



Quaker Peace
& Social Witness

Peaceworker journal letter from London

Zain Hussain, March 2019, No. 1

British American Security Information Council (BASIC)

Dear Friends,

My name is Zain Hussain. I am currently a Quaker Peace & Social Witness peaceworker placed with the British American Security Information Council (BASIC). I am assisting them on their project to help establish a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Free Zone in the Middle East.

I have been interested in the idea of peacework ever since I completed my undergraduate degree in Arabic and Hebrew. Travelling to Israel and Palestine helped me to see the reality of the lives of people living under occupation and often without their basic needs being fulfilled. This instilled in me a tendency to think about structural inequalities wherever they exist in the world, including the UK.

As a young Muslim, I was encouraged to participate in interfaith initiatives growing up. Like most people, I was also taught to be a good person, compassionate and understanding. However, like most people, I was not encouraged to look at structural inequalities in society and why they exist. While studying for my masters in international politics, I decided to write my dissertation on the government's Prevent strategy and its problematic nature.

Prior to my enrolment on the Peaceworker scheme, I was involved in interfaith dialogue initiatives. Being a Muslim teaching Hebrew to young Jewish students at a synagogue, I saw the opportunity to start interfaith student exchanges between the synagogue and my mosque. I also took part in other programmes and initiatives related to peace work.

However, it was my time as a peace worker that has really given me the opportunity to look deeper into issues that seldom get talked about or dealt with elsewhere. I was

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relieved to see how much work was being done by Quaker friends involved in disarmament activism and struggling against the militarisation of British society. This related much to my work on the government's Prevent strategy and harmful security practices.

My time as a peaceworker is teaching me much more about myself and about peacework than I could have ever learnt elsewhere. Before joining BASIC, I knew very little about issues surrounding weapons of mass destruction. I quickly realised that conversations surrounding such issues often take place in quite elite settings, in language that is complicated to many, but describe concepts that everyone can understand. I thus see this as an opportunity to engage deeper in such issues and to work towards engaging more young people in such discussions.

While working for BASIC, I have learnt more about WMDs in the Middle East, conflict resolution and conciliation, the importance of

networking with other peace workers and activists, and the importance of remaining patient in debates and discussions with those I disagree with. As part of my position, I am writing articles about WMD disarmament in the Middle East, organising events aimed at students and young people to encourage them to think about the possibility of disarmament in the world, organising round tables and taking meeting minutes. My day-to-day work involves administrative work, event planning and writing articles.

One of the most important things I have taken from my training with the Quakers is the idea of silent worship. It is such a powerful tool to help me engage with myself on a deeper level and to find strength within myself. Quaker worship is a great way for me to be in such a process with others who are also doing the same, making it all the more powerful.

I hope to continue to apply the lessons I have learnt as a Quaker peaceworker to other aspects of my life.