

AN END TO CONSCRIPTION  
REMARKS BY  
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MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY  
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Good afternoon and thank you for coming.

Previous Administrations have promised to eliminate conscription. For various reasons that was never accomplished. In keeping with this Government's pledge to ensure the modernization of Bermuda and her institutions, the public will recall that in the 2017 Speech from the Throne, this Government promised to *"..amend the Defence Act 1965 in consultation with the Governor to officially end conscription (into) the Royal Bermuda Regiment within this legislative session."*

This Government is intent on keeping its promises and delivering on them for the people of Bermuda. In 2015 the previous Administration amended the 1965 Defence Act, principally to revise the Regiment's disciplinary regime. In part, the 2015 amendments include:

- a. removing potentially confusing and gender-based terminology throughout;
- b. removing references to the repealed UK Army Act 1955, from the Bermuda Defence Act 1965, and replace (where necessary) with references to the UK Armed Forces Act 2006;
- c. giving all those charged with a military offence the right to elect for trial by court of summary jurisdiction instead of a hearing with the Commanding Officer; and
- d. Regularising the fines and punishments to be imposed in the event of disciplinary hearings.

The amendments to the Act were passed in the Legislature with bipartisan support but were not brought into force. The operation of these amendments was delayed whilst the Regiment trained commanders and all those engaged at various levels in the new process. This is now complete and I am pleased to advise the public that by a Commencement Notice gazetted last week, these amendments are now in force with effect from the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.

The 2015 amendments to the Act continued to provide a means of conscription where a requisite number of volunteers were not attracted in any given year. In particular, section 4 of the Act provided that the regiment shall be raised and maintained by means of voluntary enlistment, BUT where voluntary enlistment proved inadequate for the raising or maintenance of the regiment, by means of compulsory military service.

For the sake of good order, it is necessary to bring the 2015 amendments into force first and to thereafter amend the Act to further, and finally end conscription. This will provide the Regiment with the opportunity to effect a full transition to an all-volunteer force. The Attorney General's Chambers will shortly be requested to draft the necessary amendments and I expect to bring them to the House in the New Year. They too will have a commencement provision and the most likely course is that I will bring the elimination of conscription into force in April 2018 to coincide with the new fiscal year.

On a personal note, I served as an officer in the Regiment, retiring as a Captain and I could not be more proud of the Battalion and the important role it has played in this community. This move to eliminate conscription is a critical step in modernizing the organization and transforming it into a broader career choice for Bermudians. Work has already begun to usher in the reality of a Regiment marine unit responsible for inshore maritime patrolling. Our aim is to grow the role of the Regiment by relieving other security services of responsibilities that are more theirs by tradition rather than reflective of their core function.

In discussions with the Governor and the Commanding Officer, I have outlined a long term goal of creating a civil defence force model where we have well trained men and women of the Regiment able to function in all areas of the security services, providing redundancy capability to supplement existing resources as necessary.

As part of today's announcement I am urging able-bodied men and women to take early advantage of the opportunities this may present. The Regiment is advertising now for volunteers and I lend my voice and support to that effort. Volunteering today may be the first step in a challenging and rewarding career in this branch of public service.

Thank you.