

PET(4) WPI 49
Petitions Committee

Consultation on petition P-03-262 Wales Peace Institute
Response from Elin Tudur

History shows that Wales has a strong commitment to peace. Among the numerous examples is the Message of Peace and Goodwill organised by the Urdd every year to young people around the world. This year we commemorated the beginning of the first march to Greenham Common organised by women from Wales, and from Cardiff specifically. The Temple of Peace was set up by Lord David Davies of Llandinam with the aim of promoting peace activities and health. That work continues today.

There are many other voluntary and humanitarian establishments working for peace in Wales, and we now have our own government in Wales. Our National Assembly was established to deal with matters affecting the people of Wales. However, it does not have the powers to formulate a 'defence' policy for Wales. Therefore, we cannot realise any beliefs and aspirations that we hold as a nation for peace. The UK Government has the last word with regard to any military decisions, be that in our own country or internationally.

In the same way as the commitment to sustainable development has guided the work of the Assembly, so a Peace Institute would raise awareness among Assembly Members of the effects of policies and decisions relating to military areas, arms and conflict on Wales and the rest of the world. Establishing a Peace Institute in Wales, financed by the Government but independent of it, would encourage discussions other than mere economic discussions; it would encourage discussion on the effect of developments on every aspect of our culture, our economy and our environment, and on Wales's image in the world. A Peace Institute could look into the effect of political decisions and the role of the government in helping to build international peace.

Peace does not mean the international situation alone. The Welsh Government is committed to equality and diversity and the right of all citizens to live and to exercise their beliefs and cultures freely. It was interesting to hear a few days ago of the appeal by the Imam at the Mosques in Newport for extremism among young Muslims in the city to be eliminated, and emphasising the message of peace in the Muslim religion. There is a real need for joint understanding and tolerance among our people here in Wales. We all know of the dangers of extremism and lack of tolerance between various groups in society and in various religious communities.

Education is vitally important and it must begin at our feet. A Peace Institute would play a prominent part in education and peace studies, in promoting non-violent values and in building international relations. Since Education in Worldwide Citizenship and Sustainable Development is already part of the curriculum, such an Institute could make an important contribution.

During the National Eisteddfod ceremonies each year, we hear the question "A oes heddwch/Is there peace?" With a Peace Institute, we could reply, as a nation, and with confidence, that we are doing everything in our power to bring about that peace.