



PRIME MINISTER

147/92

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON PJ KEATING MP

COMMITMENT OF AUSTRALIAN FORCES TO SOMALIA

The Government has decided today to provide a large-scale commitment of Australian forces to the United Nations mandated Operation Restore Hope in Somalia.

Tragic famine and clan warfare in Somalia have taken the lives of an estimated quarter of a million Somalis and two million more are immediately at risk of starvation.

The extent and severity of the famine has been horribly compounded by the total collapse of law and order. Predatory bands of gunmen have preyed upon aid shipments for private gain in a way that the entire international community has found repugnant.

In this appalling situation Australian and other international Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have shown great courage and compassion, struggling against frightening odds to get food and medicine to the suffering and the starving.

Australians have been rightly proud of the efforts of these groups. The Australian public have privately donated an estimated \$11 million to the relief effort in Somalia, and the Government has added \$8.5 million in this calendar year.

In this situation, the United Nations has tried to facilitate the delivery of aid. It created UNOSOM as a peacekeeping operation.

But UNOSOM was slow to get underway and was not structured adequately to deal with the problems it faced. Somalis continued to die.

That is why we welcomed President Bush's action in offering to provide substantial US troops to a new coalition of forces that would try to enforce the peace in Somalia, not simply keep it.

Operation Restore Hope is a unique operation. The United Nations has never before sanctioned intervention on such a scale in the internal affairs of a member state, for humanitarian purposes.

It is important that Operation Restore Hope succeed, both for the people of Somalia and to show that after the Cold War, the international community can cooperate to relieve suffering.

The Australian Government has decided therefore to provide an infantry battalion group of about 900, including a reduced squadron of armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and associated administrative support. Initial elements of the battalion group will leave Australia before Christmas. The others will arrive in Somalia by about 10 January 1993.

The battalion group will be provided in the timeframe required by the coalition of forces to enable it to make a worthwhile contribution to the overall operation. The estimated additional cost of sending a battalion group to Operation Restore Hope will be \$19.5 million.

The battalion will be in Somalia for 17 weeks, after which it will be withdrawn.

We will then expand the size of the Movement Control Unit (MCU) which we have already committed to the follow-up UNOSOM operation from 30 to 45 personnel.

The contribution of about 900 personnel will be the largest commitment of Australian ground forces overseas in the last 20 years.

With our already substantial commitment in Cambodia, this places limitations on Australia's scope to participate in further peacekeeping efforts in the near future. But Australia is proud to take its place as part of this coalition to enforce and keep a just and humanitarian peace.

My thoughts and those of the Government and Australian people are also with the men and women of our battalion group as they prepare for a very different January from the traditional Australian summer holiday period.

We wish them every success in their task and look forward to welcoming them home safely to Australia at the end of their deployment.

CANBERRA - 15 December 1992