

Quakers

The Religious Society of Friends - Te Hāhi Tūhauwiri Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand

22 August 2024

Open letter to the Government: Peace and security for Aotearoa New Zealand

Dear Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence

We invite you to consider the widespread destruction that is wrought around the world by military combat forces. In Ukraine, Gaza and many other locations, such forces bring catastrophic slaughter, mayhem, destruction of infrastructure and societal and environmental degradation. This creates legacies of alienation and distrust, as well as the diversion of financial resources from desperately needed human services. Even the mere existence, enhancement, accumulation and exercise of such forces represents massive waste, exacerbating fear and animosities between nations.

We are astounded by the enormous expenditure in the enhancement of sophisticated methods to destroy life and property, in the belief that such activity brings security. Tragically neglected are efforts to develop and implement methods of constructive prevention of violence; techniques that have already [demonstrated superior success](#).

We challenge the widespread assumption that military expenditure is the best solution to security challenges. The array of threats to our society is rapidly changing, with climate change, pandemics, artificial intelligence, external control of social media, profusion of misinformation, gross inequalities in wealth, massive concentration of power to elites and many other evolving threats. Such threats present very different challenges, many of which demand extensive international cooperation for constructive solutions.

We seek, instead, a focus on more constructive ways of addressing the many threats that we face, ways which are far more powerful, flexible and capable of bringing benefits to ourselves as well as others. We refer to the increasing calls for greater international cooperation incorporated in such themes as "[Common Security](#)", based on ensuring security for all parties.

Implementing such principles would involve:

1. Speaking clearly against the destructive response to conflict, for instance, calling for ceasefires in Ukraine and Gaza and other conflict situations.
2. Enhancing the capabilities of diplomats and others in working through conflict situations and developing constructive solutions.

3. Strengthening relevant international networks and institutions and engaging them in resolving current and incipient conflicts.
4. Supporting research in constructive approaches to address conflict.
5. Educating our communities in constructive approaches to conflict. Such skills would support community resilience and domestic conflict response as well as enhancing national efforts for NZ's role as a peacemaker.

These are not new ideas. They are principles that have been promoted and practised by Quakers for nearly 400 years. While being known as conscientious objectors, Quakers have been involved more in addressing the causes of war. This may involve promoting understanding and negotiating peace between warring parties and reducing the impacts of war on combatants and civilians alike. They are principles that have proven their worth many times over. With the greatly enhanced destructive capabilities of modern technology, they have become even more important.

We submit that New Zealand's security would be best enhanced by our contribution to the international community through increased efforts in resolving conflict, rather than aligning ourselves with parties to conflict. Such action would also be of much lower cost and bring greater benefit to society in contributing to a peaceful region and preserving our respect for each other.

We look forward to engaging with you on these issues.

Yours in Peace and Friendship

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anne Hall' and 'Alistair Hall'.

Anne and Alistair Hall
Co-Clerks, Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand

cc: Leaders of all parties and relevant opposition spokespersons.