

Quakers

NEDERLANDSE JAARVERGADERING VAN
HET RELIGIEUS GENOOTSCHAP DER VRIENDEN

To Friends Worldwide...

We were together for four days from 17 May onwards for our Yearly Meeting. Our theme was 'Quakers and Just Peace' because this was also the theme of the meeting of the World Council of Churches, exactly a year ago, in Jamaica. From that meeting we learned that the churches have chosen a very important way forward, namely the decision to work together to declare war illegal! The way of the so-called Just War has now been abandoned; the still small voice of the traditional peace churches has been heard. During the days in Barchem we have explored what this means for *us*, concretely.

It is a fact that the world is still not freed from injustice and war, that there are still many places where the blossoming of a just peace is still not in sight. Although there are hopeful signs we realize that we still live in a broken world. During our time here we have felt tossed between hope and hopelessness, but we have also certainly been shaken awake.

We have continued to build on our actions in response to the Kairos-Palestine document. Friends who have been active in the occupied territories and a representative of "A Different Jewish Voice" have shared their important visions and experiences with us. The representative of "A Different Jewish Voice" emphasized that the Israel-Palestine conflict is in essence a territorial conflict, and not a religious conflict, although several parties in the conflict are using religious motives to legitimate their position in the conflict.

As Netherlands Yearly Meeting we will request our government to renounce their current plans to intensify the bilateral relations between The Netherlands and Israel.

We wholeheartedly endorse the call from the Quaker Council for European Affairs to our government to undertake actions that will end the occupation. This call demands:

- a total import ban on goods from the settlements in the occupied areas which are illegal according to international law
- A ban on traveling in the European Union for all colonists who have been identified as perpetrators of violence against the Palestinians
- An end to all arms sales to the Israeli government
- An end to all cooperation with the Israeli government in the areas of security and defense-related research
- To call a halt to any intensification of the bilateral relations with the Israeli government until such time that government demonstrates respect for human rights and international law.

We agree with Jean Zaru, clerk of Ramallah Monthly Meeting: "don't be pro-Israel, don't be pro-Palestine, but pro-justice". From that position we have discussed actions in our base groups that individual friends can and want to undertake.

Liz Scurfield and Martina Weitsch were with us and gave a retrospect of their 10-year commitment to the QCEA. Liz focused particularly on the QCEA's efforts in relation to Israel-Palestine. Liz and Martina are inspiring, indefatigable Friends.

Several Friends have attended the Quaker World Conference in Kenya and have shared their inspiring experiences with us. They have called us to action;

- to give hands and feet, as is our expression, to the call from the World Conference to start a worldwide campaign for peace and eco-justice, just as we once did against slavery
- To experiment with different forms of meeting for worship
- As monthly meetings to start partnerships with a Friends' Church, in order to stimulate spiritual exchanges between different traditions

This demands our commitment and challenges us to be open to change.

The theme of 'Just Peace' was brought down from world level to individual level. This has made us realize that world problems require personal choices and actions from us. From the interest groups, too, it was evident that we are a vibrant and active society, willing to be dynamic. It was evident in several sessions that we actively engage with problems, whether in Amsterdam, Burundi or Palestine. Furthermore, we have also enjoyed each other's unexpected talents during the Creative Evening.

The children have taken part in a programme in which anything was possible, varying from baking bread to making djembés. The children have also looked at ways in which we can reach more children and get them interested in the Quakers.

We take our leave from the Woodbrookers house because we have decided to have our next yearly meeting in a simpler accommodation.

After seven years Kees Nieuwerth has decided to step down as clerk of the Yearly Meeting. Marlies Tjallingii is willing to take on this task

We have been inspired and feel encouraged to go back 'into the world'... Our strength is the power to connect and to renew – and this we have all experienced in our meeting.

We send you our greetings and best wishes for a year of peace, inspiration and strength.

On behalf of Netherlands Yearly Meeting,
Kees Nieuwerth,
Clerk