



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Peaceworker journal letter from Geneva

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QUNO, Geneva

Dear Friends

Since writing my last journal letter in November my time as the human rights and refugees programme assistant at the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) has given me more incredible opportunities, positive challenges and unforgettable experiences.

Through my work with QUNO I have become much more connected with Quakers around the world. At the beginning of December I spoke on a panel at the Sanctuary Everywhere conference hosted jointly by the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) and Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW) in Brussels. The conference brought together over 100 people, who were mostly Quakers from across Europe, for a series of talks and discussions concerning refugees in Europe. On the last evening of the conference, a session was held to allow the attendees to share stories about the organisations and projects they are involved with that help refugees. It lasted

for over two hours and I was left completely awestruck by how many ways people have dedicated their skills, energy and time to helping refugees. Before joining QUNO, I worked with a charity in Northern Ireland that provides frontline assistance to refugees and so I know exactly how important such projects are to ensuring the welfare of so many people. At the panel session that I spoke on, I gave a presentation about the Global Compact for Migration and how QUNO has been engaging with its development process. QUNO has been closely following the development of this agreement since it was initiated by the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in September 2016. Coinciding with the conclusion of the Compact's consultation process at the end of 2017, QUNO published a briefing paper I wrote on the Compact's development and how Friends can engage with the process as it moves into the negotiation stage in 2018. It was really enriching to speak to an audience that cared so deeply about this issue and it was also a big personal achievement to speak in front of so many people.

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A further highlight was achieved at the start of the Human Rights Council session that ran from 26 February until 23 March. In the first week of the session, Mary Robinson, the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and seventh President of Ireland, spoke in the Palais de Nations at a panel session commemorating Nelson Mandela. I attended and asked the panel a question on how the human rights of irregular migrants can be reflected in the Global Compact for Migration. Mary Robinson replied and called for the human rights of every person to be respected regardless of their migratory status. I was able to speak to Mary Robinson directly afterwards and thank her for answering our question. This is certainly not something that I ever imagined doing!

What makes the experience especially rewarding is that a few weeks later at a round of negotiations for the Compact in the General Assembly in New York, Mary Robinson gave a strong statement about the human rights of all migrants, reflecting the concerns that NGOs such as QUNO share.

Since Christmas I have also worked on the 'Agreed Language Toolkit'. Throughout the negotiation phase of the Global Compact, we felt it was important that NGOs and States have an accessible document that summarises the agreements that States have made regarding the rights of migrants. So going through all of the resolutions and treaties that have been passed down the years, the toolkit highlights the obligations that States are expected to abide by concerning, for example, migrants' right to healthcare or employment. As well as

being a practical aid for those involved with the negotiations, it will hopefully send a message to States that they should not undo what has already been agreed with respect to the human rights of migrants. This is just a snapshot of what I have been up to so far at QUNO.

With the days getting brighter in Geneva and exciting plans ahead in QUNO, including putting together and leading Summer School, I am thoroughly looking forward to the next six months. I cannot thank everyone enough for supporting QUNO's work and for making my position and the opportunities that come with it possible.

In peace,

Stephen Brown