

Copenhagen Calling- Quakers and the climate emergency.

Chris Walker

The Climate Safety report, by the UK's Public Interest Research Centre, paints a dark picture. It predicts that the Arctic could have an ice-free summer by 2011-2015, eighty years ahead of predictions from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC]. This, it claims, could be the first falling domino in a series of the ocean's increased heat absorption, melted permafrost, forest fires, drought, and in short, would result in runaway climate change. Current rates of ice-melt mean that climate change is not just a prediction, but a contemporary crisis.

With the Copenhagen climate summit in December approaching, our negotiators have on their shoulders the weight of what is possibly the last chance to reach an international deal to avoid catastrophic climate change. However, many Quakers have awoken to the fact that, with the current rate of political inaction, this weight is one to be taken by everyone.

This awakening has often come in the recognition that, as tackling climate change is a long-term commitment, individual behaviour change and a simple lifestyle is key. The Quaker writer Alistair McIntosh speaks of our 'ecocidal' and self-destructive consumption tendencies that have ultimately left us less human. But I believe, as many do, that a reclaimed sense of humanity must also come from elsewhere - political activism.

What is our role in this increasingly real crisis? Throughout history, war and injustice have brought Quakers on to the streets as a central part of mass movements. However, without doing the same for climate change, resource depletion, forced migration and low human security may sweep these efforts and achievements aside. The breadth and extremity of the effects of climate change mean that we are closer than ever to a worst-case scenario for global justice.

But it isn't simply a tradition of activism that demands our involvement. I believe that central parts of Quakerism speak directly to climate policy. Much of the current and proposed government attempts at mitigation, such as carbon trading and 'clean coal' technologies, are designed to allow current levels of excess in our consumption patterns and economic systems to continue. Our tenet of simplicity can call for policy on reduction in energy consumption and, as some Quakers have done recently, questioned ideas surrounding economic growth. Our search for truth can keep us conscientious to false solutions that perpetuate global inequalities, such as biofuels, and support radical policy that better allows us to live within our long-term means.

On last year's Quaker United Nations Summer School, I saw that Quakers have a rare privilege. With highly respected integrity in mediation and cooperative persuasion, our messages have often affected the course of political decision-making. However, this representation must be coupled, mandated and validated with our mass

involvement with our political future. I believe that a stronger involvement with climate action will not eclipse current strengths in disarmament and human rights, but as the knock-on effects of climate change show, will further them.

In Britain we also have a further responsibility. Although the government's proposals for Copenhagen are inadequate, the UK holds heavy influence over the summit's outcome. This is a unique opportunity to lead the way with inspiring and radical national policies. This, however, cannot be achieved through individual change alone. Behaviours can change when governments show leadership. We are now in a climate emergency. Climate science calls for radical policy, and it does not compromise with political convenience. It is the most important calling to make our presence felt.

One thing we can do is make ourselves heard on the National Climate Demonstrations on Saturday 5th December in London and Glasgow. Join me and other Quakers at the Climate Emergency Rally and a 'Wave' of people surrounding parliament in London. It may not feel like enough, but we need every chance we have.

Chris Walker – Leicester Meeting

For more info on Dec 5th- www.campaigncc.org, www.stopclimatechaos.org
[Look out for the Quaker banner at Hyde Park Speakers' Corner at 12 noon and Grosvenor Square at 1.00pm, or call Sam Walton on 07814 683906].