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Defence Leaders Commit to Reducing Sexual Violence

Scoop

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Over 100 of the New Zealand Defence Force's (NZDF) most senior military and civilian leaders have committed to reducing inappropriate and unwanted sexual behaviour in our military.

The senior leaders' symposium was held in Wellington on Monday and was led by the Chief of the Defence Force, Lieutenant General (LTGEN) Tim Keating. The symposium was the first significant step in delivering Operation Respect – the NZDF's recently launched action plan for combatting sexual violence and inappropriate behaviour.

A range of expert speakers from the New Zealand Police, as well as those in the field of sexual violence gave presentations to help NZDF leaders better understand these issues.

"This is an area where we've stood up as an organisation and acknowledged we've got an issue to deal with and some hard work to do," says LTGEN Keating.

"We want to stamp out harmful sexual behaviours and that has to start with us as leaders being very clear about the standards we expect at every level of our Defence Force. Our strength as a Defence Force has always been built by the strong bond of comradeship and trust that exists between our people. Any threat to those bonds will be dealt with swiftly.

"As a leadership group we heard from experts that even things some people may consider minor such as inappropriate sexual jokes create the permission for this behaviour to be normalised.

"Leaders agreed that we needed to effectively recalibrate our tolerance and set a new and higher standard for our Defence Force going forward.

"We reinforced our commitment to firmly dealing with any activity that was inconsistent with our values, enforcing the higher standard we expect of ourselves and what is expected of us by the wider community," says LTGEN Keating.

The next steps in the Operation Respect action plan call on leaders to develop strategies for their individual work areas within the NZDF. From late May and through June they will lead 'town hall' style meetings at every military camp and base in New Zealand where all members of the NZDF will be introduced to the new expectations as part of Operation Respect. Shortly after, new training modules will begin that will be permanently built into NZDF career and promotion courses.