



**Response to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders call for inputs
for her report regarding human rights defenders working on climate change and a
just transition**

30 April 2025

Introduction

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in Geneva thanks the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders for this opportunity to inform her upcoming report to the UN General Assembly on human rights defenders working on climate change and a just transition.

QUNO Geneva supports programmes in Human Rights and Refugees, the Human Impacts of Climate Change, Peace and Disarmament, and Sustainable and Just Economic Systems. We regularly provide a broad range of technical expertise to UN processes. This submission, however, is different. It concentrates on Quaker examples because a significant number of high-profile climate change and just transition ‘successes, risks and forms of retaliation’ examples come from the Quaker community.

Quakerism (Religious Society of Friends) originated in the Protestant Reformation. In their daily lives, Quakers seek to uphold social justice, nonviolence, and the inherent equality of all. In 1947, Quakers received the Nobel Peace Prize.

In this report, we profile six cases of Quakers and attendees of Quaker Meetings (regular worship gatherings) who have been closely involved in climate action and just transition efforts. Five of the six cases originate in the United Kingdom (UK), where the right to protest has rapidly eroded¹ despite rulings of illegality².

Those profiled below have given us permission to use their names, however contact should go through QUNO’s Representative for the Human Impacts of Climate Change, Lindsey Fielder Cook lfcook@quno.ch

Successes:

Maggie Mason (UK)

Maggie Mason is an environmental human rights defender and member of the Kendal and Sedbergh Area Quaker Meeting. She celebrated a recent campaign success in her longstanding effort to prevent the creation of a new coal mine in Cumbria, England. The

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/part/3/crossheading/public-nuisance>

² <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/issue/court-finds-government-anti-protest-legislation-unlawful-after-liberty-legal-challenge/>

West Cumbria Mining company had [claimed](#) the mine would be carbon neutral, disregarding the [220 million tonnes](#) of carbon emissions estimated to be released when the coal would be used. After [legal challenges](#) by South Lakes Action on Climate Change (SLACC) and Friends of the Earth, the UK High Court ruled against the planning consent. In March 2025, the mining company chose not to submit any new evidence, and on April 4, 2025, the government released a statement saying it considers the matter closed. Maggie, who coordinated SLACCs campaign, said "Many different types of groups, including Quakers from several areas, helped to tell the truth about this mine. The coal was the wrong type for the UK steel industry and digging it up would have caused significant harm to the climate and the local environment. Working together for a fairer society is always worth doing." For more information see [Cumbria Coal Mine Campaign](#).

Dr. Jairus Nyongesa Koki (Kenya)

Dr. Koki is a Kenyan Quaker and lecturer at Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (JOUST). He is dedicated to environmental conservation and mitigating climate change. He sees these efforts being taken up by others in his community in Malava as a sign of positive trends and successes for climate action. For Dr. Koki, the planting of indigenous and foreign trees was a tradition passed down by his father and religious leaders in the community. The shade of trees he has planted and the refuge they provide to birds and other species. As a professor, he teaches about the important economic role of ecological health in his course on tourism and the environment and he has inspired students through his work seeking to expand climate resilient habitats. These positive trends follow a period which saw the proliferation of environmental destruction due to the clearcutting of trees for timber and the purchase of land for profit-driven reasons without regard for conservation ethics. More recently, Dr. Koki's organization, Quakers United for Environmental Sustainability Project (QUESP), seeks to act as a steward for environmental conservation. The region has faced the devastating localized effects of climate change in the form of major landslides, severe droughts, and irregular rainfall. QUESP has acted to mitigate the effects of climate change by planting trees locally and revitalizing water catchment areas. They are documenting indigenous methods of combating climate change and spreading this knowledge throughout the community to ensure that caring for mother earth is a commonly upheld value.

Risks and retaliations:

Trudi Warner (UK)

Trudi Warner is a retired social worker. She was arrested and charged with contempt of court after an individually held protest in 2023 in which she held up a placard outside Inner London Crown Court that read, '*Jurors, you have an absolute right to acquit a defendant according to your conscience.*' This is a principle in English law established by the Bushell's Case³ and the above quote is featured on a marble plaque inside the Old Bailey, the Central Criminal Court of England and Wales. Trudi was protesting at the start of a trial of Insulate Britain protesters, a group which had organized peaceful civil disobedience actions to raise

³ Crosby, K. (2012). Bushell's Case and the Juror's Soul. The Journal of Legal History, 33(3), 251–290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440365.2012.730246>

awareness of public policies that would insulate homes, increase energy efficiency, and lower carbon emissions. In this respect, her protest represented both a defense of environmental human rights defenders and a further articulation of their cause advocating for a just transition through enactment of UK energy policies.

Trudi's action gave rise to the [Defend Our Juries](#) movement where people sit outside courts where trials of conscientious protestors are taking place. These trials may include people who have taken peaceful direct action against arms manufacturers, industrial agriculture, or the fossil fuel and chemical industries. Because these people threaten corporate profits, brand reputations, and existing power structures, they can [experience](#) discriminatory treatment in court and unduly harsh sentences if convicted. Since 2023, hundreds of people have replicated Trudi's action at every functioning Crown Court across England and Wales.

In 2024, the High Court of Justice, based in London, [ruled](#) in favour of Trudi Warner, saying her protest had been '*consistent with information sharing*.' By acting in ways aligned with her conscience, she has faced repression and risk at the hands of English courts, while at the same time inspiring many to similarly heed their conscience and advocate in defence of human rights.

Phil Laurie (UK)

On August 26, 2022, individuals with the environmental activist group 'Just Stop Oil' staged protests at Shell petrol stations located in the UK. Phil Laurie, a Quaker, was one of those arrested during the action. Shell moved to obtain a Third-Party Disclosure order which required the police to provide details about arrests of people in connection with the demonstration. Court hearings were held for two individuals in October 2024 when Mr Laurie and his co-defendant decided not to accept that their right to protest should be curtailed in this way and challenged the injunction. As legal aid was not available, they had to self-represent in the High Court and were liable for considerable associated expenses.

Mr Laurie and his co-defendant argued that the injunction infringed "*on their rights to public participation in environmental activism under the Aarhus Convention, an international treaty that the UK is party to, and that disruptive protest against Shell is warranted given the harm that is done by the company's continued extraction and sale of planet-warming fossil fuels*".⁴ Both defendants also argued that the issue of an injunction violated their section 9, 10, and 11 rights stated in the European Convention on Human Rights. The current structuring of English law makes such an argument difficult to win and an injunction was granted. Climate protesters in the UK are facing long prison sentences and sweeping restrictions on protest, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act of 2022, which curtails the speech and methods available to environmental human rights defenders in the UK who wish to express their concern with extractive climate and energy policies. A separate 2024 report from the [BBC](#) only amplifies the scale of these concerns, showing that over 400 UK climate activists were named in court orders restricting demonstrations at 1,200 different locations related to the fossil fuel industry.

⁴ Gopal, Keerti. "Shell Wins Injunctions Against UK Gas Station Protesters Amid Growing Threats to Activism", Inside Climate News, December 17 2024.
<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/17122024/shell-wins-injunctions-against-uk-gas-station-protesters/>

Gaie Delap (UK)

At 77 years of age, Gaie Delap was one of [six activists](#) arrested for climbing a gantry above the M25, a major highway encircling London, on November 22, 2024. Also affiliated with the group 'Just Stop Oil', Ms Delap and the other activists took action to highlight the UK government's issue of 124 new oil and gas licenses to drill in the North Sea. Gaie was sentenced to 20 months in prison. Despite her age, upon being [admitted](#) to Peterborough Women's prison she was asked to do a pregnancy test and had to endure a frightening wait of over two months for the correct tests and medication following a Transient ischemic attack (a kind of ministroke). She was released after 3.5 months, under a Home Detention Curfew, which required the fitting of an electronic tag. But the Electronic Monitoring Service (EMS), a subsidiary employed by the UK Ministry of Justice to fit her tag, first falsely claimed she had refused to allow a tag to be fitted, and then said they didn't have a tag small enough for her wrist. This resulted in her recall to prison three days before Christmas. Gaie's story was picked up by national media and a campaign called for her release. The campaign included writing to Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood and the organization of a choir which sang outside the prison in which she was housed on her 78th birthday. She was released after 41 further days and nights in prison which followed her erroneous recall. EMS decided a size of tag they had previously rejected as too large was in fact suitable for [home curfew](#). Gaie's Home Detention Curfew has now expired, but she remains subject to a number of Licence conditions restricting her freedom to act for a further 12 months, until her full 20-month sentence has been completed. Gaie's severe and mismanaged treatment for an action she took based on personal conscience and her deep regard for climate justice shows the high price that individuals in the UK have paid as unflinching environmental human rights defenders.

Police break into a Quaker Meeting House

On March 27, 2025 police raided a Quaker Meeting House (place of worship) in London. [BBC](#), [CNN](#), [The New York Times](#), [The Guardian](#), and other major publications reported that 20 police officers forced entry into Westminster Meeting House to arrest six young people attending an open meeting of the protest group Youth Demand. Police searched the whole building, including private counselling sessions and a life drawing class. The six young defendants, who were sitting in a circle and nibbling snacks, were arrested on charges of 'conspiracy to commit public nuisance'. Youth Demand has previously used nonviolent disruptive tactics to raise awareness of the conflict in Gaza and climate change. However, this was an open introduction meeting advertised on Instagram. **Paul Parker**, recording clerk for Quakers in Britain, said: *"This aggressive violation of our place of worship and the forceful removal of young people holding a protest group meeting clearly shows what happens when a society criminalises protest. Freedom of speech, assembly, and fair trials are an essential part of free public debate which underpins democracy."*

Recommendations:

QUNO offers the following recommendations:

- States uphold their obligations to protect human rights defenders, human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- States, international and regional organizations, civil society and the private sector or other actors support urgent, healthy, equitable, human rights-based and available at-scale climate and nature protection action.
- States, private sector and other sectors, ground climate and nature protection policies in human-rights based approaches because, as stated by a former UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment, *‘integrating a rights-based approach to local, national and international policies promotes policy coherence, legitimacy and sustainable outcomes’*⁵.
- States stop plans to increase oil, coal and gas extraction and burning, as this locks in ever higher global surface temperatures leading to widespread loss of life on earth.
- States and private sector avoid policy reliance on unproven to scale, expensive, ineffective, and inequitable high-risk techno-fixes (geo-engineering) which fail to transform the root causes and thus delays life-saving climate action.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for her work. We appreciate the ability to share experiences of human rights defenders - in this case faith-based - and their moral commitment and concern for climate justice.

We offer this submission to record increasing risks and retaliation that people face when expressing concern over government inaction to avert planetary crises. The situation is inconceivable.

⁵ Knox, J., (2016). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. In: Report to the 31st session of the UN Human Rights Council. p13.