

**A Statement Stemming from the Minute:  
“Living Sustainably and Sustaining Life on Earth”**  
From the FWCC World Plenary in Pisac, Peru – January 2016

I write this statement out of loving commitment to the FWCC and to life on Earth, present and future. My participation during the 2016 Pisac World Plenary, in the consultation entitled “[Sustaining Life on Earth](#)”, has inspired me to write this thought piece, rooted in the 2012 [Kabarak Call for Peace and Eco-Justice](#) and intended to enrich our discussion into the future.

The Pisac Minute’s contents are well-stated and essential for a healthy world in the coming decades. Now we must turn to the next steps to be taken, including strategies designed to directly impact the damage that already exists—to the global environment, and especially to the world’s many disadvantaged peoples and nations.

In general, there are two interrelated issues that call out for further reflection and consideration. One has to do with Friends’ unique “value added” as a spiritual community addressing a worldwide crisis. The other has to do with pending opportunities to approach this topic integrally, touching on all parts of the equation, and thereby advancing it with a resolute sense of responsibility and compassion. We Quakers are not all experts on the topics that we discuss; and yet we are indeed, all of us exceedingly experienced spiritual practitioners. Through our collective efforts we can bring inner Light and prayerful discernment to this topic.

Participants in the Pisac Consultation were given the following guidelines: “Sustaining Life on Earth. Inspired by the Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, developing worldwide Quaker collaboration for environmental, economic, and spiritual changes: *How do we respond to the spiritual imperative described in the Kabarak Call? How do we give life to the Kabarak Call? How can we lend our collective Spirit-led, God-given voice for the good of the world?*”

The strongest statement in the Pisac Minute lies in the second paragraph, which forcefully affirms the problem: “We see that our misuse of the Earth’s resources creates inequality, destroys community, affects health and well-being, leads to war and erodes our integrity.” The Annex on the second page is a commendable gathering together of 28 familiar suggestions. The list is thorough, the items are excellent ones, and arguably it is important that Quakers be doing not just a few, but all of them.

Left to be spelled out are: (1) critical areas of current thinking and action regarding sustaining life on Earth right now, by attending to the significant, growing damage that has already been done to the environment; and even more significant, (2) a strategy for addressing the rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis that is impacting hardest on the disadvantaged peoples and nations of the world.

After the Pisac Plenary, I consulted extensively with climate disruption experts who currently work full time on these issues—at the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Oxfam America, and the United Nations. Following is a summary of their conclusions: The world is facing a burgeoning environmental *and* humanitarian crisis, of epic proportions, at this very moment. This crisis is the result of anthropogenic, or human-caused, climate disruption, and international bodies now agree that the threat is no longer one that is simply expected to arise by 2050 or by the end of the century. Especially vulnerable communities in the world are already experiencing significant consequences of climate disruption, right now, and the threat is growing. Long-term, mitigative strategies, while absolutely critical, do not address the immediate crisis affecting the Earth’s environment and its human victims. Recognizing and addressing past and current harm to the planet and its inhabitants is at least as important as preventing future harm.

“Sustainability” is a philosophical concept, not an action, and it tends to be a catch-all phrase with limited specific meaning. In the context of climate disruption, sustainability or sustainable practices entail the mitigation (which is necessary but not sufficient) of greenhouse gases and other processes, and these practices primarily promise to address the future results of climate disruption, years and decades down the road. We need to remember that by simply living more sustainably, individuals and groups will not alter the environmental damage that has already been done, nor the suffering that is currently being borne by the inequitably disadvantaged.

There are several major themes that the global community is currently struggling to act upon. These are *mitigation, adaptation* (sometimes referred to as *resilience*), and *sustainable socio-economic development*. They are all interrelated. The 28 action points in the Minute deal primarily with mitigation—i.e. actions designed to slow down and eventually halt escalating climate disruption. This is very important to do, and it’s only one part of the equation. Next to be addressed are: (1) strategies for building adaptation/resilience—i.e.

enabling disadvantaged individuals, communities, and nations to adjust to and survive the impacts of climate disruption; and (2) an additional theme that is emerging upon the world stage—regenerative efforts to remediate current and past damage to the Earth.

**As We Move Forward—Shining the Quaker Light:** We now have the opportunity to carry the inspiring Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, and the Pisac Minute, forward with specific and explicit proposals that could push the envelope. It is a spiritual and a moral imperative that we join with the poor in their efforts to build their capacity for adaptation and resilience as regards climate disruption. It is also a spiritual and moral imperative to clean up our own industrial-world messes by taking steps to regenerate the Earth's environment that we have despoiled. Mitigation actions such as taking public transportation, using bikes, reducing water and electricity use, are necessary, but it is also essential to reform the socio-political systems that are the basis of a world economy that has produced so much damage in the name of consumption and the never-ending push for growth.

Many recognize that the crisis we are in is spiritual, political, *and* economic. A sea change is called for, not just in how we use the earth and its resources, but in how we think about it and organize ourselves into systems and structures. Spiritual practice in general, and Quakerism specifically, have fundamental roles to play. Just as Friends (and others) addressed abolition of slavery, reforming care for the mentally ill, attaining women's suffrage, and opposing wars throughout history, we should now challenge ourselves to develop strategies for achieving the key prerequisite for addressing environmental damage and climate disruption—that prerequisite being a massive *spiritual* sea change in how we human beings relate to the Earth and to all living things on the Earth.

With the above concepts in mind, queries such as the following flow forth:

- What is the biblical basis for Earth stewardship and care for creation?
- What is the Christian basis for hearing the call of the suffering? How are these first two queries linked?
- In day-to-day practice, what does it mean to love and protect the Earth and all living things?
- If environmental and climate justice are human rights that warrant the same level of effort as other agreed-upon human rights, how do we Friends make establishing such rights our goal, and how do we move the world community towards declaring and achieving them for all people?
- How do we better grasp the powerful connection between nature and the spirit; why is that connection so critically important; and how do we nurture it and bring it to the attention of others?
- What can we learn from Quakers in the past who have contributed to vital spiritual sea changes?
- How can we Friends promote broad transformations in the human heart and soul—through thought, word, and deed? What specific acts of bearing witness, and forceful action, should we employ? What about increased public protest, lobbying and media campaigns, civil disobedience, and more?
- How do we Friends increase current efforts to turn world opinion toward seriously attending to the suffering of disadvantaged communities and nations facing climate cataclysm?
- How do we step up regeneration of the Earth's despoiled rivers, lakes, oceans, aquifers and water tables, dry lands and deserts, forests, soils, and atmosphere? Might new economies be built on a foundation of such challenges; new jobs created? Is it enough to wait in anticipation of some miraculous new technologies that will purportedly "save" us?
- Quakers have been led by the spirit in the past to address inequality, inhumanity, injustice, war, and oppression. What will be the next major challenge that the spirit leads us to embrace? Can we Friends consider our next new mission—our new testimony—to be care for our Earth, and care for the suffering of the Earth's disadvantaged humanity, its fauna, and its flora?

The above thoughts encompass issues and actions that fly straight to the heart of peace and nonviolence, social justice, human development, and imminent mass migration of eco-refugees. Faith communities such as ours can play a vital role in moving the world community forward on these issues, guided by the Light.

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