

Looking for the Right Words: Human Rights and Mennonite Central Committee Canada's Advocacy Work¹

Paul C. Heidebrecht, *Mennonite Central Committee
Canada, Ottawa*

Human Rights and Mennonite Central Committee²

Human rights language has become hard to avoid. It provides the basis for government policies and legal frameworks. It is featured in university curricula and research programs. And it brings together a host of civil society actors seeking to address injustices. In short, the vocabulary of human rights has become commonplace in much of the world.³ And yet, even though a rights-based approach may now be second nature for politicians, scholars, and activists, there remain some circles where questions about its appropriateness linger. One of these circles is Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches that has responded to basic human needs and worked for peace and justice since 1920.

In my experience, some MCC staff and constituents are concerned that human rights fall short of the fullness of what it means to be

human as depicted in the Anabaptist-Mennonite theological tradition. This may be because they are convinced that rights-talk presumes an individualistic worldview, because they are suspicious of anything that threatens to subsume particularity and difference, or because they are uncomfortable with anything that presumes the primacy of a single worldview.⁴ On the other hand, for many of MCC's staff and constituents, the language of human rights resonates deeply with their faith convictions. For example, some argue that it provides a clear way to limit or supersede the power of the nation state, as well as other powers that rule our existence.⁵ Some have found that this language has made it possible to find common cause with other religious traditions in the pursuit of justice.⁶ And some are convinced that the language of rights is more than a pragmatic second language, but is fully consistent with a biblical perspective.⁷ Given this range of views, it should be no wonder that MCC's "position" on human rights remains unclear.

Despite this lack of a clear vision or common understanding, however, MCC has come to support a wide range of international partners as they pursue diverse kinds of human rights work. In Haiti, for example, MCC has had a longstanding relationship with RNDDH (*Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains*, or the National Human Rights Defense Network) in order to defend both the civil and political rights and the social and economic rights of Haitians.⁸ Other significant examples can be found in Colombia, where MCC has supported the efforts of Mennonite organizations such as *Justapaz* (Centre for Justice, Peace, and Nonviolent Action) to respond to threats, torture, forced displacement, and homicide.⁹ In Iraq, MCC has helped to nurture a grassroots movement that is seeking to build a society based on respect for human rights rather than violence, as evident in the efforts of the Al-Mesalla Center for Human Resources Development.¹⁰ In Vietnam, MCC's domestic violence program has worked at both the community and family level to help women understand their rights.¹¹ And in Southern Africa, initiatives of the Africa Peace Network provide an indication of the way MCC has come to embrace the principles of a rights-based approach in peacebuilding projects throughout – and beyond – the region.¹²

A fuller examination of these and other examples¹³ makes it clear that MCC has often found a rights-based approach to be helpful in the quest for justice and peace, even if the organization – and its international partners – does not have a clear or universally held understanding of human rights. This essay attempts to build on this wellspring of experience by focusing on MCC's use of human rights language in a very specific dimension of this quest: advocacy in the Canadian political context. My thesis is that human rights language has been noticeably missing in much of MCC Canada's advocacy efforts,

and in my concluding comments I will briefly explain why I think this is problematic.

Advocacy and MCC

The pursuit of advocacy is typically linked to efforts to defend “the weak and voiceless, calling for peace, inclusion and equality, sometimes in opposition to the state, sometimes in cooperation with the state.”¹⁴ Within MCC, advocacy is often described as the effort to address injustices caused by the systems or structures that rule our existence, of which the institutions of government play a significant part.¹⁵ Beyond providing assistance with short-term emergency needs and longer-term capacity building, non-governmental organizations such as MCC have long sought to influence government policies that impact the people they work with. In the words of Christian activist Shane Claiborne, “We give people fish. We teach them to fish. We tear down the walls that have been built around the fish pond. And we figure out who polluted it.”¹⁶ Indeed, governments have come to expect and even (at times grudgingly) value the efforts of non-governmental organizations to address the root causes of problems by asking hard questions and taking action wherever possible. For example, although the Canada Revenue Agency has recently increased the reporting requirements for registered charities that engage in political activity, it continues to be guided by the policy that it is “essential” that these organizations “offer their direct knowledge of social issues to public policy debates.”¹⁷

Within MCC, advocacy is also increasingly framed as a tool that is used in order to address policy issues emerging out of all three of its three program priorities of disaster relief, sustainable community development, and just peacebuilding. Advocacy, in short, connects with all of MCC’s program work. Thus advocacy is not viewed as an end in and of itself, but the means to a greater end; MCC Canada does not pursue a relationship with the Government of Canada for the sake of that relationship alone. The expectation is that this relationship may end up having a real impact on the communities that MCC works with in Canada and abroad.¹⁸

Communication to the Government of Canada

My analysis of the ways MCC has appealed to human rights in its advocacy efforts will focus on written communication between MCC Canada’s Ottawa Office (hereafter referred to simply as the Ottawa

Office) and the Government of Canada.¹⁹ Of course, MCC's supporting churches in Canada communicated with their government long before MCC Canada was established in 1963; indeed, they did so soon after the first Mennonites arrived in Canada in 1786.²⁰ And MCC Canada communicated directly with the government prior to establishing the Ottawa Office in 1975. In at least one of these instances, MCC Canada even drew on human rights language in that communication – in 1968 it was one of 125 national voluntary organizations that joined the Canadian Commission for the International Year for Human Rights in order to mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²¹ More precisely, my analysis will focus on written communication between the Ottawa Office and the Government of Canada since 1985, which corresponds to the period of time that the office has maintained its Governmental Communications Register; this register was started in order to more systematically document Ottawa Office communication for annual reporting purposes.²²

A general observation to note at the outset is that the phrase “human rights” or even the word “right” does not appear frequently in the many hundreds of letters that have been sent to government ministers and Members of Parliament. It is even rarer in the dozens of presentations and submissions that have been prepared for Parliamentary committees studying particular pieces of legislation or policy issues. Searching for any mention of these words turned up a grand total of 82 documents; however, the vast majority of these documents make only a passing or secondary reference to human rights. They often do so as part of a larger appeal for the government to take action to support particular communities that MCC works with, rather than appealing to rights as the central rationale for this action. For example, in a 1994 letter to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Andre Ouellet, MCC Canada noted that “the war in Sudan has had a drastic effect on innocent civilians” and went on to “urge the Canadian government to continue to raise the visibility of human rights in international fora.”²³ A 2003 letter to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham noted that “we deplore all violence against Palestinians and Israelis and remain convinced that peace is possible only within a context of respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of international law.”²⁴ And a 2007 letter to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay, as well as the Canadian Ambassador to Colombia, concluded that “groups like *Justapaz* [an MCC partner organization] must be allowed to do their work. They have the right to do it and, we believe, it is of vital importance in the struggle for peace, justice and human rights in that war-ravaged country.”²⁵ I could cite several additional examples where letters speaking to the situation in Sudan, Palestine/Israel, and Colombia make reference to human rights abuses or the principles of human rights, although, once again, I found

it interesting that none of these letters appealed to human rights as the principal authority that would justify government action.

Unlike letters addressing particular contextual issues – which make up most of the communication that the Ottawa Office sends to the government – submissions to Parliamentary committees tend to be longer than a page or two, and thus provide the opportunity to develop a more substantial argument. Nonetheless, I could only find a handful of examples that included any mention of human rights, and in most cases, these references did not play a central role. For example, a written submission to the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations addressed "Human Rights, Refugees, and Other Concerns" on page 14 of a 15 page document. Regarding the first item in this list, MCC Canada wrote the following:

We also want to indicate our support for a strong human rights emphasis in Canada's foreign policy. The right not to be tortured or arbitrarily arrested and detained and the right to the basic necessities of life – these and others are clearly of fundamental importance. The Canadian government has recently taken significant initiatives in support of certain rights in South Africa. We strongly affirm these initiatives. But the concern needs to be applied also to other rights and to other places, including those of religious freedom in the Soviet Union, Vietnam and elsewhere. We encourage the government to emphasize basic human rights in its dealings with all countries.²⁶

Twenty years later, a written submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of how, in MCC Canada's view, the government could assist in "Promoting Development and Building Peace." The fifth of six sections in this seven-page brief was titled "Human Rights and Religious Freedom," and noted once again that MCC Canada supported "a strong human rights emphasis in Canadian foreign policy." It went on to say that "we want to encourage the government in its inclusion of religious freedom in its human rights work."²⁷

Another example arose out of a major advocacy campaign that MCC Canada embarked on to address the negative impact that some Canadian mining companies have had on communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Widespread concern over this impact led to the introduction of Bill C-300, a controversial Private Members' Bill that sought to regulate the activities of Canadian mining companies. Toward the end of a written submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development that was

studying this bill in 2009, MCC Canada noted that “our experience on the ground has taught us that... some companies continue to extract resources from developing countries with little regard for human rights and environmental standards.”²⁸ No mention was made in this submission of specific human rights standards, or why they should be the basis for a Canadian law that would have jurisdiction for activities taking place beyond the nation’s borders.

Perhaps it will not come as a surprise that the earliest and most frequent occasion where MCC Canada has appealed to human rights in making an argument to the government relates to communication concerning the rights of conscientious objectors. In part this is because of the Ottawa Office’s involvement in studies and debates surrounding the development of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, involvement that predates the Governmental Communications Register. One example was a submission to the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada in 1980. Entitled “Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” the submission pointed out that

The proposed Charter states: “Everyone has... freedom of conscience and religion.” This implies that this freedom will be for individuals. We do not disagree with this in an absolute way. However, there are occasional situations when we would see it as a right that the freedom of the individual be restricted for the sake of the freedom of a community... Our second request is for a clause to protect those who on grounds of conscience or religion feel themselves unable to take human life.²⁹

While the government didn’t agree to make these changes, a letter of response from then Minister of Justice Jean Chretien said “I believe that the Charter as it is presently drafted could provide the protections you request.”³⁰

MCC Canada’s input in 1980 – and the government’s response – became a frequent reference point in subsequent years. For example, in a letter to then Minister of Justice Kim Campbell in 1992, MCC Canada wrote “We understand that you are considering certain amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act. We would like to ask that you include the principle of conscientious objection in these amendments.”³¹ And several letters appealing for special consideration for individual conscientious objectors who had applied for refugee status in Canada expressed disappointment with “Canada’s judicial authorities” for failing to address “the questions of whether conscientious objection is a basic right.”³² This history of Mennonites negotiating conscientious objection as a right is given almost as much attention as the history

of Mennonites negotiating conscientious objection as a privilege in an extensive submission entitled “Conscientious Objection in a New Context” that was presented to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in 2007. Finally, a joint letter to Prime Minister Harper in 2008 goes even further in rooting its appeal in a contemporary human rights framework, stating:

The rightness and justice of Canada’s long tradition and proud history of supporting conscientious objectors was further reinforced in 1998 when the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights broadened the international definition of conscientious objection by officially recognizing that “persons (already) performing military service may develop conscientious objections.”³³

The second substantial appeal to human rights that can be found in MCC Canada’s communication to the Government of Canada is related to issues that emerged out of program work with Indigenous communities in the Canadian context.³⁴ As a 1999 letter to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy put it, “the integrity of Canada’s international promotion of human rights is dependent on its domestic human rights record. To address this, the federal government must give urgent priority to addressing the human rights abuses suffered by the Pimicikamak Cree Nation at Cross Lake, MB.”³⁵ There have been several other occasions where social and economic rights were appealed to in urging government action to address access to safe water and housing within particular First Nations communities, or political and civil rights were appealed to in urging government action to address deficiencies in education and personal safety on and off reservations.

The most sustained effort in this area, however, is found in efforts to express support for the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). In 2006 alone, MCC Canada wrote two letters and released a brief on this topic, pointing out, for example, that

MCC has a long history of working with indigenous communities in Canada and around the world. We recognize the importance of robust protection for Indigenous rights, and have been pleased with the support for the UNDRIP that the Canadian government has given... The core principles of Canadian and international human rights law are followed in the provisions of the Declaration. Therefore, we urge the Canadian government to give it unqualified support.³⁶

It must be stressed once again, however, that it is very hard to find examples where Canadian or international human rights law is explicitly appealed to in order to marshal support for an advocacy position put forward by MCC in Canada. I think the examples of conscientious objection and the UNDRIP are the exceptions that prove the overall point that human rights language has not been a significant resource for MCC Canada's advocacy work. It is true that the frequency with which the phrase "human rights" or the word "right" appears in communication to the government has gradually increased throughout the history of the Ottawa Office. But more often than not these words appear to be window dressing.

This lack of substance becomes all the more obvious when it is contrasted with the advocacy efforts of coalitions that MCC Canada belongs to. For example, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives "unites eleven churches and religious organizations in faithful action for ecological justice and human rights," and "Dignity and Rights" was one of the two overarching categories used to structure all of their program work in recent years.³⁷ Since 1998, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank has made the right to food the organizing principle for their public engagement campaigns to build support to end global hunger.³⁸ And the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), a coalition of around one hundred voluntary sector organizations working globally to achieve sustainable human development, has embraced a rights-based approach for an even longer period of time.³⁹ The same can be said for other networks MCC Canada has belonged to, such as the Policy Action Group for Emergency Response, the Food Security Policy Group, and the Canadian Network for Corporate Accountability. Thus the language of human rights abounds when the Ottawa Office's Governmental Communications Register is scanned for coalition statements and letters, as well as joint communication to the government that has involved MCC Canada in a more ad hoc fashion.

Implications

Given that the work of the Ottawa Office continues, this study is more than an academic exercise. Assuming that analysis of past practices can helpfully inform the future direction of the office, I will conclude this descriptive survey with some prescriptive comments. I think the surprisingly limited extent to which explicit appeals to human rights have been made by MCC Canada in its advocacy work should have a bearing on future efforts for three reasons.

First, there is a pragmatic reason why MCC Canada's communication to the Canadian government should appeal to human rights.

After all, human rights language is what the government speaks and understands. As one Member of Parliament (and committed Christian) once told me, “If you want to get things done around here, don’t use Sunday School language... you need to frame everything using the language of human rights.” Given the portrayal I have offered, one might wonder about MCC Canada’s political savvy-ness – about its ability to get anything done in the halls of power.

To give just one illustration, an emphasis on human rights is evident in *every* one of the many speeches given by the current Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird. For example, in an address to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations in 2012, he repeated the mantra that Canada now has a “principled, values-based foreign policy” built on “freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.”⁴⁰ While there are certainly times when MCC Canada needs to change the terms of the debate when it speaks to the government, in my view, there is often more than enough in the content of the minister’s speeches for MCC to take issue with him on his own terms.⁴¹

In addition to being pragmatic, I think MCC Canada’s communication to the Canadian government should draw on human rights language in order to be consistent with our program partners. Recall my earlier discussion about how MCC’s advocacy seeks to be rooted in the perspective of these partners. Should it not matter that a growing number of partners – both in Canada and around the world – are using a rights-based framework to guide their work? What does it mean for MCC when it supports organizations that are doing human rights work on the ground in places like Haiti, Colombia, and Iraq? It seems to me that MCC Canada needs to become more conversant in the language of human rights if it is going to adequately share these voices. If not, perhaps MCC needs to find different program partners.⁴²

The same could be said for the advocacy coalitions that MCC Canada belongs to, both faith-based or ecumenical and sector-based. Should it not be cause for concern when MCC Canada’s name is associated with rights-based arguments when it communicates with the government through coalitions, but *not* when the organization communicates on its own? How can MCC Canada make a constructive contribution to the formulation of collective statements on policy issues if it is not well-versed in this approach? Clearly the terrain for collaborative advocacy work is quite sparse if the use of human rights language is not an option.

Finally, in my view MCC Canada’s advocacy efforts should look for ways to utilize a human rights framework in order to address deficiencies in its current approach. Indeed, for all the resonance it may have when directed to MCC’s supporting churches, in my experience the theological framing of justice has often been more barren than the visions suggested by some rights-based approaches.

I realize that in trying to illustrate how rarely MCC Canada's advocacy messages rely on human rights as an authority for the issues pursued with policy-makers in Canada, I have said very little about the kinds of authorities MCC *has* relied on. There is a great deal more that could be said here, but, briefly put, MCC Canada has tended to rely on its on-the-ground program experience or partner perspectives for practical insights, and it has tended to rely on confessional history in order to explain deeply held moral convictions. One example of this latter kind of argument is captured in the title of a brochure that MCC's three advocacy offices in Ottawa, Washington, and New York produced in 2009: "Loving our neighbour through witness to government." This brochure was an attempt to build support for advocacy by showing that loving our neighbour means more than practicing acts of kindness or charity. However, it seems to me that it is both true *and* not enough to say that Christians bear witness out of love. It seems to me that our theological language in this case is too simplistic, or, even worse, verges on what Nicholas Wolterstorff calls "patronizing benevolence."⁴³ Might we not also bear witness because of our desire to be obedient to God? What about our Spirit-filled character as disciples of Christ? What about our sense of duty as fellow humans? What about our understanding of justice?

Others have asked similar questions. In his contribution to the MCC-commissioned volume *At Peace and Unafraid*, Mennonite lawyer Timothy Wichert argues that

When sufficient food, housing, medical care, and education are merely considered to be the compassionate response of NGOs or 'socialist' governments, then we forgo the means to compel their provision to those in need. Using rights language to claim entitlement to these basic human needs provides a more compelling reason to provide them. Governments have rarely provided these willingly, and it usually requires the diligent efforts of individuals and other interest groups to ensure they are achieved.⁴⁴

In the words of Jennifer Henry, the Executive Director of KAIROS, "When we promote and defend human rights we are transformed from those who seemingly 'bestow,' as in the concept of charity, to those who recognize and affirm the dignity which only God gives."⁴⁵

The larger theological argument being made here is that human rights language can be helpful in framing peace and justice issues as systemic rather than personal challenges. Indeed, MCC Canada itself faces significant challenges in trying to help constituents recognize the pervasive reality of sin, and in convincing them that achieving peace

and justice will take more than individual transformation or individual acts of love.⁴⁶ Thus I think MCC Canada needs to continue looking for the right words to use in its advocacy efforts, and human rights language has an appropriate role to play.

Notes

- ¹ An earlier version of this essay was presented at the “Mennonites and Human Rights: Grappling with State Power in the Past and Present” conference held at the University of Winnipeg, 18-20 October 2012.
- ² This section is based on my introduction to *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 1-2, which focused on the theme “Human rights and the quest for justice and peace.” This was actually the second issue of the *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* that focused on theme of human rights – see also Bob Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr, eds., “Are Human Rights Universal?” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 25, no. 3 (July-September 1995). The theme was also addressed by John A. Lapp in “Human Rights and the Agenda of the Church,” *Peace Section Newsletter* 13, no. 5 (November-December 1983): 1-3.
- ³ Samuel Moyné argues that the phrase “human rights” was virtually nonexistent in the U.S. media until the late 1970s – see *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3-4. It is interesting to see how it is now routine for global events to be interpreted through a human rights lens—see, for example, James Radner and John W. McArthur, “The Horn, Duty and Feeding the Hungry,” *Global Brief* 9 (Winter 2012): 56-59; and Lawrence M. Friedman, “Is the Arab Spring About ‘Western’ Human Rights?” *Global Brief* 9 (Winter 2012): 40-41.
- ⁴ See, for example, Ted Koontz, “Are Human Rights Universal? A Response,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 25, no. 3 (July-September 1995): 3-5; and Sriprakash Mayasandra, “Community-based critiques of human rights,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 12.
- ⁵ See, for example, Royden Loewen, “Human Rights and the Mennonites: An Historical Perspective,” an unpublished paper prepared for a symposium organized by The Mennonite Committee on Human Rights in January, 2007. For more background on this committee, see Peter Rempel, “The Mennonite Committee on Human Rights,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 7.
- ⁶ See, for example, Martin Shupack, “The Demands of Dignity and Community: An Ecumenical and Mennonite Account of Human Rights,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 241-58.
- ⁷ See, for example, Christopher D. Marshall, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., 2001).
- ⁸ Alexis Erkert Depp, “Working for human rights in Haiti: A struggle with wide scope and deep roots,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 4-5.
- ⁹ Bonnie Klassen and Adrienne Wiebe, “Colombian Mennonite perspectives on human rights: A tool in working for justice and peace,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 6-7.
- ¹⁰ Jim Fine, “Human rights in Iraq: An inspiration and objective for NGOs,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 9-10.
- ¹¹ Mayasandra, “Community-based critiques of human rights,” 12.
- ¹² Mulanda Jimmy Juma, “Human rights and MCC in Southern Africa: The case of the Africa Peace Network,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011): 10-11.

- ¹³ Other presenters at the “Mennonites and Human Rights” conference supplemented this sampling with discussions of MCC’s program work in Palestine and Guatemala, as well as further insights from the Colombian context.
- ¹⁴ “Mennonites and Human Rights” (program of conference held at The University of Winnipeg, 2012), http://mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca/events/human_rights_2012/ConferenceProgram.php.
- ¹⁵ See, for example, J. Daryl Byler, “For Such a Time as This: The Ministry of Political Advocacy,” *A Common Place* (June 1988): 8-9; and “Why Mennonite Church USA Should Speak to Government,” *The Mennonite* (9 August 2005): 8-9; Delton Franz, “Advocacy: A Biblical Calling,” *MCC Peace Section Washington Memo* 25, no. 5 (September-October 1993): 1; and Martin Shupack, “Biblical Basis of Public Witness,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 33, no. 3 (July-September 2003): 4-7. To be clear, advocacy can also involve engagement with systems and structures other than government. Examples include economic, technological, and cultural systems, which are much less tangible than governmental systems, and educational, health care, and military systems, which are often subsumed under governmental structures. Systemic evils such as racism, sexism, and ageism have also been the focus of advocacy for MCC. In addition, advocacy also includes *public engagement*, sometimes referred to as indirect advocacy, in order to make supporters in constituent churches aware of – and move them to take action to address – the systemic causes of injustice.
- ¹⁶ *Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 123.
- ¹⁷ “Policy Statement CPS-022,” *Canada Revenue Agency*, 2 September 2003, <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/chrts-gvng/chrts/plcy/cps/cps-022-eng.html>.
- ¹⁸ It is important to acknowledge that, in many ways, all of MCC’s relief, development, and peacemaking work is political in nature. This broader understanding of the political is captured in Ronald R.J. Mathies “Witness and Struggle or Politics and Power: MCC Engages the World,” *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 77-87. A narrower view is evident in John H. Redekop’s “The Politics of the Mennonite Central Committee,” *Direction: A Mennonite Brethren Forum* 23, no. 2 (Fall 1994): 63-76.
- ¹⁹ MCC also has advocacy offices in Washington, DC (established in 1968) and at the United Nations in New York City (established in 1991).
- ²⁰ See William Janzen, *Limits on Liberty: The Experience of Mennonite, Hutterite and Doukhobor Communities in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); T.D. Regehr, *Peace, Order and Good Government: Mennonites and Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 2000); and Ervin R. Stutzman, *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric, 1908-2008* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2011).
- ²¹ Frank H. Epp, *Human Rights and Christian Responsibility* (Winnipeg, MB: MCC Canada, 1968).
- ²² The Governmental Communications Register became a crucial resource when reports also needed to be filed with the government with the passage of the Lobbyist Registration Act in 1989. I want to thank to Hanna Coppes, the Ottawa Office Advocacy Research Intern for the summer of 2012, and Monica Scheifele, the Ottawa Office Program Assistant, for their assistance in combing through the register. All official communication to the Government of Canada cited below is also in the MCC Canada Collection in the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg.
- ²³ John Dyck (letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Andre Ouellet, 9 May 1994).
- ²⁴ William Janzen, et. al. (letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Bill Graham, 3 November 2003).
- ²⁵ William Janzen (letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay and Ambassador of Canada to Colombia Matthew Levin, 21 June 2007).

- ²⁶ MCC Canada, "The Well-being of All" (submission to the Special Joint Committee on Canada's International Relations, 29 November 1985).
- ²⁷ MCC Canada, "Promoting Development and Building Peace" (submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, 31 October 2005).
- ²⁸ MCC Canada, "Position Statement on Bill C-300" (submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, 28 October 2009).
- ²⁹ MCC Canada, "Freedom of Conscience and Religion in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (submission to the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada, 12 November 1980).
- ³⁰ There was one occasion where MCC Canada actually spoke out *against* broadening the interpretation of human rights to include the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation—see Marvin Frey, (letter to Prime Minister Jean Chretien, 17 April 1996).
- ³¹ William Janzen (letter to Minister of Justice Kim Campbell, 4 May 1992).
- ³² See, for example, William Janzen (letter to Minister of Citizen and Immigration Monty Solberg, 7 September 2006).
- ³³ Donald G. Peters, et. al., "Appeal from Canada's faith communities to the Government of Canada" (letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Diane Finley, 7 July 2008).
- ³⁴ This subsequently came to have relevance in international program as well. Indeed, the very first mention of "free, prior, and informed consent" to the use of Indigenous Peoples' land came in a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in May of 2005 regarding a dispute between the Subanon people in the Philippines and the Canadian mining company TVI.
- ³⁵ Marvin Frey (letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs Lloyd Axworthy, 24 February 1999).
- ³⁶ Donald G. Peters (letter to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Jim Prentice, 12 June 2006).
- ³⁷ "Who We Are," KAIROS, 14 March 2014, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/>. MCC Canada was a founding member of KAIROS, having participated in three of the ten separate inter-church coalitions that came together to form it in 2000 (these included the Inter-Church Committee for Refugees, Aboriginal Rights Coalition, and Inter-Church Action for Development, Relief and Justice).
- ³⁸ "Food Justice Network," Canadian Foodgrains Bank, 14 March 2014, http://foodgrainsbank.ca/food_justice_network.aspx. CFGB was founded by MCC Canada in 1983, and is now made up of 15 member agencies.
- ³⁹ "About Us," Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 14 March 2014, http://www.ccic.ca/about/index_e.php. CCIC is guided by a vision that "seeks to end global poverty and to promote social justice and human dignity for all." MCC Canada has been a member since its inception in 1968.
- ⁴⁰ John Baird, "Address by Minister Baird at Montreal Council on Foreign Relations Luncheon," 14 September 2012, <http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/speeches-discours/2012/09/14a.aspx>.
- ⁴¹ Recent examples include the lack of willingness to pursue diplomatic engagement with countries such as Iran and North Korea on the grounds that their regimes are notorious human rights abusers. In addition to being at odds with the Canadian government's approach, MCC has been criticized by other nongovernmental organizations because it continues to try to build bridges through modest program initiatives in both of these contexts.
- ⁴² I need to make it clear that I think it is inevitable that there will be a gap between program and advocacy. As I noted in my introduction to the April-June 2011 issue of the *MCC Peace Office Newsletter*: "As is so often the case within organizations such as MCC, not to mention within the churches to which MCC belongs, our practices often push, prod, and expand our theories rather than the other way

around.” Nonetheless, there also seems to be a gap between program and the shared vision that MCC Canada and MCC U.S. recently embraced, which makes no mention of human rights, rights, or dignity – see: MCC Canada, “Purpose and Vision” (2009), <http://mcccanada.ca/about/vision-mission>.

- ⁴³ See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); and *Hearing the Call: Liturgy, Justice, Church, and World*, edited by Mark R. Gornik and Gregory Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).
- ⁴⁴ “A Mennonite Human Rights Paradigm?” in *At Peace and Unafraid: Public Order, Security and the Wisdom of the Cross*, edited by Gerald Schlabach and Duane Friesen (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2005), 342.
- ⁴⁵ Jennifer Henry, “Ecumenical collaboration in Canada through human rights work,” *MCC Peace Office Newsletter* 41, no. 2 (April-June 2011), 2.
- ⁴⁶ Martin Kirk helpfully points out that there is an inherent tension between the charity-based messaging necessary for NGO fundraising and the public policy advocacy necessary for achieving true social and systemic change. See “Beyond Charity: Helping NGOs Lead a Transformative New Public Discourse on Poverty and Social Justice,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2012): 245-63.