

Peace Needs an Ambassador, Too

QUAKERS AND THE UNITED NATIONS

QUNO ARCHIVES

In the last days of the devastation of World War II, countries came together to form an international body with the aim of preventing future global catastrophes and ensuring the safety of people around the world. They formed the United Nations (UN).

Quakers had been actively involved in the prevention of violent conflict and war relief efforts for generations. They sent representatives to the League of Nations, supported the founding of the UN, and were committed to connecting the voices of affected communities into the UN's diplomatic and policy discussions. But how?

In 1948, Quakers were granted UN accreditation and began working at UN headquarters in New York. This new office was called, simply, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO). Today, there are QUNO offices in both New York and Geneva. Over the years, QUNO staff have engaged and supported diplomats, UN officials, and community members to implement the United Nations' original vision of peace and human rights.

We are Ambassadors for Peace

In New York, we work in close partnership with UN diplomats and officials to increase global commitment to the UN's role in promoting lasting peace. And we know that the United Nations will only fulfill that role when its peace initiatives truly respond to community needs.

Whether in New York or Geneva, Quakers working at the UN have long believed in the value of providing quiet spaces, away from formal UN meeting rooms. These spaces allow for uniquely important and constructive conversations to take place. In our work, we use Quaker House as a setting to bring a diversity of concerns, views, and perspectives to UN decision makers. This allows UN officials and diplomats to receive information they might not otherwise have, enabling them to forge new and creative solutions.



QUNO's Quiet, Steady Impact

QUNO's impact is greatest in work that must be behind-the-scenes. In some cases, QUNO facilitates conversations in highly sensitive situations that can raise safety concerns for participants. In others, QUNO's contribution comes from a long-term commitment to working on an issue over time. Here are some highlights through the years.

1953 Quaker House is given to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) by donors to support a permanent Quaker presence at the UN. Quaker representatives begin to hold private, informal meetings with diplomats on a variety of topics.

1961 UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden, dies in a plane crash in the Congo. QUNO is asked to organize private meetings of UN ambassadors to discuss the appointment of a new Secretary-General. U-Thant of Burma was selected for the position.

1970 World Youth Assembly gathers in New York for the UN's 25th anniversary. A Quaker team of Young Friends from five countries attends. Also, initial discussions on the Law of the Sea Treaty take place at Quaker House.

1988 Quaker House luncheons introduce the work of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cambodia, including that of several Quaker service agencies. This leads to the incorporation of a Quaker perspective in the UN peace plan for Cambodia.

1992–1995 In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, QUNO hosts facilitatory luncheons and retreats. These build agreement between diplomats around implementation measures for conference outcomes.

1997–2004 QUNOs in New York and Geneva play a leadership role in galvanizing support for global efforts to eradicate the trade of illicit small arms and light weapons. These efforts ultimately lead to agreement on an Arms Trade Treaty adopted in 2013.

2000–present UN Security Council calls for a report from the Secretary-General on the prevention of violent conflict. QUNO brings together diplomats with the drafters of the report for off-the-record consultations. QUNO becomes an early advocate for measures to prevent the outbreak of violence. In 2016, QUNO helps establish and co-chairs the Civil Society-UN Prevention Platform. This platform strengthens coordination and information sharing between civil society and the UN to make the Secretary-General's vision for violence prevention a reality.

2013–2015 As part of negotiations to craft the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, QUNO brings diplomats, UN officials, and civil society representatives together to highlight the importance of peace for achieving development. QUNO hosts discussions that highlight the need for the Sustainable Development Goals to include a goal on peace. This work builds support for what became Sustainable Development Goal 16 to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

2018–2020 QUNO joins a UN-civil society working group to develop the UN Community Engagement Guidelines for Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. This document provides guidance to the UN on how to engage with communities in the shared effort to build peace.

TRANSFORMATIVE CONVERSATIONS

In the period after September 11, 2001, and as the United States embarked on its War on Terror, disagreement emerged at the UN around whether governments should engage with rebel armed groups, classified by some as “terrorists.” Based on our Quaker belief that there is that of God, or the Divine, within everyone, QUNO advocated for the importance of engaged dialogue as the path to peace. To support this work, we hosted a small briefing at Quaker House on the topic of “engagement with armed groups.” QUNO brought outside experts together with diplomats, including those from countries where armed groups were fighting against the central government.

Over the course of the discussion, participants began to openly share challenges facing their countries. One of the diplomats shared their own experience in a mediation effort when a government leader stopped referring to the other side as “terrorists” and instead began calling them “my brothers in the jungle.” They noted the transformative effect this had in allowing constructive conversations to follow. After an energetic conversation, our guests left expressing deep thanks for the unique opportunity to talk openly about difficult issues.



PROVIDING A SAFE SPACE

Recently, QUNO has worked with partners to support peace efforts in a country where an attempted military coup took place. (We are withholding the name of the country to protect those involved.)

The government responded to the attempted coup with violence. Those working on peace and human rights had to flee. This crackdown constrained the UN’s ability to get information needed to respond to the unfolding crisis. Despite risks to their safety and security, some of our partners sought out the opportunity to quietly engage at the UN to bring information to policy makers. Quaker House provided a space for a critical confidential conversation. UN staff listened and learned, receiving information on the state of human rights and peacebuilding at key moments. This informed UN decisions and activities.



Current Priorities

The Quaker offices in New York and Geneva represent the worldwide community of Quakers on behalf of Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). In addition to our relationship with FWCC, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) serves as the other parent organization for our office in New York. Priorities for our work at the UN are set by a committee of representatives appointed jointly by FWCC and AFSC.

Based at the UN headquarters in New York, QUNO is always seeking opportunities to work with the UN so it can live up to its role as a leader for global peace. At the same time, we listen to our partners to lift up their voices, concerns, and insights. As a result of this dual approach, and under the guidance of our governance committee, QUNO's current priorities include:

- Supporting UN counterparts as they take up the recent proposal of the UN Secretary-General to launch a New Agenda for Peace. This will set the tone for decades of work to come.
- Working with the UN to find solutions to address the impact of climate change on peace and conflict.
- Promoting the inclusion of youth in UN decision-making.
- Urging UN partners to incorporate peacebuilding approaches within short-term crisis responses.
- Advocating for peaceful solutions to ongoing conflicts and lifting up the need for sustained peacebuilding efforts in places like Myanmar, Israel-Palestine, Burundi, the Horn of Africa, the Korean Peninsula, and elsewhere.

Celebrating 75 Years of Quaker Diplomacy at the UN— We Need Your Support

The work outlined above builds on QUNO's strengths and experience over decades. During this time, QUNO has developed a reputation as a trusted partner committed to strengthening and building the support needed for the UN to lead global peace efforts.

The total annual budget for QUNO's work is approximately \$750,000. New funds will support staffing and sustain costs that allow bridge-building between New York and communities affected by conflict.

In 2023, QUNO marks our 75th anniversary. This is an opportunity to celebrate achievements from the past and reflect on possibilities in the future together. You can be a part of this anniversary year by going to our website, quno.org. We invite you to sign up to receive regular updates, including information about our anniversary celebration in New York City, June 2023.



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