

DIRECT ACTION TO STOP THE WAR

1736 Franklin St. 10th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612
July 15, 2008

Ubisoft
625 3rd Street
San Francisco, CA 94107

To the Director of Ubisoft, San Francisco,

We are writing concerning your work as the publisher of the Army recruitment tool “America’s Army.” As you know, “America’s Army” is a game developed by the U.S. military to instruct players in “Army values,” portray the army in a positive light, and increase potential recruits. The game is the property and brainchild of the US Army, who admit freely, and with pride, that it is one of their principal recruitment tools.

America’s Army has been available since 2002 as free download or as a CD available in recruiting stations. Ubisoft has been the exclusive publisher of the console and small screen versions, developed in order to access a wider, less privileged and younger market. The game has been granted a “teen” rating, allowing 13 year olds to play.

The military recruitment of children under the age of 17, however, is a clear violation of international law (the U.N. Optional Protocol). No attempt to recruit children 13-16 is allowed in the United States, pursuant to treaty. It is also important to consider the effects of the game within the context of the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Undoubtedly soldiers now recruited through “America’s Army” will serve in these wars. The invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan are violations of international law, and contributing to their continuation through the propagation of the game is, if not a criminal violation, a moral outrage.

In May, the American Civil Liberties Union published a report that found the armed services

regularly target children under 17 for military recruitment. Department of Defense instruction to recruiters, the U.S. military’s collection of information of hundreds of thousands of 16 year olds, and military training corps for children as young as 11 reveal that students are targeted for recruitment as early as possible. By exposing children under 17 to military recruitment, the United States military violates the Optional Protocol.

The report goes on to highlight the role of “America’s Army,” saying the Army uses the game to “attract young potential recruits . . . train them to use weapons, and engage in virtual combat and other military missions”, adding that the game “explicitly targets boys 13 and older.”ⁱ

The game is having an effect. An informal study showed that 4 out of 100 new recruits in Ft. Benning, Georgia credit America’s Army as the primary factor in convincing them to join the military. 60% of those recruits said they played the game more than five times a week. And a 2004 Army survey found that nearly a third of young Americans ages 16 to 24 had some contact with the game in the previous six months.

Ubisoft's role as publisher of "America's Army" is contributing to an international crime. But you are not alone: Gameloft is working on the cell phone application and Secret Level was a developer of the 2005 version of the game. Is child recruitment, recruitment to fight the cause of dubious wars the proper business of your company and those of you in their employ?

Consider the story of Joseph Rotblat. He was a nuclear physicist working on the development of the atom bomb at Los Alamos in 1944 when he recognized that he could no longer in good conscience continue his work there. He understood that the danger of the Nazis developing an atomic bomb was past, and the bomb that he was working on had larger and dreadful purposes. When he left attempts were made to paint him as a Soviet spy and he was banished from the US, not to return for twenty years. After the bomb was deployed to horrible effect in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Rotblat determined that his future work would be channeled only toward peaceful ends. He directed his research towards the effects of radiation. He became a lifelong activist for peace and nuclear disarmament and received a Nobel Peace Prize in 1995 as part of the Pugwash Conferences.

America's Army is hardly a nuclear weapon. It's a game for some, a job for others. But it IS a game with long-term negative consequences for some players. Is the only way forward for America through the permanent militarization of our society, or are there other solutions that talented, creative and intelligent people such as those working on this game might discover if they turned their sights in another direction?

As community members and leaders of the peace movement we respectfully request a meeting with Secret Level. We would like to share our concerns about the role of "America's Army" in recruiting children. Let us remember Joseph Rotblat's example of personal integrity, come together, and discuss these important issues and consider courageous alternatives. Please contact Bill Simpich at 510 444 0226 by Monday, July 21st at the address below with a time of your convenience for a meeting.

Sincerely,

Michael Reagan Direct Action to Stop the War
Bill Simpich Iraq Moratorium Committee SF
Siri Margerin United for Peace and Justice
Janet Weil Code Pink
Cecile Pineda Direct Action to Stop the War
Sharon Kufeldt past president American Legion Post #315 SF
The Bay Area Labor Committee for Peace & Justice (LC4PJ)
Stephen Funk Iraq Veteran's Against the War
Stephen McNeil Assistant Regional Director for Peace Building, AFSC PMR
Jacqueline Cabasso Executive Director Western States Legal Foundation Oakland Ca
Nancy Mancias Global Exchange SF
David Solnit Courage to Resist Oakland CA
Rae Abileah contributing author "10 Excellent Reasons Not to Join the Military" and Code Pink
Pat Elder National Network Opposing the Militarization of Youth (NNOMY)
Arlene Inouye The Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools (CAMS) Los Angeles
Stephanie Dominiquez Students or Soldiers? New York City
Medea Benjamin Code Pink Washington DC

ⁱ American Civil Liberties Union *U.S. Violations of Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict: Sons of Misfortune: Abusive U.S. Military Recruitment and Failure to Protect Child Soldiers* May 23, 2008.