

QUNO care for creation address at the World Plenary

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Given by Lindsey Fielder Cook, Quaker United Nations Office Interim Deputy Director and Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change

Greetings Friends, to you in South Africa and across this beautiful planet earth.

My name is Lindsey, and I am a Quaker by conviction. I speak to you now from the Quaker United Nations Office, QUNO, in Geneva, Switzerland, where I have served as Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change for over 12 years.

Here in Geneva -and in our QUNO office in New York - we work on peace building and conflict prevention, on disarmament, Sustainable and Just Economic Systems, Human Rights and Refugees, and Climate Change. Grounded in Quaker Testimonies, QUNO has supported peace and justice efforts at the United Nations and related international bodies for over 75 years.

It is humbling to be asked to speak to you all, across continents, on Care for Creation from a global perspective. I will begin personally, share what we witness globally, and finish with a Call to Friends worldwide.

Personally

I speak as a Friend who has lived and worked in some of the richest and some of the poorest countries. My background was in humanitarian and human rights efforts in conflict/war zones, primarily with the United Nations. I sought peace and reconciliation; I did not think of nature. It was in mid-life that I connected how existential rates of global warming, chemical pollution and species extinction – crises driven by us - are a peace and justice concern.

Before I begin, I want to thank all who have worked so hard to make this World gathering possible. And I am thankful for the Kabarak Call to Peace and Ecojustice, for the Pisac Sustainability Minute, and for this week's weaving of 'streams' - Ubuntu, Care for Creation, and healing historical and continuing injustice.

I use the word 'Weave', because these are like a braid, made whole when woven together.

Ubuntu – I am because you are. The human family, interdependent. A collective responsibility to care.

Care for Creation – Holding sacred God's Creation - land and oceans, the universe, all species, including our own. Care for Creation is care for the sacred in all that is around and in us.

Healing historical and continuing injustice. In my work we call this is ‘climate justice’. Those least responsible are often the most affected. Those most responsible often fail to acknowledge the harm they have caused – this blocks us in the climate change negotiations – the harm from colonization, exploitation, racism, injustice and poverty, all of which still continue in various forms both within and across our countries.

To speak to Care for Creation from a global perspective, I need to connect the sacred in all that lives on this earth – nature and our neighbour.

Jesus teaches us to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself’. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus reminds us that our neighbour includes our enemy.

I understand Care for Creation as care for nature and care for our neighbour - peace **on** earth and peace **with** earth are interchangeable.

In Care for Creation, we reject violence - to the land, the seas, the air and to each other.

Recently in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights declared - and I quote – ‘*We urgently need to find our way back to peace, in line with the UN Charter and international law.*’

Less than 10 years ago, the UN birthed the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement for Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Relief Reduction.

Hope was high. These times exist and can come again.

But today, from a global perspective, we face a time fed by denial and fear.

The multilateral spaces are extremely tense and nuclear armed powers speak increasingly of war.

Last year, over 2.4 trillion dollars was spent on military, in effect, weapons that intimidate and kill people.

What is called ‘hard security’ over ‘human security’.

And financial support to help people in need - humanitarian aid, climate finance, Loss and Damage to help those lives already destroyed by climate change – these remain underfunded, or based on loans rather than grants in a world increasingly crippled by debt.

Currently, nearly half of humanity lives in countries so burdened with debt, more money is paid to debt repayments than to health and education.

From a global perspective, we also witness direct attacks on the United Nations itself. In Geneva, for example, the humiliating underfunding results in UN buildings closed to save on running costs, reduced translation services, ending of webcasting to include voices worldwide.

From a global perspective, an unprecedented political attempt to cancel a UN agency providing humanitarian relief, education and health to millions of refugees.

And democratic countries threatening the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice, because they did not agree with their legal conclusions. Democratic countries

that helped create these institutions decades earlier, in the hope of averting the horrors of World War 2.

From a global perspective, our hearts break to see our youth arrested for speaking out against genocide. And our souls break when human rights are selective rather than universal human rights for all; when our leaders cherish some, not all, children.

Care for Creation is harmed by denial and fear.

Thank you South Africa, for your courage to protect people through the International Court of Justice. Thank you Vanuatu for your courage to protect nature through the International Court of Justice.

In my work on climate change, I have watched the most extraordinary changes over the last 15 years. From a niche to a common conversation. From complicated science to a call to conscience. From denial to transformation.

And then, a new denial. What to do about it.

Climate change – climate crisis – climate emergency – is a symptom.

It is a symptom – or consequence - of a greater challenge, how to live sustainably and justly on this earth.

The root causes of climate change, defined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are unsustainable energy use, unsustainable land-use and land use change, unsustainable lifestyle and patterns of consumption and production.

Root causes in our human activities that also drive sister crises in species extinction, ocean acidification, chemical pollution, soil erosion, fresh water, and more.

Climate change is often called a **wealth crisis** – the richest 10% of people are responsible for up to 45% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate change is also called a **spiritual crisis** – our failure to see the sacred in God's creation. Our failure to care for nature and for our neighbour.

It is also a call for transformation, a concept we Quakers not only understand, we embrace.

Transformation because our human systems in energy, economics and agriculture must transform if we are to have, as the scientists tell us, 'a sustainable and liveable planet for all'.

That is heady stuff.

The scientists also tell us that *'urgent, feasible, and equitable near term options are already available at scale to address climate change and improve human well-being and planetary health.'*

Except you don't know that, because this scientific finding was cut from a final IPCC draft by certain countries who found it politically uncomfortable. Citizens might ask, *'if these are already available, where are they?'*

Many of the main drivers of greenhouse gas emissions are lucrative activities. They make some people a lot of money, and many people dependent. Money and power are not good bedfellows with Care for Creation.

Rapidly reducing fossil fuels and prioritizing - renewable and community-owned energy, 'sufficiency' and circular economies, agroecology and farmer support, healthy plant-based diets leading to reduced deforestation, restoring eco-systems, conserving land, investing in publicly owned transport, education and health systems, reducing over-consumption and over-energy use, reducing military, increasing education for girls and available birth control. Human rights-based policies that benefit people and the planet.

These transformations bring healing and build community resilience.

However, they also threaten current power and money structures. And so, perhaps predictably, we see a new, and often surreal, denial.

Last year, the UN climate conference concluded that we must 'transition from fossil fuels'. Finally.

In the following months, we learned that every extraction wealthy country – developed and developing – had plans to increase their oil and gas extraction. At the lead was my birth country the USA, blowing our chances at a safer temperature rise limit.

And the country where my children were born, the United Kingdom, increased licenses for fossil fuels extraction - and increased prison sentences for people who protested fossil fuel expansion. Quakers arrested for holding a poster.

Only Colombia, a country torn by war, had the courage to announce a limit.

In turn, fossil fuel owners promote reliance on geo-engineering technologies that are not proven to scale, are more expensive, maintain fossil fuels and their inequitable ownership by the few, and tragically delay of real action.

These are called 'techno fixes' that proposed to pump emissions into the ground, into the already struggling oceans, suck emissions out of the sky at massive energy costs, seed the clouds, block the sun, expand the military.

What world is this for our children?

peace **on** earth and peace **with** earth

We often hear the story of doom, but we need to tell the story of love, of Care for Creation, of real and possible transformations that could give our children more healthy and fair worlds.

I finish with a call to Friends Worldwide.

The Religious Society of Friends was established in the 1600s in England, a time when the country felt, as one historian described, like a world '*turned upside down*'.

Today, scientists tell us, and I quote: *"Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all."*

A world upside down.

And yet.

Friend Evan Welkin, whose farm was heavily damaged by unprecedented flooding and landslides, encourages us not to talk of sustainability, but of regeneration.

Regeneration – of nature we have depleted, of our spiritual health to face the worlds turned upside down.

This is a call to Quaker witness.

From a global perspective, we need your local action to care for creation.

Climate negotiators tell me that people need to get active – write letters, march on the streets, show your support, or their Ministers will not act sufficiently.

Next year, your countries must submit a new ‘Nationally Determined Contribution’ – or NDC – as part of the Paris Agreement. The NDC must be in line with a 1.5C global temperature rise limit and be stronger than the last one five years ago.

Your turn – find out - is it stronger? Does it reflect *urgent, feasible, and equitable near term options are already available at scale to address climate change and improve human well-being and planetary health*’?

Does it respect human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples? Does it call for people’s participation in decision making? Does it integrate policies to uphold gender equality, youth, people living with disabilities, biodiversity protection?

Does it protect environmental and human rights defenders? They are our prophets.

If a **developed country**, does it acknowledge responsibility for historical and current emissions? Does it lead on rapid reduction of emissions and financial support to poorer countries.

To care for Creation, we must care enough. Do we care enough?

Friend George Fox said, ‘be patters, be examples in all countries’ ... and to ‘walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.’

And young Friend George Bond, with us this week for the QUNO Summer School, shared

“It is important not to let the enormity of the catastrophe overwhelm our feeling of powerlessness. Feeling powerlessness is not a luxury we can afford.’

Care for Creation - Peace **on** earth and peace **with** earth