



Pax Scotia

Issue 41

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Do they know it's Christmas time at all?



Mike Mwenda is a Zambian journalist whose voice on climate issues we have heard a number of times. As COP28 came to a close in mid December, Mike told Pax Christi Scotland what Zambians face this Christmas, bringing to mind the Band Aid song from 1984. Raising our voices for climate justice is essential.

Zambians are bracing themselves for a challenging Christmas season, grappling with the threatening impact of El Niño on the nation's agricultural landscape. The dire consequences of this climatic phenomenon are keenly felt in regions such as Lusaka, Southern, Central, and Eastern provinces, where local farmers face unprecedented challenges jeopardizing both their livelihoods and national food security.

At the core of this crisis lies the vulnerability of Zambia's agriculture, traditionally reliant on rain-fed practices. El Niño, a disruptive force in climate patterns, has unleashed extended dry spells and soaring temperatures, wreaking havoc on essential crops, notably maize, a cornerstone of the nation's food supply. Persistent adverse conditions are giving rise to diminished yields and widespread crop failures, sounding alarms about the well-being of countless farmers.

Unfortunately, this dire situation traces its roots to the overarching spectre of climate change, amplifying the frequency and intensity of El Niño events. Rising global temperatures exact a toll on vulnerable regions like Zambia, where the agricultural core bears the brunt of unpredictable weather patterns. The ripple effect of this strain on agriculture extends beyond individual farmers' immediate concerns, posing a substantial threat to the entire nation's food security.

Meanwhile, addressing the challenges posed by El Niño in Zambia demands urgent and coordinated efforts. Swift implementation of resilient agricultural practices, enhanced water management strategies, and mitigation of broader climate change effects are imperative. The magnitude of this task underscores the crucial role that international cooperation and support must play in bolstering the resilience of communities facing the increasingly unpredictable consequences of our changing climate.

As the agricultural sector grapples with the harsh realities of El Niño, the need for adaptive measures becomes more pressing. Farmers in affected regions must diversify their crops and adopt resilient farming techniques capable of withstanding the vagaries of weather. Collaborative efforts between agricultural experts and policymakers are essential to disseminate knowledge about climate-smart practices and provide support to farmers navigating the challenges posed by El Niño.

Water management emerges as a critical aspect of mitigating the impact of prolonged dry spells. Investments in efficient irrigation systems and water conservation practices can alleviate stress on crops and ensure a more reliable water supply for farmers. Moreover, a concerted effort to enhance the capacity of local communities to manage water resources sustainably is crucial for long-term resilience.

The broader implications of climate change necessitate a multi-sectoral approach. Beyond immediate agricultural concerns, comprehensive strategies are needed to address the socio-economic fallout of El Niño. This includes safeguarding the well-being of farming communities, preserving local economies, and ensuring access to food for vulnerable populations.

In addition, international solidarity and assistance are paramount in navigating these challenges. Collaborative efforts between nations, non-governmental organisations, and international bodies can pool resources and expertise to provide targeted support where it is needed most. Financial aid, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing can empower local communities to build resilience against the impacts of El Niño and climate change.

As Zambia confronts the harsh realities of El Niño, the nation stands at a critical juncture. The challenges posed by disrupted weather patterns and the threat to agricultural productivity require immediate and sustained action. Through the implementation of resilient agricultural practices, enhanced water management, and fostering international cooperation, Zambia **could** navigate through these turbulent times and build a more secure and sustainable future for its farmers and citizens.

Mike Mwenda



Ellis Brooks
(left) &
Sarah
Komashko,
Quakers In
Britain

Ellis Brooks is Peace Education Coordinator for Quakers in Britain, setting up peer mediation in schools. **Sarah Komashko** is QiB Scottish Parliamentary Engagement Officer, engaging with Scottish Parliamentarians. They've recently spoken about peace education with Scottish parliamentarians.

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Equipping young peacemakers through peer mediation

"Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war." – Maria Montessori

"Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you there." – Rumi

Amidst the backdrop of widespread and destructive global conflict in places like Israel and Palestine, Ukraine, and Sudan, mediation has played a constructive role in specific cases like bringing about humanitarian pauses and the release of women and children: a glimmer of hope in a world often overwhelmed by bad news. Historically, mediation has also played a key role in ending political conflicts such as apartheid in South Africa, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and cycles of war between Egypt and Israel.

Many cultures across the world have their own iterations of conflict resolution, but the common components of success seem to be in acknowledging that disagreement is inevitable, and good communication is the key to resolving those differences.

The essence of peacemaking extends beyond resolving international disputes; it's also a crucial element for local communities. Family conflicts contribute significantly to youth homelessness, and unresolved conflicts between students in schools can lead to social problems, misery, and hinder a safe learning environment for young people.

As Quaker educators Sue Bowers and Tom Leimdorfer observed in 1990, "Society educates young people at best haphazardly and at worst quite destructively as far as conflict is concerned." But peer mediation shows young people can be peacemakers.

What makes peer mediation programmes particularly powerful is their ability to empower children and young people to take responsibility for finding fair resolutions to conflicts—skills they carry with them throughout life. Moreover, they're really good at it! Through mediation, they are exercising their right to be heard about issues that affect them.

Wajeelha, a peer mediator at Oakgrove Primary School, describes the process: *"Peer mediation is when you help other people solve a problem or conflict between them. I listen to people's points of view and then we find a solution to help them both be happy. I really like helping them. It takes a lot of patience, listening and critical thinking!"*

Karen Taylor, a Primary 5 Teacher at Oakgrove, attests to the benefits: "Peer mediators are really helpful to younger children... There are often incidents that arise which don't need to come back into the classroom. Peer mediators help to calm children down and guide them to solutions, so they return happy and ready to learn. It's great for the mediators to develop these skills too."

Peer mediation programmes have received praise in school inspection reports, emphasising the development of leadership skills and an understanding of children's rights and responsibilities. These practices help young people take responsibility for their own parts in conflict, rather than causing it to escalate. Peer mediation also forms part of a wider background of peace education in terms of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4.7 which speaks of

educating for sustainable development and promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence.

The Young Talk programme from Scottish Mediation, the professional association for mediators in Scotland, has successfully helped over 100 Scottish schools establish peer mediation. By integrating peacemaking into the educational experience, these schools are equipping young people with essential skills, knowledge and attitudes for resolving conflicts constructively.

Quakers in Britain, historically dedicated to our peace testimony, have actively supported school mediation programmes. In the words of this excerpt from Quaker Faith and Practice 24.54:

"Traditionally, little encouragement has been given to young people to take responsibility for resolving conflicts, to look for 'win-win' solutions. Yet the way in which young people learn to respond to conflict will have a pervasive effect both on the quality of their personal lives and on the prospects for society as a whole. Affirming the personal value of each individual, encouraging mutual respect and consciously developing the skills and attitudes involved in creative conflict resolution must be regarded as an important educational priority."

See our website (<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education/peace-education-case>) for details about Scotland's young mediators, and how Quakers are working with other partners across the UK to build peace in schools.

Putting peacemaking at the heart of education gives reason to hope that future generations may be equipped to resolve conflicts wisely. Peer mediation programs are empowering youth to build peace, one school at a time, inspiring future generations to build a more harmonious world. *Ellis & Sarah*



Weapons of mass destruction: the cost, the environment and world health - our TPNW update

Delia Chatoor attended the second meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which was held from 27th November to 1st December at the United Nations HQ in New York. This review of the meeting puts it into perspective, and her eye witness account of the public reaction to the meeting gives us hope - she says 'There was indeed a very vocal and constructive representation from many branches of civil society, including youth.'

Ninety-four countries participated as states parties or observers at this second meeting of States Parties, with a broad section of civil society delegates.

At the end of the meeting, a political declaration and a number of decisions were approved with the prime aim of guiding and advancing the work on the implementation of the TPNW. What was useful was the participation of states which had signed the Treaty and were awaiting the completion of domestic procedures to ratify it. There are now 93 signatories and 69 States Parties.

The discussions were conducted in a constructive environment.

In the General Exchange of Views on 28th November 2023, H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Giodano Caccia, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations opined that the implementation of the TPNW must be "accompanied by an ethic of disarmament". There must also be practical procedures to assist victims and this would require a carefully thought understanding of the "effects of nuclear radiation on human beings."

Delegates also reinforced the reality of the serious humanitarian consequences which could result from the detonation of a nuclear device whether intentional or accidental. The health facilities would be inadequate to render the much-needed support as was witnessed in 1945 following Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Of significant debate was that of nuclear deterrence and this elicited the adoption of a decision which would "challenge the security paradigm based on nuclear deterrence" and would "take into account evolving scientific evidence about the humanitarian consequences and risks of nuclear weapons." It also noted that in the development of systems to give effect to the TPNW, the voices of those who had been affected - *the Habuksha* - (and are still suffering) by the detonation of nuclear weapons and the testing, are relevant.

It was reassuring to note that delegates recognised the increase in financial resources to the modernisation of the weapon systems. This could never be justified when consideration is given to the instability in world affairs, the risks associated with

Delia Chatoor, Pax Christi Scotland's ear to the UN & member of the Caribbean Climate Change Network based in Trinidad and Tobago



the possession of nuclear weapons and the threats to use them.

The prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons was, therefore, acknowledged as a moral imperative with the concerns, risks and threats being transmitted far and wide among States Parties, states which possess them, and the scientific, health and academic communities. The Declaration also reaffirmed that the use of nuclear weapons would, *inter alia*, pose a threat to life and could create what may result in long-term damage to an already fractured environment. Furthermore, the health of women and girls would be adversely affected as there are ample scientific and health reports on this reality.

All in all, therefore, we are each called upon as individuals to spread the message of the damage which could be wrought by nuclear weapons as well as the ongoing diversion of valuable resources to newly developed systems. In his letter of 19 May 2023 to the Bishop of Hiroshima on the occasion of the G7 Summit, Pope Francis reminded that "nuclear arms and other weapons of mass destruction represent a multiplier of risk that offers only an illusion of peace."

The entry into force of the TPNW and the increase in the number of States Parties are only two steps in the attainment of a world free of nuclear weapons with the assurance that such weapons would "never again be used, tested or threatened to be used."

Delia Chatoor

Our website

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Pax Scotia December-January 2023-24 Issue 41



"A blessed Christmas & peace in 2024" - Pax Christi Scotland

We have brought together some old friends and news ones for this edition of Pax Scotia, and highlighted issues that are a constant in what we aim to do as a peace organisation.

Mike Mwenda in Zambia tells us how the climate emergency is affecting people in that part of the world (see picture below). We believe that climate injustice - which seems bound to continue after COP28 as oil giants look after their own interests - affects peace of mind and peace itself. Even as we offer you our Christmas greetings, we know that for millions around the world, weather is so much more than a polite topic of conversation - it's a matter of life and death.

Delia Chatoor's report on the TPNW states parties meeting reminds us that weapons of mass destruction are still a major threat. Our collaboration with organisations such as Scottish CND, Don't Bank On the Bomb and ICAN strengthens our campaign to remove nuclear weapons from our world. At our AGM (see the business part on our YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/eCOe9iFYD5I>), peace activist Jonathon Shafi pledged to work with us, and we believe that working together is the way we can achieve a nonviolent world.

And Christmas is a good time to consolidate new friendships. Earlier this year we joined peace education events organised by Quakers in Britain. Read the piece by Ellis Brooks (pictured below campaigning against the arms trade) & Sarah Komashko on P2 - I think we'll hear more from them in 2024. Meanwhile, our own plans for taking peace education into schools is progressing.

The war in the Holy Land of course fills our hearts and minds, and we continue to pray for a ceasefire, knowing that arms manufacturers and governments supported by them don't see peace as a viable option. Our voices are needed, and we thank all of you who have demonstrated in these past weeks.

Last December, Pope Francis said: "The time has come for all of us to endeavour to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common."

That message continues to say it all for Pax Christi Scotland. We hope your Christmas and your year ahead is blessed - please continue to journey with us. *Marian Pallister*, Pax Christi Scotland chair

