

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T FOCUS ON JUSTICE?



INTRODUCTION

This booklet is the fourth in a series designed by Quakers in Britain to explore one analysis of climate breakdown and how we might respond, known as climate justice. It's a term that is increasingly used in the UK, but not one that is well understood. It challenges our status quo and imagines a different world – a world in which we recognise and address the inequalities and power imbalances that have led us here; in which we repair the harm we have done to one another and to the planet, and build a more sustainable, loving system of organising ourselves.

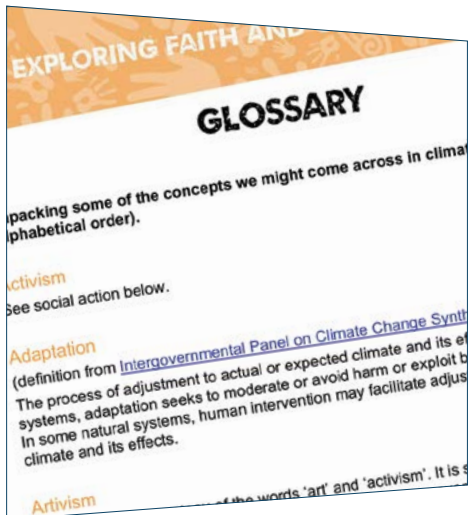
We have tried to make these booklets as accessible in language and content as possible, while offering plenty of links to other resources for those who wish to explore topics further. We welcome ignorance: for us, what's important is a curiosity to learn. While we will try to explore the topic of climate justice as comprehensively as we can, we will never be able to cover it fully. We hope these booklets will serve as a launchpad for you to begin your own journey of exploration into what taking action for climate justice might mean to you.

There will be six booklets in total, and each will consist of three main sections: analysis, practical examples and queries. The analysis section is intended to provide some basic content for consideration, along with lots of further avenues to explore. The practical examples section shares information about grassroots groups and campaigns in the UK and globally that you can draw inspiration from or support. Finally, the queries section offers

some questions for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups, as a tool to process and integrate your thoughts about the booklet and its topic.

As a companion to the booklets, we have put together a glossary of key terms, which you can find www.quaker.org.uk/documents/climate-justice-glossary. Any terms followed in the booklet text by '[G]' appear in the glossary.

For Quakers working through these



booklets, we recommend taking a look at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre's [Responding to Ecological Crisis](#) resource. This has been designed to support Quakers to explore the spiritual underpinnings of the Quaker commitment to sustainability. It will tend to the 'personal' aspect of your journey through these booklets and complement the resources and promptings they contain.

As in the days of early Friends, we sense this is a time of prophecy and want to uphold the prophets in our midst and in the wider world. We must heed the Spirit's call to urgent action. Prophets are visionaries, calling out those in power, and reconcilers stand in the middle of conflict: in this both run great risk.

From the Epistle, Yearly Meeting Gathering 2021

As we embark on this journey, we are demanding courage of each other, looking to support each other, and, especially, seeking to hear and see prophetic voices and examples. We extend an invitation to all to embrace discomfort. Learning to see the wrong in our lives and in our society, and experiencing that inwardly, is the moment we become truly engaged in transforming our lives.

ANALYSIS

1. Introduction: what's the economy got to do with it?

In module 1, we proposed the following working definition of climate justice:

"[A climate justice approach] asks us to **focus on the root causes** of climate breakdown by **recognising the systems of oppression** that have led to it. These include oppression based on class, race, disability, and gender. Climate justice aims to **fundamentally transform** the ways we relate to one another and to the planet, **so that we may live as equals, in harmony with the earth.**"

We might therefore broadly characterise approaches not based on justice as those which:

- ignore root causes and historical responsibility, instead perhaps looking for scapegoats
- see climate change as a purely technical problem, disregarding the role of power and oppression – possibly arguing that struggles for gender and racial equality, workers' rights etc. are 'a distraction' from climate action

- prop up the current economic system and its power dynamics and enable destructive activities to continue
- fail to respect the living world or understand the fundamental interconnectedness of all living things.

As extreme weather intensifies, it has become harder for those with a vested interest in the current system to deny that climate change is real. As a result, most have changed their tactics. For fossil fuel companies and their associates, that means **greenwashing [G]** their activities and lobbying for technologies that will protect their business model. For the nationalist right, it means using fear of climate breakdown to push racist discourses around overseas aid, security, migration and population.

Those of us who seek to build a just and peaceful world must therefore be alert to the tactics and narratives used by those who are pursuing a very different agenda. The climate crisis was so absent from politics and media for so many years that it is easy to assume all climate action is a step in the right direction. We should be careful to examine policies and language around climate and ask ourselves whether they are truly part of the world we want to build.

Of course, we know that we must also keep an open mind, and think it possible we may be mistaken. How do we know when to embrace differences and agree to disagree, and when a view is dangerous and should be challenged? Sometimes this may be clear to us. Sometimes our shared Quaker discernment can help. Sometimes we may need to wait for new Light.

2. What are false solutions?

To conform a little to a wrong way strengthens the hands of such who carry wrong customs to their utmost extent; and the more a person appears to be virtuous and heavenly-minded, the more powerfully does his conformity operate in favour of evil-doers... While we profess in all cases to live in constant opposition to that which is contrary to universal righteousness ... what language is sufficient to set forth the strength of those obligations we are under to beware lest by our example we lead others wrong?

John Woolman, 1763
Quaker faith & practice 20.47

People in the climate justice movement often talk about 'false solutions' –

approaches which claim to be addressing the climate crisis, but which fail to do so, or even make the problem worse, harming communities and habitats. There is no definitive list, as new technologies and policies continue to emerge, but a list of false solutions commonly includes hydrogen, biomass, nuclear power, carbon offsetting, and carbon capture and storage. Many of these false solutions are promoted by the fossil fuel industry, since they minimise disruption to their business model.



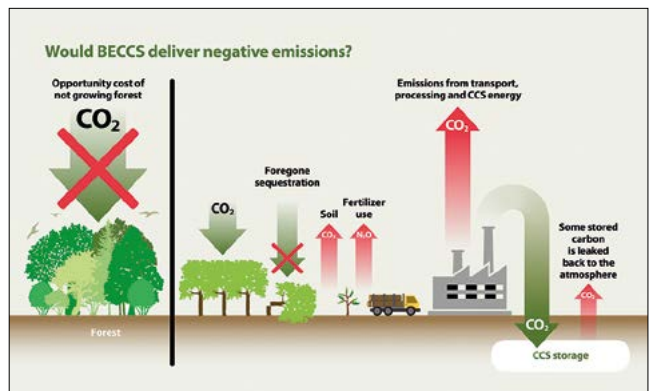
Photo: THINK b/Adobe Stock

There is also a longstanding attempt to label gas as a 'clean' or 'transition' fuel: thanks to industry lobbying, the European Parliament **recently voted to include gas and nuclear in its list of sustainable energy investments**.

The UK's net zero target relies heavily on the 'net' – that is, the residual emissions which will need to be removed from the atmosphere. This is done naturally through plant photosynthesis and by some sea creatures. Protecting and restoring carbon sinks like oceans, coastal wetlands, forests and peatlands is therefore essential to addressing global heating – and there are many projects doing this. However, these are increasingly being used as currency in 'carbon offsetting', where polluters pay for 'carbon credits' to allow them to continue their activities.

Natural carbon sequestration has limits; it is not a 'get out of jail free' card. Research by Oxfam found that **the amount of land required for currently planned carbon removal would be equivalent to all the farmland in the world**. Technological methods of carbon removal, on the other hand, remain unproven – to an astonishing degree, considering how far 'net zero' plans rely upon them. Direct air carbon capture is

– to an astonishing degree, considering how far 'net zero' plans rely upon them. Direct air carbon capture is



graphic: Fern - www.fern.org

extremely **energy-intensive and difficult to achieve**. Numerous studies have deemed it unworkable as a method of emissions reduction – and some projects emit more carbon dioxide than they capture. Furthermore, almost all carbon actually captured is **currently used to help extract more oil**.

In the coming years, we are also likely to hear more about **geoengineering** – a range of possible drastic actions which seek to alter the earth's climate by intervening in planetary systems at a massive scale. The impossibility of testing these approaches at scale makes them incredibly dangerous. Global power dynamics also mean that the risks and benefits of geoengineering would almost certainly be distributed in line with the existing wealth divide, with Europe and North America protecting themselves at the expense of the global south. There is currently no international framework regulating most forms of geoengineering.

Further exploration:



[ClientEarth – The Greenwashing Files – Drax](#)



[Friends of the Earth – A dangerous distraction – the offsetting con](#)



[Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung – A technofix for the climate? \(Part 1 of 3\)](#)

3. Profiting from catastrophe

The Covid-19 pandemic showed us once again that there is always someone willing to profit from catastrophe. Moderna **received more than \$4bn of public funding to develop a vaccine, then set the price high and moved the profits into a tax haven**. In the UK, stories continue to circulate about the extent of corruption in the government's procurement of emergency equipment.

Every time a disaster strikes, it compounds existing inequalities. We have seen this with Covid-19 – both in the UK and globally – and we see it with the climate crisis. When our economic and political systems allow companies to profit from disaster, the impacts are multiplied again through rising prices.



Photo: African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) via Flickr

The escalating climate crisis is also fuelling violent conflict and forced migration – causing immense human suffering, but creating opportunities for profit for the border and surveillance industry. Between 2019 and 2025, the global border security market is predicted to grow by **between 7.2% and 8.6%**. As well as putting pressure on asset managers to stop investing in fossil fuels, it may be time to turn our attention to their investments in agribusiness, border security and other industries with poor human rights records seeking to profit from climate chaos.



Photo: Barbara Zandova/via Unsplash

Naomi Klein, in her 2007 book *The Shock Doctrine*, explores how proponents of “free market” capitalism have exploited moments of crisis, capitalising on disorientation and fear to force through their policies and create opportunities for profit. Klein argues that the best way to resist shock is to equip yourself with information, so you can understand what is happening and why.

Further exploration:



[Transnational Institute – Cashing in on Crisis](#)



[Drilled podcast: There Will Be Fraud](#)



[Naomi Klein – Disaster Capitalism](#)

4. When climate action becomes a justification for oppression

We recognise that separating humanity from nature, from the whole of life, leads to humankind's own destruction and to the death of nations. Only through a re-integration of humanity into the whole of nature can our people be made stronger . . . This striving toward connectedness with the totality of life, with nature itself, a nature into which we are born, this is the deepest meaning and the true essence of National Socialist thought.

Ernst Lehmann, *Biological Will*, 1934

Did that give you a jolt? Ernst Lehmann was a professor of botany who characterised National Socialism (Nazism) as “politically applied biology”. We are used to associating the extreme right with climate denial and disregard for nature. But we should remind ourselves that it wasn't always this way – and be alert to the ways in which ecological concerns have long threaded through fascist narratives.

What some call ‘ecofascism’ [G] typically depends on the Nazi concept of ‘blood and soil’: the belief in an inextricable link between an ethnic group and the land, with immigrants and other ethnic groups characterised as rootless and impure. Today, some far-right politicians in Europe are drawing on the same ideology **to paint anti-immigration policies as environmental protection**. This relies on an argument popular with the far right, but which is also put forward by some in the green movement: that there are too many people.

Anxieties about pollution, resource scarcity and biodiversity loss have long fed into narratives blaming ‘overpopulation’. “Our numbers are burdensome to the world, which can hardly support us,” opined Tertullian of Carthage, writing in the second century A.D.

Photo: Marcelo Perez del Carpio / Climate Visuals Countdown

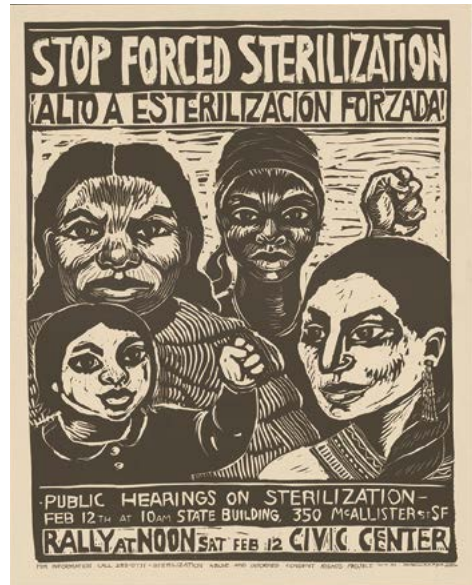


While rapid population growth in a particular area can put pressure on resources and infrastructure, the impacts of this are local, not global – and are often part of a wider picture of resource hoarding and **land grabs**. There are practical as well as **statistical** and ethical problems in the argument that addressing ‘overpopulation’ is a solution to the climate crisis.

With fertility rates in sharp decline across **Europe** and other developed countries, there is often a focus on **parts of the global south** where the fertility rate remains high. Rather than addressing the structural, economic drivers of climate breakdown so resources are used sustainably and equitably, this approach transfers responsibility to those with the smallest footprint and the least power.

Many people who express concern about population levels do so from a place of goodwill. However, taken to extremes, narratives about overpopulation can be used in ways that have serious consequences. If we do not keep justice and our

common humanity at the forefront of our arguments, we leave space for those who use the ecological crisis as an excuse for violence or repression. Arguments around 'too many people' were, for example, cited **by the El Paso and Christchurch mass murderers**. The same narrative has been used to justify the **long history of forced sterilisation** for groups seen as undesirable – an atrocity **not consigned to the distant past**. This distracts us from the real drivers of the climate crisis: fossil fuel companies, agribusiness and others who seek to profit from widespread destruction of the environment.



Graphic: Stop forced sterilization poster, Rachel Romero/San Francisco Poster Brigade

The Covid-19 pandemic, and the apparent resurgence of wildlife during lockdowns, prompted comments in some quarters that 'humanity is the virus', to be eliminated from the earth. If that were so, there would be no point trying to tackle climate breakdown or build a just world: we would be condemned by our very nature. When we tell the story that 'humanity' as a whole (as opposed to specific groups, industries or systems) has abused the living world and caused climate breakdown, we make it harder to recognise or imagine alternatives to the status quo. Thankfully, indigenous peoples from around the world offer evidence that humans are part of the natural world, not inherently at war with it, and can live in symbiotic relationship with other forms of life.

Further exploration:



[From climate denial to Blood and Soil – HOPE not hate](#)



[Lacuna Magazine – Ecofascism: the dark side of environmentalism](#)



[Naomi Klein – Let Them Drown](#)

5. Is it too late?

Ignoring the future because it is unlikely to matter might backfire. “Running for the hills” – to create our own ecocommunity – might backfire. But we definitely know that continuing to work in the ways we have done until now is not just backfiring – it is holding the gun to our own heads. With this in mind, we can choose to explore how to evolve what we do, without any simple answers.

Jem Bendell, 'Deep Adaptation', 2018

As the impacts of climate breakdown have become more evident in more parts of the world, an argument has emerged in the global north that it is “too late” for action to avert catastrophe. This argument is adopted by different people for different purposes. We see it taking the place of climate denial among those who

want to maintain fossil-fuelled business as usual; and we see it picked up by media outlets as a good headline.

(For example, the [UN Environment Programme report in October 2022](#)

which observed that there is “no credible pathway to 1.5°C in place” *at present* was widely reported as asserting that there is “no credible pathway to 1.5°C” – which is a very different thing.)

Photo: AMISOM via Flickr



However, the ‘too late’ narrative has also gained some traction in the world of climate activism. Jem Bendell’s 2018 paper ‘[Deep Adaptation](#)’, which argues that “near-term societal collapse” is inevitable, has inspired a community and sparked intense debate within the climate movement. To prepare for collapse, the paper argues, we need to move beyond current understandings of adaptation to consider four ‘Rs’:

- resilience
- relinquishment (of things that might make matters worse)
- restoration (of ways of being we have lost and which might help us)
- reconciliation (with each other and with the reality of our predicament).

The paper has been [condemned by some scientists for cherry-picking scientific](#)

data and focusing on worst-case scenarios (Bendell has **responded**), while the movement it spawned has been criticised for focusing on affluent people's fears of future collapse rather than the current impacts of climate breakdown, and for letting fossil capitalism off the hook by avoiding political engagement. Some Deep Adaptation followers take the view that near-term human extinction is inevitable, and have adopted 'prepper' behaviour, stockpiling resources and moving out of urban areas. Others have embraced the movement as a space to work collectively on peaceful ways of preparing for possible collapse.

Extinction Rebellion rose to prominence urging those in power to 'tell the truth'. Many Quakers (and others) feel this keenly, and have experienced a sense of relief – mixed with other emotions – when they hear others reject false optimism and speak of the gravity of the crisis. We should be wary, however, of assuming that the worst-case scenario is always the truth. Exaggeration is rife on social media, and can alienate people or make them mistrust other information.



Photo: John England via Flickr

Whether we feel deep down that society will turn itself around, or that we will build a new civilisation in its ashes, or that neither of these futures will come to pass, we can act from a place of love today, doing whatever we are called to do. Some of us may find wisdom in the theological concept of the kingdom of God as 'already but not yet', and the biblical parable of the mustard seed:

Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."

Luke 13:18–19

Further exploration:



In Deep Adaptation's Focus on Societal Collapse, a Hopeful Call to Action – Inside Climate News



Your Brain on Climate – Grief



The Kingdom of God – As Quakers See It

6. Challenging hate and division

As the climate crisis escalates, its impacts may bring increased conflict and division to already fractured societies, including in the UK. As we have seen, we cannot assume that universally shared concern about climate will lead to unified action. If we are to have a chance of responding well as a society, we need to work to build peace, find common ground, and challenge the politics of hate.

Photo: Stefan Müller via Flickr



We may be better able to do this when we can imagine – individually and collectively – the world we are trying to build. Research is inconclusive on whether fear can be an effective catalyst for action; but it is clear that fear *alone* will not lead us to a just and peaceful world. In a world where 24-hour rolling news and polarised social media can make us feel despairing and powerless, probably the best way to reach people who disagree with you is through face-to-face conversations.

It's important to listen to those with whom we disagree – but there are also times when challenging them feels necessary. The image of the two hands of nonviolence, as described by Barbara Deming, may help us here.

With one hand we say to one who is angry, or to an oppressor, or to an unjust system, 'Stop what you are doing. I refuse to honor the role you are choosing to play, I refuse to obey you, I refuse to cooperate with your demands, I refuse to build the walls and the bombs. I refuse to pay for the guns. With this hand I will even interfere with the wrong you are doing. I want to disrupt the easy pattern of your life.'

But then the advocate of nonviolence raises the other hand. It is raised outstretched — maybe with love and sympathy, maybe not —



but always outstretched . . . With this hand we say, 'I won't let go of you or cast you out of the human race. I have faith that you can make a better choice than you are making now, and I'll be here when you are ready.

Like it or not, we are part of one another.'

Barbara Deming, *On Revolution and Equilibrium*, 1968



At the same time, it's exhausting and isolating to be always in disagreement. If we are to keep going, we also need to find joy and replenishment by doing our work with people whose company we enjoy, and by taking time away from the struggle.

While climate breakdown tends to exacerbate violent conflicts, responding to it can also be a tool for building peace. Some peace organisations are now **incorporating climate into their peacebuilding work**, supporting communities to prepare for future threats or using resource management as a peacebuilding tool. There may be lessons here for Britain, where both climate adaptation and peacebuilding are under-resourced.

People taking action on climate are often asked what we think is going to happen, or **whether we have hope**. These questions may come from a desperate desire for certainty – for reassurance either that everything will be all right, or that it is too late and therefore nothing we do matters. In truth, the climate crisis is not simple, and we live our lives perpetually between the best and the worst of all possible worlds. "In the spaciousness of uncertainty," writes Rebecca Solnit, "is room to act."



Photo: AMISOM via Flickr

Further exploration:

 **Quakers in Britain – Toolkit: Engaging with conflict and challenging hate**

 **Possible – How to talk about climate change**

 **Peacebuilding contributions to crisis and climate change response**

PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

In this section, we highlight examples of grassroots groups and campaigns that you might draw inspiration from or support. We have divided them into 'local' and 'global', but this can be an arbitrary distinction as both are interlinked. We use the terms here to help describe actions that are primarily focused on life in the UK (local) and actions that are primarily focused on life outside the UK (global).

Local

Paid to Pollute is a campaign centered around a court case to stop the flow of public money into oil and gas industry pockets and to redirect it towards a just transition led by workers, their unions and affected communities. The campaign is moving to the streets following an unfavourable ruling by the High Court.

HOPE not hate exists to challenge all kinds of extremism and build local communities. Their work focuses on the organised far-right, the communities who are susceptible to them and the issues and policies which give rise to them.

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) For more than half a century, JCWI has been challenging policies that lead to discrimination, destitution and the denial of rights. They've also been providing much-needed legal and advice services to the people who need them most.

Biofuelwatch works to educate the public about the impacts of different types of large-scale bioenergy, and provides advice and support to communities affected by bioenergy projects.



Global

Global Witness work to hold companies and governments to account for their destruction of the environment, their disregard for the planet and their failure to protect human rights.

Geoengineering Monitor provides information and critical perspectives to support people around the world who are opposing climate geoengineering and fighting to address the root causes of climate change instead.

Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. For over 25 years they have been bringing together communities torn apart by violence and mistrust, helping people resolve their differences.

Not Too Late (nottoolateclimate.com) is an online project providing good news, perspectives, voices, connections, to help assuage the sorrow and despair and remind people that the work of climate action is worth doing.

QUERIES

In this section, we have put together some suggested queries for reflection or discussion, individually or in groups. You might like to use one of the resources we have shared in this booklet as a prompt for reflection and discussion. You are also welcome to find your own resources to use as a prompt!

We are conscious that the Covid-19 pandemic has made our already busy, stressful lives even busier and more stressful. We believe that social action should be energising and sustaining, so throughout these booklets, we will try to weave moments of joyfulness (for example, working with our senses and emotions) into the queries section. If you are gathering in a group to consider the queries, we also recommend incorporating food, and building in time to check in with one another.

The peace testimony is a tough demand that we should not automatically accept the categories, definitions and priorities of the world... The peace testimony, today, is seen in what we do, severally and together, with our lives. We pray for the involvement of the Spirit with us, that we may work for a more just world. We need to train to wage peace.

London Yearly Meeting, 1993
Quaker faith & practice 24.11

Somatic practices to explore:



Leah Sykes – Somatic practices to reduce anxiety



Dr Gloria Willcox – Feelings wheel



Wangūi wa Kamonji – Somatic practice around facing pain
(to 19 minutes)

- Some people argue that we need to invest in carbon capture and geoengineering research in case they are needed as a last resort, while others say this is a dangerous distraction that is being used to enable 'business as usual'. What do you think?
- Do you know people who talk about the climate crisis and its solutions in a way you find disturbing? How do you deal with this?
- Do you experience grief in relation to the climate and ecological crisis? How does your emotional response influence the actions you take, or don't take?

WHERE NEXT?

Exploring Faith and Climate Justice runs from July 2022 to July 2023. Over the year we will explore the following areas:

1. What is climate justice?

July – August 2022

2. Loss and damage: exploring historical responsibility and reparations

September – October 2022

3. Climate justice and the new economy

November – December 2022

4. What happens if we don't focus on justice?

January – March 2023

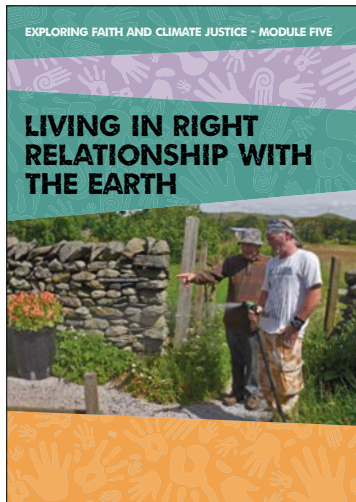
5. Living in right relationship with the earth

March – May 2023

6. How do we act in solidarity and friendship across social justice movements?

May – July 2023

The next module will look at what it might mean to live in right relationship with the rest of the living world, finding inspiration in Britain and elsewhere.



Text in this dark blue colour indicates a link to further information or resources.

To access the further information or resources in this booklet, please go to the online version which you can find on this webpage:

www.quaker.org.uk/efcj



Join **Quakers in Britain** and **Woodbrooke** on our year of learning and spiritual reflection about climate justice.

You can sign up on your own, or as part of a group or meeting at www.woodbrooke.org.uk/efcj.

For more information and resources visit www.quaker.org.uk/efcj.

Get in touch at climatejustice@quaker.org.uk.

This booklet was developed with support from colleagues at Quakers in Britain, and in turn informed by a number of Quakers who helped to shape the project. In March 2023 we made some minor revisions to the text in section 4, as a result of further feedback received. We are grateful for the time and feedback that has been generously shared.

Did you find this resource useful? To let us know your thoughts, to share a story of witness or to request support from Quakers in Britain, please email climatejustice@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1046.

For other accessible versions of this document please email publications@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1162.

Published in 2023 by Britain Yearly Meeting, registered charity number 1127633

www.quaker.org.uk

