

# **Position Statement**

## ***Peace, Security and Well-being***

The horrific cost of armed conflict for individuals, families, communities and nation states cannot be underestimated. According to the World Health Organization 35 people are killed every hour as a result of armed conflict. We also know that 191 million people lost their lives during the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of armed conflict. And – most of these people were civilians.<sup>i</sup> The catastrophic sophistication of modern weaponry has rendered our global village a potentially very dangerous place. We are all potential victims, regardless where the conflict begins.

The physical costs are easiest to see: the loss of life, limbs, and other horrible, disfiguring injuries. Less visible, but no less damaging, are other kinds of loss, children abruptly orphaned, mothers frantically searching for missing infants, entire villages simply disappearing from the map. And how do we begin to assess the loss experienced by adolescents who know how to use an assault weapon – and kill - even before they fully realize the meaning of life?

There is no health determinant as fundamental as peace.<sup>ii</sup> In itself, peace will not ensure health. But, in this era of supremely destructive weapons, if armed conflict erupts in any neighbourhood, other determinants of health fade into the background. This is not to say that armed conflict is an equal opportunity killer. It is not – nor has it ever been – equal in its implications. There continues to be a distinction in who is sacrificed first – and most often (the poor and others on society's margins are less able to escape or protect themselves). But biological, nuclear and other “modern” weapons can render “null and void” many historical advantages.

Thus armed conflict is a health issue. As registered nurses, committed to helping individuals, families and communities maximize their health and wellbeing, armed conflict is an affront to our very existence. As an association with a mandate to “Speak Out for Health” and a fundamental strategy of healthy public policy – we are compelled to rebel against the very existence of armed conflict. Anything less than this response means that we are not fulfilling our professional responsibility.

The Canadian Nurses Association<sup>iii</sup> in its March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2003 statement on peace and security urged the Canadian government – and governments around the world to “seek non-violent and democratic alternatives to armed conflict” RNAO endorses CNA's position.

RNAO echoes the Canadian Public Health Association call that the Canadian government:

- Strengthen Canada's international peacekeeping role.
- Increase aid to programs that address social injustice and other root causes of conflict.<sup>iv</sup>

RNAO calls on all registered nurses to speak against armed conflict at every opportunity. It is our ethical duty to speak out for peace as a fundamental – and unequivocal - determinant of health.

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<sup>i</sup> As quoted in International Council of Nurses. Civilians Pay in War. Press release. February, 2003.

<sup>ii</sup> Canadian Public Health Association. (2001) Statement on Peace, Security and Public Health.

<sup>iii</sup> Canadian Nurses Association (March 2003) Statement on Peace and Security.

<sup>iv</sup> Canadian Public Health Association (op cit.)