GC35 Beyond Military Force: Seeking Peace after the Cold War (1994B251)

True Document Date: December 31, 1993

1. Humanitarian intervention and civil war

Three years after the formal end of the Cold War, the major nuclear powers have agreed that they will not use nuclear weapons against each other. Still, roughly 50,000 nuclear weapons remain. In addition, 82 armed conflicts are underway in 60 locations. Thirty-five are full-blown civil wars, clustered in 5 major hot spots in the world: (i) Southern and south-central Africa; (ii) the Horn of Africa; (iii) the Middle East, south-eastern Europe and the central Asian republics of the former USSR; (iv) south-east Asia; and (v) the Andes. People who have escaped these wars have become our neighbours in many of the major cities of Canada.

These wars have placed on the United Nations and contributing states like Canada obligations that were scarcely imagined when it was founded 50 years ago. The UN's traditional peacekeeping and diplomacy have been called on for so-called "humanitarian intervention" or the use of deadly military force to achieve a cease-fire, to prevent ethnic cleansing, or to end a siege in which thousands of civilians are starving or are fired on day after day. Defence experts argue that outsiders can not stop people from fighting until they want to stop.   In addition, changes in military technology and the widespread availability of cheap arms with extraordinary killing power have made the equipment for war-making to virtually anyone with the will for it.

The depth of human suffering drives many people to say that the time has come to use lethal military force to end the siege of Srebrenica or to depose the military in Haiti. Others insist that the world needs to persist with the current tools it has for securing a shaky peace--weak as those tools are. That approach raises other questions:

- Should the resources of the UN and of Canada be drawn increasingly into support of peacekeeping work?

- Is it ethical to ask peacekeepers to put themselves at risk where no cease-fire exists?

- Is it ethical or even effective to spend greater amounts of money on peacekeeping when funds are shrinking for work that builds the conditions for peace: economic justice, human rights implementation, and sustainable development?

- If deadly military force can not stop armies from killing thousands of civilians and driving refugees from their homes, what kind of diplomats could the world pull together to strengthen the hands of the peace constituency inside war zones?

- What could non-governmental organisations contribute that organisations such as the UN can not?

1.2 Changes in war-making in the 1990s: bad news and good news

In the 1990s war has taken on new and disturbing features. Though every war has different roots, most have several features in common. They are in the two-thirds world and the former USSR. They are waged with weapons that were designed and exported worldwide by the US, Russia, France, the UK, and China. They are fought over conflicts between groups within states, especially where states have been unable to meet all their peoples' need for social and economic security. They last longer; they cause the collapse of states and the flight of millions of people to other countries. They kill few soldiers, but thousands of civilians. They destroy the delicate fabric of entire societies by turning whole populations into victims who are maimed, orphaned or made "stateless" through sieges, ethnic cleansing, and the practice of atrocities, such as public rape, mutilation, and torture. They turn teenagers-- and sometimes children--into soldiers and unemployed people into mercenaries, death squads, and warlords' militia.

The international system for controlling war and providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and victims was designed to help countries co-operate in putting war behind them. Though the ideal was often undermined, it has worked for many conflicts between states.

The 35 full-blown wars in our world, almost all have placed on the United Nations and its member states' obligations that were scarcely imagined when it was founded 50 years ago. The UN's traditional peacekeeping and diplomacy roles have been outstripped by the changing nature of war, the changes in military technology and the widespread availability of arms in even the poorest states. At the same time, modern telecommunications have made most of us witnesses to the intense suffering of people in places like Somalia, Angola, Bosnia, and Sri Lanka.

In the international arena, the climate for and against war has also changed:

- Ideological and political control by great powers has disappeared, though its devastating legacy remains.

- Weapons are widely available, with new markets growing in bargain-basement, used weapons, and especially land mines aimed at maiming people long after the conflict officially ends.

- Political "globalization" to limit the use of deadly military force--represented in the United Nations and the vision of common security based on international law--has broken down.

- Political leaders in many parts of the world speak openly of their right to force minorities out of their country or to kill them in order to create the ideal state. Millions of people are declared "disposable" in the interests of resisting the imperialism of the UN or of fulfilling the demands of local culture or religion.

The failure of both governments and religions to build a moral consensus across religious divisions and a civil society committed to peace-building only strengthens the hands of those who are intent on killing their enemies.

On the positive side, the end of the Cold War has also created a moment in which millions of people have been able to establish their own institutions and non-governmental

organisations for the first time in five decades. Churches in eastern and central Europe and in Russia have moved quickly to take on a role of witness for justice and peace in their new "public arena". Women, minorities, and stateless peoples such as the Kurds, the Roma or gypsies have made progress in seeking their rights by peaceful means. States have also developed new political structures for co-operative pursuit of economic and social development and human rights. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe--a regional agreement for the parties to World War II--has helped displace military alliances and has developed new ways of resolving civil conflicts before they become full-blown wars.

Above all, groups of courageous people in war zones have committed themselves to disarming their own hearts and building the peace constituency in the midst of the battle. Religious communities of many faiths and churches have chosen to stay in the war zones to help reweave torn social fabrics and heal the soul and psyches of people.

1.3 Challenges posed for the international community, for Canada, and for the church

In September 1993, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development summed up the experience of UN peacekeeping units, humanitarian aid efforts, and defence specialists. The conclusion was simple:

- International institutions, such as the UN, are nearly powerless to protect men, women, and children who are under fire, trapped in a siege, or forcibly displaced in ethnic cleansing.

- No outside party--not even disciplined "Blue Helmets"--can stop a civil war unless the people in the country want to stop fighting. The emphasis needs to shift to building relationships between people who have been or have become enemies.

- In the last 3 years, demands for peacekeeping units have undermined the UN's efforts to prevent war by addressing its root causes through economic and social development and human rights protections.

- Defence specialists say the world urgently needs to replace its "security doctrine" based on military force with a comprehensive approach.   This approach would concentrate on political as well as economic issues in conflicts, such as sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. Even more important, it would address psycho-social issues like "enemy images," racial and ethnic hatred, and the use of religion to justify killing.

- The UN needs to resist calls for "peace-making" (or using lethal military force to get a cease-fire). Instead it needs to strengthen its commitment of resources for resolving conflict by political means. This would allow its peacekeeping resources to do what they do well: patrol cease-fires, act as sentries in humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict reconstruction.

- The UN needs new kinds of peace workers at its disposal. Governments and non-governmental organisations need to co-operate in preventive diplomacy and in building civil society and a social fabric for peace and justice.

- The UN needs to make serious progress in disarming the world. Trade in weapons and its legitimization as a source of income and profit have to stop.

Project Ploughshares, the Canadian churches' peace research organisation, has outlined some of the implications for Canada. This country, like many caught in the transition from the Cold War, to define a new defence policy--one that rejects war as an option, pursues disarmament, controls the spread of all weapons, and promotes war prevention through conflict resolution and just development. Otherwise Canadians will be under pressure to contribute people and scarce funds to UN peacekeeping operations where there is no peace to keep. This request would make unreasonable demands on members of the Canadian forces and would put further pressures on Canada's contributions to building the conditions of peace.

1.4 "Citizen diplomacy"--a vocation for the healing of the nations

In the face of terrible human suffering in today's wars, the instinct is to use deadly military force to bring hostile parties to a cease-fire and relieve the suffering of civilians. What is less

well known is that a political alternative to lethal military action has not yet been tried: early warning, war prevention, and conflict resolution, using UN, governmental, and non-governmental institutions. Instead of bombing Mogadishu or Bosnia and recruiting more people to serve as "Blue Helmets," the world needs to add citizen diplomacy to its efforts for peace.

During the Cold War, professional diplomacy focused primarily on international peace talks at the highest level: military and political leaders with high public profiles, such as Henry Kissinger, Jimmy Carter, the Vance-Owen team, and so on. This strategy involved high level negotiations to get a cease-fire. Organisations like the church helped build the conditions for peace through development projects, human rights work, and public witness for justice. They worked with partner churches and organisations. Individual members of churches have also been active in organisations that went into war zones, such as Peace Brigades International, Medecins Sans Frontieres, and the International Red Cross. This work is still crucial, but more is needed in social conflicts between people in a single state.

The missing link has been a peace-building process and war prevention by middle-range leaders, such as people involved in ethnic, religious, humanitarian, cultural, educational, labour, and academic organisations and sectors. The middle range has proved crucial to deepening a society's ability to resolve conflicts with justice, to address the psychological and social aspects of conflict and to communicate between grassroots peace-building efforts and the high-level negotiations.

The UN itself has pointed out that the internal wars of the 1990s require the resources of governments and non-governmental organisations alike. This need offers the church both a challenge and an extraordinary opportunity for service to God and humanity. Peace can only occur when people disarm their hearts, sit down with their "enemies," and address the psychological, social, political, and economic issues that lead them to take up arms in the first place. The healing process takes persistence. It also requires the careful reweaving of badly shredded social fabrics.

The desperate need of millions of God's people requires a new approach to building peace. Mennonites and others with long experience in this kind of work say we need to use the resources that we have, plus our international networks, in a comprehensive approach to citizen diplomacy. That means we can't leave it to Canadian soldiers, diplomats and workers in development organisations alone. At the same time, we can not expect to leave it to individual members of the church to sign up for peace service on our behalf. We need to put

institutions to the task of building peace. That challenge will require attention to:

- Structural issues (e.g how we integrate our contributions to emergency relief, development and conflict resolution)

- Conflict dynamics (understanding the stages of conflict and the roles that need to be played by people and institutions in resolving conflict)

- Relationships (dealing with the psycho-social issues that unleash hatred, not just the presenting issue)

- Resources (drawing on the peace resources in the middle of the war zone and supporting them in the hard times)

- Co-ordination (moving beyond the occasional appeal to governments, projects here and there to developing peace-building capacities equal to the needs of our neighbours).

The people and organisations in current and potential war zones are the key resources for peace-building. Like a government in such a situation, they often need support, resources, and basic solidarity from their counterparts in other countries. Churches like the United Church have contributed to related work through the World Council of Churches and through relations with partner churches for many years.

The sinister spread of civil wars that will not end challenges churches to a more concerted and systematic contribution to peace-building. Churches are being called on as institutions of citizen diplomats who equip themselves to support the efforts of faith communities and peace movements at conflict resolution and mediation. What is presently missing in the Christian church world-wide is a place to turn our individual initiatives into an effective and co-ordinated effort at human reconciliation.

The United Church has some institutional experience in this kind of work in places like South Africa, South Korea, and Central America.   It also has among its members many people who have served in their youth with historic peace churches like the Mennonites or Quakers. In recent years, the church has received requests for more sustained service from churches that have only recently been able to make a public witness for justice and peace in the new democracies of eastern Europe, the former USSR, and ex-Yugoslavia. Churches like the

United Church can lend important resources to support that ministry through hard times:

- we are detached from the situation, yet we have a commitment to all God's people grounded in faith;

- we have resources--financial and human--that many churches lack;

- we can offer persistence which makes us hard to turn away;

- we have a tradition of being open to change, to inclusion, to dialogue for understanding and conciliation and to involvement of lay people with skills for such ministry;

- we can offer support to people who are marginalized in their own societies--women, minorities, people seeking self-government;

- we have a tradition of working in common cause with social movements, without forgetting that we are an institution.

- we have a political system that allows us to pursue the end of exports of weapons that endanger so many of our colleagues;

- we are perceived by many who are marginalized to have no interest but justice because we are an institution in a country that usually prefers to talk rather than shoot.

The United Church also has members who regularly offer themselves for such work. At the moment it lacks programmes that would help its members equip themselves and provide their skills as "citizen diplomats" where they are needed most.

1.5 Theological and ethical perspectives on war and citizen diplomacy

The theological and ethical basis for this kind of work has been described by General Councils since church union. In the first General Council after World War II, people declared their view that security could only come through dealing with human suffering and the hatred

generated by war and halting the flow of arms.

Today, we still derive our understanding of security from a vision of peace informed by the biblical idea of shalom--the ancient recognition that peace is not simply the absence of war, but a sustainable state of well-being and of harmony among people and with nature. That vision of peace is also grounded in Jesus' way of non-violence and the Gospels' testimony that true human community is rooted in voluntary and generous care of each for the other.

A holistic approach to security for people and nature asserts the indivisibility of development, environment, human rights, democracy, and peace. Within the Christian tradition, we understand that "peace, justice, and the integrity of creation" are all essential elements of a sustainable society. Security is also mutual. It can not be wrested from adversaries; instead it is advanced when we seek the security of our adversary.

The foundation and inspiration of our work in peace-building is the reconciling and renewing life, death and resurrection of Christ and Christ's moral teaching. The witness of Christ demonstrates that all people draw life from a single source and are members of one global community. Christ's teaching demands that evil in human society be overcome with good and that justice and peace be built by means of love and non-violent action.

Our starting point in deciding how we contribute to true security is what is actually going on in the world, where we find ourselves in relationship with God and with humanity and nature. What God calls us to is a costly unity--a koinonia--with humanity in which the interests of our neighbours become our interests. As Jesus pointed out in telling his story about the good Samaritan, we are accountable to victims with whom we are in relationship. Discipleship of Christ means we are to be for those who stand before us before they come and ask us.

Therefore we can not offer a once-and-for-all decision about our response to war in our world; we will find ourselves in a process of moral discernment and decision-making over and over again. In the practice of discernment, we need to ensure that we are not asking victims to submit to abuse or suicide by our indifference, paralysis or rigid clinging to principle.

In the current public debate, we are acutely aware that many people caught in war zones have become so desperate that they call for "humanitarian intervention" to secure a cease-fire by bombing or similar means. We can not support that approach at this time for two reasons. First, we have no evidence that military solutions brought about by outsiders will achieve a cease-fire in the kinds of wars underway today. There is much evidence that it will

only suppress conflicts for a time and, in some cases, provide the opportunity for each side to regroup for a deadlier battle when the peace keepers leave.

Second, we can not support humanitarian intervention by deadly military means because the alternative has not yet been tried. When war breaks out, the priority is to find political and diplomatic means to end it--not military means. For civil wars, that is especially true. The lessons of the last 20 years demonstrate that leaving the work of weaving the peace-building fabric in each country can not be left to governments and armies alone. Organisations with institutional and informal networks in many countries--the church among them--need to bring their resources to the support of the peace community in war zones before they call on the UN to bomb an area to make peace.

 WHEREAS God calls us to join in a costly unity with God, with humanity, and with nature;

WHEREAS we have become witnesses to the intense suffering of thousands of people since the end of the Cold War as civil wars have replaced wars between states, especially in the two-thirds world;

WHEREAS the failures of existing political and military efforts by the UN and others have stimulated calls for "humanitarian intervention", meaning the use of deadly military force (such as bombing) to secure a ceasefire;

WHEREAS we are convinced that civil wars can only be resolved by dealing with the root causes of the conflicts between the warring parties and that outside military intervention only drives the conflicts underground;

WHEREAS the international community--governmental, non-governmental, and religious--has not yet tried to build a comprehensive, co-operative, and persistent approach to peace-building and war prevention in the hot spots of our world;

WHEREAS the fundamental resources for peace lie in the peace constituency in the war zones;

WHEREAS the church has been challenged to offer its support to efforts of "citizen diplomacy" in order to prevent war and to remove the psycho-social supports for war-fighting in conflict zones;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 35th General Council of The United Church of Canada

1. Call upon the Government of Canada to:

    - move toward rejection of war as an instrument of policy and adoption of a policy of non-aggression, peacekeeping and peace building; such a policy would require:

    - reducing the need for the capacity for waging war (controlling the arms trade, ending subsidies for weapons exporters, developing economic conversion strategies, cutting defence budgets)

    - disarmament (banning nuclear weapons, eliminating existing stockpiles, and dismantling military alliances)

    - restructuring military forces and redefining their mandates to enable them to make the most effective contribution to peacekeeping operations

    - provision of training and retraining whereby military and non-military personnel from Canada and other United Nations member nations can be expressly trained in methods specific to peacekeeping and peace-building

    - acknowledge the important role played by traditional UN peacekeeping in policing cease-fires in order to contain civil conflicts and to give diplomacy a chance to work;

    - challenge other UN member nations to support to the fullest extent possible the peacekeeping and peace building efforts of the United Nations.

    - prevent the undermining of this contribution and of its non-military resources (such as the UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent) and seek new non-military instruments in the UN, where necessary;

    - limit the number of future conflict situations into which it sends peace keepers to those in which there are clear and achievable objectives;

- make preventive peace-building the fundamental orientation of Canada's contribution to peace and security in the new world order;

- provide financial and civilian (governmental and non-governmental) resources to support conflict prevention and peace-building;

- demonstrate an openness to the aspirations of people marginalized within their societies--in its diplomatic and war prevention work.

2. make its own contribution to resolving the kinds of wars emerging in the post-Cold War period by:

- reaffirming the church's traditional support of war prevention through peace-building and reconciliation; withhold theological and ethical legitimacy from the use of war as an instrument of policy; and affirm the principle of building the peace community through the work of individuals, grassroots organisations, civil institutions, and national and international political leadership;

- affirming its willingness to co-operate in an alliance of non-governmental, governmental, and inter-governmental efforts for preventive peace-building and civilian involvement in humanitarian assistance to civilians caught in civil wars;

- encouraging the Division of Mission in Canada, in consultation with the Division of World Outreach, to equip The United Church of Canada itself to make a direct contribution as an institution to citizen diplomacy for peace--or "second-track" diplomacy--in conflict situations, especially where religion plays a significant role.

GC35 1994 ROP, pp. 145-146, 393-394

Document Type: Social Policy

General Council: GC43 or earlier

Originating Body: Other