

**Geneva Dialogue on Environment,  
Climate, Conflict, and Peace:  
Meeting 22**

29 June, Zoom

Participants: 24 participants

**Presentation from Lindsey Cook, Representative for Climate Change at the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) Geneva, as interviewed by ECCP participant, Alice Munnelly:**

- How did you first come to work on connecting climate change and peacebuilding?
  - Background in peacebuilding, worked in conflict zones for the UN in humanitarian, human rights, and peacekeeping
  - Came to climate change as a peace concern
  - Some of the main connections are:
    - In questions around natural resources, conflict, and cooperation, how can public participation become a peacebuilding effort?
      - Examples include the Aarhus Convention, Principle 10 in Rio, the Latin American Ecsasu Agreement
    - Building peace around water, land, and food, including...
      - Public participation
      - Human rights based approaches
    - How do we harness public participation to channel conflict and keep it from becoming violent?
  - QUNO works at the [UNFCCC](#), Human Rights Council, [IPCC](#)
    - Our main focus is to ensure states and follow through on their obligations for climate change and human rights
      - Reducing greenhouse gas emissions
      - Supporting other states to avoid increasing human rights violations
    - Integrating human rights and climate action together - more coherent, legitimate, sustainable outcomes
    - Advocacy, together with special rapporteurs, to show positive examples of how this actually works
  - How do we create more ambitious, fair, and effective climate action through human rights based approaches?
- What does a human rights based approach look like?
  - Civil society on human rights at the major climate negotiations looks at:
    - Public participation
    - Human rights
    - Just transition
    - Indigenous peoples' rights
    - Gender, ecosystem/biodiversity protection
    - Intergenerational justice/equity
    - Food security
  - Climate action, as if people mattered
  - Need to unpack- the concepts of money and power

- The main drivers of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, are often financially lucrative activities
    - Many people are profiting and we see an increasing power of multinationals alongside a reduction in governmental power
    - Increasingly unsustainable and unjust economic systems
    - The human rights based approach is a way of ensuring that people are not forgotten
  - Human rights based approaches are essential, but misunderstood. Never assume that people know what human rights based approaches are as the concept is often misused.
- The more we can act in mitigation now, the better the longer term outcomes will be
- QUNO publications on these topics:
  - Human Rights Based Climate Action <https://quno.org/resource/2019/6/human-rights-based-climate-action>
  - Building Peace around water, land and food: Policy and practice for preventing conflict <https://quno.org/resource/2013/9/building-peace-around-water-land-and-food-policy-and-practice-preventing-conflict>
  - Building peace through Principle 10 <https://quno.org/resource/2015/5/negotiations-principle-10-rio-declaration>
  - The Peacebuilding Implications of Energy Transitions to a Carbon-Neutral Future <https://quno.org/resource/2020/10/peacebuilding-implications-energy-transitions-carbon-neutral-future>
  - The role of decentralized renewable energy in peacebuilding <https://quno.org/resource/2018/12/role-decentralized-renewable-energy-peacebuilding>

**Discussion:**

**Is there a difference in the use of “human rights based approaches” from the environment/climate to the human rights side? How do you see the silo?**

- It’s not so much a silo but really two different institutional processes (climate change vs. human rights)
  - On the Human Rights side, the work is to enforce the work that states have already ratified / a lot on the legitimacy of their capacity of action
    - Very specifically articulated
  - On the climate change side, sometimes the issues are purposefully left open ended so that states can engage to the degrees that they are able
- There is a lot of coordination between NGOs on both sides who are advocating in two different directions
  - And strong language on rights in climate change negotiations vs. climate change language in human rights negotiations

**If we only take a human rights based approach, do environmental protections become conditional to the impacts they have on human beings? Is there a reciprocal relationship between the rights of humans and non-human entities?**

- On the issue of climate change, because human activities are driving greenhouse gas emissions, so human activities MUST transform
  - Policies which aim to transform human activities driving greenhouse gas emissions, will be more effective, fair and sustainable when human rights and Indigenous Peoples rights are respected and protected in the policy.
- This question gets to the environmental peacebuilding side, beyond climate change
  - There are ongoing legal efforts to protect the environment
    - Efforts on ecocide, criminalizing individuals behind actions that endanger the environment.
    - Though, the current protections seem not to go far enough and still protect a fair amount of human behavior if entities can justify their behavior
- In legal terms, there are different issues - UNEP defines 3 crises: pollution, climate change, and biodiversity
  - Pollution is conceptually clear, implementation is difficult - the legal theory is straightforward.
  - Climate change is more complicated and muddled. For example, excess CO2 could be considered pollution, but it is a global phenomenon.
    - We struggle with this. The international system is not designed to tackle global issues and it is in part problematic because of sovereignty.
  - Biodiversity is also complicated because we understand human activity but not ecosystems themselves.
- “Ecocide” is a highly specific legal term. It is not any damage to the environment, it is a *massive* damage to the environment - an atrocity.
  - Would need to be adopted by international penal courts which prosecute the worst, abhorrent crimes.
  - Something can be awful ecosystem management but not fully considered ecocide.
- Ecosystem integrity has made its way into climate change and human rights negotiations
  - For example, in the Paris Agreement, all of the advocacy groups had a common ground to lobby from, which translated into ecosystem integrity language in the preamble.
  - But this still does not solve the conceptual issues.
- In connecting environmental issues and human rights, there is a tendency to stress more 2nd and 3rd generation human rights.
  - Climate action work, on the other hand, has a larger space for bringing in the first generation for human rights. It is an opportunity to integrate a more holistic approach and to safeguard democracy.

**How does the faith-based orientation of QUNO impact your work?**

- The role and scale of faith actors has increased in this space in the past decade.
- It is less politicised, and engaging these conversations as moral issues can be effective.
  - We are actively destroying the livelihoods of future generations.
  - What it means to care for the earth and why this is such a critical moment.

- Interfaith action is critical

**What about planting trees to restore earth, reduce erosion and create sustained livelihood, is that an effective approach for environmental peacebuilding or does it have similar problems?**

- In the IPCC, there is a real push for what are increasingly called nature-based solutions (NBS)
  - Planting *masses* of trees as a sink to GHG emissions, or to prevent or mitigate storm damage, etc.
- “Nature-based” has a role, but at large scale is “land-intense”
- The challenge is when NBS is proposed as a substitute to mitigating the drivers of GHG emissions, for example, instead of rapid reduction of fossil fuels. In this case, NBS would be used to avoid transforming the real drivers of human-induced climate change.
  - What is concerning is when it is seen as an ALTERNATIVE to larger scale mitigation
  - Fossil fuels are not the only reason but they are the majority focus
- Need to separate the arguments to make sure its not being taken over
- Also, tree planting programs are sometimes implemented in ways that exploit labor (eg in Pakistan, the “10 billion trees tsunami” program is laudable, but they pay laborers less than the country’s minimum wage)
- Ecosystem restoration is important & needed, but can only deliver on what it is: Healthy, functioning ecosystems. It is not suitable to solve human-made problems like blasting geological carbon into the atmosphere

How might we balance individual consumption and the consumption responsibilities of states and companies?

- My personal consumption pattern is a personal witness, for integrity in political engagement. Our choices in life do have an impact
  - How to be a Hero for All our Children <https://quno.org/resource/2021/4/how-be-hero-all-our-children-written-to-support-personal-witness-along-side-political-action>.
  - People's Climate Empowerment Series <https://quno.org/resource/2020/12/peoples-climate-empowerment-series>
- Isn't personal responsibility a privilege?
  - How can individuals take responsible action in an irresponsible system?
- It's not so much an either/or, but about complementarity of approaches
  - Yes, there is a moral argument that every individual has actions they can take
  - But at the same time we need to address the ideas of circular economy, investments, just transitions, etc.
- UNEP efforts and forthcoming assembly has a new resolution on sustainable consumption
  - It's not about the policies, but the implementation
- This can be a part of building a relationship with the environment that helps us to advocate for the rights of ecosystems against extraction and destruction. The personal is also political.
- The experience we've had now after covid restrictions - for the people in the weakest positions, not being able to travel has been a massive problem in not being able to speak up and have their voice heard
  - It is widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots
  - Access to travel and to electronic tools IS the way people make their voices heard

- Bodies have been replacing consultations with email campaigns, which is just not the same
- At the same time, people who would never have had the chance to travel to meetings, etc. did get a better chance to be heard through zoom, too

**Additional resources mentioned:**

- DCAF's engagement with climate change in relation to the security sector
  - [https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/imce/PRD/UniversityOfGeneva-GGPB\\_N2-2021-M-G\\_Manea.pdf](https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/imce/PRD/UniversityOfGeneva-GGPB_N2-2021-M-G_Manea.pdf)
  - <https://www.dcaf.ch/climate-change-impact-global-and-local-security-governance-learning-local-experiences-security>
- Previous ECCP session on nature based solutions
  - <https://www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/Dialogue%20Mtg%2015%2C%2016%20March.pdf>
- Previous ECCP session on just transitions
  - <https://www.gpplatform.ch/sites/default/files/Dialogue%20Mtg%209%2C%201%20December.pdf>
- Geneva Peace Week 2020 video on legal frameworks for environmental peacebuilding
  - <https://youtu.be/RUxirtJAj8>