

## **Minute from the 'Forced Migration: how can Quakers respond' Conference held at Woodbrooke 3-5 February 2017;**

*Hosted by the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, Quaker Council on European Affairs, Quaker United Nations Office, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Woodbrooke.*

We remind Quakers of Advices & Queries 33 and 32:

*Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?*

*Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?*

We came as individuals across the water, by road and rail, from countries across Europe, and cities, towns and villages in UK to focus our energy around forced migration and how Quakers can respond. We are all at different places on our journey, for some this is new, others bring years of commitment to supporting people seeking sanctuary and refugees, or of trying to change the system, and we share strong Quakerly commitment to peace, justice and equality that has guided us through the weekend together, and to healing the brokenness of our own societies.

The people who have brought us together have come from far away places where there is war, oppression of people on the basis of race, religion, nationality, gender, sexuality, belonging to a particular social group, or their political opinion, and others have fled war, famine, and poverty that has been created by climate change and politics. They too have travelled by many often-dangerous means to reach sanctuary, over water, and by road and rail. They come from cities, towns and villages looking for a safe place to live and for their children. Some of them are children, they travel alone, vulnerable, cold, hungry, frightened, brave and full of dreams.

We come from communities where some welcome those seeking safety and others do not. Others who have brought us together are decision-makers, MPs who create laws, Judges who interpret the laws, Home Office staff who put the law into action, private agencies that carry out work on behalf of the Government for example in providing accommodation, detention facilities, transport around the system and sometimes out of the country, and then there is the media.

All these people, and every person displaced whether in our own country or moving to another is in our thoughts.

Forced migration in its various forms is clearly a concern for Quakers to take forward in our individual lives, through our communities and Meetings, our Quaker bodies and Yearly Meetings, and when we work alongside others. We cannot change the world alone, however we may bring seeds of change and nourish the soil.

Quakers have through time been involved in every aspect of the humanitarian responses to forced migration including advocacy, legal help, trauma care, medical care, language and housing through the common thread of friendship.

If coming in a unsteady boat across the Mediterranean is anyone's safest route, we as humanity can do better. We need a different language for migration because the current situation and discourse is 'othering' people.

We feel a deep leading to act together on a political level in Britain and at the European level. In doing so we are acting upon our heritage, our way of being, and the leading of the spirit.

We respond to Tim Gee's invitation to put together a short publication to inform the basis of a spirit-led position of Quakers in Britain, and so to be sent for consideration by our Yearly Meeting. We invite the following people from the weekend to contribute a short 400-word draft on the following themes:

- Reflections after Calais – Renke Meuwese,
- A tested concern - Julia Bush,
- Causes of forced migration – Alex Randal and Andrew Lane,
- The experience of destitution in the UK – Chris Gwyntopher and Bridget Obi,
- The hostile environment – Barbara and David Forbes, and Gina Clayton,
- Detention centres – Crystal Dickinson,
- Brexit – Till Geiger,
- and Working for a safer world, Laurel Townhead.

The unconditional love that flows from our gathered Conference this weekend flows into the inspired Minute from yesterday's Meeting for Sufferings that was read earlier.

We work towards the breaking down of all barriers that divide us and define us, whether between countries, in the NHS, between those who have faith and those who do not, or in our own minds.

We pray that the 'scales will fall from our own eyes' and those of our politicians - as they did from Saul when he sought to create a hostile environment in his time, and that we may be the leaves on the tree of life which are for the healing of nations.

*"That which is morally wrong cannot be politically right"* 1822 QFP 23.26

5 February 2017