



In & Around the UN An Update from the Quaker United Nations Office

October 2020

15 Years of UN Peacebuilding

By Megan Schmidt, Quaker UN Representative

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Peacebuilding Commission Meets on 2020 Review.

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2020 marks a milestone year for the United Nations (UN). Not only is it the organization’s 75th anniversary, but it also coincides with the 15th anniversary of the Peacebuilding Architecture and the third review of its impact upon peacebuilding and sustaining peace. From the way it funds peacebuilding initiatives to how Member States cooperate and pursue more peaceful and inclusive societies, the review of the architecture represents an opportunity to reflect on the UN’s peacebuilding impact across the globe and to identify existing and emerging challenges.

This year’s review has focused on assessing the UN’s implementation of what is often referred to as the “Sustaining peace agenda.” This framework emerged following

the adoption of the landmark Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions in 2016, which re-conceptualized the UN’s understanding of peacebuilding. Through adopting the resolutions in the General Assembly and Security Council, all Member States committed to an understanding of peacebuilding and sustaining peace that is

“aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring

national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development.”

This marked a transformative shift from viewing peacebuilding as solely a process

The landmark Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace resolutions in 2016...re-conceptualized the UN’s understanding of peacebuilding.

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Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

Greetings from New York!

The six months since our last newsletter have been extraordinary ones. COVID-19 hit New York in force in March, with daily deaths approaching the 1,000 mark by early April, adding to a global total that has now reached 1 million lives lost.

As the pandemic unfolded through the spring and early summer, QUNO staff members quickly adjusted to working from home, and reached out to friends and colleagues throughout the UN system and to peacebuilding practitioners around the world, listening, supporting, and seeking to understand how these new conditions were impacting global efforts for peace. As the opening days of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly approached, QUNO helped to bring this understanding to UN policymakers in a call to action to governments around the world, timed for the International Day of Peace.

The call to action, referencing the

UN Charter, notes that, while the pandemic and its economic effects have had a direct impact on human lives, some actions by governments and others are making things worse. “Responses to crisis that increase violence, injustice and exclusion, that set aside ‘the dignity and worth of the human person’ and of ‘the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small’ will exacerbate development losses and human suffering.”

In these difficult times we find that Quaker approaches are appreciated more than ever in the UN community.

At the same time, as you can read in the articles in this newsletter, QUNO has continued to steadily move forward its engagement with UN decision-makers in important processes such as the 15-year review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, and provide a supportive space (now virtual) for

exploration of new perspectives on building peace, including through the work of the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform. We were also pleased to be able to coordinate with colleagues in Geneva and AFSC around the urgent debate in the Human Rights Council on systemic racism, police violence and human rights violations in relation to Africans and people of African descent, triggered by the killing of George Floyd in June.

In these difficult times we find that Quaker approaches are appreciated more than ever in the UN community – approaches based on listening, dignity and reaching out across divides, firmly rooted in the experience, insights and testimonies of Friends around the world. Thank you for your encouragement and support!



Andrew Tomlinson

15 Years of Peacebuilding (continued from page 1)

that takes place after conflict, to understanding that peacebuilding must be the thread running throughout the UN system. This year’s review then seeks to identify the progress made by the UN to implement the resolutions, with a central focus on the impact for communities and at a country level.

QUNO seized the opportunity of this major UN review to identify

ways to bring our knowledge and experience to the forefront and engage with UN and Member State colleagues on key messages for building peace. This included producing two short publications, *Building Peace Through Reconciliation* (see article on this work on page 3) and *Building Sustainable Peace* (produced in partnership with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict). These publications were then shared throughout the UN system and with

all Member States to support their efforts as they engaged in the review process. QUNO also elevated the messages from our publications as we participated in various meetings with UN stakeholders throughout the review. We look forward to seeing the outcomes from this monumental peacebuilding review process and continuing to serve as a partner to UN and Member State colleagues as they work to build and sustain peace. ❖

Building Peace through Reconciliation

By Stephen Murray, Programme Assistant



Football for Peace and Reconciliation Initiative led by UN Mission in Colombia.

© UN Photo/Jennifer Moreno Caniza

With 2020 marking the 15th anniversary and third process to review the UN's peacebuilding efforts (see article, *15 Years of UN Peacebuilding*, on page 1 for more information), QUNO saw an opportunity to elevate an often neglected yet fundamental aspect to peacebuilding and preventing violent conflict: the role of reconciliation in building peace.

Reconciliation is at the heart of peacebuilding, a trust-building process that can help societies emerge from division and conflict and contribute towards the building of a shared future. Whilst it is a difficult and generational process, its positive contribution to fostering inclusive, just and peaceful societies cannot be overstated. Identifying that reconciliation is an overlooked

theme within many UN discussions and motivated by our long history of exploring this topic, QUNO drafted a policy brief titled, *Building Peace through Reconciliation*, in which we examined the need for genuinely inclusive, forward looking reconciliation processes that are rooted in dialogue and are sensitive to the trauma brought about by conflict.

Taking the lead on this project, I was able to provide a personal perspective on the potential of reconciliation within peacebuilding processes. Hailing from Northern Ireland's historically divided society and being immersed in reconciliation initiatives from an early age, I found researching and drafting the initial paper to be both enlightening as well as a space for personal reflection. Additionally, leading on this allowed

me to apply the skills and knowledge I have gained during my time with QUNO as a Programme Assistant to produce a publication that was ultimately submitted to UN and Member State colleagues to support their efforts in this review process.

In researching our long engagement with and work on reconciliation and submitting this paper to the UN Peacebuilding Architecture review I, along with other staff members, were proud to bring Quaker-rooted perspectives on reconciliation into this discussion. QUNO looks forward to continuing the organization's exploration of this topic and to working with UN and Member State colleagues to uplift the subject of reconciliation in dialogue and policy development for building peaceful and just societies. ❖

Inclusive Approaches to Supporting Mediation

By Rachel Madenyika, Quaker UN Representative



UNMISS Civil Affairs Division Conducts Mediation Workshop.

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Mediation efforts are often more successful when they bring diverse voices to the table, allowing those affected by and involved in conflict to have the space to work towards peace. Those leading such work, including actors at the UN and the local or community levels, have been drastically impacted by the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires them to continue to adapt their approaches to meet the changing nature of crisis, and to try and find innovative ways forward in their work. This global health and peace crisis has hindered conflict prevention efforts, exactly when they are needed most.

The Secretary-General's reports on COVID-19 highlights that restrictions on movement have affected the organization's peacebuilding work globally, with many peace processes having stalled and the UN's good offices and mediation efforts being impacted. The Secretary-General's

call for a global ceasefire has not been heeded everywhere and violence continues or is even increasing in some regions. It is now more important than ever for mediation actors to adapt to the ever-changing dynamics and take steps to continue supporting building peace.

In the spirit of supporting the Secretary-General's agenda on mediation, QUNO was pleased to co-host a virtual discussion where civil society, UN colleagues and Member States collectively focused on how to strengthen inclusive approaches to mediation, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While prior to the pandemic this conversation would have been held at Quaker House, we were able to creatively use online platforms to re-create the safe, trusted and off the record environment QUNO is known for. Given that mediation processes involve the coordination and participation of a wide range of actors, this meeting provided a candid

space for participants to share and reflect on good practices and remaining challenges for mediating conflict in an inclusive way. Participants agreed that marginalized and conflict-affected communities are all too often drowned out or overlooked during mediation processes. To have maximum impact for building peace, the voices and expertise of youth and other historically excluded

groups need to be included and put at the center of mediation processes. A range of examples of inclusive approaches were shared, including the African Union (AU) launch of FemWise. This is a network of and led by African women mediators working across the continent to help implement peace agreements and ensure women's inclusion in conflict prevention and mediation practices.

QUNO believes in the transformative potential of mediation. While the steps towards peace will be different in every conflict, inclusion must be at the foundation to help build peaceful societies. Grassroots mediation efforts often provide avenues forward for prevention, sharing resources, and opportunities to co-exist after a conflict by embedding this work in communities. ❖

Staff Comings and Goings



Counter clockwise from top left: Stephen Murray; Rosemary Ventura; Hannah Patterson; Molly Burger.

In September, QUNO welcomed two new Programme Assistants (PAs), Hannah Patterson and Molly Burger, after saying goodbye this summer to our outgoing PAs, Stephen Murray and Rosemary Ventura.

Hannah joins QUNO after graduating from Middlebury College with a BA in Political Science and Philosophy, and a minor in Spanish. Her studies culminated in her thesis which focused on the philosophical relationship between empathy and morality and the practical ways in which empathy can be harnessed to facilitate a transition away from retributive justice towards transformative models. Raised Quaker, she is looking forward to putting her Quaker values into practice and applying them to complex crisis resolution as well as sustainable peacebuilding on an international scale.

Molly joins QUNO after teaching

English in Germany through the Fulbright Program. She graduated from Dickinson College, where she majored in International Studies with a concentration in globalization and sustainability and German Studies with a concentration in politics. While studying she interned with the Bremen Information Center for Human Rights and Development, and focused her senior research on the impacts of climate change on global food security. Growing up in northern New York, Molly attended the Unitarian Universalist Church and finds that the principles she learned as a child closely resemble Quaker values.

QUNO is grateful to have worked with Stephen, who supported the Peacebuilding program, and Rosemary, who joined the Conflict Prevention program, over the past year. Reflecting on his time at QUNO, Stephen appreciated gaining an in-depth knowledge of

building and sustaining peace at the UN and the valuable contribution Quaker principles can provide in these discussions. Through her work, Rosemary had the opportunity to contribute to researching and planning a new initiative on quiet diplomacy convenings for country-level prevention capacities, in addition to supporting the Civil Society – UN Prevention Platform Discussion series. Stephen and Rosemary leave QUNO extremely grateful for the skills and experience gained, which will contribute to their academic and professional paths. Upon returning to Northern Ireland Stephen will begin a PhD program, while Rosemary will start graduate studies in International Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. We wish Stephen and Rosemary all the best in their future endeavors and thank them for their invaluable contribution to QUNO's work! ❖

Supporting Country-level UN Capacities for Prevention

By Rosemary Ventura, Programme Assistant

When I arrived at QUNO and joined the Conflict Prevention Program, I was freshly returned from Peace Corps in Guinea and eager to dive into the world of quiet diplomacy at the UN. As I learned about QUNO's working methods, I was particularly fascinated by opportunities to build constituencies with national level actors to feed into higher level policy engagement. As the spring progressed, the Conflict Prevention Program team developed a new project area focused on supporting coherence for prevention in country settings through the work of the UN's Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) and Human Rights Advisors (HRAs).

PDAs and HRAs provide crucial analysis and recommendations to UN Country Teams while strengthening national capacities for human rights, conflict prevention, and sustainable peace. Because prevention work is carried out at multiple levels by a variety of national and UN actors, coherence and coordination across sectors is crucial to achieving sustainable approaches towards peace.

In developing this new project,

we explored how QUNO's unique working methods could contribute to stronger understanding and cooperation between HRAs and PDAs, allowing them to support people-centered strategies for prevention. We conducted an in-depth listening exercise with PDAs and HRAs from throughout the world to hear and learn from them on how they collaborate to jointly support prevention capacities. As COVID-19 rapidly accelerated, I was struck by the dual role of these conversations in also providing trusting emotional spaces for our colleagues on the front lines of the response efforts around the world. We then analyzed themes from the over 25 in-depth interviews, interrogated how the project fits into QUNO's strategic plan, and wrote concept notes to serve as blueprints for future activities.

While many colleagues shared examples of strong coordination, these conversations also revealed considerable gaps, such as a lack of coordinated approaches for prevention. Identifying this barrier for effective prevention, we developed a proposal for quiet diplomacy



Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention

convenings to unpack resonant themes, best practices, and challenges for collaboration. By opening space to initiate conversations between advisors, QUNO hopes to provide catalytic support for this global community of UN prevention practitioners

Developing a new program area provided me with exceptional opportunities for my professional development. This project directly informed my future academic and professional ambitions, and as I leave QUNO, I am deeply grateful for the growth and mentorship opportunities. ❖

News from QUNO Geneva

QUNO Geneva's office 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 Munnely, 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.

At the end of August, QUNO said goodbye to our outgoing 2019-20 PAs Lucy Halton, Detmer Yens Kremer, and Cara Priestley, each of whom demonstrated tremendous spirit, commitment and adaptability during a challenging year interrupted by the COVID-19

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pandemic and lockdown. In the latest issue of our [Geneva Reporter newsletter](#), you can read more from Cara, Detmer and Lucy about their development and hosting of QUNO's first ever virtual Summer School. We extend our sincere thanks and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Human rights of migrants

During the 45th Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva in September, [QUNO delivered two oral statements](#) drawing attention to the human rights of migrants. The first statement, delivered by Human Rights & Refugees Representative Laurel Townhead, focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the human rights of migrants. QUNO encouraged States to learn from best practice and move towards implementing measures to protect migrants during a pandemic in which they are disproportionately affected. The latter statement was delivered by Najmah Ali to the Working Group on Mercenaries and stressed the importance of a recent report on immigration and border management that detailed the widespread human rights violations of migrants rights as a result of increased securitisation and externalisation of border management.

Climate change negotiations

Also in September, QUNO's Human Impacts of Climate Change programme held two meetings, a dinner for delegates from the HRC, 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. We were encouraged by the positive responses to both meetings, including from a participant in the virtual meeting, who shared, "You provide the opportunity for opening up and participants did so...I would strongly encourage future sessions.

"As COVID-19 rapidly accelerated, I was struck by the dual role of these conversations in also providing trusting emotional spaces for our colleagues on the front lines of the response efforts around the world.

Reframing economic models and paradigms

The need to [reframe economic assumptions](#) has become particularly important with the pandemic and we see paths opening up for realizing innovative ideas on economic models. Our Sustainable & Just Economic Systems programme hosted a meeting for diplomats and other stakeholders in the garden of Quaker House



Laurel Townhead delivers an oral statement at the 45th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

in July 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.

COVID-19, business and human rights

In July, our Peace & Disarmament programme [submitted key messages](#), together with other NGO partners, on COVID-19 to the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, for their [project on business in conflict and post-conflict contexts](#). A previous formal joint submission in April did not include COVID analysis, as at the time of writing it was too early for that to be integrated with any certainty. The new submission is intended to ensure recent information and analysis on the impact of the pandemic in this context is included in the project. ❖