

# Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee

*An authorised committee of the Australian Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*

P.O. Box 6063, O'Connor, ACT 2602.

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5 October, 2009

The Secretary  
Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee  
P.O. Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

On behalf of the Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee (QPLC) of the Religious Society of Friends, I offer the following comments on the proposed legislation *Defence Amendment (Parliamentary Approval of Overseas Service) Bill 2008*.

The QPLC supports the purpose of the Bill as a vital objective in any democracy. We see it as a reflection of community concern that any decision to engage Australian forces in military action overseas should have the clear support of Parliament.

We note that there are already some countries where Parliamentary approval is required (eg Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey), and that there are moves to strengthen such provisions especially in Europe. For example in Britain the Government itself, in its White Paper on Governance (March 2008), has proposed that Parliament be given a formal role (by House of Commons Resolution) in approving the deployment of armed forces in situations of armed conflict. This follows considerable debate after the Iraq war.

The European Union in 2001 received a report on the need for greater accountability in any democratic country regarding the use of armed forces for international missions. The report recommended that the parliaments of Member Countries 'draft legislation or statutory amendments that make it possible to institute regular procedures for consulting and informing Parliament that cannot be circumvented by the executive under pressure of political events'.

Our only concern is that it should be clear how the proposed amendment relates to the peacekeeping operations of Australian military forces. We understand that decisions about deploying Australian forces to peacekeeping operations do not at present involve approval by Parliament, but are entirely at the discretion of the Government. Perhaps there is scope for legislating for such approval, as for involvement in warlike actions.

In peace,

Brian Turner, Co-Convenor

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