

***Memorandum to the Department of Peace Initiative (DPI) in Canada
Concerning the Potential for Collaboration with Conscience Canada's
Agenda***

Since its inception Conscience Canada has lobbied for a legal means to promote the peaceful resolution of conflict as an alternative to militaristic approaches. For 25 years it has promoted the drafting of private member's bills that would establish a 'Peace Tax Fund'. The purpose of that fund would be to enable those taxpayers whose religion and/or conscience forbids them to support killing, to systematically redirect the portion of their federal income tax that supports the military. The funds collected from conscientious objectors would support research, training, and facilitation of programs that would promote peace through nonviolent means. Conscientious objectors therefore, are concerned both with the reduction of violence by withdrawing our support, and equally the fostering of nonviolent means to resolving conflict. Conscience Canada believes firmly that the right to object and redirect the service and funding that is conscripted for the sake of war, is protected in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. While there exists precedent in pre-confederation Canadian history for the redirection of military taxes toward constructive alternatives, Canadian law does not currently recognize in an official manner either the right to object to military conscription in terms of service, or the right to object to taxes being conscripted.

While there exist many organizations and government programs that strive to work for peace without using violence, there is no clear department that would be appropriate to administer such a 'Peace Tax Fund', in the event that Parliament were to pass legislation that allowed for the redirection of taxes in this way. For many years the legislation supported by Conscience Canada provided for redirection to non-governmental peace organizations. We then came to believe that it was entirely unlikely that parliament would approve legislation which would allow the redirected taxes to benefit a non-governmental agency that worked for peace as this would remove these taxes from the governmental spending envelope. Since 1997 the legislation has proposed that the redirected taxes be allocated to any non-military function of government. The drawback of this solution is that it does

not support the positive peacebuilding interventions sought by those who oppose war on conscientious grounds. For that reason Conscience Canada strongly favours the creation of a governmental department, ministry or agency that would administer research grants, supervise training and fund programs which seek to resolve conflict nonviolently. Such a governmental body, which works toward the goals of nonviolent conflict transformation, would be an appropriate recipient of such redirected taxes. A Department of Peace would be an ideal resolution to what we perceive as a great deficiency in Canada's security strategies and a satisfactory place to put the redirected taxes to work.

The prospect of Conscience Canada openly endorsing the Department of Peace Initiative would not, of course, require a reciprocal endorsement. It would greatly benefit the prospects of Conscience Canada to have a discrete government department that would be administering the very work toward which conscientious objectors would wish to redirect their taxes. The practical benefit for the DPI would potentially involve an arrangement, in the case that our effort to establish legislation for military redirection is successful, whereby the military portion of conscientious objectors' income tax would be disbursed to the Department of Peace. The Conscientious Objection Act should allow the redirected taxes to be supplementary to the official budget available to the Dept of Peace.

Conscience Canada wishes to express its continued support, first articulated in 2005, for the creation of a Department of Peace. In the event of its creation we would continue to lobby for Parliament to respect the rights of conscientious objectors and facilitate a means in the tax code for that portion of our federal taxes that funds the military (now approximately 9%), to be redirected toward nonviolent conflict intervention and management. We envision this happening in a manner similar to the way the separate school board allows its participants to divert the entire portion of their school taxes to the alternative system. We reject the view that militaristic solutions are realistic, while nonviolent approaches are impractical. History has shown that violence continually and perhaps exponentially begets more violence, whereas nonviolent approaches to toppling dictatorships and ushering in democratic reforms have been particularly abundant since the end of the Cold War, especially seen

in the former Soviet countries. Canada has recently been failing in its role as an innovating nation, visionary leader or practical force for developing nonviolent approaches. We wish to encourage Canada's ability to further develop nonviolent approaches to managing human conflict, for reasons of religion, conscience, and pragmatic effectiveness of our tax dollars. We look forward to finding ways to work toward achieving any goals that we share in common with the DPI in Canada, possibly even finding ways that the international Peace Tax movement can connect with the DPI on an international level.