

Promoting dialogue at the United Nations

QUNO Geneva

Trusted by the international community with consultative status at the United Nations, the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva is where the Society can assist world leaders in forming and fleshing out policy, bringing Quaker insights and values to their work.

Established in 1948, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) seeks to give a voice to the voiceless at the world's great political forum. Its work is quiet, determined and impassioned, and its successes have taken many years – but they have been significant.

In answer to a concern raised by a member of Switzerland Yearly Meeting, QUNO staff led the way in raising the issue of the use of children as soldiers back in 1979. UN processes are laborious and thorough – and slow – but QUNO persisted, and in 2000 the UN agreed the Optional Protocol on Children in Armed Conflict. There aren't many organisations which

can commit to an issue for over twenty years, but QUNO – with the Society's support squarely behind it – can do exactly that.

In recognition of Quaker work on a wide range of issues, world Friends have general consultative status at ECOSOC – the UN Economic and Social Council. ECOSOC's 54 elected members oversee the work of more familiar UN bodies such as the World Health Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and UNICEF.

General consultative status means that QUNO staff have the right to propose items for ECOSOC's agenda, to attend and speak at meetings, and to submit reports

for ECOSOC's attention. In 2008, QUNO published reports on conscientious objection to military service, the treatment of women in prison and the impact on children, and on disarmament and development. Addressing key topics with Quaker insights, QUNO's wisdom and hard work are not just heard but welcomed by the UN.

QUNO's work isn't confined to the debating chamber. Behind the scenes, diplomats meet at Quaker House in Geneva in private and on an equal footing. There, away from the pressures of the UN's public activities, delegations can talk openly and in detail, reaching a better understanding of the issues behind a disagreement, challenging an assumption, or exploring a new way forward on a controversial issue. QUNO work at the World Trade Organisation led to an agreement on access to affordable medicines in developing countries.

Quaker peaceworkers are at the heart of all this work. From making lunch for diplomats to share to researching the latest findings on imprisoned women, they are helping QUNO to promote dialogue at the UN – and, step by step, to bring about a more just world.



Female prisoners in Rumbek prison in Sudan, watched over by the prison director.

Photo: Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures

Find out more about Quaker peaceworkers – visit
www.quaker.org.uk/appeal

