



# ABINGDON PEACE GROUP

Newsletter January - February 2024

**Our Peace Pole plan** has been welcomed by the trustees of St Ethelwold's House who are happy to host it in the garden there!

We now need to :

- Decide which EIGHT languages will go on the pole, and
- Raise £230.

Which language would YOU like to see on the pole?

Suggestions for languages are welcome - please email them to Sally Reynolds at [Abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:Abingdonpeace@gmail.com)

Please send donations to our treasurer Denise Watt, 39 Boxhill Road, OX14 2ET or by bank transfer to Abingdon Peace Group, Lloyds Bank, Abingdon, Sort code 30-10-04, Account 0040809102 Please add the reference "Peace Pole".

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**This month's meeting:**

**Tuesday 16th January 8pm online**

## Civil society Involvement in Peacebuilding in Colombia

We are delighted and privileged that Dr Andrei Gomez-Suarez & Dr Gwen Burnyeat, both "practical academics" living in Oxford, happily agreed to give a talk about their first-hand experiences of peacebuilding in Colombia. Both are part of peacebuilding organisation Rodeemos el Dialogo ("Embrace the Dialogue") a transnational network of Colombians and friends of Colombia co-founded by Andrei.



They will tell us about:

- the peace process with the FARC,
  - the peace community of San José de Apartadó
  - Rodeemos el Diálogo
  - the struggle to combat disinformation in the peace referendum,
  - and a bit about how things are today under President Petro
- Gwen was a Junior Research Fellow in Political Anthropology at Merton College, Oxford, and Andrei is Senior Research Fellow in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in the Centre of Religion, Reconciliation and Peace, University of Winchester.

Prepare for a window into the world of practical peacebuilding and grassroots activism!

To join our Zoom meeting, click this link any time after 7.30pm:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/91315134101?pwd=RmxHLzBQaXlHYjFSRm5nREVzYjdSdz09>

Meeting ID: 913 1513 4101 Passcode: 015836

15 people on 13 screens, including friends from Oxford and Salisbury, met to share information about groups who are trying to reach out across the divide between Israel and Palestine. There are many! Those mentioned included:

Seeds of Peace which organises camps every year to bring together Israelis and Palestinians.  
Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, an intentional community/village of Jews and Arabs living side by side.

Refuser Solidarity – supporting young Israelis who refuse to bear arms to suppress Palestinians.  
Women in Black – groups all over the world who vigil in support of oppressed minorities.  
Women Waging Peace – recently founded to accompany Palestinians needing treatment in Israeli hospitals. Sadly one of the founders was killed by Hamas on October 7th.

5 Broken Cameras – an award-winning documentary shot by a Palestinian journalist.

Breaking the Silence – an organisation of Israelis who have done National Service and are trying to open the eyes of young Israelis to the reality of life in West Bank.

Hand in Hand – a charity which runs many integrated schools.

Also: Jewish Voice for Peace; Rabbis for Human Rights; Divan Orchestra.

The day after our meeting an email from that great magazine “Positive News” arrived, with a link to a list of 12 organisations bridging the divide: some are the same but there are new ones too: <https://www.positive.news/world/groups-working-for-israel-palestine-peace/> . If ever there was a nudge to subscribe and support this magazine, this was it!

### **From Faringdon Peace Group newsletter:**

“Here's to the bridge-builders,  
the hand-holders,  
the light-bringers,  
those extraordinary souls,  
wrapped in ordinary lives  
who quietly weave threads  
of humanity into an inhumane world.  
They are the unsung heroes in a world  
at war with itself.  
They are the whisperers of hope that  
peace is possible.  
Look for them  
in this present darkness.  
Light your candle  
with their flame.  
And then go.  
Build bridges.  
Hold hands.  
Bring light to a dark  
and desperate world.  
Be the hero you are looking for.  
Peace is possible.  
It begins with us.”

L.R. Knost

### **SOME VITAL STATISTICS ON GAZA.**

Some population densities worth noting:

Globally: 62 people per sq Km

Oxfordshire: 37 people per sq Km

Israel: 400 people per sq Km

Gaza: 5,555 people per sq Km

Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao and one or two others are more densely populated than Gaza.

And land areas?

London covers 1572 sq km

Oxfordshire 2605 sq km

Gaza 365 sq km

These figures differ slightly from site to site, but I think it gives a good idea.

Both from the Nov/Dec 23 issue of Faringdon Peace Group's excellent newsletter. You can read current & past issues online here: [www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk](http://www.faringdonpeacegroup.org.uk)

## Members Corner.

**Miranda Shaw's work for peace.** Barbara was delighted to meet member Miranda Shaw in Oxford, after which Miranda sent this update on some activities in her busy life.

UN Women - I am now the treasurer for Creators of Peace International (as a volunteer) and we have just done a small project in the Caribbean around gender based violence. Hoping for continuation funding to continue that work with local partners there. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/4t5VbRbKLcsUpDAa/>

UNESCO and GHFP - I led the pilot of a project called Healing the Wounds of Slavery project in the UK and will be part of the core team going forward in service to this work. <https://ghfp.institute/intergenerational-dialogue/>

Rajmohan and Usha Gandhi visit - I coordinated a visit of the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi and his wife Usha in October and accompanied them for the month that they were here. Picture attached of me and my colleague with them at the Gandhi statue. :) It was a joy filled, profound and beautiful time. Such gorgeous people. We visited Parliament and spoke with MPs, had sessions on history and I even had the great honour of interviewing Rajmohan.



Maybe someday I will get along to an Abingdon Peace Group meeting!

**Lesley Lovell's memoir, final instalment.** With thanks to Lesley for this engaging story!

*My father told me I had ruined my husband's career by being in CND, but when he got his PhD, Aldermaston promptly sent an invite to join them in making the bombs. Bad communication somewhere? Or keeping friends close and enemies closer?*

*In Soho the Partisan coffee shop opened up, all trendy with chess boards for customers to use. Upstairs the CND had an office. One night our Secret Service raided this and removed the CND membership files. It was frightening; what would they do to us? In the end, nothing.*

*My husband got a job in Berkeley, but that was cancelled when they discovered the CND connection so we ended up in more tolerant and more neutral Canada, in lovely Vancouver on the Pacific coast. In Canada CND was very small because Canadians knew they would not be affected by such a war.*

*Four years later, back in England, my husband doing useful peaceful work trying to control plasma at Culham, I joined local CND, attended the meetings, and remember a lovely summer party at one top scientist's garden in Albert Park. Then children, divorce and I lost touch with that world, being a social scientist, not physicist.*

Lesley Lovell.

### **Abingdon Peace Group joins 21 other organisations calling on Russia and Ukraine to stop persecuting conscientious objectors.**

As part of an international week of action in early December we co-signed a letter calling on the Russian and Ukrainian governments to respect the rights of conscientious objectors, who currently risk jail in both countries for refusing to participate in the war. Identically-worded letters were delivered in person to the Russian & Ukrainian embassies. The letters started, "We are writing to you as a group of peace, faith-based and human rights organisations based in the UK. We wish to express our grave concern regarding the situation of conscientious objectors from Russia and Ukraine and human rights defenders working on their behalf".

At the Remembrance ceremony in Tavistock Square on Armistice Day, 11th November, a touching statement was read out by Isabel Kelly on behalf of Parents Circle – Families Forum, a joint Israeli-Palestinian organisation of over 600 families, all of whom have lost an immediate family member to the ongoing conflict:

***‘We, the members of the Parents Circle – Families Forum, grieving Israeli and Palestinian families, express deep sorrow for the thousands of dead and condemn the shocking acts of violence....***

***‘Thousands of victims aren’t just numbers; they represent shattered dreams, unfulfilled futures and broken loves....***

***‘The past weeks have brought upon us seemingly never-ending shock and storms of emotion. We fear the future and pray that the cursed war ends as soon as possible, that violent incidents will not break out in other places, and that the killing from both sides will stop.***

***‘We are still determined to believe that only an agreement and a political solution will put an end to wars, occupation, suffering, victims and prisoners....***

***‘Violence breeds more violence and the the only way to end it is a solution that meets the needs of both nations for security, freedom, respect and welfare.’***

You can read the full report in Peace News, <https://peacenews.info/node/10793/always-be-side-oppressed> . Peace News is the newspaper for the UK grassroots peace and justice movement, and Emily, Emma, Gabriel and Mil (the Peace News team, all of whom have spoken at meetings in Abingdon in the past) urgently need more supporters to continue to bring us the news other media ignore. Have you thought of subscribing?

### **Holocaust Memorial at Upper Heyford 28th January 11am**

**The Path of MADness 2024** will be held at the former cold war air base at Upper Heyford at 11am on Sunday 28th January, starting at the Heritage Centre, 103 Castle Street, Bicester, OX25 5BX. The centre are asking for a £5 contribution to their nominated charity [www.giraffesontour.co.uk/](http://www.giraffesontour.co.uk/) and for car registrations (unfortunately the site can only be accessed by car but hopefully we can car share). There is no limit on numbers.

The event includes a service in a Hardened Aircraft Shelter and then the opportunity to walk the NATO Runway i.e. the Path of MADness. [MAD = Mutually Assured Destruction ..Ed]

Contributions can be made to the service, reflecting on nuclear holocaust, genocides and crimes against humanity. Climate collapse and the 6th great extinction could also be included.

The weather can be cold and windy, so dress warmly. Please email Daniel on [pause.forthought@gmail.com](mailto:pause.forthought@gmail.com) if you want to come (either giving car registration number or to ask for a lift). His telephone will be 07949 159430. Daniel Scharf.

**DIARY.** For more events see <http://www.networkforpeace.org.uk/calendar> and also the very up-to-date collection on CND Salisbury’s website <https://www.cndsalisbury.org.uk/events>

**Every Monday except Bank Holidays 8.15 - 8.45am.** Vigil for peace. War Memorial, The Square, Abingdon.

**Every Saturday, 2-3pm, Martyrs’ Memorial, St Giles, Oxford.** Women in Black vigil. All welcome (men welcome to hand out leaflets.) Contact: Carol Stavris [carol.stavris@btinternet.com](mailto:carol.stavris@btinternet.com)

**Sat 13th January 12 noon Central London.** National March for Palestine: Ceasefire Now, Stop the War on Gaza. Organised by the Stop the War coalition.

**Tues 16 January 8pm on-line:** Civil Society Involvement in Peacebuilding in Colombia (See front page)

**Sunday 28th January 11am Upper Heyford.** Holocaust Memorial walk: see above.

Corrections and contributions to this newsletter are very welcome.

Abingdon Peace Group now intends to meet on the third Tuesday of alternate months on Zoom. All who are interested in peace and campaigning for it are welcome to take part, and people with IT skills are urgently needed! The Group has no party political affiliations.

Contact us on [abingdonpeace@gmail.com](mailto:abingdonpeace@gmail.com) , 07786 055195 or (01235) 526265.