

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT. HON.
SIR ROBERT MENZIES, K.T., C.H., Q.C., M.P.,
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WEDNESDAY, 18TH AUGUST, 1965

I wish to inform the House of two decisions concerning defence which have been taken by the Government.

The first has to do with the strength of the Australian forces in Viet Nam. The Government has decided to provide support units to the Army battalion there to make it up to what is known as a Battalion Group. The support units, which involve about 350 troops, include artillery, engineer, armour, signal, light aircraft and logistic elements.

Honourable members will have a full opportunity in the External Affairs debate which begins this evening to discuss the general situation in Viet Nam. All I wish to say at this time is that in recent months open aggression against the people and Government of South Viet Nam, instigated and sustained from the North, has continued to grow. U.S. assistance to South Viet Nam is being increased by the introduction of substantial additional forces whose purpose is to prevent a communist military victory in that country. It is important that the efforts of the South Vietnamese Government and the large contribution of the U.S. Government should be supplemented by assistance from other countries. At the same time, every political effort continues to be made to bring the issues in South Viet Nam to international discussion. It is our conviction that all these actions give the best prospect of opening the way ultimately to peace in South Viet Nam.

The second decision taken by the Government concerns the size of the National Service intake. The intakes of National Servicemen will be retained at 2,100 each quarter in 1966 (that is, a total of 8,400 during the year) instead of reducing them to 1,725 each quarter (6,900 during the year) as previously planned. The maintenance of the annual intake at the higher level of 8,400 will result in an Army strength of 40,000 in 1967 instead of the previous figure of 37,500.

The Government's decision has been taken in the light of the successful introduction of the National Service Scheme and bearing in mind all the various commitments, at home and abroad, which our forces might be required to undertake. It is a continuation of the Government's policy of taking measures as appropriate which will lead to a steady improvement in our defence capability.
