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COMMUNICATION STRATEGY SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE CANADIAN FORCES

AIM

1. The purpose of this paper is to outline the communication strategy for announcing the revised policy on homosexuality in the Canadian Forces.

BACKGROUND

2. The CF does not currently recruit or retain known homosexuals. CFAO 19-20 deems members who are determined with reasonable certainty, after a full investigation, to have a sexual propensity for persons of the same gender to be unsuitable for further service and are honourably released.

3. In 1986 CFAO 19-20 was put on hold pending a new policy decision. In the interim policy vacuum the Associate Minister of National Defence announced on 30 September 1987 that persons would receive an honourable release if they:

- a) acknowledge their homosexuality and whom DND considers to be homosexual;
- b) desire to be released from the CF and
- c) wish to be released under article 15.01, item 5 (d) of the Queen's Regulations and Orders (not advantageously employable).

However, members who refuse to accept 5(d) are retained in the Forces and put on special status with career restrictions (no promotions or postings) pending a government decision on the issue.

4. Twenty six homosexuals have been released under 5(d) since January 1987. Twenty personnel have their careers on hold.

5. In October 1985 the Parliamentary sub-committee on Equality Rights released its report 'Equality for All'. The report opposed existing CF policy on sexual orientation. It recommended that the Canadian Human Rights Act be amended to add sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination, and then further recommended that the CF and RCMP bring their employment practices into conformity with an amended CHRA.

6. The proposed amendment has not been actioned. However, the government's response to 'Equality for All,' the 1986 'Toward Equality,' stated "the government will take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that orientation is a prohibited ground of discrimination in relation to all areas of federal jurisdiction." At the same time the government also affirmed the vital objective of maintaining "...the requirement of the Armed Forces to be operationally effective in the interests of national security."

7. Acting on 'Toward Equality' the CF Charter Task Force was set up to review the CF policy on homosexuals. Its recommendations were that the policy be changed to no longer include sexual orientation as grounds for dismissal; instead isolating 'inappropriate sexual conduct' as constituting grounds for dismissal or refusal of admittance to the CF.

PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

Internal Audience

8. An extensive 1986 survey of CF personnel revealed widespread opposition to allowing homosexuals into the CF. 80% of male and 47% of female respondents felt the effectiveness of the CF would decrease as the result of such a policy while only less than 2% of all respondents felt it would increase effectiveness. 62% of male and 41% of females would refuse to share shower facilities or sleeping

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accommodation. 45% of males and 20% of females would refuse to be supervised by a homosexual of the same sex. Personnel within army and navy operations, the areas most likely to be disrupted should the CF change its policy, were adamantly opposed to having homosexuals in their ranks. 71% of army and 61% of navy respondents 'strongly agreed' there would be violence between known homosexuals and heterosexuals.

9. In another 1986 survey, 1200 new recruits and officer candidates were asked if a change in the CF's policy on homosexuality would have affected their decision to join: 38% of male and 26% of female respondents stated that it would have been a serious consideration.

External Audience

10. In 1985 a Gallup Poll indicated that 70% of Canadians agreed that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation should be illegal. However, when applied to the CF a 1986 poll indicated that 33% of respondents felt allowing homosexuals in the Forces would decrease effectiveness, while only 6% felt it would increase. 52% believed effectiveness would not be affected and believed homosexuals should be employed in the Forces. The interpretation of these results seem to indicate while a majority support the recruitment of homosexuals, the general impression is that effectiveness would suffer a decrease rather than an increase.

Media

11. The media's interest has centred around individual cases, with sympathy generally going to the individual concerned. The Shelburne, N.S. (1984), Sutcliffe (1986) and Dwyer (1989) attracted considerable attention. Additionally, any cases that have arisen have almost always been linked with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A recent article (3 July 1989) in the Globe and Mail suggested that DND may allow homosexuals to remain in the CF.

TARGET AUDIENCES

Internal Audience

12. CF Personnel are not expected to favourably receive any move toward a 'liberalization' of the CF's policy on homosexuals.

Media

13. The media will likely interpret CFAO 19-36 in one of two ways: **CF to accept and retain gays (celibate gays) in military; or token gesture to gays as CF reaffirms policy.** Subsequent stories will likely be centred on individual cases. The CF's policy on homosexuals is not expected to be of major interest to the media.

Special Interest Groups

14. Human Rights groups will view the removal of exclusion on the basis of sexual orientation as a positive step. Gay Rights groups will object to the celibate proviso claiming the changes are a red herring that camouflages the continued exclusion of gays in the military.

Cadet Movement

15. Any relaxation of the CF's policy on homosexuality will be viewed negatively by supporters of the various cadet leagues. Polls consistently show the reluctance of Canadians to support the rights of homosexuals when children are concerned.

Canadian Public

16. A majority of Canadians are expected to support what could be viewed as a more liberal CF policy toward homosexuals.

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Parliament

17. Mixed reactions can be expected. Svend Robinson, MP will be very vocal on the subject and he is not expected to be alone. However, the new policy will be seen as a progressive, though limited, step forward.

COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVES

18. To achieve public understanding that in the military:

the factors that insure the operational effectiveness of the CF, namely unit cohesion, mutual acceptance and respect would be disrupted and undermined if the CF were to allow the recruitment or retention of active homosexuals.

At the same time,

the CF recognizes that sexual orientation alone does not constitute grounds for dismissal from the CF.

MESSAGES

19. The CF recognizes that changes in society necessitate a change in policy towards homosexuals in the Forces.

20. The admittance of active homosexuals into the CF would decrease its operational effectiveness.

21. No nation with an all-volunteer force accepts homosexuals into its ranks because of the negative and disruptive impact on unit cohesiveness which is vital in a fighting force.

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS

22. Too much concentration on the 'liberalization' angle could lead to two problems: a possible negative impact on recruiting patterns; a challenge through the courts by one or more celibate homosexuals who attempt to enter the CF and are rejected.

23. The change in policy may be interpreted simply as a meaningless token gesture when the real purpose is to simply continue the previous policy of excluding homosexuals.

24. Therefore we should not attempt to portray the change in policy as anything other than a modification (a progressive one nevertheless).

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

25. Because of the volatile nature of the subject a low-key public affairs approach is recommended. A press release should be issued by the CDS simply announcing CFAO 19-36. This should be done in conjunction with an internal announcement on the same day. A backgrounder, RTQ and Q&As should be prepared.

26. Every effort should be made to keep the issue an internal operational decision. Commanders should be briefed on the changes contained in CFAO 19-36. Those members awaiting new policy in regard to their own cases should be approached personally by their commanding officers to be informed of the new policy and how it affects their cases.

MINISTER'S INVOLVEMENT

27. The Minister should be briefed on the issue and announcement and provided with Q and As in anticipation that questions will arise in the house. The Emphasis should be placed on the internal (CF) nature of the issue.

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