



Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto
1774 Queen St East
Toronto, ON
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December 12, 2006

Right Hon. Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington St.
Ottawa, ON
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Dear Mr. Harper,

For Canadian churchgoers, Advent marks a period of reflection on the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. For the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto, a settlement agency supported by the Toronto Area Mennonite Churches, these are the core values which inspire and inform our work as we welcome and assist newcomers in their adaptation to a new country. They are also the values that we hope to see reflected in national immigration policy and practice.

The Mennonite New Life Centre is deeply concerned at recent developments which run contrary to our deeply held values of hospitality and non-violence.

Last August, we were disturbed to hear of the federal government's decision to train and equip 4400 Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers with side arms. As the very first people to meet those entering Canada, CBSA officers should embody welcome and respect, not suspicion and hostility. We are particularly concerned about the future impact of this decision on refugees who have experienced violence at the hands of authority figures in their country of origin. The sight of armed officials may recall past trauma and make it more difficult for them to answer questions, including questions about their refugee claim.

Furthermore, we are concerned that the plan to arm CBSA officers will aggravate an increasingly aggressive approach to immigration enforcement. Just last month, the CBSA publicly questioned the decision of the Toronto Police Services Board to adopt elements of a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, designed to encourage victims and witnesses to come forward with their concerns by guaranteeing that police would not ask them about their immigration status unless there was a *bona fide* reason to do so. Overturning this policy would undermine the hopes of the immigrant community that the police might become guarantors of the safety of all.

Refugees and other newcomers come to Canada in search of peace and hope, compassion and a new chance at happiness. We urge you to honour these legitimate and peaceful aspirations. Please reconsider your decision to arm CBSA officers. Please act to guarantee that those charged with the protection of public safety may protect the safety of all.

Sincerely,

Tanya Chute Molina
Executive Director

cc. Hon. Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety