

Northern Friends Peace Board report by Till Geiger

Northern Friends Peace Board met last Saturday (2 March 2024) in Sheffield for its first regular meeting of 2024. I attended this meeting as Trustee and Phoebe Spence as your representative.

I am reporting on this meeting to address the questions raised at the last AM about NFPB finances. NFPB is a small charity which runs very efficiently with minimal staffing. At the moment, NFPB runs at an annual loss of roughly £13500 which is covered drawing on the existing reserves of £80000. These reserves mainly the result of legacies given to the Board in the past. Trustees feel that they need to maintain reserves of about one year's expenditure (currently £55000 p.a.) Therefore, the Board can cover its current expenditures, but faces the challenge that its income in terms of contributions tends to arrive at different times during the year. This means the Board relies on area meetings paying their contributions early in the financial year. And that all area meetings contribute the full amount of £10 per member. Therefore, any additional contributions will help the Board to continue its vital work.

NFPB is part of the network of Quaker Peace work and the wider peace movement. It contributes to the work of Rethinking Security, the Global Campaign on Military Expenditure and Woodbrooke. The NFPB coordinator Philip Austin also maintains links with peace campaigning and education work of QPSW and the EMES Peace and Service network. Northern Friends Peace Board is a representative body which spends time to exchange information about local peace campaigning, support this witness with information, and supporting individual through regular updates on peace news. Board members regularly reflect on current events and development and discern possible actions.

NFPB is planning to publish a short booklet of reflections by Friends on the war in Ukraine and Gaza and meaning of the Peace Testimony in our time. If Local Friends would like to contribute they should either contact Philip Austin (nfpb@gn.apc.org) or the editor Till Geiger (till.geiger@posteo.net). For more information, see the attached invitation for contributions.

At the meeting, we heard from three speakers.

Cassie Woodard, who manages the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel for Quakers in Britain, told us about some of this work and the current challenges and priorities. There is an action page on the Quakers in Britain website and a blog is going to report from the Armenian quarter of Jerusalem (Six EAs are back in Jerusalem). Cassie encourages us to call for justice whilst being aware that there has been a rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism and that when we speak out we need to be mindful of this. Demonstrations of support and solidarity in other countries are appreciated by Palestinians. QPSW is involved in a coalition of groups putting pressure on the British government to stop sending weapons to Israel.

Charlotte Cooper updated us on the current work of QPSW highlighting the recent publication of the Teach Peace secondary pack (copies available from the Quaker Bookshop). She drew our attention to the planned the Creative tactics for peace gathering event in York in May. She also promoted Britain Yearly Meeting's General Election work and local engagement by Friends with their candidates. This is in preparation and staff hope circulate more information to Friends soon.

Lastly, we welcomed Becky Alexis-Martin from the University of Bradford, lecturing in PeaceStudies and with a particular interest in the human impact of nuclear weapons. Her research encompasses the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which came into force in January 2021, and also areas where nuclear weapon testing has taken place and the humanitarian and environmental effects of this. In particular working with the people of Kiribati in the South Pacific aiming to bring the British government to a point of apologising for the harm done. She urges us to contact our politicians to pressurise the government to reconsider nuclear armaments, and at least acknowledge obligations under Article 6 and 7 of TPNW. The notes from her presentation were circulated with the minutes and I am happy to sent them to interested Friends.

In the final session in the afternoon, Friends met in small groups and reflected together on some priorities, challenges and opportunities for supporting Friends, including one another, in our peace witness during the coming year. We shared our views of how important it is to have access to knowledgeable people and information from trusted sources; that meeting with like-minded people can help to keep hope alive; and that having hope is essential for us to act.