Bank University, where she promoted accessibility and inclusion in higher education; **Beatrice Liese**, PA for Climate Change & Sustainability, recently earned her Masters in Environmental Policy and Regulation from the London School of Economics and Political Science; and **Alice Munnelly**, PA for Peace & Disarmament, earned her MA in War Studies from King's College London. We also extend a warm welcome to **Tamara Wiher**, our new Office Manager, who also joined QUNO in September. **Susan Sprague**, our former Office Manager, remains on staff in her new role as House Manager. Read more about their backgrounds at quno.org/about/staff.

Support QUNO



Najmah Ali delivers a statement during the 45th HRC session

Visit quno.org/donate and help us continue working to promote peace and justice at the UN and other institutions.

QUNO's first virtual Quaker UN Summer School

After the coronavirus lockdown began in March, 2019-20 QUNO PAs Detmer Kremer, Lucy Halton and Cara Priestley led the development of our first ever virtual summer school. We asked them about the process and their perspectives on the experience.

Was the decision to go virtual and cancel the in-person QUNSS, which has always been such a central part of the PA experience, a difficult or long process?

Cara: The uncertainty of the lockdown was difficult to deal with, especially thinking about QUNSS, which was something we had already poured so much of our hearts into through the advertising and applications phases. We felt a connection to the participants and a wish to meet them.

Lucy: We certainly felt a sense of loss, though the sense of loss and chaos of the world at that point in time was also overwhelming, and we were aware that at least QUNSS was something which we could adapt.

Detmer: Ultimately, we had to make the decision relatively quickly. It was undoubtedly a sad decision, but it seemed obvious and necessary given our duty of care to the participants and the imperative of acting in the interests of public health. But planning the virtual summer school quickly became a very exciting process—thinking creatively about how to turn this initially difficult decision into a gift.

What were your main considerations for going virtual?

Lucy: Accessibility was an important consideration—whilst there is an assumption that going online is a “great equalizer,” it is important to understand that this is not always the case. We were fortunate to be able to provide support to some participants to help them overcome financial barriers to accessing the virtual programme, but there were some barriers that were completely out of our hands.

Cara: The ten different time zones were another key challenge, as was trying to establish how long a group would be willing and able to concentrate in an online format. We were keen to use the space creatively and keep the online programme interactive to ensure participants would want to return every day.

A big part of QUNSS is the social interaction—how did you try to recreate some of that virtually?

Detmer: The challenge of community building in the online space was a key concern for us. We had to think carefully about how we could merge some of the expected in-person activities with the online format. For example, we created a multimedia journey around Quaker House by developing a video tour.

Cara: Throughout the virtual summer school we also used a range of online facilitation web tools, including Zoom breakout rooms and polls, Jamboard (for virtual brainstorming) and Mentimeter (for polls, quizzes and word clouds), to ensure the programme was as engaging as possible.



Detmer (left), Lucy (middle) and Cara (right) celebrate completion of the first week of QUNSS

Did you encounter any problems or unexpected challenges?

Lucy: There were some standard hiccups, such as speakers being unavailable at the last minute or activities taking longer than expected, as well as technical issues, such as internet cutting out or people forgetting to mute themselves. But also the unpredictable, including a power outage in Gaza, a participant dialling in from the side of a motorway after her car broke down, and Detmer's laptop deciding to update mid-session!

Were there any unexpected advantages of being virtual?

Detmer: Widened participation was a really key unexpected advantage—participants didn't incur costs to attend the virtual summer school, there was no need for visas (a participant who tried to attend for several years previously but could not get a visa was able to join us this time in the virtual format). This allowed us to have a more diverse group than would have been possible in person.

What kind of response did you receive from participants and how are you feeling since its completion?

Lucy: The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Participants turned up every day, which was a really lovely discovery, as we had no way to oblige them to be there.

Cara: Throughout the programme, we had a stream of positive messages from participants, including many who shared that they found a lot of community in the programme during a difficult lockdown experience. One participant also said they gained a real sense of hope from being part of QUNSS.

Detmer: We are proud and excited that we were able to deliver this space of learning and community building, and proud to have been able to share this knowledge and to inspire a group of young people, which is a real privilege.

QUNO Q & A with Beatrice Liese



Beatrice Liese

In QUNO Q&A, we feature interviews with current staff and alumni. For this issue, we spoke with Beatrice Liese, our incoming 2020-21 PA for Climate Change and Sustainability. She completed her undergraduate studies in English Literature at the University of Oxford, and recently earned her Masters in Environmental Policy and Regulation at the London School of Economics (LSE). Her research focused on the international law on climate change. We spoke with Beatrice about her path to QUNO Geneva, her expectations for the PA-ship and her experience this past July as a participant in the Quaker UN Summer School (QUNSS).

Welcome Beatrice! How did you first hear of QUNO and what led you to apply for a PA position?

Following my undergraduate degree, I was lucky enough to undertake an internship at the peacebuilding charity Conciliation Resources in London. One of my colleagues there, David Elliott, had done the PA-ship and directed me to QUNO as an organisation working at the forefront of both peacebuilding and climate change. I then undertook my Masters at the LSE, where I became increasingly involved with interfaith initiatives through the LSE Faith Centre. This turned out to be quite a defining

experience, where I was able to gain first-hand experience of the progress that can be achieved—on both an individual and systemic level—through reflective practice. I left with a passionate belief in the importance of creating spaces for civil dialogue and meaningful exchange at the international level, specifically within the rapidly evolving field of climate governance.

Having just begun your PA-ship, are there any activities or aspects of the role that you are most anticipating?

I feel like it's definitely a very interesting time to be entering the UN community—whilst social distancing means that some aspects of the role will be quite different to other years, I am excited about the opportunities for innovation and creativity this also presents. I am really looking forward to joining the team at Quaker House and meeting the international community in Geneva. Also, having so much enjoyed this year's QUNSS and seen the amazing work the current PAs have put into it, planning next year's QUNSS feels like a big responsibility, but one that I am sure will be a highlight of my work!

For the first time this year, the summer school was held virtually. How did you react to that news and what were your expectations?

I got the news that I would be participating in this year's QUNSS during the coronavirus lockdown in London, so I knew that this year's QUNSS would have to be quite different. Like many people I was settling into working remotely and finding community—old and new—online. So I didn't really know what to expect of the virtual QUNSS beyond an opportunity for learning and gaining insight into QUNO and the UN more generally. Needless to say, the QUNSS proved to be far more!

Many of our readers are past QUNSS participants and would be interested to hear more about the virtual experience. What were your impressions?

I came away from the experience with a strong impression of the relationship building and active listening that sits at the heart of much of QUNO's work. Creating a sense of community can be difficult, even without the limitations imposed by online communication, and yet by the end of the two weeks I felt that I had really been given the opportunity to meaningfully engage with the other participants, QUNO Representatives and guest speakers. We opened and closed each session with two minutes of silence led by one of the PAs, who were also on-hand throughout the summer school to provide both tech and pastoral support. I came away with a new impression of how community can be built online—responding to the limits of virtual communication and transforming them into opportunities to not only communicate, but also practice care across different geographies and time zones.

Do any moments especially stand out?

There were so many inspiring moments that it is difficult to pick just a few! One moment that for me encapsulates the experience as a whole was the virtual "Quiet Diplomacy Dinner," hosted by the Human Impacts of Climate Change team in our first week. Despite being the first online event of its kind, the atmosphere of the meeting was such that it encouraged a genuinely sincere and open discussion between summer school participants that was both challenging, thought-provoking and inspiring. It was a wonderful introduction to quiet diplomacy "in action" and I left the meeting deeply motivated, with a real sense of having been—for those two hours—part of a transformative space.