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**Mennonite
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OPEN LETTER to school administrators, principals, and school board staff,

As was recently stated by General Rick Hillier, the Canadian Forces is engaged in a "domestic war for talent" as it attempts to boost its ranks. This "domestic war" was particularly evident at the Kitchener Auditorium during the week leading up to the 2008 Memorial Cup hockey playoffs.

As part of the Memorial Cup events, thousands of elementary students were bused to the Kitchener Auditorium where they viewed hockey displays, played table hockey, and walked outside the Auditorium where they received free Canadian Forces paraphernalia such as lanyards, stickers, hockey pucks, and posters. Children could then take turns looking through the sights of a large Howitzer gun or climbing into the driver's seat of an armoured jeep.

While some maintained that this Canadian Forces presence was in keeping with the particular history of the Memorial Cup (i.e. the Memorial Cup was originally awarded as a memorial to Canadians who fought in WWI), we want to point out that a more fitting method of honouring this history may have been to invite a war veteran to share what so many have concluded about war: "Never again!"

We are very troubled by the presence of the military in schools or at school-related events. Quite apart from the larger issues about the defensibility or indefensibility of war, the presence of Canadian Forces personnel in schools or at school-sanctioned field trips is highly problematic because it appears that the military is trying to covertly prepare our children for eventual military service.

In addition to expressing a general concern about the militarization of children, we share the following observations about how the presence of the military in schools violates specific local and provincial agreements:

Firstly, the presence of the military in schools or at school-related events goes against the policies of local school boards. The "Safe and Secure Schools" policy of the Waterloo Region District School Board states that "[o]ur safe and secure schools policies support the position that no form of violent behaviour, that in any way threatens the well being of

another person, is acceptable at school or while participating in school-related activities.” The policy goes on to identify a categorical prohibition on the possession or use of weapons or items that are intended to be used as weapons.

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board includes a policy towards violence which states that “[v]iolent behaviour is contrary to our Gospel and Catholic values... We are to live in peace and promote means of solving conflict involving repair, reconciliation and reassurance.... No form of violent behaviour is acceptable on school property or in school sponsored or related activities.”

Some may assert that these policies only pertain to the everyday behaviour of students and teachers; however, the extent to which these policies bear upon all school-related activities can be seen, for example, in the fact that many schools prohibit violent Halloween costumes. There is nothing in a school board policy about Halloween costumes, and yet a Halloween costume prohibition can be maintained precisely because it is a practical demonstration of the broader policy. The point is that the policies provide a solid framework for making specific decisions about how to keep violence and weapons out of schools and school-related activities.

Secondly, the presence of the military in schools or at school-related events goes against the Ontario Safe Schools Act. The purpose of the Safe Schools Act, as outlined in Section 13.301.2, is “[t]o maintain an environment where conflict and difference can be addressed in a manner characterized by respect and civility... [t]o encourage the use of non-violent means to resolve conflict... [t]o promote the safety of people in the schools.”

Again, while there is nothing in the Safe Schools Act about the presence of the military in schools, it is clear that military personnel (and certainly military equipment such as Howitzer guns and armoured jeeps) represent violent rather than nonviolent means to resolve conflict.

Clearly, the Canadian Forces does not expect a Grade 5 student to sign up for the military on the grass outside the Kitchener Auditorium. However, the fairly glitzy Canadian Forces materials proactively given to the Grade 5 student indicate that the military is doing something more than simply offering information to those who voluntarily ask for it. We feel that information is being specifically withheld – i.e. information about how military service actually involves being ready to kill or be killed on command.

We believe that it is inappropriate for children to be subjected to the advertising of the Canadian Forces. Again, this is quite apart from the actual work done by the Canadian military, and how this work is evaluated by Canadians. The legitimacy of the Afghanistan mission and the effectiveness of military intervention generally are urgent matters that deserve widespread and thoughtful debate. What we conclude about these matters does not change the fact that our children deserve an education that is free from militarism and military recruitment campaigns.

We believe that the responsibility lies with school administrators, principals, and school board staff to specifically evaluate the extent to which the military's presence does or does not fit with the broader policies and goals of our area schools.

While some schools and colleges in Canada are instituting specific bans on any military presence in educational settings, we do not presume any particular solution for the Waterloo Region, though we do expect this concern to be taken seriously and to be processed in an appropriate way.

We welcome the opportunity to work together as educators, citizens, community organizations, and decision-makers in the Canadian Forces in order to create policies, guidelines, and understandings that make sense for our context.

Signed,



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