

# Is it TIME for The Department of PEACE?

A report on the  
SECOND PEOPLE'S SUMMIT FOR  
MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS OF PEACE  
held in Victoria in June

BY LESLEY MARIAN NEILSON



We have ministers of Environment and Finance. Why not a Minister of Peace?

**B**ack in May, the Federal Government debated whether to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan. The debate, it seems, was a simple black and white affair: should we stay or should we go? After a mere six hours, a slim majority decided we would stay.

But how many of our MPs (how many of us) really considered how Canada could contribute to effectively transforming the conflict that has mired Afghanistan for more than three decades?

Perhaps the questions Parliament should have debated are: How can Canada help build peace in Afghanistan? What should be the nature of our engagement? What methods in the vast arsenal of non-violent conflict resolution and peace building techniques should we employ?

Such questions will not be overlooked in future debates if the Working Group for a Canadian Department of Peace—one with parallels all over the world—succeeds in its campaign to establish a Department of Peace (DoP) within the Federal Government.

The group's mission is to give non-violent conflict resolution and peace building a much larger voice in shaping government policy. They've prepared a complete bill that could be introduced in the House of Commons, outlining ministerial responsibilities and staffing needs, and they've rounded up a host of advisors, including Lloyd Axworthy, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Canada; Dr. Paz Buttedahl, director, Human Security and Peacebuilding Program, Royal Roads University; and Dr. Mary-Wynne Ashford, past president, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

In late June, the Victoria group hosted the Second People's Summit for Ministries and Departments of Peace. Delegates from 18 countries—

including Australia, Costa Rica, India, Italy, Japan, Liberia, Nepal, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Palestine, the UK, and the US—gathered at Royal Roads University to compare notes on their national campaigns, and to affirm their international cooperation. Later, they attended the World Peace Forum in Vancouver, giving a presentation and workshops.

"We have a very highly elaborated architecture of war," says Saul Arbess, a driving force behind the Victoria Department of Peace group. "It consumes over a trillion dollars and can be mobilized at a moment's notice. We have no corresponding architecture of peace."

As Arbess explains, a Federal Department of Peace would provide a focal point for peace building activities, both within Canada and internationally. The Minister of Peace would be responsible for developing, supporting and promoting a culture of peace and non-violence, and would represent a counterpoint to the positions typically taken by the Departments of National Defence, Foreign Affairs and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Fifty years ago, it might have seemed unreasonable or just plain unnecessary to have a Federal Department of Environment. But since its inception in the mid-1980s, Environment Canada's mandate to make sustainable development a reality through conservation, research, education and management of the natural environment has become increasingly recognized as vitally important. This is exactly the analogy the Department of Peace campaigners use to illustrate how timely and realistic their proposal is.

"What we're envisioning," says Arbess, "is, just as we have Ministers of Environment and Finance and every other field who meet frequently

with their counterparts in other countries, so too would Ministers of Peace meet frequently in order to develop creative solutions to transform conflicts, and also to identify conflicts that may emerge into violence.”

A Minister of Peace would be charged with keeping Canada’s peace-building capacity current, flexible, proactive, and responsive to ever-evolving conflict. Peacekeeping—and conflict transformation and peacemaking, all of which are distinct aspects of the larger field of peace building—is not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Without a government department with such a focus, our involvement in conflict zones can, says Arbess, easily be subsumed by the architecture of war, rather than one of peace.

ANY DAY OF THE WEEK, a quick survey of the news headlines reveals the darker side of human nature: war, murder, bloodshed, revenge, corruption. You would be forgiven for believing that the world is spiralling violently out of control, that human civilization is rapidly unravelling into continual, escalating conflict and mayhem.

But in fact, armed conflict world wide is in decline, in part because of a concerted effort by the UN and countless NGOs, regional

organizations and local governments to engage in conflict resolution and peace-building activities.

“I’ve seen how effective essentially simple and intelligent methods of resolving conflicts can be when people are listened to, are respected and are included in the solutions,” says Penny Joy, a Victoria group member who was drawn into the Department of Peace campaign through her work with restorative justice. “Unless work is done in peace building, in reconciliation, in dealing with the causes that have created the violence in the first place, then it’s only going to pop up again.”

There already exist thousands of organizations around the world that develop, promote, apply and train people in peace-building activities. So do we really need another level of bureaucracy?

Kai Brand-Jacobsen, founder and director of the Peace, Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR) and facilitator of the Summit, thinks, in this case, yes. The DoPs would “build the capacity for peace building and conflict transformation, and for dealing with conflict effectively *at the level of governments*—locally, nationally and internationally. They would help to ensure that effective resources are committed where they are needed.”

The key to maintaining peace, Arbess contends, is in building human security: “Human security, in our view, is an embracing term which includes the right to sustenance, employment, to have one’s voice heard in one’s country, as well as the usual idea of freedom from fear. And this cannot be achieved by police or paramilitary forces or armies. That’s what we call an armed or negative peace. We’re talking about a *positive* peace, and a positive peace depends upon developing the sense and reality of a human security for all people in a given place or region.”

Peace building, Arbess continues, “looks at the root causes of conflict and tries to develop the institutions and infrastructures within a country that will allow it to peacefully transform itself.”

So how will Afghanistan, or the Sudan, or Lebanon or Israel, build a positive peace? And how can Canada help? Let’s start by asking the right questions.

*For more information on the Department of Peace initiative, see [www.departmentofpeace.ca](http://www.departmentofpeace.ca).*

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## The economics of war and peace

Researcher Dave Hubert, in his book *Canada @ Peace*, estimates that, instead of spending over \$4 billion tax dollars on CF-18 fighter jets and related costs such as training pilots, maintenance, operating costs and fuel, an extra 4,133 Canadians could have been hired for 20 years in a variety of service occupations such as health care workers, conservation officers, teachers and up to 8,266

childcare workers; 27,500 homes could have been built, waterways and forests restored, and infrastructure, such as roads, repaired and improved.

Dr. Tim Wallis, of the group Peaceworkers UK, has pointed out that his organization could recruit and train 1000 civilian peace workers over five years at a cost of approximately \$1 million Canadian, which is “less than the cost of maintaining UK troops in Iraq for a single day.”

Another British researcher, Scilla Elworthy, (*Cutting the Costs of War*, Oxford Research Group) notes: “The British government currently provides subsidies to arms exporters of 426 million pounds per annum [2004]. For that amount we could: support the setting up of gun collection schemes in every single country where there is local killing... introduce effective boundary controls to gun-running, with severe and enforceable penalties; fully support the EU commitment to develop a ‘Civilian Crisis Management Capacity’ by providing training for civilians ready to join.”



The CF-18 Hornet fighter jet: \$30,000,000 each