

Corporation Meeting of American Friends Service Committee,

Spring 2025

The American Friends Service Committee corporation meeting took place April 24-26, 2025, at Friends Center, Philadelphia and online.

The **plenary session on April 24** featured susan abulhawa, a Palestinian American scientist, writer and activist. She spoke at length about the inhuman actions, many of which are not captured in the western press, carried out by Israeli forces in Gaza. She then discussed issues of the unchecked use of power throughout the world, corporate media's acquiescence to portrayals of the war in Gaza and destruction of human rights in other places that align with the ruling elite. She called on Quakers to take action, to once again speak truth to power to address the world domination by a powerful minority that shred norms and values. Her talk can be viewed on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nKJA1lw2qs>.

On **April 25, Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business** was held from 9am to 3:15pm. In addition to approving committee reports, there was a panel discussion on AFSC's responses to new federal policies on detention and deportation (Just responses to forced displacement and migration is one of AFSC's three strategic goals for 2020-2030. The other goals are Just and sustainable peace and just economies). The presiding clerk, Alvaro Alvarado, presented 3 business items to the corporation. The first item, changes in the by-laws was without controversy.

There was a lively discussion of the second item, options for the board composition. The current by-laws limit the board to 25 members and 80% must be Quakers. During the April 2024 corporation meeting the by-laws were changed to add representatives from each US and international regional to the board. Since many regional directors are not Quakers this change resulted in the board not meeting the 80% Quaker requirement. Several options were discussed for remedying this situation. The corporation requires additional time for decision making.

The third item was a proposal to experiment with holding the spring corporation meeting online every other year. I think the decision was to continue the current format for the spring. However, a fall meeting of the corporation will be online.

Also to be noted was a discussion of the change in federal policies on funding organizations that support Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. AFSC has not be affected because it does not receive federal funds and because it is a religious organization that is governed by the Corporation, representatives appointed by yearly meetings and some Quakers at-large.

Workshops were held from 3:30 to 5pm and were repeated the afternoon of April 26. These workshops are designed by the AFSC regional and central staff. Two workshops were hybrid and can be accessed, NY/NJ Healing Justice: From the Inside Out

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_J2kauEMS14) and Sowing the Seeds of Justice in New Orleans, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCrLOvnPFU>

6:00pm dinner was an *Eastern State Penitentiary Bus Trip: Private Tour, Sit-Down Dinner & Programmed Worship with Francisco Burgos, Executive Director at Pendle Hill.*

The April 26 meeting consisted of a continuation of **Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, Workshops and an evening session.** The evening session, *Courage to Resist: Commemorating 50 Years Since Vietnam* included corporation members recounted their activities in Vietnam. Claudia Krich read excerpts from her new book, *Those Who Stayed*, a personal account of the collapse of the South Vietnam government and the beginning of the new Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Submitted 8 June 2025 by Diane Rowley

(Diane serves on the Community Equity Justice Committee of the AFSC board. The committee initiated a joint staff governance working group charged with “formulating a workplan and structure to embody Beloved Community and to support thriving for Black staff and volunteers within AFSC because Black cultures can and should have an impact on the way AFSC operates, and because Black staff and volunteers need space to be innovative and creative. This initiative also addresses the lingering effects of colonialism, slavery, white supremacy, and other forms of oppression against Black people that we are currently experiencing both within the organization and externally.” Diane is the co-convenor of the working group.)

Thanks to Diane Rowley you may view susan abulhawa’s plenary address. I suggest to skip the first 10 minutes to the point where her discussion becomes substantive. And I want you to know that her novel titled *Mornings in Jenin* provides compelling reading. Like her plenary talk, it is well documented with historical facts, but also provides susan’s more hopeful and gentle, more humane and compassionate perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Throughout the Corporation meeting AFSC’s support for diversity, equity and inclusion were refreshingly evident. At a time when AARP was requiring volunteer tax preparers to remove data regarding sexual orientation from the forms they use to document their work, AFSC was doubling down to ensure that everyone present be known by their pronouns of choice. Presentations by AFSC staff, including General Secretary Joyce Ajlouny, exemplified how AFSC was created to provide leadership for this time and place, challenging Trump Term Two. I have the sense that AFSC converts my cash donations into social justice. Serving on several governance committees during the past year, I gave enthusiastically of my time to AFSC as an expression of faith in action.

Submitted by 10 June 2025 by Hugh Thomforde