



Pax Scotia

Issue 13

Inside:

Reaching across barriers - P2
Sri Lanka, Police Scotland, and human
rights issues - P3

Anne Dobbings, a Pax Christi Scotland member, found our August Vigil for peace in Korea a poignant reminder of her visit to the demilitarised zone between the north and south. See her account on **P2**, and please sign the Korean Peace Petition on our website: <https://www.paxchristiscotland.org/>



Peace in Afghanistan – forever in the future?

By Grace Buckley
Pax Christi Scotland
executive committee
member

As I watch the latest tragedy unfold in Afghanistan, I am struck by the coincidence that the book lying beside my computer desk at this moment is *A Fort of Nine Towers**, a memoir by Qais Akbar Omar of his family's experiences during the civil war in Afghanistan and the subsequent rule of the Taliban. I have had the book for some time but never got round to reading it - partly, I suspect, because I knew it would be challenging and in many ways heart-breaking.

To read it now will be even more heart-breaking, knowing that after twenty years, the Afghani people are back almost where they were in 2001, but I will read it because, in a way I feel I owe it to them to gain some understanding of what they went through before the Western powers came in and gave them the promise that things would be built back differently, and they would know peace and joy, music and dancing again.

The author's final words in the book are "They [these stories] must not happen again". Some of the current media reports express the hopes that the Taliban have changed over these twenty years and they see their mistakes; that Afghanistan itself has changed over these twenty years and the changes cannot be wholly undone. Is this wishful thinking to quiet our consciences? I pray it is not so.

Sadly our own government's first concern seems to have been more about the potential for Afghanistan becoming a hotbed for terrorism, rather than the fate of the people who have been abandoned by the West. Only after public pressure has consideration been given to resettling a relatively small number of refugees in the UK over a period of five years. What about the rest of the population? I think it is for us as individuals to ensure our government does whatever it can to protect the human rights of those who cannot leave. They must not be forgotten.

Grace Buckley

* *A Fort of Nine Towers*, Qais Akbar Omar. Published by Picador (ISBN 9781447221753). Also a Kindle version.

Pax Christi Scotland Peace issues

Peace in Korea – reaching across barriers

Anne Dobbing is a Pax Christi Scotland member whose links with Korea go back many years. In her former home in Dorset, she befriended young Korean students, and then her son taught English in Korea for several years and invited his parents to visit. Following our vigil for peace in Korea at the start of August, Anne recalled one visit when her son took her and her husband to the demilitarised zone (DMZ), the piece of land between the Republic of South Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

North Korea – some memories

The DMZ was one of the most disturbing and threatening places I have ever been to. On arrival, we watched a slide presentation by the joint US and Republic of Korea forces which control tourists visiting the DMZ. We were warned about any inappropriate behaviour and asked to sign a Visitor Declaration saying that 'The visit to Joint Security Area at Panmunjeon will entail entry into a hostile area and possibility of injury or death as a result of enemy action.'

We entered a large blue building through which the boundary crosses between the two countries. I looked outside at the two lines of soldiers from each regime, who stand permanently in defensive postures facing each other across a small strip of land no wider than a corridor. If anyone ever needs a lesson on why peace between peoples is imperative, and also why war is such a waste of time, life, money and resources, that place says it all.

Looking into North Korea we saw the enormous 160-metre flagpole flying the North Korean flag above the 'peace village'. Even the size of the flags displayed on either side of the DMZ has repeatedly generated conflict and tension between the North and South Korean opposing forces, with each side introducing larger flags to outdo the other side.

We also visited a railway station called Dorasan, 650 metres from the DMZ, which was renovated and rebuilt in 2002. Signs advertise trains that never run between Seoul and Pyongyang. How many families in North and South Korea, I wonder, are separated by the continuing hostilities and are never able to meet, who could be linked if the railway line were able to operate in peace to reunite them?

In Korea I had many other experiences, such as tasting delicious spicy Korean food, going to mass in the Catholic Cathedral of Myeongdong in Seoul, and visiting a Buddhist monastery, where a kind total stranger insisted on giving me a guided tour. We also visited the incredibly moving War Memorial Museum, which portrays the terrible effects on people of the Korean War. I will never forget the display of life-sized models in the museum showing what life was like during the years of fighting, when between two and three million ordinary Koreans died. One scene in the display showed Korean children still being taught in the streets, even after schools were destroyed, showing how precious a commodity education is felt to be in Korea, as the key to hope for the future.

On the last night of our visit our Korean friends wondered what their children's future would be like. I think that they - and all children everywhere - deserve to live in peace; that the Korean War should finally be ended; and that as a world we must learn to reach across barriers and try to get to know adversaries as real people.

Anne Dobbing, Pax Christi Scotland member

Sri Lanka and Police Scotland

Marian Pallister, Pax Christi Scotland's chair, says the Scottish Justice Minister and Police Scotland must further consider Scotland's role in training personnel from countries where human rights violations are alleged...



On June 22, 2021, the UK Government published on its website a UN Human Rights Council Core Group statement on Sri Lanka, which called on the Sri Lankan Government to address the harmful legacies of war and to protect human rights, including for those from religious minorities. Regret was expressed at the lack of progress on these issues, with a number of further concerning developments.

There had already been a UN resolution in March of this year which, according to Amnesty International, ramped up 'international monitoring and scrutiny of the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, but also mandates the UN human rights office to collect, consolidate and preserve evidence for future prosecutions and make recommendations to the international community on steps they can make to deliver on justice and accountability'.

Even so, a written question to the Scottish Parliament drew the answer that Police Scotland training of Sri Lankan officers was on hold because of COVID. A subsequent letter to the Justice Minister seeking clarification about Police Scotland's role in training Sri Lankan personnel received a response in early August that stressed 'All training delivered by Police Scotland officers is quality assured to ensure that it is human rights compliant and promotes human rights. Our activity is currently focused on community policing, promoting gender equality within the Sri Lanka Police Service and enhancing the response to sexual and gender based violence. All of this activity contributes to and is in support of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.'

Almost to the day, the Sri Lankan police spokesman, Senior Deputy Inspector General Ajith Rohana, told a local TV talk show that the police would not pursue cases of threats or assault against a woman by her husband because Sri Lanka has its own values which, he said, are not those of the West. Pax Christi Scotland then joined with Human Rights Watch, Freedom From Torture and the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice to seek further clarification about Police Scotland's involvement. See our joint letter on the website.

Media reports suggested training halted because of human rights issues, Police Scotland because of COVID. What's the reality? Will there be training for other questionable states? We will continue to ask questions.

On November 25, Pax Christi Scotland will hold a Zoom event to mark the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

It will focus on the violence experienced by women in Sri Lanka, despite Police Scotland's claim to have trained forces there in issues of gender equality.

To accommodate speakers in Sri Lanka, it will begin at 1pm UK time. Please make a note in your diaries and share through your networks.

The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka seeks gender justice

The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is publicly seeking justice for cases of gender violence, both historic and current.

Rita now a mother of two, was raped on August 12 2001 when she was a student in Year 10. She was returning from St Patrick's Church, Talawakelle and made a complaint to the Talawakelle police. Two decades later, the case is still on going.

Although a case for compensation was completed in July this year, a fresh trial of the criminal case (delayed because of court errors) is still to begin. Since 2007, nine High Court Judges have heard the criminal case.

Human Rights Officer Fr Nandana Manatunga, who will speak at our November Zoom event, has supported Rita and wonders how much longer it will take for a fresh trial.

In another case, also supported by the Human Rights Office, the Bishop of Kandy, Rt. Rev. Dr Vianney Fernando and his priests of the diocese wrote to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa about the death of a 16-year-old girl. The letter called shame upon a regime that left the girl's parents so poor they were compelled to send their daughter to work as a domestic at a tea plantation, where she had no protection.

Pax Christi Scotland

Engaging with the world, seeking peace

Some important dates for your diary

Climate, weapons of mass destruction – and ethics for peace

The dictionary tells us that 'ethics' means the study of morality's effect on conduct. Ethical investment or divestment therefore suggests that our moral code as people seeking the peace of Christ will lead us to shun investments in fossil fuels that damage our common home and seek divestment from weapons of mass destruction that by definition would wipe out humanity.

It's too easy to think these issues are out of our league, above our pay grade. But as we each engage with the world, we may well unknowingly underpin the unethical investments that threaten the world we are charged with stewarding.

On **September 21**, join us to learn the connections we can make or break to create a safer world. It's an opportunity to engage with international speakers. Register at: Register in advance for this meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAqcOyvqT8vGtFLiwC1b3q9Z7QOrqrylGOA>

Gender violence – no place in our world

As Robert Burns wrote in *To a Mouse*, 'The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men. Gang aft agley'. There is no doubt that Police Scotland intended to promote human rights and gender equality when it undertook to train officers from the Sri Lankan security forces.

Sadly, we know that the Sri Lankans have not followed through and human rights violations are escalating.

We have campaigned on this issue, and will continue to do so. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (**November 25**) our speakers in Sri Lanka and the UK will help us better understand a complex situation. There will be reminders, but register at:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZArfu2vqjooH92Lq_FPBhsr30wl-0_Oj2MS

This Zoom meeting will be at 13h UK time to accommodate our speakers in Sri Lanka.

August 29, Red alert - still time to sign up for Pax Christi Scotland's Zoom event discussing Clause 6 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which addresses compensation for veterans of weapons of mass destruction tests, and restitution of radiation-damaged land. Our speakers: John Lax, UK test veteran, Mary MacPherson, widow of a Scottish test veteran, Dr Becky Alexis-Martin, lecturer in cultural and political geography at Manchester Metropolitan University, with expertise in the cultural and social effects of nuclear warfare, & Jonathan Frerichs, a Pax Christi International representative at the United Nations in Geneva for disarmament, & a consultant for the World Council of Churches' Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

Join us at 7pm UK time by registering with:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcldOGrrzsoHNwirKCoDEFi7E-C124EVC0n>

September 18 Diary date: The Scottish Bishops' Conference's Committee for Interreligious Dialogue will hold an on-line colloquium entitled *Interreligious Dialogue in the Time of Pope Francis*, featuring Dr Peter Admirand & Canon Roddy Johnston. Pope Francis has said 'To dialogue it is necessary to know how to lower the defences, open the doors of the house, and offer human warmth.' It is the aim of the Committee to offer that human warmth.

Sep 18, 2021 11:00 AM UK time. Register with:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qfu2rpzwoGtDuD49klKjtypEv8wRXKpDA>

Our website & our postal address

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 Computers -

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

See our change of postal address below left.

Where to find Pax Christi Scotland:

www.paxchristiscotland.org

<https://www.facebook.com/PaxChristiScotland>

[@PaxScotland](#) (Twitter)

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Pax Christi Scotland now has a Youtube Channel where you can find recordings of past events. Find us at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCcmLpQv27Py_ul14szp95g

If you subscribe to the channel (just click on the word 'Subscribed'), you will be informed whenever a new recording is posted.