

QUNO Introductory Statement to Aarhus Working Group of the Parties

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) represents Quakers at the UN in Geneva and New York through Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) which has had consultative status at the Economic and Social Council of the UN since 1948. QUNO works on a range of issues which reflect Quaker concerns for international peace and justice. We feel that the Aarhus Convention can be a useful instrument for achieving peace and justice in environmental matters .

QUNO has worked with a number of UN environmental processes, over a period of 40 years . More recently, we have begun to engage with the Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations and the post 2015 Development Framework process.

QUNO works on natural resources and the potential for conflict around these, especially in the face of climate change. We take a conflict prevention approach, highlighting environmental, human rights and other laws and guidelines that support States and local communities to manage natural resources sustainably, equitably and peacefully.

QUNO sees the Aarhus Convention's preambular vision to: “ encourage widespread public awareness of, and participation in, decisions affecting the environment and sustainable development”, as a valuable contribution to managing environmental matters in a constructive way. We believe that the Aarhus Convention provides a useful example for other regions to emulate and that ,for particular countries beyond the UNECE region , it may be relevant and appropriate to join the Aarhus Convention itself. For these reasons, QUNO is planning to highlight the Convention in its work on Natural Resources, Conflict and Cooperation with States, organisations and practitioners working on the ground.

An important element of QUNO's work is focused on the preconditions for effective public participation around natural resources, which we understand as contributing to the prevention of destructive conflict. In the preamble to the Convention, it is acknowledged that: “citizens may need assistance in order to exercise their rights”. We believe that it is important to recognise the peacebuilding and community empowerment dimensions in environmental decision making as we work towards effective public participation, access to information and access to justice in environmental matters

More information about our work can be found in our recent publication ‘Building Peace around Water, Land and Food: Policy and Practice for Preventing Conflict’, which is available here and on our website www.quno.org.