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Chief of the Defence Force

Opening Statement  
Senate Estimates Hearing  
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Good morning Chairman and Senators.

Last week I met with more than twenty senior military leaders from the international coalition to discuss ongoing coalition operations in Iraq. Collectively, we agree that effective action against Daesh or ISIL requires strong cooperation between international partners. To this end, the coalition strategy focuses on a range of objectives from denying Daesh safe havens and building partner capacity to supporting effective governance in Iraq and disrupting the flow of money and fighters to Daesh.

Since air operations began last August, the international coalition has assisted Iraqi and Kurdish forces to reclaim 700 - 800 square kilometres of previously occupied territory and restricted Daesh's freedom of movement - forcing the terrorists to become increasingly more defensive. As a result, Daesh has had to modify its behaviour. Their leadership hides. They've changed the way they communicate and they are building defensive positions. All this on top of a huge strategic defeat at Kobane in Syria. Adding to this, Daesh are sending raw, unskilled recruits into the fight and they're enlisting children to carry out their deadly, depraved work.

However, despite the success thus far in Iraq, there remains a long way to go. Through Operation OKRA, we are working to improve the security of the people of Iraq and also helping stop the spread of violent extremism to Australia and our own region. However, the intense interest on operations there should not overshadow the ADF's ongoing work in Afghanistan.

On December 31st last year, the international mission in Afghanistan formally moved from combat operations to a train, advise and assist mission. In real terms, that means Afghan National Security Forces are now fully responsible for security across the nation. This is a significant achievement for the ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces) and I congratulate them. This will be a critical year for Afghanistan as the ANSF test their ability to maintain security without foreign combat troops. I accept there will be challenges, but the early signs are encouraging and the international community will continue to support the Afghans through the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission.

Resolute Support has three simultaneous lines of effort; to train, advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces, to provide ongoing financial assistance, and to develop long term partnerships. These key actions are designed to support institutional development in areas like management, logistics and manning to ensure the progress achieved over the past 13 years is both sustainable and enduring.

There are currently around 400 ADF personnel contributing to this important work in Afghanistan. There is a genuine appreciation for the work we have done, and continue

to do for the people of Afghanistan. They recognise their country's future is in their hands. I know there is still a long way to go, but the trends are positive.

The important work we are undertaking in the Middle East Region also includes our maritime contribution under Operation MANITOU. A number of Royal Australian Navy personnel are currently deployed in key positions in the headquarters of Combined Task Force 150. They are working alongside HMAS *Success* and her crew to promote maritime security. *Success* is actively patrolling some of the Middle East Region's busiest waterways where she has demonstrated her flexibility - providing logistics support as well as performing a maritime security function. It would not be out of the ordinary for *Success* to conduct a resupply or fuel transfer to a ship in the morning then board a suspect vessel in the afternoon. In addition to her primary role as a replenishment oilier, *Success* recently boarded four suspicious vessels in a 60 hour period.

So Senators while we currently have more than 1600 ADF personnel deployed on these operations in the Middle East Region, we are always mindful of our significant responsibilities here at home and, as we have seen over the past week, we are ready to assist Australians when disaster strikes as it did in the Northern Territory and Queensland late last week.

As soon as conditions allowed, Air Force deployed a King Air and an AP-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft to conduct a damage assessment over Queensland in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Marcia Rockhampton based soldiers from the Army Reserve's 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, then moved in to help start the clean up on Saturday.

The ADF also deployed an Emergency Support Force to Queensland's worst hit areas in Yeppoon, Rockhampton and Mt Morgan. The Engineer elements from Townsville's 3rd Brigade are working with Queensland State Emergency Service personnel, emergency management officials and local council personnel to restore essential services. Their work has focussed on aged care facilities and schools in those areas.

These men and women have done a fantastic job - having driven 800km from Townsville, they have worked tirelessly from dawn to dusk every day to support the local community.

Following Cyclone Lam in the Northern Territory, Defence assisted Emergency Management Australia to assess temporary accommodation requirements for around 300 residents on Elcho Island [also known as Galiwinku] and we stand ready, as always, to provide further support to the State and Territory Government relief efforts if requested. As we sit here, an Air Force C-17 is positioning to transport tents from Sydney to Darwin to help support them.

Our ability to conduct these important activities at home while still maintaining our international commitments is a testament to the ADF's agility and, most importantly, the skill and compassion of our men and women in uniform.

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