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Summer School participants learnt more about the United Nations at Palais des Nations in Geneva.

QUNO's Summer School a multi-national gathering in Geneva

Since 1955, Quaker House in Geneva has annually hosted young people from around the world for the Quaker United Nations Summer School (QUNSS) — until the Covid-19 pandemic prohibited in-person gatherings. So this year was a special QUNSS for us, as Quaker House could again since 2020 be a safe gathering space for young minds. This year's QUNSS had 23 participants from various countries: Bolivia, Cyprus, Ghana, Jordan, Kenya, South Africa, Switzerland, Togo, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Vietnam. Bursary support from Quakers in Britain and Switzerland ensured a group diverse in faith, culture, and economic backgrounds made their way to Geneva. QUNSS carries costs for participants and having bursaries available helped participants with financial constraints.

Participants were aged 19 to 27 and arrived with open-mindedness and curiosity that inspired multiple in-depth discussions during QUNSS from 3 to 14 July 2023. Welcoming the participants, QUNO Geneva's director Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge said the importance of QUNSS was that it could set the tone for young people's future. Madlala-Routledge, a Quaker who has worked tirelessly against apartheid in South Africa and served as a parliamentarian in that country's democratic era, said also that QUNSS encourages "faith in action". "We are preparing participants for peace in a world

at war all around us. Our Summer School is an opportunity to share what Quaker values are about, while helping build young professionals. We want to help young people who come to Quaker House in their careers," she said. QUNSS participants were introduced to topics related to QUNO's work, engaged in educational role-play exercises, spoke to experts on some of the world's most pressing issues, and visited multiple international organisations, including the United Nations (UN).

A visit to the UN Human Rights Council offered participants the opportunity to observe an interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Environment and see firsthand the heart of international human rights governance. Participants were introduced to negotiation and mediation skills, which they put to the test during a water sharing negotiation role-play. One participant said this was an "interesting, unique and Quakerly practice".

QUNO is grateful for the support from individuals, Quaker Meetings and others. Visit <https://quno.org/donate/geneva> and help us continue working to promote peace and justice at the United Nations and other institutions.

Journeys to Geneva

As we highlight Quaker United Nations Summer School and the young people who made their way to Geneva, we were curious to hear also from QUNO Geneva's programme staff about their path to Quaker House.



Laurel Townhead:
Representative: Human Rights & Refugees

I first learned about QUNO from a notice board advertising Summer School at my university. I was 21 and finishing a degree in law and politics. I had a drive to work on justice, so Summer School sounded like a perfect opportunity. Unfortunately, I did not get a place!

Thankfully, that was not the end of my story with QUNO. I was the Human Rights & Refugees programme assistant from 2005-2006 and this was a turning point. I will always be grateful for the investment that QUNO made, providing me an opportunity to learn not only through shadowing but crucially also through doing — doing effective research, analysis, facilitation and advocacy at the United Nations (UN).

I could shift from the theory of the UN's human rights system to the reality of it. I had space to develop soft and hard skills and a grounding in substantive work on women in prison that I carried on until I returned to QUNO almost a decade later. It also shaped me as an advocate: seeing the impact of quiet diplomacy, of persistence, of bringing a radical foundation into a formal establishment that is not always ready to go where we believe it should. And, critically, the power of working with people in and around that establishment as individual human beings, rather than just their institutional functions, to support and sustain their drive for justice.

I have been proud of QUNO not operating unpaid internships for young people, instead investing in paid training roles, intentionally working to make early career roles around the UN more accessible, in line with the Quaker testimonies to integrity and equality.

Summer School is likewise an investment in accessibility that I am proud to be part of at QUNO, providing space for young people to learn about the UN and decide if and how they can engage with it in their studies, work or activism. It is deeply impactful to hear about Summer School participants and programme assistants' hopes for the UN and their analysis of its shortcomings. It is also fun to let them know that I failed in my first attempt to engage with QUNO, but that I still found my way to being part of it and its commitment to young people.



Lindsey Fielder Cook:
Representative: Human Impacts of Climate Change

As we celebrate QUNO's 75th anniversary, I celebrate QUNO's role in my life. I was born in New York City, but met Quakers while doing academic research in Northern Ireland. Someone suggested I interview Quakers because "they're really weird". "How are they weird?" I asked. "They help people on both sides." I never looked back. My passion was peace and reconciliation. After university I joined QUNO New York as a programme assistant in 1986, focusing on disarmament and learning to write 'Mr or Ms' rather than 'Ambassador', because "we don't recognise titles". I spent the year with diplomats and advocates from around the world. I found my home.

From New York I went to Ramallah, in the Israeli-Occupied West Bank, to teach at the Friends Girls School. Two months later the first intifada exploded. My classroom was teargassed, students were arrested, I was shot, education was banned — so we taught English in refugee camps when Israeli soldiers weren't looking.

From there to humanitarian and human rights work with the United Nations (UN), jobs where women were few, but those most suffering were women and children. When my children were born, I stepped back to embrace their early years. We moved to Germany, but QUNO New York called again. I went on to serve in governance, representing European and Middle East Friends who talked of climate change as a peace and justice concern. Their voices moved me deeply. I returned to graduate school to study climate change and sustainable development. Then QUNO called again, this time Geneva, to be their representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change programme.

I am still moved when I enter UN buildings, the flag flying light blue and high. My UN work helped save lives, uphold ideals, bring hope. Yet my work at QUNO is unique: upholding peace and justice at the UN from a spiritual grounding, with freedom to speak truth to power, act swiftly in political change, demand the ethical, and stay humane even in politically brutal spaces. When I am drained, Quakers past and present are with me. They whisper — human rights, peace and justice are not something you 'win', they are existences we must work for every day.



Florence Foster:
Representative: Peace & Disarmament

My path to QUNO as its youngest Representative was one of serendipity and daring. I came back from working on community mediation and armed violence reduction in the Central African Republic disillusioned and tired — in need of some time to sit with myself.

After months of traveling to continue learning Spanish, finishing a course in third-party mediation and reconnecting with family and friends, the unemployment office sign-posted me to a job opening. It spoke of working on social justice, peace and arms control by bringing people together in informal conversations to advance policy at the United Nations (UN). This was serendipity strike #1.

The content was appealing, but it was a big step-up professionally. I applied nevertheless. A call for daring strike #1. The invitation to interview came as I was traveling in Kyrgyzstan, so my presentation was put together on my return flight. I cobbled together the hopes and aspirations of what I could bring to the programme.

I arrived early; stunned by Quaker House, its garden and flowers in early July. The following day, my flight was delayed by yet another hour and my phone rang. I was offered the job. Had that flight been on time, I would have been mid-air, heading to rural England with no signal for five days. This was serendipity strike #2. I said yes, obviously.

Later that week, as I was doing some preparatory reading in my parent's living room, my father mumbled something about knowing a Quaker working on humanitarian disarmament once — David was his name. I looked down at the paper I had just started to read; 'From the inside out: Observations on Quaker work at the United Nations' by David Atwood. My father had known my predecessor all along! Serendipity strike #3. Stepping into my predecessors' shoes, whose name still echoed in the UN chambers, stepping into the man's world of arms control as a young woman, stepping into the policy universe as someone who'd only seen it from the outside was daunting. A call for daring strike #2.

The support of colleagues and peers who gave me the time to grow, and with whom my vulnerability was a strength and success was a shared endeavour, were key to settling into my role and thriving. Importantly, it gave me a chance to find renewed hope in my work on social justice and to continue nurturing safe and creative spaces for change at Quaker House and in the corridors of the UN.

What next you might ask? A call for daring strike #3.



Andrés Naranjo:
Associate: Sustainable and Just Economic Systems

Joining QUNO in September 2021, I was thrilled at the opportunity of working at the intersection of sustainability, justice, and global economic systems. With a background in political science and international relations, I was passionate about addressing complex global challenges.

I started out as a programme assistant for the Sustainable and Just Economic Systems (SJES) and Human Impacts of Climate Change programmes, stepping into an arena that required nuance, understanding, and a keen drive for change.

One of the most transformative aspects of QUNO was its empowering approach, especially towards young people like me. I was given substantial responsibilities and meaningful opportunities to contribute to our initiatives, fostering my professional growth and shaping my perspective on the interconnected global challenges we face.

My personal journey reached a milestone when I became a programme associate for SJES in 2023. Originating from Ecuador, a country with rich biodiversity yet fraught with environmental challenges, I was inherently drawn to the pressing issue of plastic pollution. Collaborating with Ron Steenblik, an expert on fossil fuel subsidies, I delved deeper into the intricate role of trade in promoting plastic production. Our shared vision for a future with package-less trade and reusability was not merely an abstract idea but a pressing necessity for both marine and human life.

So far one of my most rewarding experiences has been leading our input into a global treaty to end plastic pollution. For a young person, this level of involvement and trust placed in my capabilities was both humbling and inspiring. It cemented my belief in the potential of youth to bring about tangible change, guided by their ideals and invigorated by their optimism.

I fondly remember my time as a programme assistant, particularly organising and running the virtual Summer School alongside my peers. The experience encapsulated the vibrant and dynamic spirit of youth and the instrumental role we play in shaping a sustainable future. My journey at QUNO has been a testament to the organisation's commitment to empower young individuals, entrusting us with crucial responsibilities and nurturing our passion for global justice. This experience has enriched my understanding of the complex interplay between economic systems, environmental sustainability, and social justice. It is a journey that I cherish and one that continues to inspire my aspiration for a more equitable and sustainable world.

Q&A with Yasmin Beldjelti

QUNO annually employs programme assistants to work with our Representatives for a year. This full-time position introduces young professionals at the early stages of their careers to the United Nations (UN) ecosystem. Yasmin Beldjelti was a programme assistant for QUNO'S Human Rights and Refugees programme. She reflects on her year with QUNO, which ends in September 2023.



Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

A: I was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and have roots in Morocco, Jordan and Switzerland. I've had the privilege of living in numerous countries across Africa, Europe and the Middle East. While my experience as a migrant was a privileged one, it exposed me to some of the harsh realities of the

inequalities in our world from a young age. It brought me face-to-face with the weight that privilege and social identity carry.

Q: What led you to QUNO?

A: The pursuit of answers gradually steered me towards the path of human rights and social justice advocacy, especially toward advocating for the human rights of migrants. Migrants are often subjected to social, economic, and political hostility, which not only harms those who are on the move but also undermines social cohesion on both local and global scales. QUNO'S Human Rights and Refugees programme is crucial in highlighting these important issues and bringing them to the forefront of various UN processes. Ultimately, this compelled me to aspire to join this programme and contribute my efforts to QUNO'S mission.

Q: What was a highlight of your time as a programme assistant?

A: I have had a significant improvement in my confidence in public speaking. I had the privilege to refine this skill by delivering impactful statements at the UN Human Rights Council and serving as a panelist for the inaugural Youth Panel editions at Geneva Peace Week. I have actively participated in high-level meetings and bilateral discussions with delegates from missions, UN representatives, and civil society representatives, enabling me to contribute proactively to the strategic planning of our work. I had the opportunity to contribute to challenging negative narratives surrounding those on the move, and bridging governance gaps that often leave them vulnerable and unprotected.

Q: How will your time at QUNO help the next step in your career?

A: I feel grateful to have been part of an organisation that aligns closely with my beliefs and values. Our holistic approach to strategic advocacy has served us as a trusted facilitator of difficult conversations and negotiations in Geneva. My experience at QUNO inspires me to continue advocating for a just world and to apply the knowledge and many skills I have developed in future activism.

QUNO connects with Swiss Quakers



QUNO director Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge (right) with Caroline Dommen who was one of the guest speakers at our 75th anniversary celebration at Quaker House in May 2023.

QUNO held various events and worked at strengthening relations with Swiss-based Quakers during the first few months of 2023.

In May, we held our 75th anniversary celebration at Quaker House in Geneva. Quakers were among our guest speakers and spent an evening reminiscing about our shared history that dates back 100 years in Switzerland. In May, QUNO director Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge attended the Switzerland Yearly Meeting's annual gathering. It was held in picturesque Aarau, capital of the northern Swiss canton of Aargau.

And when summer was in full swing in June, Geneva Monthly Meeting held a 'Meet the Neighbours' picnic at Quaker House. QUNO staff attended too, getting to know more about local Quakers and sharing news about our work at the United Nations.



Bob Bowers (on the left), Co-Clerk of Switzerland Yearly Meeting, was also a guest speaker at QUNO'S 75th anniversary celebration.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

QUNO'S new publications are regularly distributed via our website

A Government Official's Toolkit. Edited by Lindsey Fielder Cook and Alana Marie Carlson (2023)

Fair Sources of Financing For a New Loss and Damage Funding Arrangement. Alana M. Carlson with Olivia Hanks (2023)

QUNO Review 2023. Our annual report and summary of recent work (March 2023)