

Update April 2023

Northern Friends Peace Board

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Focus on military spending

Each year, from mid April, the Global CAMPAIGN on Military Spending (GCOMS) promotes Global DAYS OF ACTION on Military Spending (GDAMS). NFPB, with QPSW, organised an online meeting in March for Friends interested in taking action. After an introduction to the campaign and how it is organised in the UK, Friends shared dilemmas, questions, suggestions and concerns.

The campaign this year takes place in the difficult context of growing demands and action by our government, and others, to increase military spending in response to the war in Ukraine. This can make it harder to discuss or campaign. Quaker resources on looking at some of the difficult issues in relation to Ukraine can be helpful (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/ukraine>), alongside the information provided on the GDAMS UK website. <https://demilitarize.org.uk/>

The big Extinction Rebellion protest from 21 April will also be an opportunity for GDAMS supporters to address the environmental consequences of increased militarism, at a time when action on climate change needs so much additional energy and resourcing.

The global slogan for the GDAMS period is 'War costs us the Earth'. Look out for further resources for this, and our poster below is still available to download from:

<https://nfpb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2021/10/planet-care-poster-v2-.png>

Looking further ahead, Global Campaign on Military Spending in the UK has some additional funding to help develop and sustain work on these issues. If you would like to keep in touch with the campaign, sign up to the mailing list via: <https://demilitarize.org.uk/contact/> .



Ukraine

We organised and hosted an online session for reflection and listening in February. Four NFPB members contributed opening prepared ministry, sharing hopes, dilemmas and concerns about the continuing war. This was followed by a time of worship-sharing.

More than 50 Friends participated and we have put online the text of the opening contributions, along with notes from the response time. **This material can be found at:**

<https://nfpb.org.uk/ukraine-nfpb1/> . NFPB hopes to develop other opportunities and resources to support Friends.

As part of his contribution in opening ministry, Till Geiger said:

In asking what the peace testimony demands of us in this moment, love will also need to mean speaking the truth about the breeches of international law and the law of war, the crimes against humanity, the potential genocide being perpetrated and that any threat to use nuclear weapons is unacceptable in a world which has outlawed weapons of mass destruction. And yet, since Ukraine relies on western weapons, ammunition and financial support, we are at least complicit in the continued violence, suffering and forced displacement.

... The Russian invasion has deepened rifts and eroded trust making the likelihood of a true peace arising from true justice more unlikely for the time being. Speaking our truth about the horrors of this war and the futility of violence, resisting the narratives created by disinformation and deceit, and bearing witness about the true nature of this war and the crimes being committed, may be the most important act love demands of us at this present time.

Following prepared introductions, responses were shared during a time of worship-sharing.

This note tries to capture some of these contributions:

We heard a number of different messages, questions and reflections, as Friends expressed how they were feeling in relation to the war and explored possible ways forward. We heard of exasperation at the way governments and leaders have got to such a point as this, coupled with a real distress and compassion for all those affected by the war. We must search for peaceful solutions, our small voice adding to other voices. We must ask what part our own government is playing, and to urge our own leaders to explore alternatives; a negotiated settlement must be found at some point. As well as understanding the history of how we got here, we know there will also be a legacy, that will most probably feed into the cycle of hurt and response. At what point is restorative justice appropriate rather than further retribution? We were reminded that George Fox talked about taking the occasion of all wars, and asked what more we might do to that end. A non-violent way forward has to recognise shared needs of all countries affected and their neighbours; so we must take time to understand different perspectives, open our imagination to possibilities and draw inspiration from peace-building that has been done in other settings.

NFPB members' meetings

NFPB members and other Friends met in-person (at Lancaster Meeting House) and online at the end of February. The meeting was a time for further consideration of the war in Ukraine, following the event reported above.

Friends received a financial update and a report on working arrangements from Trustees, and began a discussion about ways in which we might better support young people.

Friends reported on a range of peace activities and concerns in which they had been involved. These included:

- The **Conflict Minerals Campaign**, supported by Friends in Manchester and Warrington Area meeting
- Preparations being made by **Quaker Roots** ahead of the DSEI arms fair taking place in London in September. <https://www.quaker-roots.org.uk/>
- Glasgow Quakers' hosting of a regular **Climate Café** to share ideas and action
- The campaign to resist the development of the **Rosebank oil and gas field** near Shetland - <https://www.stopcambo.org.uk/>
- Efforts to get Sheffield City Council to support the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** <https://cities.icanw.org/>
- Preparation for Friends and peace organisations' witness at **The Big One – Extinction Rebellion** witness in London between 21-24 April.
- Events at **Words and Actions** in Edinburgh – the new base for Secure Scotland the Peace and Justice Scotland <https://wordsandactions.scot/index.php/2019/06/05/about-us/>

-Board members will next meet:

- 24 June (in Darlington and online)
- and on 23 September (in Edinburgh and online).

Contact us if you would be interest in attending one of our meetings

Meetings for Worship for witness in Yorkshire

A longstanding Quaker peace witness mentioned in our NFPB members' meeting is the Meetings for Worship that take place at Menwith Hill and at Fylingdales military bases in Yorkshire.

On the **first Saturday of every even-numbered month** of the year, a Quaker Meeting for Worship takes place outside the **Menwith Hill** US communications base between 2 and 3pm, supported by Harrogate Friends, York Area Meeting. If you would like to join this meeting for worship for witness, contact Ruth Rymer on rymer365@btinternet.com.

For information about Menwith Hill: <https://yorkshirecnd.org.uk/campaigns/menwith-hill/> and <https://themhac.uk/>

Meanwhile, a different part of Yorkshire is host to **Fylingdales**, one of the 3 stations in an American Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) chain of radars linked across the North Atlantic. Friends in Pickering and Hull Area Meeting support a Meeting for Worship at Fylingdales on **the first Saturdays of odd-numbered months of the year between 12 and 1pm**. If you would like to join that Meeting for worship, call 01751 472827.

For information about Fylingdales: <https://yorkshirecnd.org.uk/campaigns/fylingdales>

NFPB Workshops

We're offering workshops for Quaker Meetings and other groups, on the themes of **Building Peace Together**, and **Rethinking Security**.

These can be for a half day or full day, in person or online, and can be tailored to address specific issues or for a particular group.

For more information, go to:

<https://nfpb.org.uk/current-work/workshops/>



The year in review

2022 saw us moving to a period in which we started to hold and participate in more in-person events, with our members meetings being both online and hybrid events. Friends travelled to meetings in Glasgow and in Leeds for our in-person meetings and heard a range of speakers, considered current peace concerns and shared information, ideas and resources. In response to the war in Ukraine, we developed and maintained web resources and participated with Quakers in Britain in hosting a series of online sessions for Friends to explore dilemmas and challenges.

We continue to be active members of a number of networks, some meeting in-person again for the first time since the start of the pandemic. We also contributed talks and workshops for Friends in different settings. We worked with Woodbrooke and Rethinking Security in delivering an online course, and with the Quaker Council for European Affairs in hosting a webinar on militarism and climate connections.

NFPB trustees met throughout the year, mostly online but also having a facilitated 'away day'. During these trustee meetings a number of priorities for the future were identified in relation to communication, financial planning,

fund raising, engaging with young people, encouraging participation of our members and responding to changes in the wider context of Quaker work in Britain. A revised governing document was adopted by NFPB members in March.

The NFPB office had been at Bolton's Victoria Hall for many years, an arrangement which came to an end in the autumn. The move required some additional time and effort from staff and trustees, but the new location* at the Quaker Meeting House in Bolton provides a better and more accessible working environment from which to develop our work.

NFPB trustees suggested an increase in the level of financial support from Area Meetings to £10 per Member, whilst recognising that many Meetings, like ourselves, are finding it harder to make ends meet without drawing on reserves. They were grateful for the support that has continued during these challenging few years.

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