



NEW ZEALAND'S AFGHAN MISSION

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New Zealand's decade-long military contribution to Bamiyan province, Afghanistan, officially came to an end at a ceremony at Kiwi Base, Bamian town, on 3 April 2013.

The New Zealand flag was lowered for the final time by the 21st and last rotation of New Zealand Defence Force personnel to serve with the New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team (NZPRT).

Among those attending the ceremony were Governor-General of New Zealand Lieutenant General Sir Jerry Mateparae, Defence Minister Jonathan Coleman, Chief of Defence Force Lieutenant General Rhys Jones and New Zealand Police Commissioner Peter Marshall.

Lieutenant General Jones said the NZPRT had made a substantial contribution to security and development in Bamiyan province in the past decade.

"New Zealand is leaving a lasting legacy in Bamiyan province. As a result of the security that the NZPRT has provided, significant progress has been made," he said.

"The impact of our development projects in the past 10 years is considerable. It is clearly visible in the classrooms built, the hospitals refurbished, the villages with water supplied, the sealed roads, bridges and flood protection that have been constructed.

"Bamiyan remains one of the more secure provinces in Afghanistan.

"The Defence Force's active engagement with the local population and our strong relationship with key leaders, coupled with development projects and community involvement, has helped to minimise influence from insurgents."

Lieutenant Colonel Sholto Stephens, Senior Military Adviser to the NZPRT and Commanding Officer of CRIB 21, said it had been a privilege to serve on New Zealand's final rotation.

"The last contingent has been focused on building the capacity of Afghan National Security Forces through mentoring and training, and also helping to prepare

Bamiyan for the PRT's withdrawal," Lieutenant Colonel Stephens said.

"The Afghan National Security Forces and the provincial government in Bamiyan have been carrying out their role and demonstrating their capability for some time. It is the right time for the PRT to withdraw.

"Bamiyan continues to face some challenges – ensuring security is maintained, particularly in the north-east, and that development progress continues. It is for Afghans in Bamiyan to take forward their future."

More than 3500 NZDF personnel have deployed to Afghanistan since late 2001, with the majority serving in Bamiyan with the NZPRT.

Tragically, however, 10 New Zealand soldiers were lost.

During the final flag-lowering ceremony, a new memorial was unveiled to commemorate the eight Kiwi soldiers and the 23 men from the Afghan National Security Forces who died in Bamiyan province.

Lieutenant General Jones said New Zealand should be very proud of the work that its defence-force men and women had achieved in Afghanistan, particularly in Bamiyan.

"It has, however, come at a price, and 10 of our soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in the service of others.

"We will always remember them, and our thoughts remain with their families and friends as they continue to mourn their loved ones.

"Today we unveiled a new memorial which we leave behind as a lasting tribute to our soldiers who died in Bamiyan."

Lieutenant Tim O'Donnell, Private Kirifi Mila, Corporal Douglas Hughes, Lance Corporal Pralli Durrer, Lance Corporal Rory Malone, Corporal Luke Tamatea, Lance Corporal Jacinda Baker and Private Richard Harris were killed in Bamiyan province, while Corporal Douglas Grant and Lance Corporal Leon Smith lost their lives in Kabul.

The new memorial was funded by the NZPRT, constructed by locally employed civilians and engraved in Bamian.

It is located at the Provincial Operational Co-ordination Centre from where Afghan National Police, National Directorate of Security, and Afghan National Army personnel operate.

The old memorial from Kiwi Base was blessed and removed to Dubai, and will eventually be returned to New Zealand.

