
Sent: Tuesday, 30 September 2008 17:47
To: White Paper
Subject: WWW Submission: 1. Strategy/International [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Name: Sarah Williams
Organisation: Jahwork Doveton

Submission: Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon and the Community Consultation Panel.

My name is Sarah Williams, I am 24 years old and reside in a lower socio-economic community of Doveton, VIC. I am writing this submission as an ordinary citizen of the Australian community. I also attended the public forum at the Town Hall in Melbourne in September.

Currently, I work as a Support Worker at the Salvation Army in Doveton (I have been doing this for 3 years). I am also a member of Jahwork in Doveton which is a small faith community experimenting with living simply and reaching out to our neighbours. The reason I am telling you a little about myself is to understand the context of where I am coming from. Daily, I hear stories of refugees who have come from a war-torn country. The trauma and abuse that they have experienced is understandably overwhelming. I would even go as far as to say that a large part of that trauma and abuse has been directly and sometimes indirectly caused by Australia's defence strategy. The large proportion of people that I do see are people from Sudan, Afghanistan, and some from Iraq. It is these stories over the years that has led me to believe that war is never necessary as it never solves anything and only causes more destruction. The more research I do, the more I find out that the wars we are currently involved in have more to do with our own gain than the protection of the citizens of these countries or our own country. This really stood out to me when I heard stories from Matthew Howard (an American Iraq Veteran Against War who conscientiously objected). Matt flew to Australia with IVAW to give ordinary citizens first hand accounts of what is really going on in Iraq. Matt told of how he was ordered by a superior to dispose of the humanitarian aid which was located in the truck he drove (transport vehicle) in the first deployment to Baghdad. This aid was to be distributed to civilians but instead his superior stated "We are not to be seen as helping these people." Matt told us that whilst in a convoy of tanks the crew were ordered to run over children crossing the road as they were not permitted to stop. He told of how the oil contractors were waiting even before the defence forces arrived. I have heard countless stories even from Australian Defence Force members when I was talking to them in Shoalwater Bay in June last year whilst attending Operation Talisman Sabre War Games. The soldiers talked of how they joined because they believed they would be "helping people" - a noble cause. Instead, they felt that they had become guinea pigs with our foreign policy in regards to the Iraq war. We then talked about options for conscientious objection if they were to be deployed there.

In answer to the question "What role should our armed forces play" and "What kinds of armed forces should we develop" I would suggest that our armed forces should be armed with different skills of conflict resolution other than using direct force. Currently, all our efforts of conflict resolution consist of training to hurt, maim and kill an unknown enemy and this costs billions of our taxpayers money. The theories and practice of non-violence have been tested throughout history and have been extremely successful and yet we have not taken them seriously. Thomas Merton states "If this task of building a peaceful world is the most important task of our time, it is also the most difficult. It will, in fact, require far more discipline, more sacrifice, more planning, more thought, more co-operation and more heroism than war [violence] ever demanded."

When reading the defence policy discussion paper I noticed it mentioned Operation Azure in Sudan (pg 52). Whilst in Sudan in February and March this year (for 5 weeks) I met one of our ADF personnel who was sitting down drinking coffee in Khartoum. I believe the ADF could better service our country by being deployed to places like Darfur and South Sudan and help with peacekeeping (in a non-violent way) and rebuilding the infrastructure. We certainly have the expertise! I personally think it is pitiful that only 15 ADF personnel have been sent to Sudan in a conflict that has lasted over 20 years and continues. It is our public interest to assist this country as we have high proportions of refugees who come from Sudan alone (13,000 a year come from various countries).

In regards to the question "Can we afford such forces" I do not believe that our current spending is sustainable as noted on pages 22-25 of the discussion paper. The billion dollar arms trade continues to exploit and each year the "toys of destruction" get bigger and better. The more we participate in these "war games" the more Australia's "cost" rises in that we become a target more than ever. This is evident with operating places like Pine Gap and hosting Operation Talisman Sabre. This "cost" continues whilst where I live in Doveton the issues of homelessness and the housing crisis, social isolation, mental health and refugee integration are left largely untouched. I would be happy to contribute taxpayers money if I knew it was going to reconstructing civilizations instead of destroying them.

Thankyou for giving me this opportunity and taking the time to read this submission and seriously consider the recommendations I have made. I write this in solidarity with many ordinary Australians who are concerned with Australia's defence policy. This is demonstrated with thousands of Australians participating in public rallies, informaton sessions and protests. I do not believe the community consultation process of this defence white paper has adequately consulted the wider demographic of Australians who hold such conviction but hope that you will fairly represent these opinions in tabling the results.

Regards and Salam! Sarah Williams

I agree to my submission being published on the Defence website

I agree to my submission being quoted in the Community Consultation Report