Interview with

David Pratt: Minister of National Defence

1. Whenever national identity is considered, the armed forces come to mind. Canada has positioned itself since the 1960's as multi-lateralist and as peacekeepers. Does the diversity of the Canadian population contribute to our ability to act as peacekeepers?

We know that Canadians regard diversity as one of our core values. As a national institution, the Canadian Forces strives to reflect Canada's cultural, ethnic and linguistic makeup, as well as its regional diversity. And Canadians can be confident that the men and women who serve in their armed forces—regardless of race, religion, or culture—share the goal of protecting Canada and its interests and values, while contributing to peace and security around the world.

As the Prime Minister recently said, Canada is well positioned to assume an important role in the world due to our international reputation and our cultural diversity. Our military operations in Afghanistan and Haiti are recent examples of our basic commitment to human rights and human security. Everywhere and every time our Canadian Forces are deployed abroad they touch the lives of the people they encounter.

Peace support missions—and by this I mean the full spectrum, from peacekeeping to peacemaking—are all about providing security and stability where there might otherwise be none. In unstable and war-torn regions, no higher progress is even possible if you can't provide basic human security. In part, we can achieve this by sharing Canadian values, including our respect for diversity, with local populations. In addition, we are working closely with our colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency as part of the government's 3D approach to international affairs—the three Ds being defence, diplomacy and development. In so doing we hope to foster new traditions of peaceful and democratic conflict resolution wherever our forces are deployed throughout the world.

2. Military service is considered an excellent means to contribute to a sense of national solidarity. Indeed, like the education system, in many nations it is one of the key engines of integration. How do the armed forces contribute to a cohesive and inclusive national identity in Canada?

The Canadian Forces are one of Canada's most important and most recognized national institutions. Canadians look to the Canadian Forces as a powerful symbol of security, stability, and reliability. I believe the respect that Canadians have for the Forces is well-placed when you look at the kind of work our military does every day, from guarding our domestic security, to responding to natural disasters within our borders, to being placed directly in harm's way defending Canadian beliefs and values far from home.

Our diversity remains a source of strength and creativity, and continues to play a central role in making the Canadian Forces a modern and forward-looking organization. From coast to coast to coast the Canadian Forces reflect Canada's considerable cultural variety, drawing on members' diverse backgrounds for the ideas, experiences and skills that will benefit all.

The Reserve Force is a concrete example: located in communities across Canada, the Reserves draw on the diverse cultural fabric of the country, further strengthening the partnership between ordinary Canadians and the Canadian Forces, which in turn helps to reinforce our national identity.

3. Recruitment is often a challenge for the armed forces and as a result recruitment drives tend to target traditional groups. How does DND seek to recruit from all Canadian communities?

We are committed to ensuring that the Canadian Forces is seen as a rewarding career choice for all qualified Canadian citizens.

We have made significant strides in our recruitment efforts. For several years now, we have been very active in seeking recruits outside of our traditional recruitment pool. For example, we actively recruit from designated groups, including Aboriginal Peoples, members of visible minorities and women.

To reach these diverse communities we are actively seeking Canadian Forces members from all ethnic and cultural groups to serve as recruiters. We are networking with community leaders and we are taking part in outreach events to reach members of these groups. In addition, we have opened more recruitment offices accessible to rural Canadians

The Canadian Forces strives to be an employer of choice that offers equal opportunity to all and embraces and promotes diversity. We are making every effort to create an inclusive workplace.

4. In the wake of some unfortunate incidents in the late 1990s, what has DND done to ensure that it counters racism, harassment and discrimination?

We simply don't tolerate racist attitudes or any type of harassment or discrimination. Any recruit who is unable or unwilling to comply with our policies on racism and harassment is not welcome and will not be enrolled. Any conduct by Canadian Forces members that violates these rules will result in disciplinary action, which can include being released from the Canadian Forces.

Still, we're not just punishing offenders here: we're taking positive action as well. Recent changes to harassment policy have shifted the emphasis to prevention and early resolution, and have brought military and civilian personnel under the same policy.

We've made harassment awareness training part of every Canadian Forces member's training and every unit has a harassment advisor to carry out awareness and prevention activities and to advise commanding officers and managers.

Like any other type of change, this is a work in progress: we will continue to strive toward eliminating racism, harassment, and discrimination in the Canadian Forces and National Defence.

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