

CHEF DE L'OPPOSITION OFFICIELLE  
NOUVEAU PARTI DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CANADA



LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION  
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

*Hon. Thomas Mulcair, Député/M.P.  
Outremont*

O T T A W A  
January 10, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P.  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

New Democrats join with Canadians across the country in expressing our profound sadness at the reports of suicides within the ranks of the Canadian Forces. Even one is too many, and the number of recent reports is greatly distressing for all. Like those we have lost in combat, these men and women have often died as a result of injuries sustained in service to our country.

We know, sadly, that this is not a new problem. Since the height of the Canadian Forces' deployment in Afghanistan, we have expressed deep concerns about the need for increased investment in mental health services for Canadian Forces members. While we appreciate steps have been made to improve access to health services, and to remove the stigma associated with mental illness, it is clear that these efforts have not been sufficient.

There are over fifty boards of inquiry on military suicides that remain outstanding to this day, some as old as five years. The report from the Military Police Complaints Commission inquiry into the 2008 suicide of Cpl. Stuart Langridge has still not been released. In too many cases, grieving families are left without answers or closure – and Canadians are left with grave concerns about whether the system put in place to help our armed forces is broken, or if we are learning from these tragedies in order to prevent future ones.

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While we all know the solution will not be simple, a wealth of information can be drawn from mental health experts of varied backgrounds, from doctors and nurses to psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists. Canadian Forces members and their families can provide unique insight into better understanding where our systems have failed them and how we can do better.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence has heard countless hours of testimony filled with recommendations and ideas about how we can better assist those Canadian Forces members who are struggling. We have also seen successive reports by the Department, the Defence Ombudsman and the Veterans Ombudsman and there remain many recommendations the federal government has not yet implemented.

In the face of this, I am asking you on behalf of your government to honestly acknowledge the crisis, accept responsibility for the fact the status quo isn't working, and commit to taking urgent action that properly addresses the mental health needs of the men and women who bravely serve this country.

I urge you to make addressing this issue a personal priority for you as prime minister.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Mulcair". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair, P.C., M.P.  
Leader of the Official Opposition