

## **To Friends everywhere, greetings from Switzerland Yearly Meeting 2021!**

With delight, on the weekend of 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> May, 17 Friends were able at last to gather again in the familiar idyllic surroundings of the Herzberg, high above Aarau and the swollen River Aare in the north of Switzerland, looking out, when the clouds lifted, as they did on Sunday afternoon, upon the eastern Alps.

We were also joined online by a number of Friends roughly equal to those physically present, including representatives of Britain, France, Germany, and Ireland Yearly Meetings, EMES, and a guest from South Africa. It was pointed out that while there were only four women present at the Herzberg, the online participants redressed the balance.

We were thankful to note that despite the ravages of Covid-19, none of our Meetings had suffered the death of a member since our last business meeting, and that indeed among Friends in Switzerland for all the hardship this pandemic has meant for many of us, only a few have fallen seriously ill.

We were joined at the Herzberg by Jonathan Woolley, who will retire late in 2021 after over ten years as Director of the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), Geneva, and Joachim Monkelbaan, QUNO Representative on Sustainable and Just Economic Systems. Other QUNO colleagues who joined by Zoom were Laurel Townhead, Representative for Human Rights and Refugees, and Lindsey Fielder Cook, Representative for the for Human Impacts of Climate Change.

The COVID-cancelled 2020 SYM had been meant to feature QUNO staff, so we were fortunate that they were again free on the traditional Pentecost weekend this year.

Jonathan and his colleagues presented their work, and also spoke of the QUNO Peace and Disarmament programme, with an emphasis on its grounding in Quaker thought and sense of right ordering. Our testimonies, and in particular the belief that there is that of God in everyone, have guided QUNO's approach to migration policy, the human rights impact of climate change, fair trade practices, and many other international issues. QUNO follows a process of discernment, starting with patient listening to different points of view, before deciding what role to play in facilitating international discussions. Agreements on major issues are only achieved when delegates think beyond their national interests to what would be better for the world at large. QUNO prioritizes this shift in thinking and as a non-governmental organisation is often more able to access and influence decision makers in international negotiations for this reason.

On Saturday morning Jonathan and Laurel gave examples of how the work of QUNO brings out the spiritual elements of international diplomacy, as expressed in a quotation from Duncan Wood, who with his wife Katharine ran QUNO for twenty-five years from the 1950s to the 1970s. *"If we believe in the necessity of worldwide institutions to meet the needs of the whole human family, we have a duty to support and encourage those who work [with] them....our task is essentially to demonstrate the spiritual dimension of international relations."* (We were pleased that their daughter Rachel was among those who participated online.) Jonathan drew attention to two recent landmark international agreements to which QUNO staff's behind the scenes diplomacy contributed—Lindsey at the Paris climate summit of 2015 and Laurel at the Global Compact for Migration (2018).

On Saturday afternoon, Joachim described his successful advocacy for and innovative ways towards realising sustainable and just economic systems. On Sunday, like her colleagues, Lindsey gave us an insight into how, with quiet diplomacy in off-the-record meetings involving much listening and ensuring that all voices were heard, QUNO achieves remarkable progress.

We also heard news from our Meetings. All had undergone a great digital learning curve and were now looking forward to returning to in-person meetings. We hope to make good use in the future of our new digital competences.

Our prayerful wishes are with you and your meetings as we all emerge from the trials of recent months.