**Message delivered by Paul Parker at the Interfaith Talanoa Dialogue held at Garnethill Synagogue, Glasgow, alongside COP26, 31 October 2021**

Hello. I’m Paul Parker and I’m the Recording Clerk of Quakers in Britain, the senior staff member for our small community of faithful people in Britain who believe there can be heaven on Earth, and that we have to build it ourselves.

That means that for us, the idea of living sustainably and peacefully together on this planet is core business. It matters to us, because we recognise that there is something of the divine in every person. So something which causes one of us to suffer diminishes us all.

That has led Quakers in Britain to work for climate justice, for a response to climate change which does not punish those least responsible. It led us, in 2013, to divest from fossil fuels, and to campaign against fracking for shale gas. It leads us to call for reparations for loss and damage, and for far-reaching changes to the economic system which has brought us to this point. We can talk about individual behaviour changes, and many Quakers have made changes to their homes and lifestyles, but a response to climate change which has justice at its heart has to be about systems – about what we can all do, not just what I can do. It leads us to use Quaker processes to work at the UN, and to pin our hopes to quiet processes and small circles, and to send people here to COP. It leads us to protest and to civil disobedience and to lobbying parliamentarians, as well as to dialogue, collaboration and individual commitments. We know our actions are not yet enough.

This evening I want to say something about hope. At heart, this COP26 is a hopeful event. It carries the hope of multilateral agreement, of co-operation between peoples. It brings hope that we can act together for the common good, the hope of the worst averted, the hope of support to the nations and people most deserving of it. We can hope for mitigations, for climate finance, for adaptations, and, crucially, for loss and damage – support for those worst affected by a crisis which is not their fault. We can hope that the voices of those already suffering in the global South – though poorly represented here in Glasgow – will be heard. We can hope for urgent action from our governments. We can hope for an end to fossil fuel subsidies. We can hope the oil will be left in the ground unburnt. We can hope for carbon budgets that bring emissions down so we have a good chance of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Even that means big changes to our world. But the difference between that and 2 degrees, or the barely-imaginable consequences of 3.5 or 5 degrees if we do nothing, means we can hope for action that will limit the rise to 1.5. These are big hopes. But surely we have a right to hope.

I’m realistic that these hopes may not be fulfilled at this COP. That makes me sad, and angry. But I refuse to be hope-free. I want to enter into this COP in good faith, full of hope. These multilateral processes are the best chance we have to reach a global consensus of climate governance.

The thought that won’t leave me, though, is that I am part of a generation which can still hope for these things. We still have that chance. We know the science. We can avert untold suffering and conflicts. We can change how the system we have created works. We have the multilateral processes, imperfect as they are, through which our hopes could be met. We have the resources, the technology, the innovators we need.

But unless this COP sets us on the right path, we may be the last generation to be allowed to hope. The last generation to be able to see a path which leads to a just settlement, to a future which allows us to leave peaceably with one another on this beautiful planet. The thought of a future generation who are denied that hope terrifies me. We will be judged on our actions. We have to be accountable to them for our response – even though those future generations are not yet here – at least not here in the UK. There is a terrible risk of complacency, of fatalism, of resignation to what seems inevitable. This, so far, has been the West’s response, while people in the global South are already suffering. How dare we! We must not rest, but commit to righting the wrongs of centuries of racist history which have brought us to the place we are now.

As a Quaker I live my life in the belief that there is an inward voice, a guiding spirit which prompts me to act. I have faith that we can be led to solutions. I have faith that there is a loving way through this. I refuse to be fearful, but the thought of those who come after us losing their right to hope fills me with righteous fury. We cannot and must not let that hope-free future happen. That’s what brings me here, to Glasgow, to stand alongside you all, to hope, to work together to build a hopeful heaven here on this Earth we share.