

Vaughan Gething MS
First Minister of Wales
Welsh Government
5th Floor, Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay, CF99 1NA
[REDACTED]

20 March 2024

Dear First Minister,

Re: Building a culture of peace in Wales

The Peace Pledge Union would like to congratulate you on your elevation to the post of First Minister and wish you the very best for your time in office. We hope that, during your time in post, you will strive to make Wales a beacon of peace which can provide an example to the rest of the world.

To that end, we would like to meet with you or your officials to discuss how this can happen in the years ahead. The Welsh Government has made many very laudable steps in the right direction. Its support for peace initiatives through the Wales Centre for International affairs - things like Wales for Peace, Academi Heddwch and most recently the Women's Peace Petition Project - have been fantastic achievements. We also welcome progress towards making Wales a Nation of Sanctuary, and the commitments in the new Welsh curriculum of teaching students in Welsh schools to be ethical, informed citizens dedicated to promoting global citizenship.

Nevertheless, there is still much to be done. The Welsh Government still provides subsidies and other support for the arms trade here in Wales¹, resulting in misery being caused to thousands of people around the world, many of them innocent civilians, because of deadly weapons made in Wales being deployed in conflict. Meanwhile, the Welsh Government is still failing to regulate or restrict military recruitment visits to schools in Wales, even though the recruitment of under-18s to the military goes against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UK is the only country in Europe that recruits 16-year-olds to its armed forces² – a principle with which over 70% of people in Wales disagree³, and something which is linked⁴ to worse health / mental health outcomes for the child recruits involved. Our own report⁵ made a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government and other actors to follow in order that such visits be curbed and their impacts ameliorated.



ABOUT US: The Peace Pledge Union is the UK's oldest secular pacifist organisation. We resist everyday militarism, promote active nonviolence and educate for peace. Our members have all signed the peace pledge, committing to opposing war and the causes of war today:
"War is a crime against humanity. I renounce war, and am therefore determined not to support any kind of war. I am also determined to work for the removal of all causes of war."

We are also concerned about the broader proliferation of militarism and pro-war rhetoric within UK public discourse. Just over recent months, we have seen:

- Calls for the development of a 'citizen army' to address falling troop numbers.⁶
- UK involvement in air strikes against civilians in Yemen⁷, further embroiling the UK in a conflict which has seen our nation supply billions of pounds worth of arms to the Saudi-led coalition despite evidence they were being used in violations of international law such as attacks on civilians.⁸
- Senior Cabinet members within the UK Government describing demonstrations calling for peace in Gaza as "hate marches".⁹
- Pro-war rhetoric from the UK Government over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, against the advice of military chiefs.¹⁰

Both domestically within Wales, and as Wales' voice to the UK and the world, we believe you have a moral duty to act as a force for peace on these and other issues. The Peace Pledge Union wants to work with you to put structures in place which allow Wales to continue our proud history of opposing war, conflict and division.

We look forward to speaking with you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

Peace Pledge Union in Wales steering group

✉ [Redacted email] (secretariat)

¹ See, for example:

- Voice.Wales (2021) "[Welsh Government attacked For 'brushing shoulders with human rights abusers' at notorious arms fair – again](#)", Voice.Wales website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).
- Dafydd, R. (2023) "[Wales' role in the war in Yemen](#)", Institute of Welsh Affairs website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).
- Jones, C. (2023) "[Welsh Government backs defence industry from a distance, says firm](#)", BBC website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

² Child Rights International Network (2020) [The British armed forces: why raising the recruitment age would benefit everyone](#), London: CRIN.

³ ForcesWatch (2018) [Public poll on minimum age of armed forces recruitment](#), ForcesWatch website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

⁴ See, for example:

- Baker, K., Den, M., Graham, B. & Richardson, R. (2014) "[A window of vulnerability: impaired fear extinction in adolescence](#)", *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory*, vol. 113, pp90–100.
- Gee, D. (2013) [The Last Ambush? Aspects of mental health in the British armed forces](#), London: ForcesWatch.
- Abu-Hayyeh R. & Singh, G. (2018) "[Adverse health effects of recruiting child soldiers](#)", *BMJ Paediatrics Open*.

⁵ Cymdeithas y Cymod, Peace Pledge Union & ForcesWatch (2021) [Recruitment of children to the military in Welsh schools](#), Wales: Cymdeithas y Cymod, Peace Pledge Union & ForcesWatch.

⁶ Beale, J. & Faulkner, D. (2024) "[Britain must train citizen army, military chief warns](#)", BBC News website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

⁷ UK Government (2024) "[Statement on air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen: 3 February 2024](#)", UK Government website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

⁸ Quakers in Britain (2024) "[Quakers in Britain condemn UK and US airstrikes in Yemen](#)", Quakers in Britain website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

⁹ Syal, R., Sabbagh, D. & Stacey, K. (2023) "[Suella Braverman calls pro-Palestine demos 'hate marches'](#)", *Guardian* website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).

¹⁰ Norton-Taylor, R. (2023) "[UK military figures warn ministers about Ukraine](#)", Declassified UK website (accessed 10 Feb 2024).