



Pax Scotia

Issue 35

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Why are populations moving worldwide? Asimwe Mourine reflected at the end of Refugee Week

Climate change has become an alarming global challenge and its effects are becoming more pronounced every day. According to the United Nations, climate change has become the biggest threat to global security and peace. Rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions such as floods, landslides, drought, hurricanes, and sea-level rise are already having an impact on livelihoods and migration patterns. People are being forced to leave their homes and move to new areas in search of food, water, and shelter. Climate change has the potential to cause millions more people to be displaced in the coming years and this seriously affects peace of mind and livelihoods.

As the world warms, various regions experience unprecedented weather events that have devastating effects, such as the loss of crops, livestock, and fish stocks, which creates a ripple effect on the economy. As a result, many people find it difficult to make a living, leading them to migrate. For example, many Pacific island nations are facing the threat of rising sea levels, which could lead to the displacement of entire communities.

Furthermore, the tourism industry is also being affected. Beaches that were once popular vacation destinations are being eroded, and coral reefs are dying due to warming oceans.

In Africa, many regions are having lower crop yields due to droughts, which can lead to food shortages and malnourishment. In coastal regions, fishing communities are experiencing a decline in fish stocks due to changes in water temperature and acidity levels, which has led to a loss of income and ultimately, migration. Coming back to my country, Uganda, most people in eastern parts of Bududa and Bulambuli districts and south western parts of Kabale, Rubanda, Kisoro and Kanungu districts have been displaced after losing lives, animals, crops and property during the previous rainy season as a result of floods and landslides.

Ugandan Asimwe Mourine is a social entrepreneur, an environment activist and the Director of Practical Climate Change Responses (PCCR)



These continuous climate change incidents in my home area of Kabale district and other neighbouring districts in Uganda have led me to get back to the drawing board.

After a thorough study, I found out that Uganda loses 2% of its forest cover every year to loggers seeking fuel and building materials. This prompted me to start an environmental organisation called Practical Climate Change Responses (PCCR) based in Kabale to rally women and young people in practical skills and community initiatives aimed at conserving the environment and poverty eradication.

These community-based initiatives such as reforestation, and ecosystem restoration help to reduce the impacts of climate change, while promoting economic growth, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. There is also need for international cooperation in addressing climate change.

Together, countries can help to create a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable world for all.

The psychological impact of losing one's livelihood due to climate change is hurtful. Livelihoods are linked to peace of mind and the climate-induced migrations and conflicts are increasing, and can cause mental ill health.

Let's take action now to address climate change, protect livelihoods, and promote peace of mind. By working together, we can create a more sustainable and equitable future for everyone. Let's all do our part and make a difference!

Asimwe Mourine

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/YappcJVxkwecT3p7>
(PCCR link)

The UN recently issued a report about the situation for women in Afghanistan. The UN's special rapporteur, Richar Bennett, writes: "One of the most illustrative examples of the systematic discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan today is the relentless issuance of edicts, decrees, declarations and directives restricting their rights, including their freedom of movement, attire and behaviour, and their access to education, work, health and justice." If that sounds like a hopeless situation, we forget the determined women working for change.



Women face discrimination worldwide - but none more than those in Afghanistan

Sara Gawhary is a vibrant women's rights and civil society activist whose impact is making noticeable changes in Afghan society. She's a lawyer, a teacher, artist and writer (with many other strings to her bow). She has involved hundreds of women in her women's leadership development programmes - but none of it is easy. There are constant threats and she wisely attempts to stay safe and to keep those on her programmes under the radar. Here she explains her work with WERA...

The Women's Empowerment Research Association, WERA, is an independent and non-profit association that started its activities in March 2022. Its primary objective is to support, strengthen, and promote voluntary activities and scientific research within Afghan society. WERA aims to establish a platform where women can be empowered and learn how to lead families, institutions, and society.

In addition, this association seeks to provide a suitable environment for research activities, increase practical skills, and harness the creativity and ability of women in scientific and research fields.

As known, many women in Afghanistan cannot attend in-person academic programmes due to cultural and logistical barriers. Via online classes, we can reach a wider audience and empower women with knowledge and skills. We are also making progress by partnering with national and international organisations and institutions. Working together can achieve more than we could on our own.

Meanwhile, WERA promotes the role of women in leadership and empowerment globally.

It is well known that women play a crucial role in sustaining peace, especially in conflict-affected areas like Afghanistan.

WERA believes that the empowerment of women is the key to achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan.

The role of women in peacebuilding in Afghanistan can be seen in a number of different ways. First, in order to ensure that their perspectives and needs are acknowledged, women can participate in peace discussions and decision-making processes. Second, by aiding in the development of mutual respect and understanding between various groups, women can play a significant part in fostering social cohesion and reconciliation within their communities. WERA is still dedicated to helping Afghan women to create a peaceful and successful future for both themselves and their nation.

On the other hand, WERA has consistently called for global support and requested the Afghan Diaspora to take part in this global movement to advocate women's rights, especially women's education rights in Afghanistan, and build a bridge between Afghan women and the international community. After a short

Sara Gawhary,
Afghan activist
extraordinaire.



period of activities, WERA now has one of the most successful histories in creating opportunities to build trust and relationships between Afghan women and the international community. These achievements caused the world to recognise WERA as a beacon in Afghanistan and foreign countries.

At the same time, WERA identifies that women are still facing significant challenges in Afghanistan. The ongoing conflict in the country has made it difficult for us to reach some areas, and the recent withdrawal of foreign troops has created even more uncertainty. WERA is enthusiastic about the prospects that lie ahead as we look to the future. By working together and maintaining our focus on peace, we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of women in Afghanistan.

To this end, we offer a range of leadership and personal development programmes for women, including workshops, mentorship opportunities, and networking events. WERA also conducts research and evidence-based advocacy activities to promote policies and practices that support women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes. By empowering women to take on leadership roles, WERA can help to create a more inclusive and representative society in Afghanistan.

Sara Gawhary



We 'do' hope

Chris Rose is the director of Amos Trust. Prior to joining Amos in 2006 he led a youth and community project in Cambridge. He is also an ordained Anglican priest. Following our online event in June - **The Holy Land: Seeking A nonviolent future** (see the recording on the website) - we asked Chris to give us his take on how to achieve a nonviolent future in that troubled part of the world.

As a small creative human rights organisation that challenges injustice, builds hope and creates change, we at Amos Trust are often asked: What hope do we see for Palestine and Israel?

We are witnessing a rapidly deteriorating situation. This year has seen the highest rates of Palestinian and Israeli deaths on the West Bank and Jerusalem in nearly 20 years. By the end of May Israeli forces had killed 112 Palestinians and 21 Israelis had been killed. Settlements are expanding and settler violence is increasing. The demolitions of Palestinian homes are increasing. Palestinians have very little trust in their own government and more young Palestinians (a very small minority) are taking up arms.

The Israeli Government is the most right-wing government Israel has ever had, and yet because of the failings of the international community, knows it has impunity for any actions it wishes to undertake.

When faced with so little hope we can despair or bury our head in the sand - or choose to listen more deeply and identify afresh how to 'do' hope.

Culture

People often use the arts to talk about politics. We believe that "When words fail, art speaks" (Raphael Chikukwa). Our identity is interwoven with culture whether that be food, music, song, poetry, hospitality or art. Our *On Location* galleries feature over 50 remarkable artists from Gaza, 'the world's largest prison'. In a similar way we work with Palestinian musicians, dancers, poets and particularly chefs and among many other activities run the *Taste of Palestine* trips with Zaytoun.

Facts on the ground

"If we don't build on the land, they will take it. If these people leave their homes, they will be gone for ever," says Hamed from our partner HIRN (Hebron International Resource Network)

We have, with UK volunteers and local builders, rebuilt eight homes destroyed by the Israeli Defence Force. Through HIRN we have supported numerous community projects in threatened villages across the southern half of the West Bank. In Gaza where over 50% of young Gazans are unemployed, we train young people in employment skills so that they can build a future.

Promoting rights

We seek to promote Palestinian rights and call for an end to

Chris Rose, director of Amos Trust



Israel's apartheid policies. Having worked in South Africa we have long agreed with Palestinians and Israeli activists that what we witness in Israel/Palestine is apartheid. We were not prepared to waste time debating this until last year's reports by Amnesty International, and Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations B'Tselem and Al-Haq meant that this interpretation became more widely accepted.

Our advocacy work is built around anti-apartheid principles - boycott, divestment and sanctions. We are particularly committed to cultural boycott, to divestment from companies who benefit from the occupation, and to pressuring JCB to stop its machines being used in home demolitions.

Promoting rights also means very specific practical rights-based responses: promoting breast cancer screening with the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza, where women are three times more likely to die from breast cancer than in the UK or a few miles away in Israel; establishing the *Gaza Sunbirds* paracycling team for young sportspeople who have had their lower limbs amputated because they were shot by Israeli snipers; supporting *We Are Not Numbers*, a youth journalism programme in Gaza focussing on young women, so that their voices can be heard.

'Doing' hope can feel overwhelming. Solidarity is costly. We must maintain and build our resilience. We produce resources to feed us in this (*Seeds of Hope* book) and have created activities such as *Run the Wall* so that we can join activists around the world in taking a few small steps for Palestine.

Chris Rose

<https://www.amostrust.org/>

Our website

Blogs, podcasts, past and future events – these are all on our Pax Christi Scotland website. All newsletters are archived there. You can pay your annual membership fee on the Membership page and make donations. Please explore and share:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Continued thanks to webmaster Chris Boles of Caledonian Websites:

<https://www.caledonianwebsites.com/>

Membership Reminder

Easiest method? Pay on the membership page of our website.

If you pay by online banking, please give your name to identify your payment.

If you wish to pay by cheque, send to the address below, cheques payable to Pax Christi Scotland.

You can also make regular donations on our 'donate' page - thank you.

Membership fees are £10 for waged, £5 for unwaged.

Explore the website for all our activities:

<https://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

<http://www.paxchristiscotland.org>

[@PaxScotland](https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland)

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YouTube Channel

You can find recordings of all our events at:

[https://www.youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland)

[@paxchristiscotland](https://www.youtube.com/@paxchristiscotland)

Click on the word 'Subscribed' and you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.

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Refugees and asylum seekers - “dignity must be upheld”

Asylum seekers and refugees have been targeted in Scotland by extreme right wing groups spouting hatred. Erskine and Elgin became front line towns for these organisations, including Patriotic Alternative (PA), which has among its members Holocaust deniers.

Erskine, where the Muthu Hotel houses refugees seeking asylum, has been at the heart of demonstrations since March of this year. At the end of May, anti-racism supporters showed their solidarity with the refugees. Pax Christi Scotland's **Hugh Foy** added our voice to those of Stand Up To Racism and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, reading a moving message in support of asylum seekers from Bishop John Keenan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I21H5IQPTNI>)

In June, the alt-right group Highland Division gathered in Elgin. One of their invited guests was Alek Yerbury, who launched the National Support Detachment - a neo-Nazi organisation.

Moray Trades Council, with Stand Up to Racism, the STUC and Pax Christi Scotland, organised a nonviolent counter demonstration, which prevented Yerbury from speaking

Kit Fry, another Pax Christi Scotland executive committee member, said at the counter demonstration: “We are a Catholic organisation that campaigns for peace around the world but also seeks to address the root causes and destructive consequences of violence within our own society. Our work addresses all forms of discrimination, the language of violence and the need for a peace-filled welcome for refugees and migrants.”

He added: “True peace means respecting or better still, liking and helping each other, as fellow human beings, putting ourselves in the place of others, to understand them better and what they're going through.”

Kit shared a message from Rt Reverend Hugh Gilbert, Roman Catholic Bishop of Aberdeen diocese, who said: “I thank everybody who has come to Elgin today to show solidarity with our asylum seeker brothers and sisters, and to counter attempts to foster hostility towards those who have come to our shores seeking refuge and safety.

“Asylum seekers and refugees are our fellow human beings, our brothers and sisters, and regardless of their immigration status their intrinsic dignity must be upheld.

“Pope Francis himself has shown in both his words and actions a strong commitment to the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees...the Catholic Church will continue to support our asylum seeker and refugee brothers and sisters locally, nationally, and internationally.”



Kit Fry, speaking in Elgin to make clear Scotland's welcome for refugees