

Petitions Committee

Consultation on petition P-04-432 Stop the Army Recruiting in Schools

Response from the Fellowship of Reconciliation

‘No’ to the Military Visiting Schools in Wales

**An address on the steps of the Senedd,
Cardiff, 14.xi. 2012**

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Life is sacred. Each person has the right to live. But in every war the purpose is to destroy life – to kill. And the result? Unimaginable pain and suffering and the destruction of families and communities.

On a leaflet issued by the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Wales we read the following words (I translate):

‘... after thousand of years of wars, the world is in a more dangerous state today than it has ever been. The belief in war is responsible for this. War is the problem, not the answer.’

That is the message that school children and young people should be hearing. But what is happening in many schools in Wales today? The Army is given permission to visit these schools to recruit.

Of the 27 countries of the European Union, Britain is the only member to allow the Military into schools. Yes, although Britain has already signed the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, and although the British Government is, therefore, obligated to put words into action and keep its promise. What hypocrisy! What heartbreaking situation.

The Welsh Government says: 'We have nothing to do with this; defence is a matter for the British Government.' But we are here today to say to each member of the Assembly: 'Yes, yes, yes, you do have a responsibility.'

They have a responsibility; all church members; all members of societies and institutions in Wales; all of us, you and I – we all have a responsibility, a vital role to play to ensure that, instead of promoting the culture of violence and war, we promote the culture of non-violence and peace.

Of course, the Army will say: by visiting schools we are not actually recruiting, we are merely educating. In other words they are telling the children of Wales: what a wonderful career the Army can offer, especially at a time when, in poor areas in particular, so many young people are out of work. But are we to believe this? Will they also be told about the heart of stone they need to kill a

fellow human being? Will they also be told of the fear and anguish and often the grief of a family back home, day by day waiting for news of their beloved son or daughter? And will they also be told of the traumatic effect of war and life in the army on a soldier's personality and health?

We are here today, therefore, to present a petition and to say to the Welsh Government in a loud and clear voice: the Army must not be given permission to visit one single school in Wales.

Rather, we are asking the Welsh Government to ensure that studies relating to justice, peace and human rights will soon have a central role to play in the education of the children and young people of Wales.