

Quaker Input to the Talanoa Dialogue

In 1772, the Quaker, John Woolman, wrote: “The produce of the Earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age”.

Where are we now?

The Quaker community, also known as the Religious Society of Friends, circles the world, spanning a diversity of regional cultures and beliefs. Around half the world’s Quakers live in Africa.

In facing climate change, we prioritize three messages: transformation to sustainable and fair lifestyles, inclusion of human rights in climate action (rights-based action), and upholding environmental justice. We applaud the efforts of Fiji through the COP23 Presidency to prioritize these concerns.

We celebrate the Talanoa approach. Our Quaker faith tradition has taught us to respect each voice, encourage deep listening, expect that each individual speaks from their heart, to give time for creative solutions to emerge. Sharing stories from across the world, empathy for others, and being open to inspiration and creativity are essential for humanity to act with fairness, innovation and love.

As people of faith, we are called to commit to equality, justice, peace, simplicity and truth in seeking positive social and legislative change.

Climate change is a global issue. Addressing how we live on this earth as global citizens is integral to being part of the ‘solution’. Cutting greenhouse gas emissions to meet the targets set out in the Paris Agreement requires nearly all of us to make changes in our lives while our decision makers implement necessary policies. We stress the critical importance of rights-based climate policies response to secure more sustainable, effective and fair mitigation and adaptation actions.

We also stress that climate change is a justice concern. While the principal cause of climate change is high consumption, those who are most responsible rarely feel the worst impacts of climate change. It is those who are already vulnerable to extreme weather events, natural disasters and rising sea levels – often those who are socially marginalised due to their economic status, race and gender – who bear the brunt. Climate change is creating greater inequality and as a result, leading to conflict and violence.

Quakers recognise the need to urgently transform our activities to protect present and future generations, yet time to act is limited. Environmental destruction is already harming people’s lives and rights. But catastrophic climate change is not inevitable if we choose to act urgently and secure meaningful political, economic and social changes.

Where do we want to go?

We nurture a global human society that prioritizes the well-being of people over profit, and lives in right relationship with our Earth; a peaceful world with fulfilling employment, clean air and water, renewable energy, and healthy thriving communities and ecosystems. As members of this beautiful human family, we ask ourselves and our leaders to address climate change for our shared future, the Earth and all species, and the generations to come.

At COP21 in Paris in 2015, 195 countries agreed to keep global warming well below 2C and to pursue efforts to limit temperatures to 1.5C above industrial levels. As a global community we now have the technology, finance and creativity to radically cut emissions, invest in renewable solutions and protect the most vulnerable from the effects of climate change. We see this as an opportunity to build a fairer economy that can support the health and wellbeing of everyone. We call for bolder action from those in power to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, for our decision makers to support policies which radically cut emissions fast, whilst bringing about a just transition to a global economy that works for all. We call on countries to refocus spending away from military expenditure and toward climate action, to truly protect their citizens now and in the future.

As people of faith, we have a duty to ensure our leaders take this action, to advocate for ambitious climate action and to hold them to account in these efforts to protect citizens and ecosystems worldwide. We support Quaker communities worldwide in expressing their faith through action.

Below is a profile of Quakers in Rwanda offering a positive model in building resilience and action despite the challenges climate change presents. We share this story to inspire others to unlock greater climate ambition and action.

Case Study from Rwanda

The weather in Rwanda is becoming more and more unpredictable. The National Household Vulnerability Index (2015) shows that vulnerability to climate change is located in all parts of the country. In 2016 alone dozens of people lost their lives as a result of floods and other hazards linked to intense rains in Rwanda.

Quakers in Rwanda are helping church communities, especially in many of the rural areas, to be more resilient to the impacts of climate change through the 'Forever Green Rwanda Friends' initiative.

Rwandan Quakers are involved in a number of efforts including:

- Promoting sustainable farming practices that preserve the environment including proper use of the land and water preservation.
- Pastors and young people are leading efforts to plant trees on church land and at home
- Supporting anti-erosion measures for those living in mountainous areas by cultivating crops in a responsible and sustainable way to preserve the soil
- Encouraging people to use solar energy, reduce the use of firewood and shift from electricity to biofuel



Images: Quakers in Rwanda

How are we going to get there?

Climate change is a global crisis, driven by human activities. Transforming our human activities at the root cause of climate disruption is essential. Yet many of the root causes of climate change are financially lucrative activities, and we stress the importance of the Talanoa Dialogue to engage honestly with the question of how we must live sustainably and fairly on this Earth. Building a framework of caring for each other and future generations and maintaining as much biodiversity as possible provides a basis for action. Each household needs to minimize their carbon footprint, but that alone is not enough. Each community needs to support clean and resilient climate action plans, each region must enact effective and timely climate policies and programs, and each business must limit the ways they impact climate change because acting alone is not enough. Each country must not only support the Paris Agreement, but also support urgent, rights-based climate policies to help transform activities at the root cause of rising temperatures.

This first set of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) will, even if fully funded, push temperature rises to 3C above industrial levels. This would result in profound human suffering. Countries led by the wealthiest economies must urgently increase their mitigation targets for humanity to avoid catastrophic consequences. To do this fairly requires a commitment to human rights and eco-system protection to maintain biodiversity, while conducting an open and transparent dialogue and decision-making process.

Specific steps to limit global temperature rise to 2C include committing to renewable energy, changing our diet and food systems, and providing education for girls and family planning (see the QUNO Negotiator's Toolkit for a full list). The sooner we reach these goals, the more we can limit devastating impacts from climate change.

Quakers worldwide support the goals of the Paris Agreement and oppose projects that threaten these ambitions. According to the Global Carbon Budget 2017, around 90% of all CO₂ emissions from human activities are derived from fossil fuels¹. We therefore question profoundly the continued investment in, and subsidising of, fossil fuel extraction.

Global citizens and people of faith have a unique role in confronting climate change through building and nurturing our collective power for influence and demanding changes to the way our society and economy are run. Building a new economy is now both possible and necessary. It should use renewable, affordable energy, delivering jobs, services and economic opportunity. It needs to meet the needs of the many.

As Quakers we embrace our role in building and nurturing a collective movement with a powerful voice. With this voice, we call on our institutions to act boldly to achieve a just transition to a sustainable future where no one is left behind. We have the knowledge and limited time - we must not fail our common family and future generations through a lack of political will or apathy.

Further reading:

[The Kabarak Call for Peace and Eco-Justice](#)

[Quaker Statement on Climate Change](#)

[Quaker United Nations Office \(QUNO\) Negotiator's Toolkit](#)

¹ R B Jackson *et al* 2017 Environmental Research Letters 12 110202

Contacts:

Shelley Tanenbaum
General Secretary
Quaker Earthcare Witness
shelley@quakerearthcare.org

Susanna Mattingly
Sustainability Communications Officer
Friends World Committee for Consultation
susannam@fwcc.world