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Media Release

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**YMCA World Peace Week 2010–
YMCA awards Peace Medal to Holy Cross High School Just Youth**

The YMCA of Saskatoon will present the annual YMCA Peace Medal to the Just Youth group from Holy Cross High School. A special Peace Week highlight on November 22 will be the presentation of the Peace Medal to the Holy Cross High School Just Youth group at the Hilton Garden Inn, 7:30 p.m.

“Just Youth is the perfect illustration of peace-making at the personal and community level and an embodiment of YMCA World Peace Week,” says Terry Gibson, YMCA President.

The Just Youth group began at Holy Cross in 2003. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace initiated a youth arm to spur interest and engagement in youth in the work of worldwide sustainable development and peace. ‘Just Youth’ groups sprang up across the country, in schools and in universities. Since its inception, the group at Holy Cross has organized the Development and Peace educational campaign for the school in the fall and a major fund-raising event in the spring. Both are geared towards creating a world of greater justice, peace and human rights in developing countries. In 2009, Just Youth focused on the issue of food sovereignty, the right of communities to produce food locally in a sustainable manner. In 2010, the focus is on bottled water, and advocating for personal commitment to use tap water and re-usable water bottles. Each year the group organizes the school-wide Box Lunch Auction as its major fund-raiser. The last three years of the auction have raised \$78, 293.00. The school community continues to offer its heart towards creating a world of greater peace and development.

This year the YMCA in Canada celebrates 26 years of peace building. Inspiring others to become actively engaged in peace in their everyday lives is the goal of the YMCA's peace efforts. Although YMCAs teach peace building activities year round, marking the third week of November as Peace Week places special emphasis on exploring many dimensions of peace from a personal, community and international perspective.

Since 1987, over 1,100 individuals and groups have received the YMCA Peace Medal across Canada.

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BACKGROUND: Holy Cross High School “Just Youth” YMCA 2010 Peace Medal recipient

Brief history of the group– The Just Youth group started at Holy Cross High School in 2003. The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace initiated a youth arm then to spur interest and engagement amongst the youth in the work of sustainable development and peace in the world. Just Youth groups sprang up all across the country, both in schools and in universities. Since its inception, the group at Holy Cross has organized the Development and Peace educational campaign for the school in the fall and a major fund-raising event in the spring. Both are geared towards the cause of creating a world of greater justice and peace.

Peace activities– In 2004, the group organized a presentation for the school on the atrocities towards humankind that were happening in the Congo. It was intended to probe big questions: What social responsibility do we have as fellow-human-beings on this planet? What is the relationship between power and violence? How does poverty and lack of education contribute to powerlessness? Why is understanding history so important in our efforts towards peace? The presentation certainly captured people’s attention. In 2005-2006, the group focused their educational initiative on the right to safe drinking water for everyone in the world: Water: Life Before Profit. Their educational thrust was to move water out of the realm of commodity for profit, towards the realm of universal access in the global commons. In 2006, the group collaborated with a local NGO called Friends of Loa, striving to re-build a secondary school in southern Sudan. Just Youth planned an educational forum for the school, with speakers speaking about the war in Sudan, experiences in a refugee camp, and the desperate need to rebuild destroyed and abandoned schools, as a sign of hope for those returning from the camps. Following the forum, they organized a fund-raising “brick-by-brick” 10-day plan to raise the \$4,000 that would build one classroom of the school. They raised the funds in 5 days! Following that, they helped organize the 6th annual Box Lunch Auction at the school, which raised over \$14,000 for the Schools Building Schools initiative of Friends of Loa. In 2007 -08, the group joined a national campaign lobbying for a Canadian ombudsmen to become a spokesperson to give communities in the Global South a voice when human rights and the environment are threatened by acts of Canadian mining companies. In 2009, the group focused on the issue of food sovereignty in the world. Food sovereignty is about the right of communities to produce food locally in a sustainable manner. In 2010, the group is focusing their attention to the issues surrounding bottled water, and advocating for personal commitment to use tap water and re-usable water bottles. Each year the group organizes the school-wide Box Lunch Auction as its major fund-raiser. The last three years of the auction have raised \$78, 293.00. The school community continues to offer its heart towards creating a world of greater peace and development.

Collaboration with other groups– The Just Youth has collaborated in some circumstances with the Student Representative Council and the Environmental Club. They have collaborated with the NGO Friends of Loa. They consistently collaborate with the Canadian Organization for Development and Peace. Most recently, they are collaborating with Peaceful Schools International.

Impact/result of the activities of the group– The Just Youth group throughout the years has been instrumental in making the school community more aware. Their thoughtful focused educational initiatives have been based in sound principles and researched facts, much of which comes from the National Office of Development and Peace. It is difficult to measure the impact on people’s thinking, but if the amazing generosity and engagement in the fund-raising that follows is any test of impact, then the results testify to significant punch. The fact that each year there is a strong group willing to commit to the work and efforts of Just Youth would signal that the work and efforts of the group hold authentic meaning and value for students. Many of our students have gone on to do mission work, to join Just Youth on campus, and to continue exploring ways to contribute to building a world of greater justice and peace.

Taking place in YMCAs across Canada, YMCA Peace Week is an opportunity to join people of all ages in activities focused on exploring peace from a local and global perspective.