

# Washington Newsletter

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## Building Peace in Times of War

by Bridget Moix  
(Page 2)

## War Is Not the Answer —Peacebuilding Is

by Diana Ohlbaum  
(Page 4)

## Friends Place Off to Strong Start

by Alex Frandsen  
(Insert)

## The Courage to Engage

by Jim Cason  
(Page 6)

## Q&A with a European Quaker

by Alex Frandsen  
(Page 8)



# Building Peace in Times of War

By Bridget Moix



How do we build peace amid war?

Nearly 80 years ago, a group of Friends joined together across Quaker traditions with a common interest to bring a voice for peace to Capitol Hill during World War II. Their effort was small at first, and their chance of success must have seemed even smaller. The public largely supported the war and our country's involvement in it. Few voices in Congress challenged the idea that meeting violence with violence was the only option.

But Friends had faith.

In its early days, FCNL began lobbying Congress to protect the rights of conscientious objectors, rebuild Europe, advance civil rights at home, abolish nuclear weapons, and support the United Nations. Centuries of refusing to participate in violence and actively practicing peace had convinced Quakers, again and again, that war is never the answer.

Since then, FCNL has consistently lobbied Congress to prevent and end wars and to invest in the tools and policies we need to advance a more just and peaceful world. We have not always succeeded, but we have made important gains along the way and helped open the eyes of many decision-makers to the possibility of a world without war or the threat of war.

Now, a devastating new war in Europe is again testing our faith and our Quaker Peace Testimony. Russia's blatant invasion of Ukraine invades our conscience and pleads for an urgent and effective response.

The determination of the Ukrainian people to defend their country is honorable and understandable. It is hard not to want to support their fight in any way we can.

Yet, we also see the unraveling of humanity in this war as we have seen in so many others. The predictable cycle of violence is now feeding itself.



More fighting with more weapons fuels more hatred, which fuels more aggression and leads to more death and devastation.

So, amid yet another war, how do we witness and work for peace on Capitol Hill and around the country? How do we hold onto the belief that peace is possible? While the White House and Congress rush through billions of dollars in military aid, FCNL is urging Members of Congress to ask the hard questions: When and how does this war end? What is the future of NATO and of US-Russia relationships? How do we avoid nuclear catastrophe?

In Ukraine, as in other wars, there are nonviolent options. We continue pressing for urgent diplomacy to secure a just political settlement and for more humanitarian, not military, aid. With other Quaker organizations and peace advocates, we are also asking how we can envision and bring into being a more effective, more just global system to prevent war and build peace for the future.

While we have been focused on building peace abroad, we have also realized that we need to build peace at home. The last two years of the pandemic have brought into focus the attacks on our democracy, the systemic racism, the white supremacy, and the rising violence in our communities. We simply cannot build peace abroad if our country is internally at war.

The reality is that FCNL has always worked to build peace amid war, whether domestic or foreign. Since those first faithful Friends brought their voices for peace to Capitol Hill, we have been strengthening our witness. We are now the largest peace lobby in Washington and a powerful grassroots network of advocates around the country.

We build peace by lobbying Congress and the administration to fund crisis prevention programs and long-term peacebuilding programs. We build peace by nurturing relationships with our legislators and engaging diverse coalitions to meet with them on the issues our communities care about.

◀ *During Spring Lobby Weekend 2022, participants learned about and lobbied on migration issues, even while the conflict in Ukraine weighed heavy on everyone's mind. Photo by Cheriss May/FCNL.*

We build peace by advocating for policies that address the root causes of violence and injustice, not just the symptoms. We build peace by recognizing that we must address our government's own violence and oppression at home, as well as its actions abroad.

And we build peace by sustaining our witness in even the most difficult times when our voice on Capitol Hill is challenged—and needed—most.

Peacebuilding is a process, not an endpoint. Our work together as FCNL stands on the shoulders of generations past whose faith was tested and grew stronger from it and who laid the path upon which we now walk.

Our witness for peace today—amid another war, amid rising domestic violence and the fraying of our democracy—carries on our Peace Testimony for those who follow. We persist as we always have, with courage, commitment, faith, hope, and with love.

*Bridget Moix is FCNL's general secretary.* 

**"True Peace  
cannot be dictated,  
it can only be **built**  
in co-operation  
between all peoples."**

— *From a 1943 epistle issued by the London Yearly Meeting during World War II.*





# War Is Not the Answer—Peacebuilding Is

By Diana Ohlbaum



At times it seems like the United States' only answer to war is more war. As the world's greatest superpower, the United States has become accustomed to getting its way through coercion, intimidation, and the use of force. Domination, not cooperation, seems to be the only language in which Congress and the executive branch are fluent.

Yet this approach to the world has proven itself to be immoral, ineffective, and unwise. The costs of 20 years of war are staggering: over 929,000 people have been killed; 38 million have been forced to flee their homes; and U.S. taxpayers have spent over \$8 trillion, with no clear or lasting victories—let alone sustainable peace—achieved.

That's not to mention the estimated 15 million people globally who have died from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many or most of whom might have been saved if governments had put people first in their budget and policy decisions.

It doesn't need to be this way. We may not be able to stop aggressors like Vladimir Putin from undertaking illegal and unjustifiable invasions, but we can help create an environment in which such actions are less likely, civilians are better protected, and diplomacy is prioritized.



*A tank is decorated with calls for domestic priorities at the Poor People Campaign's Moral March on Washington in June 2022.*

*Photo by Eric Bond/FCNL.*

Straightforward steps such as ratifying international treaties, participating responsibly and constructively in multilateral institutions, and refraining from actions likely to be perceived as hostile or threatening can help to build trust and confidence in U.S. intentions and actions.

Providing humanitarian and refugee assistance is important, but it must be accompanied by the lifting of broad-based sanctions that make life more difficult for impact innocent and vulnerable populations.

Rallying others to our cause is something that U.S. diplomats excel at, but they've placed much less emphasis on bringing parties to the bargaining table and ensuring that women; youth; and ethnic, racial, and religious minorities are represented in negotiations.

All these steps, and many more, are the work of global peacebuilding. Peacebuilding includes providing diplomatic, legal, and material assistance for nonviolent civilian resisters, peace activists, human rights defenders, and civic leaders without compromising their independence and autonomy.

It also includes working with civil society groups to monitor human rights violations, prevent and document atrocities, correct misinformation, address psychosocial trauma, and promote social cohesion. Peacebuilding means supporting truth and reconciliation efforts, pressing governments to recognize and prioritize the needs of their people, and strengthening mechanisms for peaceful resolution of disputes.

At heart, all these efforts are designed to nonviolently repair injustice and transform the structural conditions that generate armed conflict.

These are the efforts that FCNL's lobbyists work every day to support, with the help of a broad network of coalition partners and grassroots advocates.

Through the Prevention and Protection Working Group (PPWG), a coalition of about 250 groups that FCNL coordinates, we identify countries at high risk of conflict, genocide, and mass atrocities and propose steps to reduce those risks and prevent harm to civilians.



The PPWG holds regular meetings with a wide variety of administration officials to bring their attention to these situations, improve their understanding of what’s happening on the ground, and make recommendations for policy change.

The PPWG also briefs Congress on its country assessments to help build pressure for early and effective action to prevent conflict and atrocities.

FCNL’s peacebuilding program bolsters this work by lobbying Congress to provide robust funding for specific budget accounts, such as the Complex Crisis Fund, that support conflict prevention and response.

Each year, we coordinate a letter to members of the appropriations committees specifying the desired funding levels for each account and explaining their importance. This year, 35 groups signed the letter, and many of them join our lobby meetings to discuss the request with key House and Senate staffers.


Adequate funding for these accounts is necessary, but not sufficient without policies and laws in place to prioritize peace. FCNL is also working to overturn a congressionally imposed restriction on funds for UN peacekeeping, to reverse a Trump-era policy allowing the use of landmines, and to ensure that all the requirements of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act (P.L. 115-441) and the Global Fragility Act (P.L. 116-94) are met.

All too often, policymakers wait until violence erupts to respond—and when they do, they prioritize military power as the only resource. For a far lower cost, with far less harm and often greater impact, the United States can invest in early action to prevent genocide, atrocities, and armed conflict; and in nonviolent action, to protect civilians and promote diplomatic solutions during times of crisis.

*Diana Ohlbaum is FCNL’s senior strategist and legislative director for Foreign Policy.* 

# BRAVE & CONSTANT

*Building the World We Seek*

 FCNL 2022 Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute

**Save the Date: November 16–20, 2022**

Join Quakers and friends  
November 16–20, 2022  
for worship, learning,  
fellowship, and action.

Our hybrid gathering  
will be based in  
Washington, D.C., and  
span the country.

[fcnl.org/annualmeeting](https://fcnl.org/annualmeeting)



Photo by Cheriss May/FCNL

# Viewpoint: The Courage to Engage

By Jim Cason



In 2022, the FCNL community has a big agenda: We are a lonely voice against expanding the war in Ukraine, a faith community calling for accountability for the crimes committed by people of faith and our government at Native American boarding schools, and advocates for government investments that focus on the people of color and poor communities that have been most impacted by climate change.

Our most important role today, however, may be in the way that we advocate and train thousands of people around the country to bring their own experiences, their faith, and their stories into Congressional offices around the country. Our staff and volunteers help thousands of people find the courage, the resilience, and the mutual support to engage with members of Congress even in cases where they don't agree.

In a world that seems to be pulling apart rather than coming together, FCNL's practice of advocacy today is as important as the policies we advocate for.

We advocate in this manner because of FCNL's grounding in Quaker faith and practice. Approaching each other, our neighbors, and members of Congress with both a clear sense of the policy, we support and listen deeply as we try to understand the perspective of the other person in our conversations.

What I didn't know when I started at FCNL 17 years ago, was how powerful this approach to advocacy could be. In working with Yemeni Americans, our own network, and others to end U.S. support for the Saudi war in Yemen, we have developed relationships of trust with members of Congress who are appalled at the famine in that country and concerned about the U.S. role in maintaining the aircraft that drop bombs on one of the most impoverished countries in the world.

The result, in 2019, was the first successful passage of a bipartisan resolution in the House and the Senate invoking the War Powers Act.



*After 17 years at FCNL, Jim Cason is stepping down as associate general secretary for policy and advocacy.*



Although that resolution was vetoed by then-President Donald Trump, the peace negotiators have told us that Congressional pressure was a factor in the movement toward peace that resulted in a ceasefire in 2022.

But it is not enough to be against war. Our FCNL community has successfully worked to persuade the U.S. government to invest in preventing wars and to change the structure of the State Department to provide more incentives to diplomats to act now to prevent a war five years in the future.

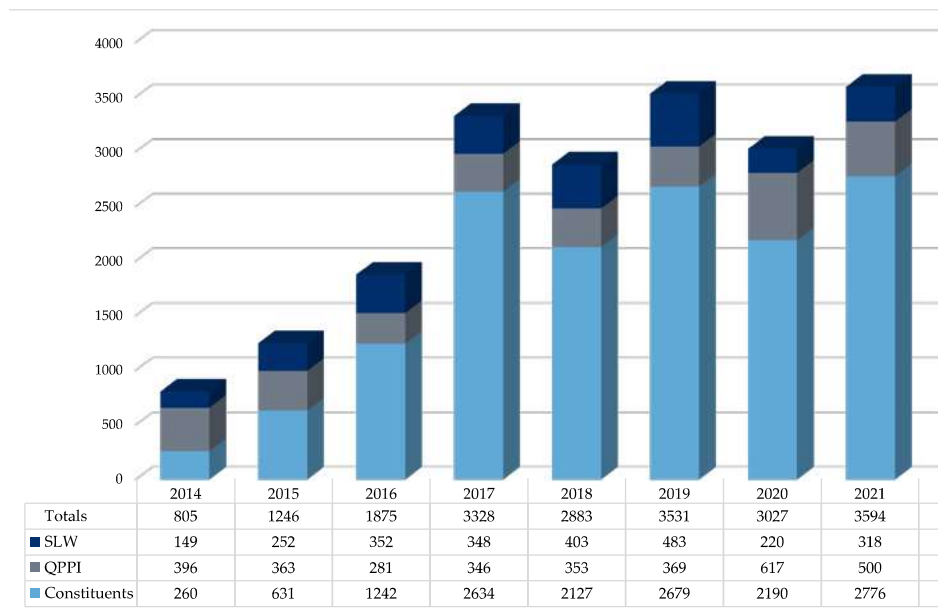
These investments don't prevent all wars, and they certainly seem thin gruel for local people in Somalia, Yemen, or even Ukraine. Yet we're also beginning to see how the focus of 10 or 12 separate US government agencies on the task of preventing atrocities and violence can begin to show results.

This work takes patience, steady financial support from thousands of people and it requires a long-term commitment to change that isn't derailed if the results don't show up in the headlines.

The policy results are visible in the legislation expanding the rights of Native Americans to address violence against women, the successes in pushing back against new types of nuclear weapons, and the investments our government is beginning to make in addressing how we care for and nourish children and families.

Quakers founded FCNL nearly 80 years ago to change federal policy. Today, against many odds we are continuing to do that.


FCNL Constituent Lobbying Over Time, by Calendar Year (2014—2022)



I am most moved by the diverse communities of young people FCNL is engaging across the country. Justifiably impatient and mad at the failures of our society on so many levels, and at the inaction of generations of political leaders, FCNL is working with, learning from, and training thousands of young people to talk to their neighbors, engage their members of Congress and bring their voices into the political space in this country.

They are creating the world we seek.

*After 17 years at FCNL, Jim Cason is stepping down as associate general secretary for policy and advocacy. Throughout his FCNL career, Jim has worn many hats, including leading such teams as development, communications, lobbying, policy, information technology, finance and human resources, and as interim general secretary.*

*We are grateful for all his contributions to FCNL and hold him in the Light as he returns to his first love, journalism.* 



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# Q&A: Figuring Out the Quaker Role in Ukraine

With Michael Eccles

*For Friends in Europe, the invasion of Ukraine has sparked urgent discussions about how to respond to the continent's largest conflict since World War II. We spoke with Michael Eccles, executive secretary of the Europe and Middle East section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC-EMES).*

## **How would you define the work and goals of FWCC in Europe and the Middle East?**

Our goal is to help Friends in different countries connect on common topics such as peacebuilding and working with children and young people. A lot of our work is also focused on supporting new Quaker groups.

Across eastern Europe, including Ukraine, the Quaker groups are smaller and newer and need a bit more support and guidance. There are about 25,000 Quakers in Europe and the Middle East; the majority are in Britain and Ireland.

## **How is FWCC engaging with the conflict in Ukraine?**

We ran an event in Kyiv in 2018, a Russian-speaking gathering, to teach folks a bit more about Quakerism. In February, we had been planning another Russian-speaking online gathering, but it became very clear that wouldn't be an appropriate event.

We held two meetings for worship instead, one in Russian and one in English. After that, we decided to hold weekly meetings for worship for Ukraine, which we've been doing every Tuesday since.

I've also been keeping in touch with Quakers in Ukraine and Russia, mostly to ensure they're doing okay. We also set up a fundraising mechanism through two partner organizations so that Friends who want to give money to Quakers doing work in Ukraine can do that. So far, we've raised and distributed several thousand pounds.

## **Could you tell us a bit about your conversations with Friends in Ukraine and Russia?**

I've let them know that Quakers around the world are upholding them. One of the Quakers I speak with in Ukraine lives about 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of

Kyiv. She has decided that she is not going to leave her home and will accept whatever fate comes to her.

The Russian Quakers I'm in touch with are very concerned about Ukrainian Quakers. I've also gotten the sense that Quakers in other eastern European countries feel as if they could be next.

## **Has the war in Ukraine changed your outlook on your work?**

At some point, the war will end, and there will be a huge amount of rebuilding and reconciliation that needs to be done. We're working with other Quaker organizations to figure out the Quaker role in Ukraine.

We have something unique to offer in terms of reconciliation and peace work. There are Quakers in Ukraine, Poland, Latvia, and Russia. We can have a role to play in reconciling them.

## **So many of the political discussions going on now are related to militarism. What's the case for peacebuilding?**

It's a very difficult question for Quakers in eastern Europe. For some of them, giving arms to the Ukrainian army is the best response. One thing to remember is that during World War II, huge numbers of Quakers in Europe joined the army.

This all just shows me that peacebuilding is more important than ever. There are a lot of lessons to learn from how western governments have behaved since the fall of the Soviet Union. We have to keep channels open; we have to keep talking, and we have to keep up diplomacy. I worry that providing more weapons will only prolong the war.

*Interview by Alex Frandsen.* 