



Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

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Summary of Canadian Quaker Discernment on “The Responsibility to Protect”, 2006-7

Executive Summary

“Responsibility to Protect” or R2P is a concept for international policy that has been developed through several international commissions and UN processes since 2000, and was accepted as a general principle by the UN in 2005. It is intended to give the international community more effectiveness in responding to cases of massive human rights violations, war crimes and genocide. R2P redefines a state’s sovereignty as the responsibility to protect all of its citizens, including protection from threats that originate within the state. It insists that in cases where a state is unable or unwilling to protect, the international community, under the authority of the UN, has a responsibility to intervene and protect. Intervention is interpreted as including armed force “in the last resort”.

The Canadian Council of Churches, of which Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) is a member, has circulated a draft statement on R2P for discussion by its member churches. In August 2006, CYM asked Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) to organize a discussion process with Monthly Meetings (MMs) in order to formulate a response to the CCC statement. Atlantic Friends Gathering and 7 MMs used a resource paper developed by CFSC’s Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee to discuss the statement and return written responses to CFSC. Gianne Broughton wrote a synthesis report which was studied at a special interest group at Yearly Meeting 2007. The special interest group brought the following recommendation forward, and it was accepted in minute 57 of the 2007 Yearly Meeting:

The CCC draft statement consists of 18 paragraphs. The first eleven paragraphs call for prevention. Friends supported this and recommended strengthening this emphasis towards promotion of peace. The last 7 paragraphs describe what some churches believe is the last resort, including detailing limits on the use of military force for intervention. Friends would not be able to sign on to this part. **The responses from Friends meetings were in unity that we could not support “military intervention in the last resort”. Thinking of military intervention as a “last resort” assumes that it is inevitable. It hinders non-military action such as non-violent inter-positioning. Insisting upon the spiritual imperative of respecting that of God in every person, Meetings showed the**

effectiveness of the wide range non-violent intervention strategies that are available. As one Meeting wrote: “the last resort for Jesus was self-sacrifice.”

Discernment Process

In August 2006, Canadian Yearly Meeting asked CFSC to organize Monthly Meeting and Worship Group discussions to formulate a response to the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) draft statement on the topic of “Responsibility to Protect”. CFSC’s Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee developed a discussion resource paper and invited Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups to use it at their convenience and send in responses. Some MMs were able to send a delegate to a preparatory meeting. Responses were received from Atlantic Friends Gathering, Halifax, Hamilton, Ottawa, Peterborough, Prairie, Toronto, Vancouver, and Yonge Street.

Responses showed Friends’ thinking about how to build peace, including the issues of protection. Friends made specific recommendations with respect to the Canadian Council of Churches Draft Statement, and called for an expression of our own.

Synthesis of Monthly Meeting Responses

This synthesis has three parts. The first indicates the range of Friends’ thinking on the issue, quoting helpful, representative words from the MM reports, in order to present the authentic voices of the MMs. The quotations are marked off with quotation marks, but they are not attributed to a particular MM. The second part summarizes the recommendations regarding the CCC Draft Statement. The third points out what thinking we need to do in order to clarify next steps. This report has been seasoned through a teleconference and e-mail correspondence with MM delegates who confirmed that the intent of the reports of their MMs is well represented here.

Part I: Range of Friends’ Thinking

Friends used their direct experience of peacemaking, non-violence practice and conflict transformation to examine the notions of “military intervention as a last resort”, and “just policing”. There was unity in denying support for the first notion, and diversion with regard to the second.

Speaking of the call to care for that of God in every person, including those defined as “enemy”, and often quoting the 1660 statement to King Charles II, Friends demonstrated the wrongness of military action in any situation. They also pointed out the need to be clear about the meaning of the word “military”. Military force is different from police force, and both are very different from non-violent force. These differences are manifest in different assumptions about appropriate responses. For instance, “Military doctrine includes the policy that when a soldier is in danger, lethal action must be taken to protect that soldier. The use of less-than-lethal force is not an available option in these circumstances. This is very limiting when it comes to finding non-lethal ways of protecting civilians. Protection of civilians should not be carried out by the military.”

Friends also demonstrated that the logic of “last resort” thinking is not acceptable. “... by setting a limit to oppression after which other countries can intervene, it suggests that up to that limit, it is allowable – which is not okay.” How can we really know when a situation has reached, or will reach, the “last resort?” When do we give up on violence prevention or peace promotion? Thinking

of military intervention as a "last resort" assumes that it is inevitable. "It precludes dialogue and the recognition of the humanity of the "enemy". It hinders non-military action such as providing food and other necessities to beleaguered people. The last resort for Jesus was self sacrifice."

Some MMs were hopeful for a form of "just policing" that could limit its use of force and be accountable to a civilian authority that insisted upon peacebuilding values. Almost all noted that providing such oversight is a challenge that has not yet been met in Canada, let alone in countries where people are even more vulnerable. Some MMs interpreted "just policing" as a phrase to describe the current UN-based practice, which has clearly failed. "We do not agree that "just policing" provides protection. Armed forces frequently enforce the status quo and further oppress the vulnerable group. In these circumstances, there is no peace to be "kept" and the police are put into an untenable position. UN peacekeepers have experienced this in Kosovo and Rwanda, for example." The people of Esgenoôpetitj (Burnt Church), Kanasatake (Oka), and Ipperwash would question whether Canada has a "just police".

Friends called for renewed support for non-violent responses. The MM reports offered many constructive ideas. The work of Peace Brigades International, Christian Peacemaker Teams, Nonviolent Peaceforce and Amnesty International were often cited. "Why use troops that have been trained for war to keep peace? Why not use organizations that have been trained in peace initiatives?" Friends were very aware of how the international economy fuels war, both in relying on the arms trade and in exacerbating poverty. They advised that respectful support of local peacebuilding initiatives is paramount in non-violent response.

Some MMs indicated that they are willing to engage with our government. "We urge the Canadian Government to reduce Canada's complicity in violent military interventions and work to eliminate Canada's participation in the global military-industrial complex."

Friends welcomed the change in emphasis from "state as absolute power" to "state as responsible for the protection of its citizens" that is evident in the concept of Responsibility to Protect. They were also certain that the "military intervention in the last resort" concept would be misused to justify war for other, perhaps hidden, ends.

Part II: Regarding the CCC draft statement

Friends welcomed the emphasis on prevention, and also recommended strengthening this emphasis towards promotion of peace. Friends appreciated the evidence of dedicated work, reflecting a broad understanding of the seeds of war and an appreciation for the many actions that can be taken to prevent conflict.

Friends questioned how responding to the CCC draft statement would further our efforts to promote peace. What is the role of a CCC statement? What does participation in this process usefully offer to us and what can we usefully offer the CCC?

The CCC draft statement, though subdivided in its own way, can be analyzed to fall into two parts: paragraphs 1 to 11 call for and define prevention; paragraphs 12 to 18 describe what some churches believe is the last resort, including detailing limits on the use of military force for intervention. Friends could offer ways to strengthen the first part, showing how peacebuilding works, with examples that inspire.

Friends would not be able to sign on to the second part. The reports were in unity that they could not support “military intervention in the last resort”.

In order to show their willingness to engage with CCC, while insisting that they could not sign any statement that supports military intervention in the last resort, one Monthly Meeting offered wording changes to two paragraphs (numbers 12 and 14) in the second part, primarily to clarify that military intervention, if used, will not solve the problem, and to show what our commitment to nonviolence is. These wording changes are quoted here to honour the work that was done, and to share the clarity that is expressed. It also shows how hard it is to write about non-violence in the midst of a document that comes from a tradition that accepts military action: “force” is assumed to be armed and threatening violence, whereas the tradition of non-violence recognizes a “soul-force” which depends on different human motivations.

Original:

12. In calling on the international community to come to the aid of vulnerable people in extraordinary suffering and peril, *the fellowship of churches is not prepared to say that it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force for the protection of the vulnerable. This refusal in principle to preclude the use of force is not based on a naïve belief that force can be relied on to solve intractable problems. Rather, it is based on the certain knowledge that the objective must be the welfare of people, especially those in situations of extreme vulnerability and who are utterly abandoned to the whims and prerogatives of their tormentors. It is a tragic reality that civilians, especially women and children, are the primary victims in situations of extreme insecurity and war.*

Changes:

12. In calling on the international community to come to the aid of vulnerable people in extraordinary suffering and peril, *the fellowship of churches realizes that the resort to military force for the protection of the vulnerable is the historic norm, and will no doubt remain entrenched in coming to the aid of those in desperate situations for years to come. However, military force cannot be relied on to solve intractable problems.* The objective must be the welfare of people, especially those in situations of extreme vulnerability and who are utterly abandoned to the whims and prerogatives of their tormentors. It is a tragic reality that civilians, especially women and children, are the primary victims in situations of extreme insecurity and war.

Original:

14. Churches may acknowledge that the resort to force for protection purposes in some circumstances will be an option that cannot guarantee success but that must be tried because the world has failed to find, and continues to be at a loss to find, any other means of coming to the aid of those in desperate situations. It should be noted that some within the churches refuse the use of force in all circumstances. Their form of responsibility is to persist in preventative engagement and, whatever the cost – as a last resort – *to risk non-violent intervention during the use of force. Either of these approaches may fail too, but they both need to be respected as expressions of Christian responsibility.*

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of those in desperate situations. It should be noted that some within the churches refuse the use of force in all circumstances. Their form of responsibility is to persist in preventative engagement and, whatever the cost *to continue to use non-violent means in working towards a solution to the problems, even while others have resorted to military force. May their persistence help the world find ways to end the use of military force.*

Several Meetings recommended that the CCC or Canadian churches continue to take constructive action such as keeping in touch with faith groups in our own and other countries, including groups within vulnerable populations. Empowering vulnerable groups to take responsibility for their own community is the core of preventive action. In addition to such community-based work, churches can search for opportunities to facilitate dialogues between parties in conflict, and insist that governments use constructive, preventive diplomacy that sustains dialogue.

Part III: What's in a Statement?

Every MM report recommended renewed commitment to supporting non-violent peace building work, and a list of such actions summarizing this recommendation is given as an appendix to this paper. Friends also indicated areas for further study, which are also listed in appendix. The recommendation about writing our own statement is less straight-forwardly unanimous.

Friends understand “testimony” to be a lived witness, not a form of words. However, we also like to collect quotations that inspire us and transmit the experience of the lived witness from person to person, across time and space. Some MM reports identified a need for a quotable, inspirational statement to put our peace testimony in contemporary context, for example:

“CYM /CFSC should draft a strong contemporary statement and Monthly Meetings should support and contribute any ideas we can. The statement must flow from contemporary human rights and social justice imperatives and not from old theology. The statement should be a call to action for all those who desire peace and the peaceful resolution of in country and inter-country conflicts. It should also be a demand that governments support NGO's and community organisations with peace funds to achieve what governments seem unable to do.”

Most reports also recognized that this would be a lot of work. “If we were to prepare a unique Quaker response to this proposal, it would take us much longer than just this year. We would have to look at building a culture of peace, and relate that to our relationships with each other, abuse issues, war, etc. How could we do this and not get the whole subject so diffuse that we are overwhelmed into non-action? The bigger and wider you make the discussion, the less you can focus on immediacy of an issue.”

There is an educational benefit to the discussion that can produce the statement: a clarification and deepening of our understanding of peacebuilding.

A statement should not be a general recipe for peace. “Quakers have practical experience with intervention and in each individual situation come to know the parameters of the situation and the limits/needed scope of the intervention. Developing general rules of when and how to react is not the Quaker way. It is better for us to follow the Mennonite path in this. Our position: this is a fruitful discussion but it is not our place to refine other people's documents. We want to make our judgement on each case as it arises out of our experience and discernment.”

Several Meetings also found value in the Mennonite statement, which is appended as a resource.

In their reports, several Meetings quote the 1660 letter to Charles II. We thought it useful in this report to offer Friends some detailed context for that letter. The context of the letter was very different from the context of Responsibility to Protect, and, when quoting it in such discussions, Friends will communicate better if they carefully draw the bridge between the 1660 context and the context of their discussion.

The 1660 letter was written by a small group of the key leadership (some refused to sign it) not long after a rebellion by the 5th Monarchists that was designed to be a coup. Quakers and 5th Monarchists had some perceived similar beliefs (and a few Quakers were apparently mixed up with them) so when the 5th Monarchists were being swept up by the military, etc. for treason, so were many Quakers -- over 700 were picked up and imprisoned.

This letter was the first Quaker statement of commitment to corporate pacifism. It was not a letter saying that the government should be without a military or fight wars (to the contrary, at one point Fox wrote Cromwell saying he should make war on the Papists in Europe, in his mind a real problem, rather than harass groups like the Quakers at home). The 1660 letter was saying to Charles II, "We are not a threat to you, we do not believe personally in the use of force and violence and that our interest is in the Kingdom of God not the Kingdoms of the earth (thus we will not try to overthrow you)." The letter was an effort to placate the government in order to get the 700 released by saying we are not a threat, we are not 5th Monarchists.

The corporate commitment of pacifism was very controversial as, up to this point, it was a personal belief and witness, not corporate (some felt that this was an action that the other churches they had left would take -- impose a belief without having heard and reflected the views of the congregants). The nub of it is, regardless of a specific context, that the Quakers were committing themselves personally to pacifism. They had no expectation that the rest of the world would be pacifist; indeed, without a spiritual transformation they likely did not think this was possible. This, of course, does not deride Friends' efforts to impress upon their governments (and others) to seek to resolve conflict non-violently, for we have seen (just as the Early Friends did) that violence seldom achieves the ends which are promised by its use.

Canadian Yearly Meeting 2007 minute 57:

Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), re: Responsibility to Protect:

This matter arises as part of a requested response to a statement on this issue from the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). Gianne Broughton presented a report from the Special Interest Group (SIG) on Responsibility to Protect held earlier this week. This report, and the synthesis report presented by CFSC to the SIG, will be attached to these minutes¹.

We approve the following three recommendations from the report:

¹ The SIG report appears as the "Executive Summary" on page 1, and the "Synthesis Report" is the remainder of this document, except for the copy of Minute 57.

- a. that the CYM clerks and other representatives of CYM use the first two parts of the synthesis report as their guide to act on our behalf in response to the Responsibility to Protect issue. Such response could be in writing or in dialogue with the CCC and other groups.
- b. that CYM ask CFSC to consider how an education program on nonviolent peacebuilding could be organized for Monthly Meetings, in response to the thirst evident in the Monthly Meeting reports.
- c. that CYM ask CFSC to facilitate further discussion on the issues raised by the concept of “just policing”.

We thank Gianne and the many Friends who have worked on this issue and these reports. Friends also expressed a hope that we could develop our own, pro-active statement.