

Report on Consultation #3 – Sustaining Life on Earth

World Plenary in Pisac, Peru

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The “Sustaining Life on Earth” consultation at the World Plenary in Peru was facilitated primarily by personnel from the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in New York and Geneva. The first two days consisted of break-out groups of more than 50 Friends producing a large array of sticky notes, each with a word or phrase stating an action for “living sustainably” that Quakers could carry out at the level of individuals, Monthly Meetings and other small groups, and Yearly Meetings. The consultation on the third day was cancelled, due to the late return of the field trip participants to Pisac.

The facilitator team then crafted a minute to be discussed and revised during the third and final meeting, which would give guidance to Friends around the world on “Living Sustainably” (It was not made clear why this changed focus, rather than the broader and more immediate topic of “Sustaining Life on Earth”.) The final version of the minute is not yet available, so I am restricted in this report to discussing the draft minute.

The draft begins with an eloquent statement regarding the need for care and stewardship of the Earth and the natural world, and it lays out the results of the misuse of the Earth’s resources, namely that it “creates inequality, destroys community, affects health and well-being, leads to war, and erodes our integrity.” It then lists action points for FWCC, including investing ethically and sharing Quaker experiences, and it asks Yearly Meetings to do as follows: initiate at least two concrete actions on sustainability; support individuals and groups to take sustainability actions; and support the work of Quaker organizations to ensure that international agreements support sustainability. Individual Friends and groups are asked to share experiences of living sustainably.

In an annex to the minute, 27 sustainable actions are suggested, including the following: reduce consumption of all kinds, especially energy and meat; walk, cycle, use public transportation; grow your own food and develop urban gardens; use less water; share housing; educate ourselves and others; love nature; pick up trash and litter around meeting houses; build alliances and approach legislators; invest ethically and divest from fossil fuels; develop zero-carbon meeting houses, share sustainability skills, build solidarity locally; support Quaker political and international work; and move concerns to action.

After much prayerful meditation, research, and extensive phone consultation with several experts in the field of addressing climate disruption, I feel strongly led to offer constructive analysis of the minute as part of this report. I found general agreement that the minute is worthwhile as far as it goes, but that it falls far short of where it could have gone and needed to go. It passes over any explicit discussion of two of the three major climate-disruption themes being addressed around the world at this time—adaptation/resilience and regeneration—and it offers suggested actions that are a decade or more behind the

curve. (These are not misguided suggestions, by any means, just ones that have been widely heard for many, many years.)

It was disturbing that the main subject of the consultation was somehow changed from the original theme of "Sustaining Life on Earth" (see below) to a similar, but much reduced, "Living Sustainably". The latter primarily addresses mitigation actions (in particular, measures that will eventually decelerate and perhaps even reverse the emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere). These are all *very* important things to do, but they will only have an impact 5-10 years or more into the future.

What this narrow focus on mitigation misses entirely is the looming humanitarian crisis—of epic proportions—that is already forcing poor people and disadvantaged nations to try to adapt to calamity, as well as leaving aside the massive current and past damage to our Earth that must be remediated and regenerated. Quakers, above all, should be addressing this suffering and destruction, right now. While mitigation will prevent, in the future, a worsening of this situation, it does not salvage, heal, and minister—while the damage is currently unfolding. The suffering of the poor, and the damage to the Earth are basically missing from the minute, in any direct way.

And this brings us to the spiritual dimension of the crisis, regarding what actions Friends could be taking, which the minute also fails to explicitly address. Faith communities like ours are especially prepared to focus on the spiritual side of any world crisis, and duty bound to do so. Unfortunately, it appears that we have missed our chance in this minute.

Rather than lament this fact, we should laud the good work of the group and its facilitators, and focus upon how we can move this minute forward at future meetings of FWCC-SoA.

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Consultation #3 [distributed at the beginning of the World Plenary]:
Sustaining Life on Earth: inspired by the Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice, developing worldwide Quaker collaboration for environmental, economic, and spiritual changes.

How do we respond to the spiritual imperative described in the Kabarak Call?

How do we give life to the Kabarak Call?

How can we lend our collective Spirit-led, God-given voice for the good of the world?