

## PROPOSAL TO FUND PILOT PHASE OF DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION CLUBS AMONG RUSSIAN WAR EVADERS

### I. Overview

#### Why This Project and Why Now?

The Friends Meeting at Cambridge community has struggled with the meaning of the peace testimony ever since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. **This project offers the community an opportunity to live out both our peace testimony and our concern for justice by providing resources to Russians who have resisted or evaded the war by fleeing their homeland.** An estimated 700,000 Russians have left Russia following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Most of them live in Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Poland, and Lithuania. Andre Kamenshikov, representative of Nonviolence International in Ukraine, hopes to mobilize the potential power of this Russian diaspora to hasten a just end to this war. A seasoned activist and organizer, Kamenshikov is training and supporting Russians to provide friends, family, and acquaintances still in Russia with alternative sources of information that might inspire them to refuse cooperation with Putin's unjust war and advance a more democratic and egalitarian society in Russia.

#### How Will This Project Deepen the Spiritual Life of the Meeting?

In 1660, George Fox wrote a letter to George III to assure him that Quakers were not a threat to his monarchy. Fox declared then that "All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world."

The statement sounds unequivocal, yet only a year later, in 1661, Friend Isaac Pennington said, "I speak not this against any magistrates' or people's defending themselves against foreign invasions, or making use of the sword to suppress the violent and evil-doers within their borders...."

Friends have continued to grapple with the use of force and military power in the face of injustice in the intervening centuries. During the U.S. Civil War, Quakers who were committed to the peace testimony *and* the abolition of slavery faced a conundrum. Many felt that slavery was a form of violence more egregious than the war. Different Friends struggled to resolve the dilemma. Quaker Daniel Wootton of Indiana said "I came to the conclusion by serving my country I would be serving my God and friends also, therefore I resolved to enlist." Quakers who chose conscientious objection had to pay large fines, money that was likely dedicated to fighting the war. Delphina Mendenhall, a highly regarded Quaker minister in North Carolina, offered food and shelter to Union soldiers as an expression of her dedication to abolition.

During World War II, the specter of spreading fascism and the persecution and murder of Jews, sexual and religious minorities, Roma, disabled people, and political dissidents led London Yearly Meeting to issue this statement in a 1943 Epistle: "True peace involves freedom from tyranny ... That way of peace is not to be found in any policy of 'unconditional surrender' by whomsoever demanded. It requires that men (people) and nations should recognise their common brotherhood (humanity), using the weapons of integrity, reason, patience and love..."

Today, after many decades of opposing the use of militarism to advance the cause of imperialism and the exercise of U.S. economic power, many Friends, including many at Friends Meeting at Cambridge, wonder how to apply the peace testimony to the situation of the war imposed on Ukraine by Vladimir Putin. Should we call for a withdrawal of military aid by the United States and NATO? Would doing so lead to further violence and destruction by a leader who is hungry to restore control of territory lost to Russia in 1990? Does providing weapons and armaments to Ukraine escalate the risk of a larger war, including perhaps a nuclear war? Sadly, the answer to both of the last two questions is likely to be *yes*. And yet, are we to risk the apathy warned of in 1943 by London Yearly Meeting, when Quakers found themselves unclear about what they should do to secure “true peace” and a “freedom from tyranny”?

Many of us find ourselves torn between calling for peace and feeling compelled to aid Ukraine in resisting the would-be tyranny of an authoritarian leader who suppresses and murders his opponents, advances homophobia, and appears to be increasingly anti-Semitic. We question whether such a person can be trusted to negotiate any peace agreement, recalling the tragic outcomes of efforts to appease Hitler in the 1930s. Many of us long to take some action but struggle to determine the best way to resist violence. **This proposal offers the Meeting the opportunity to take an active role in living out the peace testimony by offering “weapons of integrity, reason, patience, and love.”**

#### **Goals of the project:**

1. Raise awareness in the Russian heartland to erode support for or complacency with Putin’s malign policies including the war against Ukraine.
2. Mobilize and empower diaspora war resisters and evaders to engage in mutual support and to provide alternative information to their families and networks.
3. Encourage social entrepreneurship and creative ideas and demonstrate models that may prove scalable for improving the capacity of Russians.

A typical meeting includes presentations on topics such as nonviolent communication (NVC), persuasive communication, and information about the war and its justifications. Presentations are followed by discussions about the experience and challenges of communicating with people still in Russia and the development of communication strategies to be tested by the group.

#### **Potential Results:**

I see this project as not only laying the groundwork for bringing an end to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but also possibly for advancing the kind of nonviolent revolution that transformed the political situation in the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s. In nearby Poland, for example, the Solidarity trade union that formed in 1980 persisted, despite severe repression over most of the decade that followed, to circulate information and inspiration through underground networks that ultimately led to a democratically elected government in 1989. Kamenshikov’s project will make a significant contribution to laying the groundwork for a more positive outcome in Russia, whatever the outcome of the war.

**How much is being requested, and what do you hope these funds will accomplish?** I am requesting \$18,000 to support a pilot project in communication via encrypted social networks such as Telegram by Russian war evaders to friends and family still in Russia.

**Will you personally oversee execution, or will it involve another organization or non-FMC persons?**

This project will be carried out by Andre Kamenshikov, director of Nonviolence International (NVI) in Ukraine. Kamenshikov is a U.S. citizen (born in New York in 1967) who has spent most of his life in Moscow. For the last nine years, he has lived in Ukraine, where he has served as the coordinator of many regional peace groups through the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict. Since the invasion, Kamenshikov has shifted his focus to working with members of the Russian diaspora who left their homes following the invasion of Ukraine either to avoid being drafted or out of opposition to the war.

The money would be administered by Nonviolence International, a 501(c)(3) organization based in Washington, D.C. NVI was founded by Palestinian peace activists Mubarak Awad and Jonathan Kuttub, and is directed today by Michael Beer, author of *Civil Resistance Tactics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and supervisor or trainer on nonviolent intervention and mobilization projects throughout the world, including in Western Sahara, Burma, Syria, and Palestine. He has worked closely with Quaker activist George Lakey.

**Over how many years will the funding be used?**

This funding will cover three months of the project while NVI undertakes further fundraising.

**Is this a local proposal, elsewhere in the U.S., or international? Or for FMC itself?**

This project is to be carried out in Kazakhstan, Georgia, and other countries in which Russian war evaders have settled.

**Who will carry out this project, both short-term and long-term if applicable? What are the roles, who will be doing them, and will there be adequate support?**

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With the equivalent of only a few thousand dollars Kamenshikov has reached out to war evaders in Kazakhstan and Georgia and has already held several meetings of people located through the social media channels of local human rights activists. He has recruited small teams of diaspora activists to lead efforts to train and organize other recent Russian emigrants to communicate with friends and relatives still in Russia. As far as we know, no one has done anything like this, and

Kamenshikov is courageously developing a creative approach to employing the potential of Russian war evaders who have left Russia to shift the attitudes of those still in the country.

In addition to Kamenshikov, local project teams include:

- ◇ Alexander Chichkov—lawyer, human rights and civil activist in Almaty, Kazakhstan;
- ◇ Nikita Rakhimov—psychotherapist; private entrepreneur, civil activist in Almaty, Kazakhstan;
- ◇ Maria Petrukhina—mediator and facilitator, NVC-practitioner and trainer in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Kamenshikov is supported in this effort by U.S.-based volunteers, including Nadine Bloch from Beautiful Trouble; NVI founder Dr. Mubarak Awad; Michael Beer, NVI Director; and Eli McCarthy of DC Peace Teams who communicate with the Europe-based groups through Zoom.

## **II. Use of Funds**

**Does this proposal advise keeping some or all of the bequest for FMC’s capital or budget use?**

This proposal is a small portion (5% or less, depending on the value of investments) of the total bequest and makes no assumptions about how the balance of the bequest would be used.

**Is this the only funding for this project or is it part of a larger effort?**

The amount requested is only for the pilot phase of this project. I have raised a little over \$6000 for this project, thanks to generous donations from appeals to friends and several members of the FMC community as well as my own contribution. Other sources have provided something close to \$4000, for a total of approximately \$10,000. Another \$18,000 would enable the pilot project to develop, implement, and test communication strategies that would allow each participant to reach a large number of respondents in the hope of offering a unique model of communication that will expand to provide huge numbers of people in Russia’s heartland who have not generally looked for alternatives to government propaganda with a source of alternative information.

**Is it ongoing after these funds are depleted?**

See above. Nonviolence International is also seeking much larger sources of funding with the hope of building out additional communication groups in other countries. FMC’s contribution (if provided soon enough) will keep the project going until that kind of support materializes. I have no expectation nor intention of requesting additional funds from FMC. In the words of Kamenshikov, “Ideally, the project is completed and closed when the Russian invasion of Ukraine and illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory is terminated, political changes in Russia occur, and those who left Russia are free to return without official sanction. In this scenario the project’s goals are realized, whatever this project’s contribution. However, the mutual support groups, created among the Russian diaspora during the project and their capacity to effectively communicate with people in the country will be a valuable asset in helping Russian society overcome the consequences of Putin’s regime.”

**Is this funding for a start-up, a program already up and running, or is this for an expansion?**

The pilot has started and continuing funds are needed, with a larger project to follow the pilot. Funds being requested are to continue the pilot. The pilot has the goal of not merely dumping

alternative information, but of finding techniques and messages that will keep people in Russia open to communications about the war and government policies from members of the Russian diaspora.

With the equivalent of only a few thousand dollars Kamenshikov began reaching out to Russian war evaders in Kazakhstan and Georgia in July of 2023. He held several meetings of people located through the social media channels of local human rights activists in Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Armenia, and has met as well with civil society activists in Finland. He has recruited small teams of diaspora activists to lead efforts to train and organize other recent Russian emigrants to communicate with friends and relatives still in Russia. As far as we know, no one has done anything like this, and Kamenshikov is courageously developing a creative approach to employing the potential of Russian war evaders who have left Russia to shift the attitudes of those still in the country.

**If being given to an existing program, what portion of that budget will this represent?**

This proposal would provide about 60% of the funding for a three-month pilot project (the remaining 40% would be the \$10,000 already raised). It represents about 15% of what NVI hopes to raise for an on-going project of three years.

**If an existing project, are members and/or attenders at FMC already engaged with this project, and if so, how? Are community members welcome to become involved and how?**

Several members of the FMC community, including myself (Lynne Weiss), have made generous donations to the effort already. In addition, I have been attending Zoom meetings with Kamenshikov and the staff of NVI. I will continue to do so to report back to FMC on use of the funds and progress of the project. Other members of the FMC community would be welcome to participate in these Zoom events to stay apprised of Kamenshikov's ongoing work.

**III. Budget**

While U.S.-based trainers communicate via Zoom, it is important that local groups meet together in a room. Even outside of Russia, the work they are undertaking feels risky and challenging. Therefore, it is important that Kamenshikov be able to travel to these countries from Kyiv and that funds are available for in-person meetings among the local participants.

Russian emigres face many obstacles. They do not have a lot of choices about where they can go, and in the countries that will accept them, they are often seen as spies or agents of Putin and have difficulty finding work and housing. While it is not Kamenshikov's primary goal, he has also been trying to aid the Russian war evaders in their survival in their new homes.

Taxes and benefits and capital costs are not applicable to this situation.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Amount</b>
<b>Personnel:</b> Coordinator NVI Support	3 months	\$6000
<b>Travel:</b> Coordinator Travel	4 trips to 2 countries	\$4200 (estimated)
<b>Additional:</b> Training venues, snacks	18 meetings	\$2500 (estimated)

<b>Personnel:</b> Support of local staff and activists	3 people for 3 months	\$3000
<b>Supplies:</b> Local expenses	3 months office supplies, communication	\$500 (estimated)
<b>Additional:</b> NVI Overhead	3 months	\$1800
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$18,000</b>