

## **EPISTLE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF QUAKER COUNCIL FOR EUROPEAN AFFAIRS NOVEMBER 2024**

Dear Friends

Greetings from Quaker House in Brussels where QCEA's General Assembly (GA) has met over 15-16 November 2024.

Yearly meeting representatives and alternates, funding support group representatives, the Executive Committee and representatives from EMES and EMEYF, together with the Staff team, gathered together. We welcomed new members and QCEA staff. In opening worship, hearing words from Joanna Macy, we were encouraged 'to be absolutely present'.

Our third workshop with Sarah Diedro Jordão on anti-racism and anti-oppressive behaviour started with a summary of the two previous sessions and then in small groups we considered what we can do to improve diversity, both in QCEA and also in our own communities and meetings. The recognition of the dominance of English was clear and became a theme throughout the two days. We look forward to including an agenda item at future General Assemblies in another European language, and to learning from those in our community who already have more focus on translation and interpreting in their meetings. We ask Yearly Meetings to consider diversity when nominating Friends for GA.

In the Friday evening session, we also talked about the need for effective induction of new GA members with possibly the introduction of a buddy system. There could also be a pre-GA forum to pose questions and maybe help those of us who are nervous of talking in public. We appointed a working group to consider all the suggestions and to bring proposals back to future GAs. The Friday evening session ended with a reading from the Epistle of the 2024 Friends World Plenary during Epilogue.

On Saturday morning Tracey Martin, QCEA Director, gave us an update on the work done by QCEA staff at a time of flux and political hardening following the June 2024 European elections. She started by telling us of staff changes and welcoming Celina Bebenek our new Communications and Programmes officer, who brings to us her knowledge also on Conscientious Objection. On climate justice and peace, Alice Privey stressed the importance of emphasising a socially just transition for all within the EU priorities. We affirm the need to hear the voices of people from the global south as real agents and not just as tokens. To this end one of QCEA's actions has been to publish stories about communities most affected by militarism and the climate crisis. Maybritt Lyck-Bowen told us of her work in finishing the Migration and Peace Handbook started by Saskia Basa and we look forward to its publication and launch early in 2025. In all this work, an important focus for QCEA is using our Quaker experience in promoting dialogue especially in more polarised political and social contexts.

While we will not be going into full partnership with American Friends Service Committee, through Tracey's work, QCEA is planning to offer on the ground support when African peacebuilders come to the EU in 2025. There will also be a joint QCEA and QPSW conference in June 2025 on the theme Faith in Action in an Age of Permacrisis.

Looking forward, there will be a new Strategy Working Group to consider our vision from 2026 to 2031 and further ahead. In the current very unstable world and taking into account

our own limited finances we need also to extend this vision further into the future. GA members will be involved in small groups to feed into this work.

We ended our Assembly with dinner in Quaker House. A time of relaxation and building community.

In Friendship

**Quaker Council for European Affairs**  
**16 November 2024**