

Endeavours to mend: perspectives on British Quaker work in the World today (2006), edited by Brian Phillips and John Lampen.

Chapter 5

Responding to Conflict in the North Caucasus

by Chris Hunter

[OCR scanned by AVW 30-04-2014 – some transcription errors may remain]

In February 1995, I was present at a most extraordinary congress on the outskirts of Moscow - the annual meeting of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia. The congress took place two months after the first Russian troops were sent into Grozny and the bombs began to fall on the city and its inhabitants.

The Russian mothers at the congress were appalled at what their politicians and military leaders were doing in Chechnya in the name of “restoring constitutional order” and horrified that their sons were being used to do it. They were also painfully aware of the lack of preparation, equipment and even adequate clothing provided to these 18 and 19-year-old conscripts, whose corpses were already being sent home in the hundreds. “If our generals are so concerned about constitutional order in Chechnya, then why don't they send their own sons there to restore it?” asked one angry and anxious mother. Others stated that they were not prepared to stay at home and wait for the news of their sons' deaths for a dirty war they did not believe in - they would have to go to Chechnya themselves to bring their boys home. Chechen mothers had also been invited to speak at the congress. They spoke of the terrible destruction and suffering of the civilian population in Chechnya, of how the capital city was being carpet bombed, and of the thousands of inhabitants - Chechens, Russians and other nationalities - trapped in basements without food or water.

Many people from Chechen women's, youth and human rights groups had shared with me their stories and accounts of the devastating effect of the war in Chechnya over the previous weeks. I was working as a Quaker Peace & Service (QPS) representative in Moscow, and so was viewed as a representative of the international community. Many of these people felt that the population in Chechnya was completely isolated and forgotten, and they saw it as their task to alert international opinion to the horror unfolding in the republic. They believed that if the truth of what was happening to ordinary, peace-loving inhabitants in Chechnya was known, then people everywhere would react and unite to put a stop to such a senseless war.

I felt deeply moved and saddened by the stories and reports that I

heard. In my role as a Quaker representative it felt important first to listen to these traumatic and tragic stories, which the tellers needed so much to convey to receptive ears and hearts. I felt very much a sense of spiritual responsibility, as Brian Phillips describes in the first chapter. Why should people in Chechnya be left alone to experience such devastation? What could I, and others, do to help and to support their efforts to find solutions?

For two months I had participated in prayer vigils, public meetings, round tables and conferences in Moscow, calling for an immediate cessation of violence and the restoration of peace. Prominent Russian politicians and civil society leaders also took part. But such activities were having little impact. On the other hand, the Russian soldiers' mothers and Chechen women whom I met in Moscow showed such spirit and compassion for the young conscripts and civilians suffering in Chechnya that I wondered how these dynamic and courageous voices for peace could be better heard. A small group of us met together during a break at the soldiers' mothers' congress and came up with an idea for a Mothers' March for Life and Compassion from Moscow to Grozny. Our small basement QPS office in Moscow became the coordination centre for the march (a kind of press office, planning and logistics centre, national and international liaison and fundraising base all rolled into one) and on 8 March, International Women's Day, 1995 the marchers set off from Red Square. Soldiers' mothers, Chechen women, Buddhist monks, local Russian Quakers, representatives from Jewish and Russian Orthodox faiths walked through central Moscow, beating drums and chanting, and followed by dozens of journalists and several TV camera crews. As the distance to Grozny was well over 1000 miles, large stretches of the march were covered in buses. The buses stopped at Russian cities and towns along the way to inform people why we were marching, through local media, vigils and public meetings.

About two weeks later around 200 marchers crossed over the border from Ingushetia into Chechnya. Bombs were pounding the small settlement of Bamut a few miles to the south. As we entered the first Chechen village of Sernovodsk, hundreds of inhabitants lined the streets to meet and cheer the marchers, handing us warm bread and salt as a traditional welcome. After weeks and months of isolation and terror, here were people from afar risking their lives to show they cared about what was happening in Chechnya. Following speeches at a public meeting local people put us up in their homes for the night, before we set off deeper into war-torn Chechnya the following morning. A similar welcome awaited us in Samashki, but that day we needed to press on to the regional centre of Achkhoi Martan. A

military roadblock prevented us from doing so. Russian soldiers were instructed to form two rings around the marchers and we were held there until late into the night.

Animated discussions with Russian military personnel ensued, interspersed with humour and smiles on weary faces of marchers, soldiers and officers. Away from their seniors, some Russian servicemen expressed their support for the march and hoped they could soon go home from this war that they wanted to have no part. Russian soldiers' mothers sought information to lead them to their sons' units so they could challenge the commander and bring their boys home. Chechen women described to the soldiers the devastation that the war had brought to their lives and saw at close hand the terrible conditions that the soldiers themselves were living under. In the middle of the night the few foreign male marchers were lifted out of the crowd by special forces under glaring lights and taken to a dark corner behind a row of tanks. Russian and Chechen women tried to hold on to us and pleaded for us to be released, afraid for what might happen to us. We were searched, there was more talking and then everyone was herded into buses and driven back to Ingushetia. Personal security was an important factor and concern for me during the march and during the following years of working in Chechnya, as it was for many others. The personal risk of such work and witness was often great. The conviction I felt that I should be there with people from Chechnya and Russia at such desperate times and initiating activities that offered hope and relief, reconciled me to this personal risk. Although I inevitably felt fear at times, mainly before the trips into Chechnya rather than during them, the prompting and openings of the Spirit to do this work were clear, particularly at the most crucial times, and they sustained me. Fortunately colleagues, family and friends understood and shared the conviction that led me to being there, though it sometimes, understandably, caused them anxiety too.

During the march, an update of our situation was passed on through friends of the monks to my Quaker Peace & Service colleague in Moscow, Patricia Cockrell. The message that some of the marchers had been beaten up was relayed bluntly over a crackling line in Russian as “ikh izbili: they've been beaten up” and heard as “ikh ubili: they've been killed”. Patricia had gastritis at the time, and this condition together with the news, which seemingly referred to all the marchers, caused her body to go into a state of shock, with trembling and sharp stomach pains. Fortunately we were soon able to confirm that everyone was still alive, although a group of Buddhist monks who had been on the march had indeed been held and beaten by Russian

troops in another part of Chechnya.

Most of the marchers returned to Sernovodsk from Ingushetia to plan further efforts to bring the war and its tragic consequences to the attention of the public in Russia and abroad. The TV camera crews and many of the journalists were still with us, and so news of our activities and the soldiers' mothers' efforts to free their sons was being broadcast throughout Russia and several European countries.

While we waited to continue the march to Grozny, I was able to network with groups and individuals who were deeply motivated to make a positive change to what was happening around them. I was able to provide some with video and photo cameras to record the atrocities being committed without the knowledge of people outside Chechnya. I collated information that Chechen women travelled bravely around Chechnya to collect, and sent it to relevant bodies such as Amnesty International, who used it to publish urgent appeals and updates, and to relevant United Nations departments and international peace movement representatives.

The town of Samashki, which the march had passed through days earlier, was surrounded by Russian forces as we waited in Sernovodsk and a brutal massacre of civilians took place there. Shortly afterwards Chechen women accompanied me and a Russian Quaker and his colleague to the town, to speak with survivors and hear personal accounts of the horrors that happened there.

We met many more people from the town who arrived to seek refuge in Sernovodsk, some of whom had been tortured. The scale of the mindless violence and cruelty that was crippling the bodies and lives of many of the people I was meeting brought home to me in a very real and tangible way the tremendous potential for barbarity of human beings. I felt very close, then to what George Fox had described as “an ocean of Darkness and Death” and for a time experienced a terrible loss of faith in a human race that was capable of such acts. I was reassured by the spirit and generosity of the people around me in Sernovodsk, who helped to restore my faith in humanity, and to see again the work of Fox's “ocean of Light and Love” that was keeping hope and even humour alive in such a desperate environment. Continuing to seek and respond to the openings of the Spirit seemed the only way for me to make sense of what was happening. In the summer of 1995, I worked with Rachel Brett and colleagues at QUNO (Quaker United Nations Office) in Geneva and with the International Peace Bureau to bring two Chechen women and two Russian soldiers' mothers to Geneva. We spoke to members of the United Nations

Human Rights Committee, meeting to discuss human rights in the Russian Federation at the time, and with other UN, governmental and non-governmental bodies. Our presence and testimonies meant that the official Russian government policy to paper over human rights abuses in Chechnya was undermined, and the truth of Samashki and other atrocities was brought out into the open. With the help of peace groups around Europe and QCEA (Quaker Council for European Affairs) in Brussels, I was able to organise further speaking tours for Russian and Chechen women who were courageously working for peace in their communities. We spoke to the European Parliament and national parliamentary committees, politicians and dignitaries such as Mme Danielle Mitterand, and to the press and to peace and human rights groups.

Back in Russia, those of us who had coordinated the march brought together a group of Russian, Chechen and international peace and human rights activists and scholars to publish accounts of our work for peace in Chechnya and Russia in the form of a book called *Chechnya in My Heart* (Karta journal, 1997).

Persistently raising awareness about a concern and using instruments of international law to promote justice and positive change can be very effective, as Chapter 6 of this book demonstrates [i.e. *Endeavours to mend*, in which this Chapter 5 by Chris Hunter appears].

The challenge of using such instruments to overcome the injustice of violent conflict in a particular region or country can be particularly complex, especially when an influential nation is involved as one of the main perpetrators of violence and oppression. Leaders of powerful nations are reluctant to risk upsetting their political, economic and security relations with an important strategic partner for the sake of defending human rights. And so as the conflict in Chechnya enters its eleventh year, the Chechens and others caught up in the war remain in many ways victims of the macro-political, global situation. Western leaders are unwilling or unable to effect serious change on Russia's policy in Chechnya. It has been made more difficult still following the war in Iraq. Russian leaders deflect any criticism of their methods in Chechnya by maintaining that they are fighting global terror, just as the USA and Britain are doing in Iraq. As is so often the case in other parts of the world, the violent "solutions" imposed on people in Chechnya are doing nothing to foster stability or to reduce violence. We are witnessing the very opposite, as extremists inflict instability and suffering increasingly beyond Chechnya's borders in neighbouring Russian regions and in the capital Moscow. The theatre siege in

Moscow in 2002 and the Beslan school tragedy in 2004 are two prominent and tragic examples. The work that my colleagues and I developed in Chechnya has focused increasingly on supporting local initiatives for peace: offering training and support for peacebuilding initiatives and assisting and empowering people of all ages to deal with and survive the trauma and suffering of war.

At the same time as helping to raise awareness of how war was affecting people's lives in Chechnya, I worked with people on the ground there to arrange practical support to those who had lost their homes, possessions and loved ones. The brothers of one family I met in Sernovodsk had been driving into Grozny, dodging the bullets in a 15-year-old Lada Estate to bring fresh bread and supplies to some of the thousands of people still trapped in basements as the fighting and bombing thundered above them. I met many such individuals, whose courage and drive to help was inspiring, but who had access to few resources and so were limited in what they could do. I appealed to international humanitarian agencies, which generally considered Chechnya to be too dangerous a place to work. I offered to use the networks I had been building to distribute their food, clothing and other assistance without the need for them to risk being present there themselves. Oxfam, World Vision International, American Friends' Service Committee, Quaker Peace & Service and other organisations obliged.

As such work gained momentum, financial constraints in Britain Yearly Meeting and cuts in centrally funded work meant that QPS would soon no longer be able to employ representatives in Russia: Patricia Cockrell and I had written an application to a funding body of the European Commission, "Technical Assistance to CIS countries" (TACIS), which would enable us to continue our activities, including the work in the North Caucasus, peace education and our support for conscientious objectors in Russia. We needed an international partner to apply for the grant, and for several reasons QPS was unable to play that role. The German sister organisation of QPS, Quaker Hilfe, subsequently agreed to be our international partner and to support our work in this way.

Shortly before the deadline for submitting the TACIS grant however, the clerk of the QPS committee in London to which we were responsible contacted us to say that a minute made by the committee meant that we were not allowed to apply for the European Commission grant. Patricia and I met in her central Moscow flat, the grant application spread out covering half of the floor, and deliberated on what was to be done. The deadline for the application was that

same day. The committee must have had its reasons for forbidding us to submit the proposal, we considered, but at the same time we were aware daily of the great needs that the grant would allow us the resources to answer to.

Neither of us had previous experience of disobeying our employers in this way, but conscience and leadings of the Spirit urged overwhelmingly that we do it. This was after weeks of discussion, discerning and quiet contemplation: we decided to submit the application and hurried to the European Commission offices, hastily made the required number of copies and handed them in just in time. We were called by QPS to a meeting in London shortly afterwards, where we all spoke honestly and openly about the situation. Having listened intently to everyone, QPS general secretary Andrew Clark referred to the committee minute and to the elders of Balby, who had affirmed the predominance of the Spirit over the letter. The decision was made to continue supporting us as QPS representatives and to accept the decision we had made.

The TACIS grant application was approved by the Commission, and on receiving it, we set up a new organisation called the Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development (CPCP). QPS continued supporting us as representatives until the new international Quaker body Friends House Moscow was opened in 1996. QPS continued supporting me as a Friend working under concern for around two further years. Since that arrangement ceased, my monthly meeting in Leeds has provided support to me as a Friend under concern. CPCD became the structure for implementing the activities of the one-year TACIS grant, and it also provided the framework for new projects in the North Caucasus. In 1996, I helped to facilitate an international youth conference “Peace in Caucasia” in Yalta, which brought together young people working for peace and justice from all over the region and other parts of Russia. We developed plans there for a peacebuilding network in the North Caucasus to provide ongoing training in peacebuilding skills and coordination of peace and humanitarian projects.

During the months I spent in Chechnya I had become aware of the detrimental effects that the war was having on the psychological health of people there as it entered its second year. We discussed this at the conference in Yalta, and a group of us resolved to explore ways in which we could provide assistance to those most in need of psychosocial support.

During the months ahead, my Chechen colleague Adlan and I worked

with local partners and authorities in Chechnya to register the organisation and plan the new projects and activities. At the same time, I wrote funding proposals and applied to donors in Europe. In January 1997 we held an international youth conference in the ruined Chechen capital Grozny to further raise awareness of the situation and develop practical responses to assist the local population and support the excellent ideas and initiatives of local activists. We supported a group of the conference participants to set up a Chechen youth group, Laman Az (Voice of the Mountains), which continues its relief and education work in Grozny today with support from UN agencies.

Many of the conference participants remained behind afterwards to help monitor Chechnya's elections, which saw Aslan Maskhadov elected as President with international and Russian recognition. Russian troops had been withdrawn from the republic since a peace agreement between Russian and Chechen leaders several months earlier. Another presidential candidate, Shamil Basayev, who had orchestrated the siege of a hospital in southern Russia as a call to Russian politicians for peace talks, visited the conference, responding to our open invitation to all of the candidates. We conducted a dialogue with him in plenary about our aims and efforts to help build peace in Chechnya by peaceful means, and listened to his views on the situation and relations with Russia. Participants from Russia afterwards, used to media reports that demonised Basayev, had private discussions with him which were respectful and ended with a good degree of common understanding.

In the spring of 1997 the Chechen Ministry of Health agreed to loan the building of a former children's sanatorium to CPCD in return for our repairing damage inflicted to it during the war, installing a new heating system and redecorating the buildings. The building, right on the edge of Grozny in a tranquil setting surrounded by trees and fields, became the children's psychological rehabilitation centre, Little Star. We invited international experts to train local teachers and nurses in psychosocial assistance. They became our new staff members and worked in Grozny schools with children, teachers and parents identifying children with particularly high levels of psychological stress. We brought these children to the Little Star Centre by bus every day after school (before lunch as the schools worked in a shift system) for several hours of activities. We aimed to create a safe, creative and supporting environment for the children at the new centre, to allow the children to gently unwind, open up to each other and the counsellors, and in many cases to remember what it was to play and to have fun. Activities included art, dancing, simulation games, theatre and festivals, as well as individual consultations with

the counsellors.

Camilla Carr and Jon James, friends of mine who had done similar work with children in the UK, came out to live with us in Grozny and to work at the Little Star Centre. Through regular consultation with the parents, we observed that many of the symptoms of stress and psychological trauma among the children such as sleeplessness, recurring nightmares, hyperactivity or antisocial behaviour, were abating. In early July 1997, when the work of Little Star and our other peacebuilding and humanitarian programmes was gradually growing and developing, all of us at CPCD and many others in Chechnya and around the world were shocked at the news of Jon and Camilla's kidnapping. Armed gunmen burst into the house where our team was living in Grozny in the middle of the night and took Jon and Camilla away in blindfolds. I had just arrived in Cornwall for a break and so, not for the last time, narrowly escaped being abducted too. It was difficult to take in the news at first, but I immediately made journey plans back to Moscow and Grozny. I met with British Embassy staff in Moscow and with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, law enforcing agencies, colleagues and anyone else who might be able to help back in Chechnya. Such efforts, which included public appeals for help through television and other media, were complemented by the campaign of Jon and Camilla's families in the UK and efforts by the British government in Moscow. Finally, following fourteen months of captivity, at times in appalling conditions, Camilla and Jon were released. When I met Camilla at Brize Norton RAF base after their release, her first question was "How are the children at Little Star?"

Jon and Camilla used mutual support, tai chi, chi kung and yoga techniques to survive their ordeal. They have both met with colleagues from Chechnya since, and Camilla leads sessions on art, movement and other creative skills at our regular retreat seminars for the sixty psychologists and counsellors working at Little Star today. Camilla was raped by one of her captors, but ever since her release she has affirmed that she feels no hatred towards any of the men who held her and Jon captive. She has talked about the desperation and trauma that their captors too had suffered in the war, and is able to forgive them for what they did to her. Camilla and Jon have inspired thousands of people through talks and interviews since their release, and through their participation in The Forgiveness Project, which informs the public of their and other examples of people managing to forgive what some may consider to be unforgivable. Jon, Camilla and I all understood the risk of living and working in Chechnya. Their kidnapping and another in Ingushetia at the same time marked the

beginning of a period of numerous kidnappings by criminal groups, usually for ransom as in Jon and Camilla's case. Hundreds of Chechens were kidnapped too, but it was the several dozen abductions of foreigners that made the headlines around the world. Shortly after Jon and Camilla's release, four telecommunications workers, three of whom were from the UK, were found beheaded in Chechnya, several weeks after being abducted.

As the security situation deteriorated, many international organisations closed down their missions in the North Caucasus. The strength of CPCD was that the majority of workers and volunteers were local people who continued the work when international staff could no longer visit. This enhanced the trust of the local population who appreciated the evidence of commitment to a long-term approach. The strong partnership built up between international and local staff and volunteers at CPCD, and With our partners also plays a key role in our work.

The kidnappings and other crimes, fuelled by the devastating effects of the war, mass unemployment and economic disaster, marked the fall of Chechen society into a spiral of lawlessness that the new government was unable to control. The Russian authorities offered the Chechen government little support, and indeed impeded their attempts to help the republic back onto its feet. Extremist groups in Chechnya were becoming increasingly influential, and in 1999 such a group led an incursion into a region of neighbouring Dagestan. This triggered Moscow's decision, in September 1999, to send the troops back into Chechnya, this time "to combat terrorism". All CPCD staff members had to flee Chechnya for their safety, as did the rest of the population who had the means to do so. One of the Little Star counsellors met with our Ingushetia coordinator Murad, and so established contact through him with Adlan and me. We gradually found all the other counsellors, who also had fled to Ingushetia, and so we set about establishing small Little Star centres there to provide psychosocial support to children living in the tent camps for internally displaced people. These small centres or points were in tents, but nevertheless could provide the children with a creative, supportive space in their new lives in the refugee camps. As the military campaign gradually subsided in Chechnya, we were able to open further such points all over the republic, occupying classrooms in schools and a community building that we renovated in 2003. Our sixty psychologists and counsellors now all work in such centres in pairs, and in 2005 we will open a new purpose-built larger centre in Grozny to bring the children to for trips and for more intensive work to assist children with higher levels of trauma.

As the work of Little Star evolved over time, with vital financial support from our various donors and partners, so did many of our other projects, which are described briefly below. Today CPCD is a registered charitable company in the UK with a representation office in Moscow, branch offices in Chechnya and Ingushetia and smaller offices throughout the rest of the North Caucasus. We employ over 250 people, mainly locals, with our headquarters based in Bude, Cornwall.

I have been living in the UK since 2001, since being unable to obtain a Russian visa due to my years of working in Chechnya and a new, suspicious Russian administration in Moscow. Although frustrating in some ways, having an unquestionable reason not to be able to continue living in Russia may well have saved me from burnout, which happens to many people living and working under constant stress in such an environment over long periods of time. Seven consecutive years in the field is sufficient in many ways, and continuing to manage the work and fundraise for it, to develop the structural framework for it from our UK base and to share my experience with people here and in other parts of Europe has also proved effective.

CPCD's work today focuses on developing local capacities for peace through programmes in peacebuilding, education, psychosocial support, humanitarian aid and reconstruction. Many of the peacebuilding activities in the North Caucasus centre around our Peacebuilding Network. This work includes conflict resolution, tolerance and human rights training for trainers, and seminars for young peacebuilders from the six North Caucasian republics, South Ossetia and North West Russia. Several dozen such trainers have now received training over several years and are themselves conducting seminars and other projects in their own republics. Projects developed between the republics include summer camps, youth exchanges incorporating conflict resolution training, round tables on peace building themes, and conflict resolution in schools and universities. A project called "Russian North - North Caucasus" arranges youth camps for Russians and North Caucasians to help overcome prejudice. Other projects include youth cultural festivals and conflict resolution training with authorities such as traffic police. The network also provides support and training to local nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), facilitating relations between NGOs and journalists and promoting the reporting of conflict and peace building activities in the media.

Dialogue work between civil society leaders from Russia and Chechnya has resulted in the participants creating a “Yalta Initiative for Peace in Chechnya” (YIPIC) dialogue coalition to explore ways to build understanding and move towards reconciliation. Joint peacebuilding projects are conducted, such as a Peace Prize Ceremony and an exhibition of Russian and Chechen children's drawings in Moscow in 2004. The Peace Prize was 'presented to distinguished Chechen and Russian peacebuilders at the Tretyakov Gallery and raised awareness of their work through the media. The children's drawing exhibition will be touring Europe in 2005. We have also conducted dialogue work with Ingush and Ossetian communities in the Prigorodny Region since 1995. We are beginning a new project there to bring children, young people and adults from both communities together through vocational skills training, creative workshops and training seminars.

Other CPCD programmes in Chechnya and Ingushetia provide practical support to internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups. This includes distributing food and hot meals, rebuilding damaged schools and medical buildings and running a grain mill and bakery. Our women's support centre in Ingushetia offers psychosocial, medical and general moral support to women. A further women's support centre and a men's support centre are planned in Grozny in 2005. A conflict resolution centre in Nazran, Ingushetia opened at the end of 2003 and provides training in conflict resolution, tolerance and human rights. Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops are held in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia. CPCD supports the Chechen children's dance ensemble Daimohk, organising yearly European tours for the group. In 2004, CPCD began peace education training for secondary school teachers in the Moscow Region. Over the year, around 140 teachers of the humanities participated in a series of seminars introducing principles and values for civic education. At these seminars, Russian trainers explained concepts of human rights, tolerance, democracy and conflict resolution, and methods of teaching these concepts to children. We estimate that around 8000 young people, aged 15 to 18, will benefit from this teaching. A conscientious objection consultant based at our Moscow office offers consultations for young men, providing them and their families with information and guidance on their rights as conscientious objectors.

My motivation for developing this work in Chechnya and Russia together with colleagues was and is a response to the great needs that I witnessed and an absence of adequate support from other sources. There is always a potential for despair, to think that after years of hard work the situation in Chechnya has barely improved, and in some

ways has worsened since 1995. The lack of will on the governmental level in Russia to solve the many problems of the North Caucasus through peaceful means is a major reason for this and encourages the marginalisation of resistance groups, some of which are becoming ever more extreme in their responses.

What we are able to do is focus on peaceful solutions and to share and develop these with individuals and communities affected by violence. Decision and policy makers of the societies engaged in the armed conflict are often involved in this process. It is hard to quantify results of such work, but there is always a powerful potential for enacting positive change towards peace and justice with the many gifted and committed people who live in such difficult situations and who are still capable of envisioning a more positive and life-enhancing way of living.

All of us in our different ways are struggling to incorporate the tension of “living in the old city while building the new” (Britain Yearly Meeting Epistle, Exeter 1986). The situation in Chechnya in many ways mirrors and magnifies what is going on in each of us in our journey out of fear and ego towards love and “that of God within”, to use the traditional Quaker expression. Wherever we are, we are called to do what we can to quicken the pace of this change for ourselves and for those we are privileged to come into contact with. As a Friend, I can think of nothing that brings more joy to the soul than helping to nurture the Light in such an environment as Chechnya beset by darkness and despair, through lending support to courageous initiatives of hope and healing.

- The “Centre for Peacemaking and Community Development”; the CPCD company, ceased its activities at the end of December 2005, due to difficulties in the UK. The charity, using the similar name “Centre for Peacebuilding and Community Development” which was created to gradually take over the company's work, consequently did so sooner than planned, in January 2006. We therefore continue the work of CPCD in the North Caucasus, supported by a new UK structure. The many experienced and deeply committed local staff and partners in the region continue to run activities and programmes such as I have described.

<END >