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The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
July, 2006

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

As a church of the historic and well respected Peace-Church tradition, Mennonite Church Canada is deeply concerned about the escalation of violence that we have recently witnessed in Lebanon, Israel and Gaza. We are distressed to see the actions of combatants on all sides of this conflict that have already destroyed many lives, including civilian families, and permanently marred livelihoods, homes, and vital infrastructure of the nations. We believe that, especially in such difficult international conflicts, God calls us all to nurture a new imagination that reflects the peace-making model of Jesus Christ and therefore contemplates the possibilities of surprises that only God can bring about. We are called to seek responses to conflict that do not involve violent initiatives, violent retaliation strategies, revenge, or all-out warfare.

Mennonite Church Canada currently has workers in Israel who work at building bridges of understanding between Jewish and Christian and Muslim peoples of that region. As a Peace Church, our work in Israel involves peace-building that crosses both religious and political boundaries. Our denomination is an active member of the Mennonite Central Committee, which has worked with Palestinian and Israeli partners in the Middle East since the late 1940s in relief, development and peace-building ministries.

Our concern, however, goes beyond the immediate crisis in the Middle East. We are concerned about what appears to be a multi-faceted and intentional escalation of public advocacy, decisions, and actions that foster the increasing militarization of the Canadian mind, psyche, soul, and imagination. We have noted advocacy coming from you and your office that closely resembles the logic of military solutions so evident in the Bush administration in the USA. We have noted the shifting assignment for Canadian troops from their traditional peace-keeping role to active and pro-active military combatants in Afghanistan. And we have noted the decisions and heard the public rationale advocating for the remarkable increase for military spending in the Canadian budget. These are all symptoms of a desperate need for a new imagination in addressing the evils of our world based on other than military paradigms. As a fellow Christian, we know we can appeal to you from this framework and exhort you to find strategies that are more in keeping with that which is so foundational to our common faith.

It is in this spirit of peacemaking that we call on you, Mr. Prime Minister, to use your influence to issue statements that favour peaceful solutions, and call on all sides to observe an immediate cease-fire in the Middle East.

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The insistence on diplomatic solutions, rather than military accomplishments, is of vital importance to the lives of many in Lebanon, Gaza, and Israel. We ask that you avoid aggravating tensions further and that you do not advocate the justification of the violence and war or signal that Canada indeed might support or favor the escalation of war.

We are thankful for Canada's history as a peace-building nation. As a Peace Church, we are committed to voicing our concerns for peace and justice in the world.

On behalf of Mennonite Church Canada, I urge you and your government to act quickly to promote the ways of diplomacy and peace within this current crisis, and to open all of us to the possibilities of surprise by humanity and by God's activity in the world.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Suderman
General Secretary
Mennonite Church Canada

cc.
The Honourable Peter MacKay
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Government of Canada