



Building sustainability, building peace

What does it mean to have a commitment to peace in a world faced with climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion?

All species and the Earth itself have interdependent roles within Creation. Humankind is not the species, to whom all others are subservient, but one among many. All parts, all issues, are inextricably intertwined. Indeed the web of creation could be described as a three-ply thread: whenever we touch it we affect justice and peace and the health of all everywhere. So all our testimonies, all our Quaker work, all our Quaker lives are part of one process, of striving towards a flourishing, just and peaceful Creation – the Kingdom of God.

Audrey Urry, 1994, Quaker faith & practice, 25.04

Introduction

Whilst, in the early days, Quakers understood violence as war and fighting, today Friends understand that violence takes place every time we violate the well-being of others and prevent them from meeting their basic needs. Our current economic system is unsustainable and violent as it leads to climate change, environmental degradation and resource depletion, which threaten the well-being and *human security* of many around the world. This in turn increases the risk of political instability and violent conflict. Therefore this document argues that the current economic system is one of the greatest challenges to peace that we face today.

The witness of Friends to peace is a witness against war and violence but it is primarily a witness to seeking a peaceful vision of the world and to the way of nonviolence. Friends are called to ask how it is they want the world and their lives to be. In the face of climate change, environmental degradation and resource depletion we are all compelled to consider our contribution to building a low-carbon sustainable economy suitable for a finite planet. When we live sustainability we work for peace and in witnessing to peace we must search for sustainable ways of living in the world.



Quakers took part in 'the Wave' march through London and Glasgow in December 2009.

Photo: Liam Geary Baulch

This document is a thinkpiece and therefore is intended to raise questions rather than to provide answers. You'll find questions for reflection and discussion and ideas for action on pages 7–8. There is a glossary of key terms on page 6.

A violent economy

Ecological violence

Our current economic system is violent to the planet. It calls for continuing economic growth, on the presumption that this will bring increased happiness and well-being. As a result the global economy has grown more than fivefold since the mid twentieth century, and if it continues to grow at the same rate, it will be 80 times bigger in 2100 than it was in 1950.¹ The planet remains the same size however, and its resources are finite and ecosystems fragile. Consequently, a system that only actually provides economic prosperity for a few is based on ecological destruction.

If everyone in the world lived as people in western Europe do we would need at least three planets to support us.² We are consuming above what the world's ecosystems can produce and polluting more than they can absorb. For example, the speed at which the climate is changing is accelerating as we emit carbon faster than the forests and seas can absorb it. The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is now more than 390 parts per million (ppm), significantly higher than the pre-industrial average of 280 ppm.³ This means that the earth is already 0.74°C warmer than it was a century ago. It is expected to increase by another 1.8–4°C by the year 2100 if action is not taken to avert this.⁴ Scientists have examined various causes for this trend, however, they are almost certain that the most significant cause is the 'greenhouse effect' resulting from human activity, in particular the burning of fossil fuels.⁵

Climate change is the most publicised violence to the planet resulting from continuing economic growth, however, there are many others, including species extinction,⁶ forest depletion,⁷ soil erosion and freshwater stress. These are all symptoms of the fact that collectively humanity is not living well in the world.

Structural violence

The current economic system is also structurally violent. Structural violence is a term first used in the 1960s by Johan Galtung. It refers to a form of

violence based on the systemic ways in which a social structure or social institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. As the section above demonstrates, the system today is eroding the environment on which people's lives in the future will depend, and thus will deny them the source of their livelihoods. And while the system may enable some to accumulate massive amounts of wealth today, it deprives others of meeting even their basic needs. With regards to climate change, for example, if temperatures continue to rise to a 4°C increase, the UK Meteorological Office predicts impacts such as declining crop yields, increased water stress, rising sea levels and significant increase in drought affecting the lives and livelihoods hundreds of millions of people.⁸

Therefore the economic system causes, and is perhaps premised on, social injustice and inequality. It is unjust that it is the poorest and most vulnerable people that are hardest hit by climate change. Many of the places where poor people live will see temperature rises above the global average.⁹ The poorest in society are most likely to live in areas where it is already hardest to make a livelihood and have fewer resources or options to adapt and recover if disaster does hit. Yet the world's richest 7% are responsible for producing 50% of the world's annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions whilst the poorest 50% of the global population are responsible for producing just 7% of global emissions.¹⁰

We cannot be at peace if our behaviour leads to injustice and suffering; and we are not at peace when one community's way of life prevents another's from thriving, or when our actions now diminish the quality of others' lives in the future.

The seeds of war

May we look upon our treasures, the furniture of our houses, and our garments, and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions.

John Woolman, in Quaker faith and practice, 23.16

The current economic system also increases the risk and incidence of violent conflict and instability globally. As such we can say that our economic system and consumption habits contain many 'seeds of war', in the commonly understood sense of armed conflict between peoples and nations.

For example, many of the goods that we consume rely on resources that have been extracted in such

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is already feeling the effects of climate change. In particular river water levels are rising due to melting glaciers, and the sea level is rising and flooding coastal areas. Some of the poorest people in Bangladesh live on river islands (chars) and along river banks, which are being increasingly frequently flooded. Though many people have found innovative ways to adapt to changing conditions many do not have the resources to move away from affected areas, and are slow to recover if they do lose their assets.



Gita, who lives near Rajoir in Bangladesh, has built her chicken rearing shed on stilts to protect them from flood water.

Teresa Parker/QPSW

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In DRC fighting has been going on for ten years, fuelled by the trade in valuable minerals, especially cassiterite (the ore for tin), coltan (the ore for a rare metal called tantalum), wolframite (tungsten ore), and gold. Trade in these minerals funds the campaigns of both the rebel and national armies and millions have died in the process. The electronics industry is one of the main destinations for these metals, which end up in mobile phones, laptops and other consumer products. Tin is used as a solder in circuit boards; tantalum

goes into capacitors, small components used to store electricity; tungsten is used in the vibrating function of mobile phones; gold is also used by the electronics industry – as a coating for wires. See www.globalwitness.org.



Many people have been displaced in DRC as a result of the conflict.

Photo: Aubrey Graham/IRIN

a way that they cause or fuel violent conflict, as well as human rights abuses and corruption. The organisation Global Witness has done extensive work on the way in which the extraction of natural resources, such as timber, diamonds and minerals, have contributed to the destabilisation of governments, incentivised corruption and helped to fund armies and militias, often illicitly.¹¹ Many of these resources end up in products that we use on a daily basis, such as mobile phones and laptops. In other parts of the world the use of land for biofuels (rather than growing food) is causing violent conflict, as well as hardship for many small producers.¹²

Climate change also brings a heightened risk of violence, particularly in developing countries with weak governance structures that cannot cope with increased conflict resulting from changing or reduced access to resources. Work by International Alert has found that there are 46 countries – home to 2.7 billion people – in which the effects of climate change interacting with economic, social and political problems, will create a high risk of violent conflict. Those countries predicted to be most affected by climate change are already affected or threatened by violent conflict and instability or poor governance, making it harder for people and governments to respond, adapt and recover.¹³ International Alert identifies five areas where climate change may contribute to violent conflict, dependent on other factors such as the state of governance, poverty, history of past conflicts and other grievances:¹⁴

- Water – with increasing water scarcity conflict over water resources is possible, particularly if management is poor or the issue is politicised.
- Agriculture – disruption to agriculture will have a massive impact on food security, especially for the poorest. Where the state cannot or will not intervene this has already led to violent conflict, such as in Northern Nigeria, Sudan and Kenya.
- Energy – climate change necessitates changes and reduction in consumption of energy, and could have negative impacts on human security and development if not handled carefully, leading to an exacerbation of conflict.
- Health – changes in temperature and rainfall will have an impact on health. If the state cannot provide health services in response this may lead to political instability and violent conflict.
- Migration and urbanisation – many people are likely to move as a result of climate change,

either internally or by crossing borders to new countries. This will lead to increased urbanisation which may add to increased urban poverty and conflict. As many communities and countries find migration difficult to accept this may lead to violent conflict, particularly if the political response is inflammatory.

Climate change and migration



The Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva is undertaking a project to consider the protection of people who are affected by migration or displacement due to the effects of climate change. They are looking in particular at how international displacement and migration rules can be adapted to cover these people, and at the role of faith communities in ensuring climate migration is as positive an experience as possible for all involved: the migrants themselves and the communities of origin, transit and destination.

See www.quono.org.

Responding peacefully

What then does a commitment to peace mean today in the context of climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion? Quakers, as people of faith, have a vital role to play in asking whether the way humanity is living on the planet today really upholds what it means to be human. And Friends, along with others, are called to uphold the way of nonviolence in the face of a violent economy and its potentially destabilising effects. What this entails is the subject of this section.

Resisting securitisation

A common understanding of peace today is that it consists in an absence of non state-controlled violence and the existence of stability. This is peace as a state of 'pacification'.¹⁵ State-controlled military force is used to suppress apparent threats to stability. Politicians and military strategists are becoming increasingly aware of the implications of climate change, and other environmental crises, for global security and peace, with concern about the risks of state failure and radical oppositional movements in particular.¹⁶ This recognition of

social and political implications is to be welcomed; however there is a real risk of 'securitising' the response.¹⁷ Viewed, as the military tend to, through a pacification lens the answer to these threats to stability is in line with that of the Roman military commander Flavius Vegetius Renatus. He said, two thousand years ago, that "if you want peace, prepare for war". Today that means increased border security, military intervention to stabilise failing states, and patrolling of migration routes.

However, while Flavius was advocating war, Jesus and the early Christians were preaching what is now called 'nonviolent peacemaking',¹⁸ as Friends are called to do today. The biblical sense of peace is very different to that of Flavius. The Bible speaks of peace as *shalom*, which literally translates as 'wholeness'. In this sense peacebuilding is about building relationships and connections between people and the conditions and systems that enable all to exist as a flourishing whole. This means addressing the root causes of violence (such as the current economic system), rather than trying to put a lid on violence when it erupts, as in the pacification approach. This is the only way to build *sustainable security*. Friends can join with others such as the Oxford Research Group and Northern Friends Peace Board to advocate the sustainable security concept.¹⁹

Building a nonviolent economy

Do Quakers have an alternative vision for the world, where people live on the planet in a way that maintains the planet in its beauty and diversity and enables all things to flourish, in justice and in peace? What would a nonviolent economy look like? One that is not dependent on infinite growth or on social injustice and inequality, and that recognises the finite nature of the planet's resources? These are questions which many people are starting to ask, and that are central to the peace testimony today.

What would it mean to move away from a system based on the presumption that the earth's environment is a subset of the human economy?²⁰ This planet does not belong to us. We are only one small part of the kingdom of God that encompasses everything and that can never be fully understood by humans. To assume that we do is hubristic and will lead to tragedy.²¹

Research by the New Economics Foundation shows that in rich countries we keep consuming more but don't get any happier.²² So we need to

find new ways of defining prosperity that enable the development of a new economics that fits our finite planet.²³ What do we really value and want to sustain?

These questions are the focus of an emerging piece of work led by Quaker Peace & Social Witness, on sustainable economics.

One Planet Economy



QPSW is supporting Friends to learn about the economic system – both the way it is now, and possible alternatives – and to consider the way in which the testimonies inform the way Friends understand and respond. The project will involve speaker tours, events, a study pack and other written materials.

See www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw for more information.

Personal witness

The love of God overflows and spills out from the Peace Testimony into every aspect of life. It challenges me to affirm peace and to root out un-peace wherever I find it. Those challenges are real and sometimes very painfully close to home. No one said it would be easy! I've certainly had some spectacular and painful failures, as we all have, but I keep trying: 'That spirit of Christ is not changeable.' It affects everything: how I earn (and spend) my money; how I bring up my children; where I live; what I eat; how I get from place to place; how I deal with my awkward Friends, my antisocial fellow-citizens, or my own dear family. The Peace Testimony moves me from 'how I am in the stillness before God' into 'how I try to be in the world'.

Caroline Westgate, in Affirming the Light: Ten stories of Quaker peace witness, 2002, p. 7

What does this mean for Quakers trying to live the peace testimony day to day?

We are all complicit in the current unsustainable economic system, just as we are all complicit in war through our taxes. This is true even of those who are making concerted efforts to tread lightly on the earth, as some Quakers have done. The least that is required of us is to become signs of contradiction. Many Friends are called to speak out and let their

lives speak, becoming public signposts to a different way of being and acting.²⁴

Friends can challenge themselves on the choices they make every day; recognising that for the world to be sustained in its beauty and for living things to continue to flourish we must accept that all aspects of our lives are called into question. We need to do a lot more than change our light bulbs. We need also to think about where our food and clothes come from, how we travel, how we source our energy, where we shop, and how we invest. We witness peace as much when we make choices that minimise our carbon footprint, and reduce our impact on the environment and use of the world's resources, as when we protest against military intervention. The nature of life itself is called into question. What is the essence of life, where do our priorities really lie? We need to each reconceive our place on the earth, as belonging to it, rather than it belonging to us.

We can ask what this means for meeting houses, and the life of Quaker meetings. How can meeting houses become sustainable, radical community spaces, where groups with alternative visions for society gather? Some meetings have taken big and creative steps to 'green' their buildings and to reflect together on sustainability. Do Friends consider the sustainability of the food eaten at meeting, or the way Friends travel there? And how do Friends in Britain act together as a Society? What collective decision and action can be taken? What can be celebrated and upheld? Who else is striving to achieve the same goals that Friends can collaborate with?

Friends are also called to 'speak truth to power' and to protest and resist practices and actions contrary to sustainability and peace. Friends were among those gathered to protest against the building of third runway at Heathrow and many Quakers are involved in Climate Camp, as they were present at Twyford Down in the early 1990s protesting against road building. How radical do Friends need to be? In the US some Friends are now organising their own direct action on these concerns. The Earth Quaker Action Team, for example, was established to take nonviolent direct action on environmental issues.²⁵

Concluding thought

In committing to peace Friends commit to affirming and upholding those things that enable all life to flourish without violence and injustice and to resisting and challenging that which contradicts this. When we live sustainably and seek ways to build an alternative economy we work for peace and in witnessing to peace we must search for sustainable ways of living in the world.

Glossary

Human security Human security puts the individual rather than the state at the centre of security concerns. The focus is on protecting the well-being of individuals, and on addressing the root causes of threats to this. It resonates with a principle that is central to Quakerism, that there is 'that of God' in everyone. As a result the security of one person or nation cannot be guaranteed at the expense of the security or well-being of the global community.

shalom Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace, used in the Bible. It translates literally as 'wholeness' or 'integrity'. About the personal it implies wholeness or well-being; socially it implies social well-being and relational health. In its biblical senses shalom includes meanings of welfare, shared prosperity, salvation, reconciliation, satisfaction, contentment and a state of being safe and unharmed. This is different to the dictionary definition of the word peace, which is based on the Latin, *pax*, from the idea of 'agreement' and meaning the absence of disturbance.²⁶

Sustainable security The central premise of the concept of sustainable security is addressing the root the causes of insecurity, rather than the symptoms. Those highlighted by the Oxford Research Group are: climate change; competition over resources; marginalisation of the majority world; and global militarism. This approach is contrary to the current mainstream approach to national and international security, which is based on the presumption that insecurity can be only be controlled through military force or containment. See *Sustainable security: A briefing for Friends*, for more information.

Sustainability The most widely accepted definition of sustainability is that it is about living in ways that meet "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".²⁷

Endnotes

- ¹ *Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet*, Tim Jackson (earthscan, 2009), p. 13.
- ² WWF One Planet Future campaign. See www.wwf.org.uk.
- ³ *Warning signs: The science and impacts of climate change*, Whittington, E (Christian Aid, June 2010).
- ⁴ UNFCCC. See http://unfccc.int/essential_background/feeling_the_heat/items/2917.php.
- ⁵ *Climate change 2007: synthesis report summary for policymakers*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
- ⁶ *Living beyond our means: Natural assets and human well-being*, Statement from the Board of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. 15. See www.maweb.org.
- ⁷ *Global forest resources assessment 2010: Key findings*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2010, p. 3. See [ww.fao.org](http://www.fao.org).
- ⁸ *Warning signs: The science and impacts of climate change*, Whittington, E (Christian Aid, June 2010), p. 5.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *The consumption explosion: The 3rd UK interdependence report*, New Economics Foundation, 2009, p. 3.
- ¹¹ See www.globalwitness.org.
- ¹² *Soil not oil: Climate change, peak oil and food insecurity*, Vandana Shiva, (Zed Books, 2008), p. 77.
- ¹³ *A climate of conflict: The links between climate change, peace and war*, Smith, D. and Vivekananda, J, (International Alert, November 2007).
- ¹⁴ *Climate change, conflict and fragility*, Smith, D and Vivekananda, J, (International Alert, 2009), p. 8.
- ¹⁵ *From pacification to peacebuilding: A call to global transformation* Francis, D (PlutoPress, 2010).
- ¹⁶ *Climate change and security*, Rogers, P, Oxford Research Group monthly briefing, September 2010. See www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Security for the common good: A christian challenge to military security strategies*, Pax Christi and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2009, pp. 7–8.
- ¹⁹ The Sustainable Security group of Northern Friends Peace Board have recently produced a statement of concern on sustainable security. See http://nfpb.gn.apc.org/sust_sec/.
- ²⁰ 'Two Economies' Berry, W. in *Every man an artist: Readings in the traditional philosophy of art* (World Wisdom, 2005).
- ²¹ Hubris means arrogance and overestimating one's own importance. For the ancient Greeks, to do so would result in tragedy.
- ²² *The happy planet index 2.0: Why good lives don't have to cost the earth* (New Economics Foundation, 2009).
- ²³ *Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet*, Jackson, T (earthscan, 2009).
- ²⁴ *Spirited living: Waging conflict, building peace*, Fisher, S (Quaker Books, 2004), pp. 77–78.
- ²⁵ See www.eqat.wordpress.com.
- ²⁶ *Peace: flourishing in relation to one another*, Gee, D, (QPSW, 2005), Part 3, Think Peace. Download from www.quaker.org.uk/think-peace.
- ²⁷ *Our common future*, United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987. This is commonly referred to as the Brundtland Report.

What can Friends do?

Reflect, discuss and educate

Reflect by yourself or with F/friends, perhaps as a starting point for discussion. Educate yourself and others about sustainability and peace. Perhaps you could have a discussion, workshop or activity day in your meeting, or with other groups?

Questions

1. What does it mean to you to have a commitment to peace in a world faced with climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion?
2. What can Quaker testimony offer in a world faced with climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion?
3. How does thinking about sustainability and peace make you feel – depressed? Angry (if so, at who)? Scared? Hopeful? Inspired to take action?
4. Is there anything you strongly disagree with in this article? Or strongly agree with?

Other resources

- Living Sustainably, *Journeys in the Spirit: Youth work edition*, issue 12, February 2011. Two days of sustainability-related activities. Aimed at 12- to 18-year-olds but suitable for adults.
- *Peace 350 years on – what does the peace testimony mean today?* (2011) A QPSW-designed workshop based on the 1660/1 declaration of the peace testimony to Charles II.
- *Responding to climate change pack* (Updated in 2011). QPSW briefing pack. Includes six briefings, questions for reflection and suggestions for action.
- *Sustainable security: a briefing for Friends* (2011). A briefing co-produced by QPSW, Northern Friends Peace Board and Oxford Research Group, outlining the concept of sustainable security, with reflection points for Friends.
- Sustainable security display. Eight panels explaining the concept of sustainable security in a clear, easy-to-read format. Available in large A1 (borrow for free) and smaller A3 (buy for £25, borrow for free) formats.
- The Sustainable Security group of Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) have produced a statement of concern on sustainable security, accompanied by suggested questions for discussion, and a list of additional links.
- *The Quaker peace testimony* (2011). A QPSW booklet containing details of the background behind the peace testimony and of its impact today.
- *Think Peace*, David Gee (2005). A series of six booklets about a commitment to peace grounded in faith.

All resources are available at www.quaker.org.uk or from Sunniva Taylor (details below).

Live differently

We can all make changes in our own lives, and our meetings, to reduce our carbon footprint and to be more sustainable.

Suggested resources

- *Greening your meeting*. A toolkit from QPSW and Living Witness. Available from June 2011 in print from Quaker Bookshop and from www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability.
- The Living Witness Project provides information and resources on living more sustainably and works with groups of Friends to help them witness for a more sustainable world. See www.livingwitness.org.uk.

Speak out

For details of current campaigns and opportunities to speak out see www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability.

Contact us

This thinkpiece was written by Sunniva Taylor, QPSW Sustainability & Peace Programme Manager. To find out more about this programme see www.quaker.org.uk/sustainability, where you can also sign up to receive the *Sustainability for Peace* newsletter.

If you have comments, thoughts, or questions, or would like to request copies of the materials above please do get in touch. Sunniva Taylor: sunnivat@quaker.org.uk; 020 7663 1047.

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