

Seven themes for the Peace Conference

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By Eden Grace

Yesterday, the sixty delegates to the Kenyan National Quaker Peace Conference worked throughout the afternoon and evening in Sections, analyzing in depth and seeking ways in which Kenyan Friends can make an impact in their context. The seven themes that were explored encompass the many facets of Friends ministries in Kenya. As each group reported to the plenary today, Friends heard a powerful call to faithful witness in these days.

1. *Peace and non-violence as central to the gospel*—or as the group suggested “the Gospel as central to peace and non-violence.” This group looked at the biblical principles of peace, justice, truth and non-violence. They acknowledged that Kenyan Friends have been inadequate in their teaching and preaching, in their formation of their own members and in their public witness. The group articulated the biblical framework for our peace work, and proposed that it be circulated to all Friends pastors as a resource for preaching in the present crisis.
2. *Trauma healing and post-conflict ministries.* This group analyzed the meaning of trauma, its causes, symptoms, and consequences. The current crisis in Kenya will require both short-term and long-term interventions for trauma healing. Friends are fortunate that there are already “tools” in the Quaker “tool box”, namely the Alternatives to Violence Programme and its various activities. The Conference saw the need for a massive scaling-up of these programmes in order to impact on healing Kenyan society.
3. *Humanitarian needs, internally displaced people and vulnerable populations.* There is a tremendous humanitarian crisis unfolding in Kenya right now. This group collected informal data on numbers of displaced people, and discussed their various physical and psychological needs. It was clear to all Friends present that one of the calls upon the Friends Church is to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of their fellow Kenyans, regardless of political or ethnic affiliation. An essential aspect of resolving the current crisis is to mediate between those who are displaced and those who displaced them, so that people can be reintegrated into multi-ethnic cities and villages. In a longer-term perspective, Friends may want to develop pro-active capacities for addressing both natural and man-made disasters.
4. *Ethnic conflict and reconciliation toward a harmonious society.* This group discussed the ethnic aspects of the Kenyan political crisis, and acknowledged that it is a complex matter. Contributing factors include unjust land distribution practices, unequal development throughout the country, corruption of some leaders, excessive concentration of power, various cultural practices, and attitudes of prejudice. The group also noted that the Friends Church has traditionally had an ethnic identity, as a church for one community only. The Conference felt very strongly that our church must move beyond this exclusive identity, to see itself as a church for all people.
5. *Preaching and evangelism in the present context.* This group recognized that the work of preaching is essential in this time, to proclaim the message of Christ as the One who can bring change, who can bring healing, hope and peace. Where there are hopeless, hungry and angry people, the practical gospel of Christ can address their needs. Our church has not been active enough in this kind of holistic outreach.
6. *The mission of our institutions of education and healthcare.* The Friends Church is well known for its centers of excellence in education and healthcare, although the Conference recognized that in recent years, internal politics in the church have weakened our commitment to schools and hospitals.

Considering that young people are particularly involved in the current violence, there is an urgent need to strengthen peace education in our schools.

7. *Global partnership and the role of our international/ecumenical partners.* This group discussed the linkages between Kenyan Friends and the global Quaker community, and also made proposals for how the many ideas from this conference could be organized and coordinated at a national level in Kenya.

Two important facets of the current Kenyan crisis were not specifically listed in the group topics, namely economic injustice/disparities of wealth and poverty, and youth disaffection/hopelessness, but they were raised by every group in their reports. Conference participants have recognized that these two factors are largely responsible for the incredible explosion of anger witnessed in Kenya since the election. In discerning long-term action toward a culture of peace in Kenya, these will inevitably form two crucial areas of focus for the work.

The Conference will spend the rest of its time together collating and organizing the recommendations of the Sections, in order to develop a coherent strategy and coordinated action plan for both the immediate and long-term witness of Kenyan Friends.