

Epistle of Quaker Council for European Affairs General Assembly

18-19 November 2022

To all Friends everywhere,

The QCEA General Assembly (GA) met again in hybrid format, with many Friends gathering in person at Quaker House in Brussels and some others joining virtually.

The QCEA General Assembly welcomed in its new clerks Martin Ford (in service to the General Assembly) and Martin Touwen (in service to the Executive committee), as well as Tracey Martin who had officially begun her appointment as QCEA's Director this week.

Discernment was made about the governance structures and processes, as well as how these can best be articulated. Friends were pleased to receive and accept a proposal from European and Middle Eastern Young Friends that increases and secures their engagement with the QCEA GA.

We were led in Epilogue on Friday evening, with a quote from Britain Yearly Meeting Quaker Faith & Practice 24:56

Peace begins within ourselves. It is to be implemented within the family, in our meetings, in our work and leisure, in our own localities, and internationally. The task will never be done. Peace is a process to engage in, not a goal to be reached. Sydney Bailey, 1993

General Assembly members who had been able to attend the Study Tour organised by the QCEA staff team between the 14th and 17th of November, reflected on the experience. They expressed their appreciation to QCEA staff for their excellent organisation of the tour, which explored themes of Militarization, Climate Justice and Migration in the context of the European Union. There were twenty-four participants from ten nationalities, including from Europe, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, and a Palestinian from Israel.

Turning to the development of a strategy for 2023-25, QCEA GA members had been tasked with gathering concerns of their Yearly Meetings in advance, reviewing documents such as yearly meeting epistles, articles and reports. In small groups we organised and discussed these ideas around the themes of Peace, Justice and the Environment, and the intersections among these. We then participated in an exercise exploring in what way concerns might be furthered- how radical or technical a project might be, where it might sit between secular and spiritual, the kind of partnerships desired, how specialist the QCEA team might need to be on certain issues and what concerns were intersectional and what were single issues. There were more than one-hundred ideas collected by members participating online and in-person. These ideas will be summarised and synthesised in the next few weeks, and GA members and yearly meetings will then have the opportunity to further reflect and input, with the aim of having a more developed draft by the next General Assembly in the spring of 2023.

We received reports from the QCEA staff team, which included information about publications, workshops, forums and roundtables they have all contributed to over the past six months in collaboration with a great many partners, which aimed to break silos between Peace, Climate and Human Rights issues. Staff have welcomed the resumption of in-person events and highlighted the

fact that QCEA remains a trusted partner in Brussels and provides a space that is especially valued for the facilitation of difficult conversations.

We have further defined our fundraising strategy and received an account of our finances. We heard again of the importance of raising funds to enable the continuation and expansion of the work of QCEA.

Tracey Martin informed GA members about a global statement on our Peace Testimony, which was prepared in relation to the invasion of Ukraine and published on the 26th of October 2022. QCEA collaborated with several other Quaker agencies including Friends World Committee for Consultation in the development of this statement. We can expect follow up activities. We heard about the work that small groups of Quakers are doing in many countries to support Ukrainian migrants fleeing the invasion, and the need for QCEA action in relation to support for conscientious objectors and other aspects to be considered as part of the developing new strategy.

We ended by considering how to strengthen channels of communication between Yearly Meetings and QCEA, and reaffirming our determination to continue contributing to and mobilizing support for QCEA.

Signed in and on behalf of General Assembly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Martin Ford

Clerk

19 November 2022