



American Friends Service Committee



American Friends Service Committee

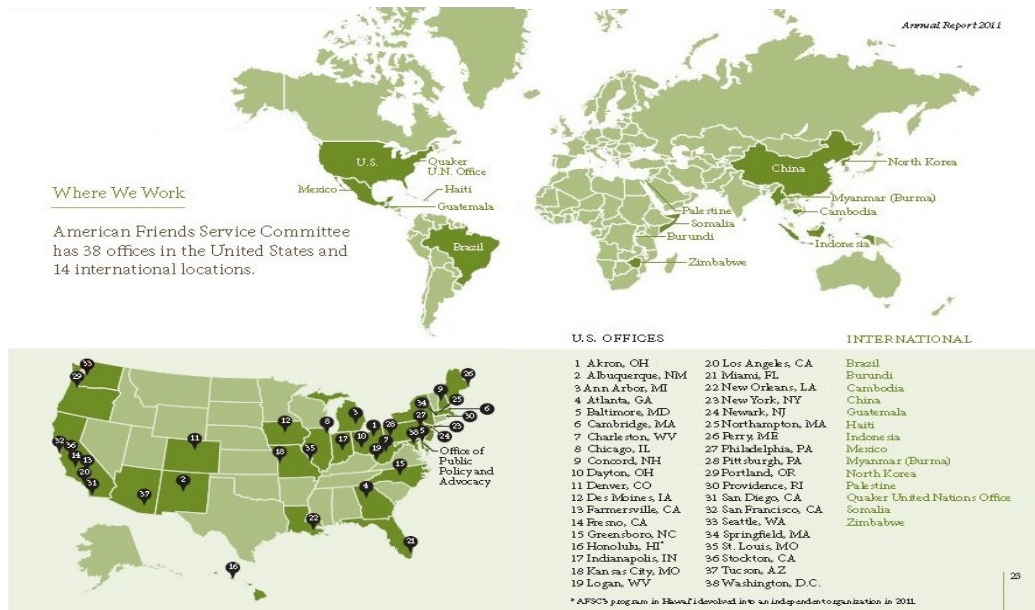
For more information, visit us on the web: www.afsc.org

American Friends Service Committee

East Asia Quaker International Affairs Program

AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE (AFSC)

Overview



The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization committed to social justice, peace, and humanitarian service. Our work is based on the belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.

Our mission is to create practical demonstrations of the power of nonviolence to bring about lasting peace, to overcome injustice, and to bring wholeness to communities wounded by violence and oppression. Thus, the AFSC draws into its work people of many faiths and backgrounds who share the values that animate its life and who bring to it a rich variety of experiences and insights. AFSC works to nurture faith that conflicts can be resolved nonviolently, that enmity can be transformed into friendship, strife into cooperation, poverty into well-being, and injustice into dignity and participation.

History

The AFSC was founded in 1917 as a combined effort by American members of the Religious Society of Friends to assist civilian victims of World War I. AFSC has more than nine decades of experience building peace in communities worldwide, having worked throughout the world in conflict zones, in areas affected by natural disasters, and in oppressed communities to address the root causes of war and violence.

AFSC's original mission grew from the need to provide conscientious objectors (COs) with a constructive alternative to military service. After the end of the war in 1918, AFSC began working in Russia, Serbia, and Poland with orphans and victims of famine and disease, and was chartered by President Herbert Hoover to provide United States sponsored relief to Germany. During the 1930s and through World War II, AFSC helped refugees escape from Nazi Germany, provided relief for children on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, and provided relief to refugees in Vichy, France. After the war ended, AFSC did relief and reconstruction work in Europe, Japan, India, and China. In 1947, AFSC received the Nobel Peace Prize along with the British Friends Service Council (now called Quaker Peace and Social Witness) on behalf of all Quakers worldwide.



As the Cold War escalated, AFSC was involved in relief and service efforts, often supporting civilians on both sides of conflicts around the world including the Korean War, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Algerian War, and the Nigerian-Biafran War. Beginning in 1966, AFSC developed programs to help children and provided medical supplies and artificial limbs to civilians in both North Vietnam and South Vietnam. In the United States, AFSC supported the American Civil Rights Movement, and the rights of African-Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans. Since the 1970s AFSC has also worked extensively as part of the peace movement, especially work to stop the production and deployment of nuclear weapons.



AFSC in China: An Ongoing Relationship

China has always been a central part AFSC's work. AFSC work in China can be traced back to 1925, when we began work on a model village near Shanghai to improve social conditions among Chinese laborers. During the Sino-Japanese war, AFSC established a Friends Center in Shanghai to provide medical relief and transportation services for the Chinese people. Starting from 1941 the AFSC also provided support to the Friends Ambulance Unit, a Quaker effort which consisted of over 150 volunteer ambulance drivers from Britain, America, Canada, and China who provided emergency transportation, medical care and comfort to Chinese citizens affected by the war. The Ambulance Units later worked in Yanan during the Chinese civil war.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, AFSC lobbied for China's inclusion in the United Nations, and for the United States to recognize the People's Republic of China. In 1971 and 1972, AFSC organized two high level American delegations to visit China. During the height of McCarthy's red scare in the United States, AFSC published a book titled "A New China Policy," and sponsored a series of conferences in the United States calling for recognition of the new China. This contributed to the founding of the National Committee on US-China Relations, which later organized the famous Ping Pong Diplomacy delegation, paving the path for normalization.

From the 1980s until present, AFSC has engaged with a variety of different programs to promote better channels of communication between China and other countries, especially the US and Southeast Asian countries. These programs have focused mainly on economic development, empowerment of women, migration, conflict resolution, and sustainable development.



Photos: Photographs of AFSC China work from the 1930s to the 1980s.

Current AFSC Activities

AFSC maintains programs in 43 locations in the United States and 22 countries around the world. The programs touch a wide range of issues, countries, and communities. What unites them is the unfaltering belief in the essential worth of every human being, non-violence as the way to resolve conflict, and the power of love to overcome oppression, discrimination, and violence.



In the US, AFSC conducts programs to change government policy at the federal and state levels, and seeks to educate, train and advocate on behalf of different communities on issues around peace building, social justice and immigrant rights. It also works with programs around the globe to advocate for more peaceful foreign policy.

■ Social justice

AFSC endeavors to help create a society that is based on the principle of equality and solidarity, which understands and values the dignity of every human being. We have worked closely with communities and government departments in the US to offer help to people whose rights have been violated and to support their voices in efforts to change policy for the better.



Photo : artwork honoring 29 miners who lost their lives in a West Virginia mining accident.

AFSC Work towards justice and safeguards for workers in the United States: The worst mine disaster in the U.S. in 40 years occurred on April 5, 2010 when 29 miners lost their lives at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine. Shortly after the tragedy, AFSC was appointed by West Virginia's governor as one member of an independent investigation panel, and played a major role in developing a Mine Disaster Report. This report helped lead to justice for the families of those impacted by the disaster, encouraged companies to adopt better safety practices, and pushed state and national leaders to enact more stringent safety regulations.

■ Immigrants and Prisoners Rights

For decades, AFSC has worked with immigrants and prisoners in the US, highlighting the often malicious treatment they face and pressing for change. We believe that the basis of U.S. immigration policy should be the protection of the human rights of all people. AFSC believes that humane immigration policy must include a fair path for undocumented workers to gain permanent residence status. AFSC also believes that the US system of criminal justice and incarceration is fundamentally unjust and must be changed. Changes in immigration and prison conditions need to be accompanied by greater economic justice, for example by economic and trade policies that permit working people to earn a living wage in the US and in their home countries. On a broader scale, AFSC works to shift US government spending away from immoral and wasteful weapons and prisons, and to foster an authentic commitment to demilitarization, and toward investment in human needs and peaceful resolution of internal and international conflicts.



AFSC Research on Prison Rights: The U.S. has the largest prison population in the world, with over 2.3 million people incarcerated, and has yet to recognize that there are serious problems. The U.S. has only 5% of the world's population but it has 25% of the world's inmates. In 2011, the private prison industry advocated for increasing detentions in many states. AFSC's research has shown that private prisons have little accountability and poor safety conditions. We oppose profiting from human misery, and have worked to improve prison conditions and reduce the number of people detained.

■ Peacebuilding: Community and Policy Oriented Approaches

AFSC has opposed every war since its inception in 1917, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are no exception. AFSC has been a steadfast voice for an end to the reliance on military solutions, withdrawal of US military forces and support for civilian-led reconciliation and reconstruction to resolve the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In our Washington, D.C. office, our advocacy and education work stretches across the country utilizing a network of staff and volunteers to bring the message of the human and economic costs of the war to the general public and to our elected officials. We focus on alternatives and explore the root causes of violence.



Internationally, the AFSC maintains programs in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In ***Africa***, with a regional office in Nairobi, Kenya, AFSC works with people who are seeking peace in their lives communities after having suffered from war and conflict. In Somalia, through peace building initiatives, AFSC seeks to contribute to the reconstruction of peaceful and safe communities. In Burundi, AFSC supports civil society participation in peacebuilding frameworks, while in Zimbabwe, it works to enhance the livelihoods of those living precariously in displaced communities. AFSC work with the most vulnerable – women, people with disabilities, adults with HIV/AIDS, and those caring for orphan children – to offer training and start-up funds to gain economic self-sufficiency.

In ***Asia***, with a regional office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, AFSC maintains programs in China, Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma) and North Korea as well as coordinating emergency humanitarian response in the region. AFSC's Quaker International Affairs Program is also active in Asia supporting dialogue on contentious issues affecting the region and the world.

Current work is particularly focused on changing political and economic dynamics resulting from China's rise as an economic superpower. AFSC's history and presence in the region allow us to build linkages between local communities, NGOs and media, business, and policy makers. AFSC is also one of the few American organizations providing humanitarian assistance and rural development assistance in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).



In ***Latin America and the Caribbean***, AFSC's programs focus on issues of urban peace and the security of individuals. The Regional Office in Guatemala provides monitoring and support to the programs. Staff in Latin American collaborate with other AFSC programs on educational activities and the rights of immigrants to the United States.

In the ***Middle East***, AFSC began work in 1949. In the aftermath of World War II AFSC gained experience resettling refugees and displaced persons, and was asked by the United Nations to organize relief efforts for Palestinian Arab refugees in the Gaza Strip. This continued until the United Nations Relief Works Agency began operations on May 1, 1950. From its initial engagement with refugees in Gaza, AFSC has been committed to peacebuilding as well as relief efforts. Most recently AFSC has responded to US military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Photo: AFSC exhibition raises awareness of human costs of US war in Iraq.

AFSC has also worked to promote the continuation of dialogue between the US and Iran. AFSC's approach is twofold: it works to empower the people directly affected by the conflict, while also working through its representatives in the region and in the USA to advocate for policy change.

CHINA: EAST ASIA QUAKER INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PROGRAM

Overview

As China's engagement and influence in the world grows, communication could not be more important. The world needs to understand more about China's increasingly complex society and Chinese perceptions on critical issues, and China needs to better understand the concerns of citizens and civil society around the world. AFSC work in China is committed to a belief in the importance of international cooperation. Therefore, we work through dialogue and exchanges at all levels — from grassroots communities to academics to policymakers.

Based in China, AFSC's East Asia Quaker International Affairs Program works in collaboration with AFSC programs throughout Asia, Africa, the United States and the Quaker United Nations Office to facilitate dialogue, research, and exchanges between China, the United States, the United Nations and between China and developing countries. Currently the program focuses on three areas: engagement and research with China on sustainable development in Southeast Asia; research on and dialogue with China on its involvement in UN peacebuilding and prevention of conflict processes; research and advocacy around the evolving peace and security environment in the Asia Pacific Region.

Linkages between AFSC Offices around the Globe

Cambodia Office

In Southeast Asia, lives and environment are being endangered by investments and development practices. In Cambodia, foreign investment has polluted and destroyed rivers, lakes and forest resources. It has ruined livelihoods and taken away access to land and resources, often without compensation to local communities. As investment activities have grown, violent conflict has erupted between local people and investment project holders, generating catastrophic losses on both sides.

AFSC has a long tradition of focusing on sustainable development in conflict states. In Asia, our goal is to address particularly complex tensions prompted by deepening economic involvement in fragile and post-conflict states by emerging centers of power in the region. We work to build dialogue and policy solutions to minimize the negative impacts of foreign investment and promote sustainable development in some of the poorest countries in the region, including Myanmar (pictured here), Laos and Cambodia.



To create productive dialogues between Asian countries, AFSC's offices in China and Cambodia collaborate to bring together key policy advisors, researchers, journalists and NGO and community leaders. For example, AFSC facilitated study tours to Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar for Chinese researchers and policy advisors to learn about negative impacts of unregulated outward direct investment (ODI) in the poorest countries of Southeast Asia, and has provided workshops on investments in conflicts zones for participants from both China and Southeast Asian countries. It has also partnered with NGO leaders in Korea to consider the impacts of Korean investment on communities in Cambodia.

AFSC also works to share solutions between countries in the region. With the sponsorship and support of the AFSC, the Appraisal Center for Engineering and Environment of the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection implemented its first overseas training targeted at sharing China's experiences in developing a framework for environmental impact assessment with Cambodia. With AFSC's support, three rounds of training courses provided Cambodian participants the opportunity to learn about how the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection has built capacity to protect environment, health and livelihoods over the past two decades. At the same time, hearing from Cambodians about the country's limited capacity to assess environmental impacts, about the sheer number of destructive projects being implemented, and about China's role as the number one investor in the country, the participants gained awareness of the need for China to enhance regulation of its ODI. (Photo: Cambodia EIA training)



Africa Office

AFSC's offices in China and Africa work closely to support research and engagement around China's role in peace-building processes in Africa. From April 3 to April 13, 2011, the Africa and Asia programs of AFSC and the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in New York jointly facilitated a study tour for six of China's leading researchers on the United Nations (UN) and Africa to Burundi and Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) for an exchange and learning on peacekeeping and peacebuilding. While China currently plays a very active role in UN peacekeeping efforts through its provision of non-combat troops, engineers and medical teams, peacebuilding is still a new concept. The delegation met with government officials, with the senior management and project staff of a full range of UN agencies, with civil society, with local researchers, and with members of the media. The two-week trip allowed the scholars to see peacebuilding first hand, highlighting the work of local civil society.



Picture: Members of the delegation pose for a photograph with AFSC Burundi staff.

The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO)

Supported by AFSC, the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) serves as a Quaker presence at the United Nations (UN), representing Quaker concerns at the international level, with offices at UN headquarters in New York and Geneva. QUNO facilitates dialogue and works on specific issues in a manner that is unique in the UN community. QUNO advocacy is carried out in a number of ways, particularly by facilitating informal, open dialogues in which all participate on an equal footing. QUNO works closely with AFSC's East Asia Quaker International Affairs program to build connections with academics and policy advisors from China. For example, From October 30 to November 5, 2011 the East Asia QIAR program collaborated with QUNO to organize a dialogue and exchange program at the United Nations for a group of four of China's leading UN scholars working on peacebuilding, peacekeeping and prevention of violent conflict. The goal was to stimulate greater engagement between Chinese and UN stakeholders on these important endeavors.



Photo: Chinese scholars make presentation at public event titled Chinese Perspectives on UN Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding.

US Programs

AFSC helps build linkages between the US and China to promote dialogue on disarmament and the development of new security concepts in the Asia Pacific Region, and to support AFSC advocacy in Washington, DC. For example, in October 2011, AFSC held a conference titled "Peace in Asia and the Pacific" at American University in Washington, DC for participants from the U.S., China, Korea, Japan and other countries in the region to discuss ways that civil society might address rising tension generated as the U.S. shifts its strategic focus to the Asia Pacific region and as China continues to rise as a regional and global power.

More Information

For more information about the American Friends Service Committee or the East Asia Quaker International Affairs Program, visit us online at www.afsc.org



American Friends Service Committee

DESCRIPTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS ON COVER

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon gives a speech on disarmament at an AFSC peace forum (top, first on left)

Scholars from China present on a panel at a workshop on UN peacebuilding sponsored by AFSC and the Quaker United Nations Office in New York (top, middle)

AFSC supported medical team visits facility in Haiti (top, first from right)

AFSC staff provide training for teachers on conflict transformation and reducing violence in classrooms at the Charles Borromee school in Haiti (right side, middle)

AFSC organizes Maryland youths to visit a mining site to participate in gardening and restoration projects (bottom, first on left)

AFSC arranges for North Korean officials to visit farms in China for technical exchange (bottom, middle)

One of 40 schools in Myanmar that have benefited from teacher' s training provided by AFSC (bottom left)