



Dili, 15 November 2002

NEW ZEALAND BATTALION TO DEPART TIMOR LESTE

In a formal ceremony in Suai today the New Zealand Battalion ended three years of Peacekeeping operations in Timor-Leste. The Thai Battalion along with a Singapore Rifle Company and Singapore Aviation will take over operations in the rugged area that borders West Timor.

The hand-over ceremony, at which a monument was unveiled that honors the contributions of the New Zealand Battalion, was attended by President Xanana Gusmao, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri and other Ministers of the Timor-Leste Government; the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRG) Sukehiro Hasegawa and New Zealand's Minister of Defence Mark Burton.

The New Zealand Defence Force's first troops arrived in East Timor in September 1999 as part of INTERFET. In recent years, the New Zealand Battalion has been operating in an area of over 1,200 square kilometers of very rugged terrain, with 80 kilometers along the Tactical Control Line at the border of West Timor.

President Xanana Gusmao praised New Zealand's commitment to Timor-Leste, acknowledging that out of a relatively small National Defence Force, New Zealand has had 646 of its troops committed as Peacekeepers in Timor-Leste. He also paid special tribute to New Zealand Private Leonard Manning who was killed while serving in East Timor in July 2000, saying, "We shall not forget his sacrifice." President Gusmao went on to thank Private Manning's family who, subsequent to his death, led a campaign to raise funds to build schools and help educate children in Suai.

The DSRSG, Mr. Hasegawa, cited the significant role of the New Zealand battalion in maintaining a calm and secure border area and in facilitating the return of refugees coming across from West Timor. He also praised “the compassion and devotion” the New Zealander’s have shown toward the East Timorese people including helping in the “rebuilding of schools, clinics, water supply points and of a market.”

The UNMISSET Force Commander, Maj. Gen. Huck Gim Tan, praised the fact that what had been a violent and dangerous area in 1999 is now stable and calm, “largely due to the untiring efforts of the men and women of the New Zealand Defense Force. You have built a reputation as capable and professional soldiers, fierce warriors to those that harbor ill intentions”, he added, “and yet caring servants to the people you are here to protect”. “Well done, all of you!” he concluded, giving special thanks to the New Zealand Commander Lt. Col. Dean Baigent.

The Force Commander welcomed the Thai Battalion, and the Singapore Rifle Company and Singapore Aviation that will take over operations from the New Zealanders. He cited in particular the Thai Battalion’s excellent record of past achievements in Timor-Leste, particularly in the Baucau area.

The New Zealand Peacekeepers will complete their repatriation from Timor-Leste on 19 November.

WORKSHOP ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION TO BE HELD

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Office for Promotion of Equality (OPE) within the Office of the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste will host a workshop on 20 to 22 November to review draft legislation on Domestic Violence.

The three-day workshop will give all relevant sectors of society an opportunity to examine draft legislation to curb Domestic Violence and to consider

recommendations before the legislation is formally presented to the Council of Ministers.

The need to address Domestic Violence in Timor-Leste stemmed from the First Congress of Women of East Timor held in June 2000. Issues such as strengthening national capacity to address gender-based violence were identified as a crucial component within the country's civil society.

UNFPA and the Office for Promotion of Equality (OPE) within the Prime Minister's Office have work together to address the need for community support at both the national and local level in the formulation and implementation of appropriate legislation and programmes aimed at the prevention and care of victims of domestic violence.

Strengthening the current weak legal framework and the need for specific legislation drew a coalition of national lawyers, coordinated by the local NGO Fokupers and supervised by Maria Domingas Alves, the Advisor of the Prime Minister for Promotion of Equality, tasked with drafting the outline for this important piece of legislation.

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