

# Update – March 2021



## Northern Friends Peace Board

NFPB, Victoria Hall, Knowsley Street, Bolton BL1 2AS  
[nfpb@gn.apc.org](mailto:nfpb@gn.apc.org) 01204 382330 <http://nfpb.org.uk>  
Charity SC 024632

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## Friends share hope and ideas in online meetings

**NFPB members and supporters met online – via Zoom - in February and March.** We have a number of new members this year, and most of these have joined us for these online meetings. It has been a hard year, with Friends both valuing the ability to keep connected through video conference, whilst also acknowledging its and our own limitations.

Thirty Friends gathered online on 20<sup>th</sup> February, for the first of this year's periodic NFPB **informal meetings**. After a period of cold weather and distressing health developments across the country, Friends were pleased to note the first signs of spring, alongside cautious hope that we could see an end to the period of lockdown and the worst of the current phase of the pandemic.

On 6<sup>th</sup> March, thirty seven Friends gathered for our **first full NFPB meeting of 2021**. Just over a year earlier Derby Meeting House was our venue; this time we came together courtesy of zoom, warmly welcomed but without the handshakes and cups of coffee on arrival.

A central part of our March meeting was hearing from Grace Da Costa and Andrew Tomlinson, both working for **Quakers in Britain on parliamentary engagement** in relationship to Westminster and Holyrood respectively. They gave an informative presentation on the range of issues and opportunities for Quaker engagement, from the review by government and parties of defence policies, asylum and migration policies, peace education, to addressing the climate crisis in the lead-up to the UN climate conference – COP26 – taking place in Glasgow later this year, and the forthcoming May elections. They encouraged us to

keep presenting our concerns to politicians, working on building relationships when possible as well as drawing on our own experiences and expertise.

**NFPB Trustees** gave a report and financial update, noting some of the changes to our income and expenditure that had occurred as result of the pandemic; whilst NFPB remained within its 2020 budget there were further challenges ahead. New Trustees had begun service at the start of 2021.

During a session in which Friends shared news of other **peace action and concerns** across the NFPB area, we heard accounts of witness, acts of care and solidarity, learning and preparation for action, and new developments in peace organising.

In reflecting on the experience of a family from Yemen now finding safety through becoming refugees in this country, a Friend shared in ministry during our closing worship these two verses from the longer poem – **Say 'No' to Peace by Brian Wren** (see <https://bit.ly/3tA4Kid> )

*Say "No" to peace  
if what they mean by peace  
is the quiet misery of hunger,  
the frozen stillness of fear,  
the silence of broken spirits,  
the unborn hopes of the oppressed.*

*Tell them that peace  
is the shouting of children at play,  
the babble of tongues set free,  
the thunder of dancing feet,  
and a father's voice singing.*

# Disarmament action and collaboration

## Nuclear weapons

On the day (22<sup>nd</sup> January) of the entry into legal force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), NFPB was a co-signatory to an open letter from partner organisations in the UK of ICAN, the international campaign that worked so hard towards the treaty coming into being. The letter to the Prime Minister stated

*“Nuclear weapons are dangerous security risks, not assets. They are useless for tackling today’s major threats like the COVID-19, climate and ecological emergencies. Whether intentional or accidental, nuclear weapons use would have catastrophic global humanitarian consequences – the UK therefore has a responsibility to work with the global community on this issue.”*



Meanwhile, around the country Friends were active in making a gentle but highly visible splash, within the limits of Covid restrictions, to mark the Treaty achieving legal status. Banners and posters were displayed at Quaker premises, on city centre billboard, near peace poles and through electronic media. And Friends hosted and contributed to zoom events, wrote letters to local and other press and much more. A gallery of photos of just some of these can be seen on our website. Read more about the treaty and ways to get involved. - <https://nfpb.org.uk/tpnw-info/>

NFPB’s nuclear weapons working group plans to further support and encourage Friends in promoting awareness of and commitment to the TPNW. The UK government and main opposition party seem a long way from getting on board, but the global and national ICAN network sees the TPNW as transformative in setting a new norm against the acceptability of nuclear weapons, and towards making very real the commitments already embedded in the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

At the time of writing, the news was coming out of the UK government plans to increase its nuclear arsenal. We unite with the **statement from Church leaders released on 16 March** that reads, in part:

*“The Government’s decision in the integrated review of defence, security and foreign policy to increase the number of Trident nuclear warheads the UK can stockpile by more than 40 percent is a retrograde step that will not make any of us safer.*

*“...Progress on reducing the threat from nuclear weapons will come through dialogue, diplomacy and principled action. The Government’s announcement today will complicate rather than aid this process.*

*“The entry into force of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition in of Nuclear Weapons is an encouraging development. As people of faith, we join with millions across the world who are working towards the elimination of nuclear arsenals. Living up to our responsibilities under the Non Proliferation Treaty would be a step towards realising that vision.”*

The full statement can be read at: <https://www.quaker.org.uk/news-and-events/news/churches-oppose-plans-to-increase-stockpiles-of-nuclear-warheads>

## Military spending

We are active in the UK group promoting and developing the **Global Campaign on Military Spending**. The group has secured funding for a paid worker for several months; Matt Fawcett has been working to help us develop a new website and supporting online events. The first of these was a well-attended briefing session, attended by over 100 participants from across the country. Some key points from this can be found at <https://demilitarize.org.uk/2021/03/02/briefing-points-in-advance-of-the-uk-government-budget-announcement/>

Following that up, a session in mid-March brought people together from a wide range of organisations and networks to share and plan ahead of the **Global Days of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS), from 10th April-9th May**.

Ideas for raising awareness that came out of the GDAMS planning included: focussing on alternative spending areas for non-military security, such as climate and health and social care; lobbying politicians; use of social media and carefully distanced outdoor vigils etc. when the circumstances allow; displaying banners, posters and other visual materials; producing short and clear written materials.

For more information, briefings etc. <https://demilitarize.org.uk>

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## Organisation news

### NFPB office and working arrangements

The Northern Friends Peace Board Coordinator, Philip Austin, has now been working from home for a year because of the pandemic, calling into the central Bolton office periodically to collect post and materials. We will be making a judgement about when and how best to return to office-based work on the basis of progress out of the current lockdown. Steven Waling, our admin assistant, returned from a period of furlough in November and is also working from home.

### Trustees and Finance

NFPB's trustees are in regular touch with each other and the Coordinator throughout the year, as well as having formal decision-making meetings at least quarterly. They have been active in ensuring working conditions are appropriate during this challenging period, and in helping to set priorities and plans for the work.

Friends' financial contributions during 2020 meant that we ended our year in line with our budget. The deficit was anticipated and we have drawn on reserves. Trustees are making use of ethical investment options to generate some additional income from reserves and will be looking at additional income-generation options for the future. The guideline figure for donations from Area Meetings in 2021 has been kept at £9 per Member.

Robert Keeble completed his service as a trustee at the end of 2020 and we welcomed Alan Frith and Peter Speirs as new trustees. Trustees continue to meet online for the time being.

# Coming up

## Events

We have three further **NFPB members' meetings** planned for the year – in June, September and November and will be considering the best way of holding these as the year progresses. We hope to contribute a workshop to British Quakers' Yearly Meeting Gathering in July/August and to a range of other Quaker and non-Quaker events.

We also have a number of **online workshops** coming up, in partnership with other peace organisations. Dates have still to be confirmed, but we shall publicise these through our mailing lists and website. They will address issues of militarism and higher education and facilitated with support from a number of partner organisations.

**We list events and activities organised by Quakers on our website** - <https://nfpb.org.uk/calendar/>  
Please let us know of events that we can publicise in this way.

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## From around the network

### Quaker Roots

The Quaker network supporting Friends in preparing to oppose the London arms fair – DSEI – is part way through a series of online times for reflection and sharing under the title of 'Turning to one another'. Details of these and other events can be found at - <https://www.quaker-roots.org.uk/events/>

### International Conscientious Objectors Day - 15<sup>th</sup> May

Plans are being made for another online event, or events, to mark this occasion – see <https://www.ppu.org.uk/international-conscientious-objectors-day>

### Alternative Security Review

*Rethinking Security* is soon to start a three-year project that will work with people across the British isles to develop thinking and proposals for an alternative approach to security, providing an alternative to the main government narrative. Some of the issues around this are explored in this blog from *Rethinking Security* Coordinator Richard Reeve: <https://rethinkingsecurity.org.uk/2021/03/01/case-for-human-security-strategy/>

### Peace Education conference

QPSW and QCEA are planning a major online conference - **the possibilities of peace education: Evidence and opportunities**, which will take place online in the **afternoons of 20-21-22 May 2021**. To find out more and to register go to <https://www.qcea.org/home/events/conferences>

### Learning from the Past

We were pleased to be invited to the launch event of this new online exhibition, originally to be hosted at Lancaster City Museum. It tells the story about the efforts for peace and internationalism made by people across Europe during the interwar years and the impact of this shared heritage on young Europeans today. <http://learningfromthepastexhibition.uk/>

*If you would like to be added to the mailing list for this newsletter, please contact us via: [nfpb@gn.apc.org](mailto:nfpb@gn.apc.org)*