

Worship & Action for Peace Letter
March 15, 2005

Dear Friends in New York Yearly Meeting,

What is the connection between worship and action for peace? This letter outlines one cycle in the connection fostered by the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

At about this time last year, the Friends Committee on National Legislation began the process of developing priorities for its lobbying work during the 109th Congress (2005–2006). Input was invited from Friends meetings and churches around the country as to how the spirit was moving among them during these times and how FCNL best could focus its resources in the coming two years. Friends responded in unprecedented numbers; over 150 meetings and churches (from 30 yearly meetings) gathered in worshipful discernment and forwarded written reflections. From this wealth of insights, as well as the perspectives of FCNL staff, there emerged a core group of leading concerns that the FCNL Policy Committee crafted into a draft Statement of Legislative Priorities for the 109th Congress and that the FCNL General Committee seasoned and approved at its Annual Meeting in November 2004. (The Statement of Legislative Priorities is available online at: www.fcnl.org/legpolcy/priority_109th.htm.)

During the process of developing these priorities, FCNL's Policy Committee and staff also discerned that a long-standing concern among Friends was rising up with renewed urgency. In our nation's crusade of wars against Afghanistan, Iraq and "terrorism," the rights of conscientious objectors was emerging anew as a focus of Friends' attention, worship, and action. FCNL felt called to honor and reflect this opening of the spirit by developing a Minute on Conscientious Objection to War.

FCNL's Policy Committee crafted a proposed minute, which was brought to the General Committee gathered at the Annual Meeting around the theme of "The Work of Spirit Led Friends." The Young Adult Friends at the annual meeting were asked to consider the draft minute. They provided incisive questions and suggestions from the perspective of their personal ongoing grappling with the issues of military registration and potential conscription. From their concerns emerged, in particular, the hope that the minute be useable with draft boards and in the preparation of conscientious objector files and possible future CO applications; and the desire that monthly meetings and churches specifically be urged to provide counsel and support to conscientious objectors among them and their communities.

As can be expected among any large gathering of vocal, activist Friends, members of the General Committee had reflections, questions, and suggestions on the draft minute. Most striking, however, was their deep support and appreciation for the minute and its spiritual tone and underpinnings. After extended discernment, the General Committee approved in principle the revised draft minute with the request that Policy Committee make improvements in clarity and form as it believed appropriate. Policy Committee

worked further on the draft minute and approved it in further revised form at its meetings in January 2005. FCNL's Executive Committee gave a final reading and approval of the Minute on Conscientious Objection to War at its meeting on February 19, 2005.

This careful and patient process of discernment gave rise to a statement on conscientious objection that speaks to the condition and concerns of Friends and persons everywhere. We agree with Dwight D. Eisenhower that war "signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed." It steals our time, our attention, our money, our very lives. In worship we receive the words of the FCNL Minute on Conscientious Objection to War that "[t]he witness of those who object to participating in preparation for war and in war making calls all of us back to this truth, reminding us that true 'peace and security can be achieved only by peaceful means'."

We share the FCNL Minute on Conscientious Objection to War below. (It also may be accessed online at www.fcnl.org/legpolicy/priority_109th.htm#war.)

In care,

Linda Chidsey, Vicki Cooley, Fred Dettmer, Lu Harper
Worship and Action for Peace working group

Friends Committee on National Legislation Minute on Conscientious Objection to War

As members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), we share an abiding faith that heeding the Inner Light present in every person empowers all people to resolve disputes without resorting to the machinery of war. The earliest Friends "testif[ied] to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never more move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the Kingdom of Christ, nor for Kingdoms of this world."¹

Friends have long followed this testimony of peace by opposing the institution of military conscription, refusing to participate in war making even when they suffered for their acts of conscience. In 1651, George Fox, a founder of the Religious Society of Friends, twice declined offers of freedom from imprisonment in exchange for serving in the Commonwealth's army, stating "I told them that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars."² And in 1656, Friends in Great Britain cautioned "that care be taken, that as any are called before outward powers of the nation, that in the light, obedience to the Lord be given."³ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the absolute refusal of Quakers to fight was so familiar that at least five colonies—New York, Virginia, Massachusetts, North Carolina, and Rhode Island—

allowed Friends to be exempted from obligatory military service. (Pennsylvania, because of its Quaker roots, did not even adopt a military conscription act until 1775).⁴ Conscientious objection has remained an important expression of Friends' peace testimony in all the major wars, from the Revolution through the present conflicts.⁵

Friends have also long been opposed to supporting war making, even indirectly. Some avoid employment or investment in war industries. Some decline to register with the Selective Service System or to cooperate with conscription, or undertake non-combatant military service. Some refuse to pay war taxes voluntarily. During the Revolutionary War, Friends approved minutes similar to that of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: "that a tax levied for the purchasing of drums, colours, and other warlike purposes, cannot be paid consistent with our Christian testimony."⁶ Many individual Friends and Quaker organizations refused to pay the federal telephone tax imposed to help finance the Vietnam War.⁷ Some Friends continue to ask that their taxes be applied only to non-military uses; and some Quaker organizations affirm such employees by refusing to cooperate with Internal Revenue Service withholding requirements or levies on their wages.⁸

In faithfulness to this historic peace testimony, Friends today uphold all whose conscience calls them to refuse participation in warfare. John F. Kennedy said "War will exist until that distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige that the warrior does today."⁹ We call upon our government and the people of the United States to recognize and honor the conscientious objector to military service or war taxes.

We support the recognition of the rights of persons not to be subjected to military registration, military service, or continued military service. We support the inclusion of a "check-off box" or other means for persons to declare their conscientious objection to war on military registration forms that they currently are required to complete and file with the Selective Service System upon turning eighteen. We support enactment of the Religious Freedom Peace Tax Fund Act.

We urge all Friends monthly meetings and churches to provide counsel and support to those who seek recognition as conscientious objectors.

From his deep experience in war and governance, Dwight D. Eisenhower counseled that "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."¹⁰ The witness of those who object to participating in preparation for war and in war making calls all of us back to this truth, reminding us that true "peace and security can be achieved only by peaceful means."¹¹

War is not the answer.

This minute does not seek to replace the Statement of Legislative Priorities approved 11/14/04,¹² but rather to augment it. This minute is intended to be an expression of the General Committee to share in the wider community, to add our voice to those who work to protect and broaden rights of conscience and the peaceful prevention of deadly conflict.

1. Declaration "Against All Plotters and Fighters in the World" addressed to Charles II by Fox, Hubberthorne et al, 1661; <http://www.quaker.org/peaceweb/pdecla07.html>.
2. The Journal of George Fox (1651), John L. Nickalls, ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952), ch. 2; <http://www.geocities.com/quakerpages/fox05.htm> (abridged edition).
3. The Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656, no. 13 (as set forth in the copy in the Lancashire Records Office at Preston, from the papers of Marsden Monthly Meeting); <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/balby.html>.
4. Peter Brock, *The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660 to 1914* (Sessions, York, England, 1990), p. 48.
5. See, e.g., Brock, pp. 142-183 & 290-298.
6. Minute of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Quoted in Brock, p. 190.
7. *Quaker Crosscurrents: 300 Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings*, Hugh Barbour, ed. (Syracuse Univ. Press, 1995), p. 313.
8. See *American Friends Service Committee v. United States*, 368 F.Supp. 1176 (E.D.Pa. 1973), rev'd on procedural grounds, 419 U.S. 7 (1974)(per curiam)(objection to being compelled to withhold taxes from the wages of Quaker employees who were refusing to pay war taxes); *United States v. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting*, 753 F.Supp. 1300 (E.D.Pa. 1990)(refusal to comply with Internal Revenue Service levies on wages of employees who were engaging in war tax protests); *United States v. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends*, 322 F.Supp. 2d 603 (E.D.Pa. June 21, 2004)(refusal to honor Internal Revenue Service levy on wages of employee engaged in war tax resistance).
9. Letter to a colleague from his naval PT-boat experience during World War II reflecting upon his observation of the founding sessions of the United Nations in San Francisco in June 1945, as reported in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 76.
10. Chance For Peace Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, DC, April 16, 1953, <http://eisenhower.archives.gov/chance.htm>.

11. FCNL Statement of Legislative Policy (approved 11/03), Part I,
http://www.fcni.org/legpolcy/sek_frewar.htm.

12. FCNL Legislative Priorities for the 109th Congress (approved 11/04),
http://www.fcni.org/legpolcy/priority_109th.htm.