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DEFENCE FORCE TASK IN BOUGAINVILLE ENI

peacekeeping

June 29, 2003

After nearly six years of continuous involvement in the peace monitoring deployment to Bougainville, the New Zealand Defence Force will lower the flag on Operation BEL ISI II on Monday, June 30.

The close down ceremony will be attended by the leaders of villages throughout Bougainville who have participated in the peace process while the NZ Chief of Defence Force, Air Marshal Bruce Ferguson, will head a New Zealand delegation comprising the Chief of Army, Major General Jerry Mateparae, Ministry of Foreign Affairs representatives, an Honour guard and a Maori cultural group.

The former New Zealand Minister of Foreign Affairs, Don McKinnon, helped negotiate a truce between warring Bougainville factions in 1997. This resulted in a New Zealand-led Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) deploying to Bougainville in November that year. The TMG was unarmed and New Zealand's contribution comprised 150 New Zealand Army personnel, a detachment of RNZAF Iroquois helicopters and, for varying periods, HMNZ ships Canterbury, Endeavour and Manawanui. Australia contributed Defence and civilian personnel, while Fiji and Vanuatu provided military personnel.

Eight months later, in May 1998, the TMG was replaced by the Australian-led Peace Monitoring Group, and the number of NZDF personnel on the island was reduced.

A weapons containment plan commenced in May of 2001 and, in June this year, the United Nations verified the second stage of the plan, leaving the way clear for elections to be held for an autonomous Bougainville government.

The New Zealand Defence Force currently has 19 personnel in Bougainville. Some will return with the close down delegation while the remainder will return in August after completion of the mission drawdown.

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