



## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

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PREMIER & MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

### THE BERMUDA REGIMENT - SHAPING THE FUTURE

11<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2014

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**Mr. Speaker**, the public discussion around the issue of conscription has its ebbs and flows. In spite of this, the Government has continued to work on the fulfillment of our promise to eliminate conscription. Both sides of the aisle agree with this course and in light of our common experience in governing I suspect we might agree that it cannot be done at the stroke of a pen.

With that in mind, **Mr. Speaker**, I think it is necessary to indicate to this Honourable House the consistent message from this Government on how this issue is to be handled and to frame the crux of this statement today against that background.

**Mr. Speaker**, Honourable Members will recall that this Session started with the debate on the report of the Security and Defence Review. In the course of opening that debate I indicated to this Honourable House that:

*“ ..... the elimination of conscription will not be done in a haphazard fashion but will be an orderly transition designed to preserve the strength of the Bermuda Regiment without prejudice to the role and responsibility it is required to discharge.”*

Additionally, **Mr. Speaker**, I also advised Honourable Members that:

*“ ..... this change will take time, money and planning and no amount of campaigning to the contrary will make it happen any sooner.”*

**Mr. Speaker**, that debate was on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that in the two, short months since that debate a considerable amount of the required planning has been underway. In consultation with the Commanding Officer, Cabinet has considered a plan which has the potential to shape the Regiment for the future.

**Mr. Speaker**, the move to an all-volunteer force will not be without its challenges and the means by which the Government proposes to mitigate those challenges is through a phased end to conscription working towards the last ballot for recruits in 2015 for 2016's Recruit Camp and a completion of service for those soldiers in 2019.

Achieving the number of volunteers required to maintain “fitness for role” capability will take some investment in enlistment and retention, as well as in advertising and recruiting. Honourable Members should take note that the experience of other affluent countries is to provide significant joining incentives as they are competing with diverse job markets and opportunities. **Mr. Speaker**, our

aim will be to provide funding for the Regiment to allow it to have some ability to provide incentives such as a joining bonus.

We will also aim to provide the resources for a dedicated member of staff to handle the full ambit of recruitment of volunteers. A significant part of this role will be to develop a system of enhanced benefits for soldiers in volunteer service to including expanding the current discounts for local goods, wider employability and incentives for recruiters themselves. These and other proposals will continue to be developed.

**Mr. Speaker,** the fulfillment of our principled pledge to eliminate conscription must be tempered by the realities of life in modern Bermuda. The demographics of our Island indicate that the pool of individuals from which we would ideally seek to draw volunteers in this context is small. In spite of this economy there is still competition for reliable, keen employees.

**Mr. Speaker,** I have stated on numerous occasions and I will reiterate the position again: This Government will not eliminate conscription in a manner that leaves the Regiment unable to fulfill their mission.

As I indicated during the debate on the Report of the Security & Defence Review Committee:

*“Mr. Speaker, I will introduce into this House amendments to the Defence Act 1965 to provide for the end of conscription but with a Commencement Notice which will permit the Minister responsible for the Regiment to bring the provisions into force at the appropriate time.”*

**Mr. Speaker,** Honourable Members will recall that an amended Defence Act was tabled in this Honourable House in November 2012 just prior to the General Election. That Bill will be further refined to take account of these proposals to eliminate conscription. The new Bill will retain those provisions that introduce a disciplinary system that is fully compliant with the European Convention on Human Rights. Further to changes recommended as part of a 2010 legal review of the Regiment's Standing Orders, the Bill will also do the following:

1. Remove confusing and gender-biased terminology
2. Remove references to the repealed UK Army Act 1955 and where necessary replace it with reference to the UK's Armed Forces Act 2006
3. Give all those charged with a military offence the right to elect for trial by a court of summary jurisdiction instead of a hearing with the Commanding Officer; and
4. Regularize the fines and punishments to be imposed in the event of disciplinary hearings.

**Mr. Speaker,** these changes provide a modernized disciplinary process and an important legislative platform for an eventual all volunteer Regiment.

**Mr. Speaker,** as the Commanding Officer indicated in his interview carried in Wednesday's Royal Gazette, it is this Government's policy to transfer the Regiment to a volunteer force and he is working hard to make that happen. I am grateful for the careful planning and regular updates provided by the Commanding Officer and I have also found useful the views and advice of the Defence Board and its Chairman Mr. Wendall Hollis. While we approach this issue from different sides, I

am confident that working together the Regiment will go from strength to strength as we implement these changes.

**Mr. Speaker**, let me say in closing that one area of potential expansion for the Regiment, which has been mentioned over several years, is the inshore maritime patrolling responsibility.

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the skill of those members of the Regiment's Boat Troop as they trained and rehearsed drills in the area of the Great Sound. **Mr. Speaker**, during this season of increased boating and water related activity, the people of Bermuda will see The Regiment hard at work alongside the Bermuda Police Service providing support in this maritime role. This practical engagement will provide the support for a fuller, written Brief that I expect to receive from the Commanding Officer on how we can make the assumption of the inshore maritime role by the Regiment a working reality.

**Mr. Speaker**, this statement today is the forerunner to substantive legislation which will be tabled on our return in the next Session and at that time, I look forward to the support of Honourable Members as we shape the Bermuda Regiment for the future.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker.**