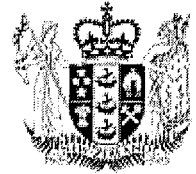


**Hon Phil Goff**  
**Minister of Defence**



**Hon Rick Barker**  
**Minister of Veterans' Affairs**

## **Media statement**

06 December 2006

### **Healing Begins Today for Veterans**

Defence Minister Phil Goff and Veterans Affairs Minister Rick Barker today announced details of the government's response to the recommendations of the Joint Working Group report on the concerns of Viet Nam veterans.

"A formal memorandum of understanding has been signed between the government and representatives of Viet Nam veterans, the Royal New Zealand Returned and Services Association (RNZRSA) and the Ex-Vietnam Services Association (EVSA).

"This is a far reaching and wide ranging package and a concrete acknowledgement by government that service personnel in Viet Nam and their families have been exposed to and continue to be affected by a toxic environment.

"The package has been developed to address the key concerns of veterans and their families. These concerns involve personal health, the health of children and grand-children, the hurt that has remained with them for decades over the way their exposure to toxic environments has been denied and handled and the manner in which they were treated on their return to New Zealand.

"The focus of this package is on those who have served their country and have faced health or other difficulties and is based on the three key themes of acknowledging the past, putting things right and improving services to Viet Nam veterans. This government is prepared to make the investment required to ensure this structured and thorough process creates the right circumstances in which we can put this sad chapter in New Zealand's recent history behind us.

"A large amount of detailed planning and development work is required to implement this package. We will establish a Joint Implementation Group comprising representatives from the New Zealand Defence Force, Veterans' Affairs New Zealand, Ministry of Social Development, RNZRSA and EVSA to oversee the implementation of the memorandum of understanding. The first meeting of the JIG will be held in early 2007.

"Details of the events, services and programmes to be implemented will be promulgated to veterans and their families as soon as the JIG has begun working on the practical implementation issues.

"Total cost of the package is yet to be finalised but it is expected to be between \$12 - \$15 million.

"Today's announcement brings to an end events which began in 2004 when parliament's Health Select Committee reported on Viet Nam veteran's exposure to defoliants. In response, the Joint Working Group, chaired by Michael Wintringham, was established to make recommendations to government on concerns of Viet Nam veterans.

"The Joint Working Group reported to Ministers on 28 April 2006 and the report can be found online at [www.vietnamvetSWG.govt.nz](http://www.vietnamvetSWG.govt.nz) . Following completion of the report, draft responses by government were prepared which were then used as the starting point for negotiations with veteran's organisations and the package announced today is a direct result of the report and the subsequent negotiations.

"It is estimated that approximately 4000 New Zealanders served in the Viet Nam war. Of that number 1,341 veterans and their families receive services from Veterans Affairs New Zealand and the War Pension Services Unit within the Ministry of Social Development. From today, for all those New Zealanders, the healing can begin," said Mr Goff and Mr Barker.

***A summary of the government's response package is attached to this release.***

**ENDS**

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All Phil Goff's media releases and speeches are posted at [www.beehive.govt.nz](http://www.beehive.govt.nz)

Summary of the Memorandum of Understanding signed today between government and veterans groups covering the government response to the concerns of Viet Nam Veterans.

### **Apology And Acknowledgement**

- A formal public apology to Viet Nam Veterans and their families.

### **Reeves and McLeod reports**

- Acknowledge the Reeves (1999) and McLeod (2001) reports were based on flawed assumptions and do not inform current government policy or decisions.

### **Welcome Home Ceremony**

- New Zealand Defence Force to host parade and welcome home ceremony.
- Formal Statement by NZDF acknowledging the role played by Veterans, the treatment they received on return to New Zealand, and the sacrifice of those Veterans killed in Viet Nam.

### **Oral History Programme**

- Funding through Ministry of Culture and Heritage for an oral history programme beginning in 2007 to record accounts of the experiences of Viet Nam Veterans.

### **Increased Medallic Recognition**

- Recommend to Her Majesty the Queen that she approve for acceptance and wear South Vietnamese gallantry awards given to New Zealanders.
- A Review of the medallic recognition awarded to Vietnam Veterans and of the Theatre Honours awarded to the 1 RNZIR Battalion.

### **Ex Gratia Payments For Viet Nam Veterans**

- Ex-gratia payment of \$40,000 for Veterans suffering a prescribed condition.
- Ex-gratia payment of \$25,000 for spouse or partner of Veteran who has died as a result of prescribed condition.

### **War Disablement Pensions**

- All Veterans, of any conflict, diagnosed with a terminal illness which is a result of operational service will receive pension equal to 160% of current War Disablement Pension.
- Substantial and substantive review of War Pensions Act to provide improved service delivery for all Veterans.
- Expert panel established to advise Crown on rates, types and eligibility criteria of war pensions.

### **Programme For Children Of Viet Nam Veterans**

- Ex-gratia payment up to \$30,000 to each child who suffers from any of five accepted conditions.
- Ex-gratia payment of \$30,000 to each family who has lost a child to one of five accepted conditions.
- Review of services for children and grand-children of Viet Nam Veterans in other countries.

## Ongoing Research

- Crown will access, monitor and where appropriate sponsor research into the intergenerational effects of dioxins.

## EVSA Youth Development Trust

- One off grant of \$250,000 to EVSA Youth Development Trust which assists children of Viet Nam Veterans.

## Veterans' Card

- Card issued to all Viet Nam Veterans to allow easy identification by medical professionals.
- Children and grand children of Viet Nam Veterans to received similar card.

## National Register

- Crown to establish a national register of Viet Nam Veterans and their children and grandchildren.

## Provision Of Information

- Veterans' Affairs New Zealand to make available to Veteran groups and health professionals medical information to assist with treatments and diagnosis.
- Crown to work with Veteran's Homes to establish centres of excellence for information on and treatment of conditions prevalent amongst veterans.

## Veterans' Affairs New Zealand Review

- Review of all aspects of operations of Veterans' Affairs New Zealand.

## Medical Assessments

- Viet Nam Veterans funded for a one off comprehensive medical examination and a specialist visit.

## Trust Fund For Viet Nam Veterans And Families

- Crown endowment of \$7 million to create trust fund to provide assistance to Veterans and families.
- Interest from endowment sum will provide for ex-gratia payments to be administered by trustees.
- Exact status, form and criteria of trust yet to determined.

## Joint Implementation Group

- Joint Implementation Group representing wide range of agencies will oversee implementation of measures announced today.
- Group will convene in early 2007.

## Notes:

1. The term 'prescribed conditions' refers to conditions on the United States Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine "Sufficient evidence of an association with exposure to Agent Orange" list: Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, Soft tissue sarcoma, Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and Chloracne.

2. The five "currently accepted conditions" are: Spina bifida, Cleft lip, Cleft palate, Acute myeloid leukaemia and Adrenal gland cancer.