



Australian Student Christian Movement Inc.

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Defence White Paper Team
Defence Establishment Fairbairn
F4-G-015
26-28 Fairbairn Avenue
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir or Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Defence White Paper Community Consultation Process. The Australian Student Christian Movement is an ecumenical movement of tertiary students, university faculty and senior friends with a history in Australia dating back over a hundred years. It is an affiliate movement of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), an international federation of over 100 national movements spanning six WSCF regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North America.¹

In 2004 the General Assembly of WSCF affirmed the following statement as the guiding vision of the federation:

The WSCF is a global community of Student Christian Movements committed to dialogue, ecumenism, social justice and peace.

Its mission is to "empower students in critical thinking and constructive transformation of our world by being a space for prayer and celebration, theological reflection, study and analysis of social and cultural processes and solidarity and action across boundaries of culture, gender and ethnicity."²

As a movement of students, faculty and friends committed to social justice and peace, the ASCM believes the humanitarian role of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) should be extended. Already, Australia's role in our immediate region, the south Pacific, does not involve combat missions. Peacemaking and humanitarian missions, in the context of a collective regional approach to security, are the most effective way Australia can contribute to ensuring the future stability of our neighbours. Moreover, this region will feel the impact of global warming most intensely, increasing the importance of disaster relief. For this reason, it is of vital importance to develop the capabilities of ADF personnel to work in

such situations outside combat through training in peace building programs. Peacebuilders International and the ANU Peacebuilding Compared Project are several examples of peace building organisations. The skills and methodologies of these organisations, should they be acquired by ADF personnel are readily transferable to operations in other parts of the world.

Ultimately the degree to which funds are injected into the ADF in a limited budgetary environment is a question of national priority. As a nation, do we want to be spending \$22 billion or 1.8% of GDP on defence appropriations when we are faced with problems such as indigenous health and increasing rates of depression and mental illness amongst our youth? The ASCM does not advocate an "either/or" approach to these issues but recognises that in a limited fiscal environment serious decisions must be made about where limited resources can best be spent.

The changing strategic environment brought about by new technologies and the threat of terrorism also necessitates a different approach to defence spending. While military equipment and traditional forms of defence capability were effective in fighting state declared wars, the current perceived threats to national security cannot readily be countered predominantly through the use of traditional forms of defence armament. As such, spending on these forms of defence capability should be reduced.

Through our solidarity and partnership with Student Christian Movements in other parts of the world, the ASCM is acutely aware of the risks many students face in advocating for social justice and peace in countries where the rule of law is not well established. In many cases the political freedom of SCMerS to practice peace building and non violence is actively undermined by foreign state governments. The killing of Roderick Aspili in the Philippines in November 2006 provides one such example.

Aspili was a former leader of the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines before he became part of the labour union movement in that country. On 20 November 2006 Aspili was watching television with his family inside their house in Barangay Trinidad in Suriagao City when he was shot dead by one of four bonnet-wearing men.³ At the time of his death Analyn Lumawag, spokesperson of the human rights alliance Karapatan for Caraga said that Aspili's work with the labour union movement was the likely reason he was killed.⁴ She said at the time that the attack on Aspili and other demonstrators in the area was part of the "continuing crackdown on leftists and members of progressive people's organisation."⁵

Due to the pattern of attacks which have resulted in the death or disappearance of over 290 Phillipino peace activists, clergy members and



human rights defenders since 2004⁶ the Phillipines military are widely regarded by the community and numerous NGOs as being responsible for the attacks.

As part of Australia's defence relationship with foreign countries such as the Philippines the ASCM recognises the ADF is uniquely placed to design interventions which can prevent the illegal conduct of its foreign defence partners in their own countries. These interventions must go beyond the training and resourcing of foreign militaries to establish firm processes of accountability in these organisations. As such military support programs that support the international rule of law must be strengthened and funded as a core priority.

In summary, it is the ASCM's submission that the ADF's humanitarian role in the region should be extended for the enhancement of our regional security. We submit that the changing strategic environment of our era necessitates a different approach to defence spending. One that extends Australia's defence relationship with foreign countries in such a way as to strengthen and support the international rule of law.

Yours faithfully

Annabel Dulhunty
National Coordinator
Australian Student Christian Movement



- 1 · World Student Christian Federation, *WSCF: Who Are We?* World Student Christian Federation <http://www.wscfglobal.org/who_r_v.php> at 30 September 2008.
- 2 · Ibid.
- 3 · Franklin A. Caliguind, Chris V, Panganiban, Jeffrey M. Tupas, *Young Labour Leader Gunned Down in Suriagao* (2006) *Inquirer* <http://newsinfo.inq7.net/breakingnews/metroregions/view_article.php?article_id=33927> at 24 November 2006.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 *Stop the Extra-Judicial Killings in the Phillipines* (2008) <http://www.pinoyhr.net/st_phil.php> at 30 September 2008.