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NGO update to the Committee on the Rights of the Child On the Third and Fourth Periodic Reports of New Zealand

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This document provides a brief update on three of the matters raised in our preliminary report¹ and briefing to the Committee² on the state party's compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) and the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (the Optional Protocol).

A. Prevention

1. Voluntary recruitment

a) New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) involvement in youth development programmes³: Since our preliminary report to the Committee, the state party's Defence White Paper⁴ has been released. Among other things, it explicitly links armed forces involvement in youth development work to recruitment: "... the NZDF's recruitment efforts, including through various youth related programmes, means that it should be able to meet future requirements."⁵

In addition, both the Defence White Paper and the Youth Programmes Companion Study⁶ (part of the Review on which the Defence White Paper is based) link the armed forces' recruitment efforts to the current high level of youth unemployment and the NZDF's ability to provide training opportunities for young persons that are not otherwise available⁷.

As outlined in our earlier reports, this is of concern for two main reasons: firstly, the issue of the appropriateness of increasing military rather than civilian development programmes for children and young persons aged 12 to 18 years; and secondly, the state party's lack of provision of civilian training and employment opportunities for all school leavers. The latter also raises a question about whether armed forces recruitment can be fully described as 'voluntary' if there are insufficient other opportunities for school leavers.

b) NZDF recruiting practices: In relation to the description of the army's recruiting practices in our preliminary report⁸, we have updated information about (and photographs of) the combined armed forces recruitment stand at the Armageddon Expo, held in Auckland from 23 to 25 October 2010, which indicates that children are still being encouraged to 'play' on military combat training equipment.

Furthermore, rather than the state party providing children with a realistic picture of the purpose of the armed forces and of military duties, the portrayal of the armed forces as

“fun” has recently been expanded with the launch of a new NZDF website specifically designed “to provide a fun and engaging forum”⁹ for young persons.

2. Education: As mentioned in our two earlier reports, the increasing involvement of the armed forces in schools, education and youth development programmes raises concerns in relation to the state party's compliance with, in particular, Articles 28 and 29 of the Convention (especially when the Committee's General Comment on the aims of education¹⁰ is taken into consideration) and with the intent of the Optional Protocol. These concerns are exacerbated by the lack of any nationwide comprehensive peace or human rights education¹¹ programmes in the New Zealand education curriculum.

As stated in our preliminary report¹²:

“We note in this connection that the Committee's Concluding Observations on other state parties¹³ have included recommendations that training programmes to promote the values of peace and human rights should be developed and implemented, and that peace education and human rights should be taught as a fundamental subject in the education system. In the light of the avoidance of teaching Maori history (an understanding of which would contribute greatly to more peaceful relationships in this country), the lack of peace education generally, and the increasing involvement of the armed forces in youth development programmes, we suggest that similar recommendations in the Concluding Observations on New Zealand would be particularly useful at this time.”

Thank you for your attention to our comments.

References

¹ *NGO information to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Third and Fourth Periodic Reports of New Zealand*, Peace Movement Aotearoa, August 2010

² *NGO briefing to the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Third and Fourth Periodic Reports of New Zealand*, Peace Movement Aotearoa, October 2010

³ Examples of which were provided in our preliminary report, as at note 1, in particular paras 20 to 40

⁴ *Defence White Paper 2010*, New Zealand government, 2 November 2010 at

<http://www.defence.govt.nz/reports-publications/defence-white-paper-2010/contents.html>

⁵ As at note above, at 6.17

⁶ *Youth Programmes Companion Study*, Major General (Retired) Lou Gardiner, 27 October 2010, at

<http://www.defence.govt.nz/pdfs/defence-review-2009-released-youth-programmes-companion-study.pdf>

⁷ That such opportunities are specifically designed to attract young persons is clear: “The activities through which Defence Force personnel gain access to opportunities to develop skills and competencies, particularly in the early stages of their career, are therefore designed to appeal to and motivate young people.” as at note above, para 19

⁸ As at note 1, in particular paras 41 to 57

⁹ ‘New Defence Force website launched’, NZDF, 13 December 2010 at <http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/news/media-releases/2010/13122010-ndfwl.htm> The website is at <http://www.operationhq.co.nz>

¹⁰ General Comment No. 1, Article 29 (1): The aims of education, Committee on the Rights of the Child, 17 April 2001, CRC/GC/2001/1

¹¹ On the latter, see for example, *Human Rights in New Zealand 2010*, Human Rights Commission, December 2010, ‘The right to education’ at http://www.hrc.co.nz/hrc_new/hrc/cms/files/documents/28-Jun-2010_14-09-07_HRC_Education_chapter_V2.pdf

¹² As at note 1, para 14

¹³ In, for example, Concluding Observations: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 17 October 2008, CRC/C/OPAC/GBR/CO/1