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April, 2007

House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

On behalf of the 225 congregations and 33,000 members that make up Mennonite Church Canada, we address you with concerns over our common quest for peace in our world. This quest must begin with our own actions for peace as individuals and as a church, but must also include our government in both domestic and foreign policy arenas. We are encouraged in this quest by the words of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney:

*So I approach the **pursuit of peace** with determination, recognizing both the enormity of the task and the **requirement for action**. To those who say it cannot be done, I say **it must be done**. To those who say Canada can't do it alone, I say **we can do it together**. And to those who claim it is none of our business, I say **the search for peace is everyone's business**.*

Specifically, we urge your government to support a Private Member's Bill that will be introduced into the House by Bill Siksay (Member of Parliament for Burnaby – Douglas in British Columbia) that would allow for Conscientious Objection to the payment of those taxes designated for military purposes. This is an historic initiative, and we urge you to support this Bill when it is introduced. But more than that, we urge you to mobilize your government and members of Parliament of both sides of the House to support this Bill.

The "pursuit of" and the "search for" peace are also at the heart of our sacred scripture. The Psalmist exhorts us to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14). The Apostle Paul instructs us to "pursue what makes for peace" (Romans 14:19). The Apostle Peter teaches us to "seek peace and pursue it" (I Peter 3:11). And Jesus the Christ taught us that the best way to deal with enemies is to "love them" and to "pray" for them (Matthew 5:44). Mennonite Church Canada is a Christian denomination that has had the "search for and pursuit of peace" in our heart and soul since our inception in Canada in the early 1800s, and before that in the birth of the Anabaptist movement in Europe in the 16th century, and before that in the words and life of Jesus of Nazareth, the foundation of our church.

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11

April 27, 2007

Page 2

We wrote to you in July/2006 about our concern regarding the escalation of military response in Lebanon, Gaza, and Israel. At that time we expressed our concern as follows:

We are concerned about what appears to be a multi-faceted and intentional escalation of public advocacy, decisions, and actions that foster the increasing militarization of the Canadian mind, psyche, soul, and imagination.

Since then our concern has only increased. In July 2006, the delegates of our congregations, meeting in our annual Assembly in Edmonton, expressed their concern in a tangible way. They went beyond affirming our historic conviction that Conscientious Objection status needs to be available for those who cannot in good conscience serve the military purposes of our nation, to express their reluctance to pay those taxes that finance the capacity of others to do so. The delegates asked that these concerns be brought to the attention of our government together with some suggestions about how the tax question could be addressed.

We are aware of and pleased with the initiative of Mr. Bill Siksay in introducing the Private Members Bill C-348 on June 22/06. This Bill, *Conscientious Objection to the Use of Taxes for Military Purposes*, proposed a vehicle which addressed some of our concerns and we applaud this effort.

We have been working with Mr. Siksay, and with other concerned groups coordinated by Conscience Canada, to strengthen the impact of this Bill. Mr. Siksay is now drafting a new strengthened Bill to be introduced into Parliament at the earliest opportunity. This Bill will propose concrete ways in which our concerns can be more fully addressed. Not only will it propose a way in which the end-use of our taxes is subject to the conscience of the taxpayer, it will also suggest alternate ways in which those same tax-dollars can be effectively used for the pursuit of peace via non-violent and peaceful means.

The logic for this Bill is clear. The end-use and impact of our money are as important as are the end-use and impact of our actions. If conscience is a legitimate cause for exemption to what we oppose, namely military service, conscience must also be a legitimate cause for exemption *to pay* for what we oppose, namely military action.

Allowing taxpayers to designate their taxes to non-violent strategies is only one small step in our “search for” and “pursuit of” peace. We also urge you to become a world spokesperson and statesman in the promotion of a peace that is gained through peaceful (and not violent) means.

For example, Mr. Prime Minister, it is not convincing to us that the Canadian military forces should be seen and promoted as being the front line of “rebuilding the infrastructure” and engaging in “development” work in Afghanistan, as we hear your

April 27, 2007

Page 3

officials and military spokespersons argue so often. By this we are not suggesting that Canada should not be engaged in developing that and other countries. But it is not logical that our military forces should be the vehicle for social development and re-construction there. Again we would call you to an alternative imagination in how the same level of budget could be used for the social and economic development of Afghanistan but via development organizations that have a solid reputation for using non-violent strategies for social development.

We draw your attention to the words of another eminent Canadian, also a predecessor to you. The words of Lester Pearson, although spoken half a century ago, are as relevant (or more so) today as they were then:

The stark and inescapable fact is that today we cannot defend our society by war since total war is total destruction, and if war is used as an instrument of policy, eventually we will have total war. Therefore, the best defence of peace is not power, but the removal of the causes of war, and international agreements which will put peace on a stronger foundation than the terror of destruction (1957).

[We must search for] peace based on something more enduring than force (1955).

Mr. Prime Minister, we pray for you, we are open to meet with you, and we are prepared to work with you and your government toward transforming the increasing Canadian confidence in military solutions into a strengthened imagination for the potential of nonviolent options regarding the complex issues facing your government and our world. Other statespersons have, in the past, demonstrated the positive impact of such alternative imaginations. We urge you to now step into that circle and continue the legacy of peacekeeping and peacemaking that Canada has established at home and abroad. In doing so you will be giving leadership to the “new imagination” for peace that we called you to exercise in our July 2006 letter to you.

Statistics from the United Nations tell us that in 2005 the annual world military expenditure reached \$1.1 trillion dollars while the United Nations spent approximately \$5 billion dollars on peacekeeping efforts. This is less than 0.5% of military expenditure. Can we imagine ways in which these numbers could be inverted? The increasing militarization of the world, and the reactive militarization of Canada, is not the road to peace. We urge you, Mr. Prime Minister, to demonstrate a Canadian commitment to the pursuit of peace by supporting provisions, such as the upcoming Bill, that advocate for non-violent strategies, and at the same time to become a proactive proponent that encourages the imaginations of our citizens in the search for peace via peaceful means.

Prime Minister Trudeau, in accepting the annual award of the Albert Einstein Peace Prize Foundation (1984) stated:

April 27, 2007

Page 4

... politicians act as if peace is too complicated for them.

Our confidence is that peace is not “too complicated” for us. This confidence arises from our faith that God is at work and that God’s strategy, as illustrated through Jesus Christ, is a strategy of non-violent communities pursuing peace via peaceful lives and means. This confidence is more than sectarian religious conviction. There is by now ample evidence from multiple sources and experiences within and beyond the church that point to the wisdom of this confidence. Non-violent strategies do indeed have the power to effectively engage the societal and global cul-de-sac of confronting the injustice of violence with further violence that inevitably generates additional injustice. We call on you to help Canadians break this spiral of violence and foster imaginations of peace for the sake of and the pursuit of peace.

Sincerely,

Henry Krause
Moderator
Mennonite Church Canada

Robert J. Suderman
General Secretary
Mennonite Church Canada

Janet Plenert
Executive Secretary
Mennonite Church
Canada Witness

cc. Mr. Bill Siksay, M.P. Burnaby – Douglas
Hon. Gordon O’Connor, Minister of National Defence
Hon. Peter Mackay, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Stéphane Dion, Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Mr. Gilles Duceppe, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
Hon. Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance
Hon. Vic Toews, President of the Treasury Board
Hon. Carol Skelton, Minister of National Revenue