



Irish Defence Forces  
Veterans Association  
(I.D.F.V.A)  
16/03/2021

## **Submission to the Commission on the Defence Forces**

### **Introduction**

The Irish Defence Forces Veterans Association (IDFVA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Commission. By the way of a background, the IDFVA, founded in 2012, is the **only** national veterans association comprising of **only** veterans and representing **all** veterans of the Irish Defence Forces regardless of Unit, Regiment, Battalion or Formation served. Nationally the IDFVA comprises of over 1,200 members of other Veterans Associations and none. Members are primarily based in Ireland but include members based in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and various European nations.

### **WVF**

The IDFVA is a member of and the Irish representative branch of the World Veterans Federation (<http://www.wvf-fmac.org/>). The WVF is now a Federation of 172 veteran organizations from 121 countries representing some **45 million veterans worldwide** and retains a consultative status with the United Nations since 1951. It was conferred the title of "Peace Messenger" in 1987. The WVF's vision is to be at the forefront of promoting and defending international peace and security and to be proactive in ensuring the health and wellbeing of all veterans and victims of war worldwide; to guide and advise Member Associations so that they can take the lead in supporting initiatives that foster peace and security and to campaign for health and welfare initiatives that will enhance the wellbeing and independence of their members.

In line with our membership of the WVF, the IDFVA also has fraternal relations with the following veterans' associations and organisations

### **NIOVA**

The Norwegian Veterans' Association for International Operations (NIOVA), founded in 1961, is an organisation of Norwegian veterans of international military operations, under the command of United Nations and NATO. Membership exceeds 7,200, and it is the largest organisation for veterans in Norway

While serving overseas Irish Soldiers have served alongside Norwegians Forces. This link has resulted in the NIOVA travel visiting Ireland to participate in events with the

IDFVA. On two occasions NIOVA representatives attended the IDFVA Veterans Awards in Leinster as guests of honour. The IDFVA have also travelled, as part of our exchange programme, to Kristiansand in Norway. Unfortunately, Covid has prevented further mutual visits.

## **RBL**

Royal British Legion consisting of 235,000 members internationally. Our connection with the RBL developed out of joint military service in Cyprus and Kosovo. In 2018 and 2019 the RBL and other international veterans participated alongside the IDFVA in the Annual St Patricks Day Parade in Dublin. This was a significant event for the IDFVA as it represented the first time that international veterans participated in the parade. In 2019, the parade group of 130 veterans was led by Senator Gerard Craughwell who is both a member of the IDFVA and the now President of the Irish Branch of the RBL.

## **AL**

American Legion (Post IR-01) is part of the American Legion Worldwide. Their Irish Branch Vice Chairperson, Michael Collins, is a member of the IDFVA. The Legion has also participated at some of our events including visits to the Mansion House to meet the Lord Mayor of Dublin and to Áras an Uachtaráin to meet President Higgins.

The strong links forged between the IDFVA and other international Veterans Associations has proved to be beneficial in gaining an understanding of how the Defence Forces veterans are perceived and treated both in Ireland and in other jurisdictions.

## **The Role of the Defence Forces**

In Ireland the primary role of the Defence Forces is:

- To defend the State against armed and other forms of threat or aggression
- To assist An Garda Síochána and the civil authorities when requested
- To participate in peacekeeping missions in support of the UN or other international organisations
- To provide ceremonial services on behalf of the Government.

In doing so, they sacrifice some civilian freedoms, face danger and have suffered serious injury and death in serving the State and its citizens. Members of the Irish Defence Forces remain the only individuals who swear an oath of Allegiance to Ireland and the Constitution. As they are our 'citizens in uniform' they are subject not only to the civil and criminal laws that apply to all but also to Military Law within a 'command and control' environment. They deserve to be paid a decent wage and have better conditions of employment but more than that, they deserve to be treated with dignity and respect by the State and its citizens.

## **Defence Forces Veterans**

In Ireland, veterans are often the public face of the Defence Forces as generally most DF activity takes place behind barrack walls or outside of the public eye (Covid excepted). However, the veterans operate in public whether that be through their involvement in charitable activities, commemorative events, and parades. It is through their activities within the community, the sharing of their service and telling of their tales that the story of the Defence Forces is told. Often, their efforts are what encourage young men and women from within their communities to join the Defence Forces. Indeed, it could be argued that veterans are one of the strongest recruitment tools for the Defence Forces.

Unfortunately, in Ireland veterans are respected within their communities but not by the state itself. Indeed, the White Paper on Defence, specifically sets out to divide veterans by only recognising 2 veteran's groups. All veterans' associations deserve to be recognised and engaged with by the State. This requires a change to the current provisions in the White Paper on Defence which is considered by many veterans to be divisive and biased in terms of its treatment of veterans.

## **Retention and Recruitment**

As stated, the actions of veterans contribute significantly to the recruitment of young men and women to the Defence Forces. Retaining these recruits is a multi-faceted matter. Clearly, pay and conditions are key and no doubt the Commission will receive numerous submissions on that matter. But the decision to join and remain with the Defence Forces often goes beyond pay and conditions. Often it is the sense of pride and duty in serving one's country or participating in international peace keeping duties, etc that is a strong driving force in making an individual remain in the organisation.

The IDFVA, from its members dealings with both those we served with during our international missions and dealings with international veteran's associations, have discovered that in many countries, one of the key reasons for deciding to join the military is the recognition and respect given by civil society and the State for those who serve. This recognition and respect take many forms, but one common element is that in these countries' veterans are recognised by way of the law or a social contract/veteran's contract. In these countries, serving members of the military know that notwithstanding pay rates, they are held in high regard within civil society but beyond that, they know that when they retire from the military that they will be provided with the necessary assistance to move from the uniqueness of military life and all that such life entails into civilian life. Further, they know that because of the State's public treatment of their service that the public are also engaged in the public recognition of their service to their country.

In Ireland, we have no such State or public recognition (of course we do have recognition from some elements of the public but as often as not the public/media commentators have asked 'why do we need an army?'). Indeed, the State itself has ensured that the Defence Forces rarely parade in public and declined to allow the Defence Forces commemorate the centenary of its foundation in 2013. If there is limited or no regard by the State for its Defence Forces, we cannot expect the public to respect and value them for their service and duty to the country.

For that reason, the IDFVA believes that the Commission, in considering the future of the Irish Defence Forces must look at not only its role in the security of the nation but

its role within wider Irish society and how it can become a role within society that is respected and valued. One with a social contract with society.

The IDFVA believe that part of that social contract requires the implementation of a Veterans Charter which provides a public acknowledgement and respect for the onerous duty and service given by members of the Defence Forces, just as it is in other countries. Military duty and service is different to any other job in society. This needs to be accepted and rewarded and acknowledged. One of the ways it can be rewarded and acknowledged is for serving members to know that when their duty is done, they will be recognised by a State backed Veterans Charter. The existence of such a Charter, underpins their service and can act as a strong motivational tool to continue serving their country as they know their service is valued in later life when they retire.

The IDFVA have drafted such a Charter (copy attached). It has been provided to members of Government, the Oireachtas and other veterans associations. We believe, such a Charter along with the role played by veterans in Ireland should be considered by the Commission as vital tools available when considering the future of the Defence Forces and in particular the difficulties that have existed for many years in respect of recruitment and retention.

For the information of the Commission and to provide a context to this submission, the issue of Veterans is dealt with in The Handbook on human Rights and fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel – published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) 2008 (copy extract attached).

Yours sincerely



**Declan Sheridan**  
**President**  
**Irish Defence forces Veterans Association**

#### Attached Documents

1. Veterans Charter
2. Extract from the Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel  
Published by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) 2008
3. Support :Respect and loyalty  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=i8PQXssvDt4&feature=share>

## **Chapter 18** **pages 188-201**

### **Veterans**

Whereas nearly all chapters in this handbook deal with the human rights of personnel when they are serving in the armed forces, this chapter focuses on personnel who have left the armed forces. It addresses the rights of veterans as a sub-group of former servicemen and -women (while acknowledging that in some states veterans can still be in service). Depending on their historic and cultural backgrounds, various OSCE participating States define veterans differently, which has consequences in terms of the number of veterans who are entitled to benefit packages, as well as the type of benefits they may receive.

The key question of this chapter is: who is a veteran? To answer this question, two points need to be considered: (a) whether personnel served on active duty or as reserve forces. (b) whether armed forces personnel have conflict experience or not. These are important distinctions because the amount and type of benefits for veterans depends on the definition of veterans. The more exclusive the definition of veterans, the more generous the benefits that veterans enjoy. Veterans with conflict experience enjoy more benefits than veterans without such experience (if the latter receive any benefits at all).<sup>432</sup> This chapter first deals with the relevance of veterans for OSCE participating States. Relevant rights are discussed, in particular the social, cultural, and economic rights that apply to veterans and that OSCE participating States have committed to uphold. Examples are provided of national approaches to defining veterans. The chapter also discusses the major elements of veteran's policies by answering the following questions: Who receives support? Who delivers support? What type of support? How can the transition from military to civilian life be facilitated? The chapter concludes with policy recommendations.

#### **1. Issues at Stake**

An important feature of civilian-military relations is how states recognize the sacrifices that armed forces personnel have made for their country and how states provide care and support to armed forces personnel and their families once they have left the military.<sup>433</sup> State support for, and societal recognition of, veterans are evidence of national solidarity, as well as of the values that a society stands for. They also show an intergenerational bond with those who have made sacrifices for future generations.

While states have at least a moral obligation to establish policies for veterans because of the sacrifices they have made, there are also other pressing reasons for doing so.

##### *Duty of care*

As a responsible employer, the armed forces have the duty of care for their current and former employees. While on duty, particularly in war or war-like circumstances, armed forces personnel are often subjected to dangerous and life-threatening situations. Many veterans often suffer the consequences of their service even after they have left the armed forces.<sup>432</sup> Christopher Dandeker, Simon Wessely, Amy Iversen, and John Ross, "What's in a Name? Defining and Caring for 'Veterans': The United Kingdom in International Perspective", *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 32, No. 2, January 2006, pp. 161-177.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*

*Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel* 189 f Armed Forces Personnel forces, experiencing, for example, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical health problems, and disabilities. States have a moral duty, if not a legal obligation, to take care of veterans.

### *A proper veterans policy supports recruitment and retention*

It is in the interest of the armed forces as an employer to take care of veterans, as improved **services for veterans can be seen as a recruitment incentive as well**. In addition, providing improved benefits for veterans' signals to current and future armed forces personnel that the armed forces are a responsible employer. On the other hand, negative publicity about the poor treatment of veterans could deter potential future recruits from signing up for the armed forces. It could also lead to dissatisfaction among those serving in the armed forces, especially those who are about to return to civilian life, as well as among those who have already left the armed forces.<sup>434</sup>

### *Care for veterans supports a broader social agenda*

It can be argued that specific military social policies serve broader social objectives. Helping veterans, especially those who are vulnerable or homeless, also contributes to a broader agenda of tackling social exclusion.

### *Transition from military to civilian life*

As is the case with other (non-veteran) former servicemen and -women, it is in the interest of society in general, the armed forces, and the individuals concerned that special measures be taken so that (especially young) veterans are in a position to have a successful career as civilians. This is important not only to individual servicemen or -women, but also, to the armed forces as an employer. If job seekers see that armed forces have an active policy in place for former servicemen and -women, they may be more interested in working for the armed forces. In the same way, such a policy also reassures current armed forces personnel.

### *Veterans in post-conflict situations*

The concept of *veteran* has a special meaning in post-conflict states. Unfortunately, some OSCE participating States have experienced war, e.g., the countries of the western Balkans. Since the end of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, all western Balkan states have entered a phase of downsizing and restructuring their armed forces. In the countries involved, each warring party brought many men to arms who became redundant after peace agreements were reached. Though each country faces different challenges, they have all laid off armed forces personnel. Not all veterans have the needed expertise and qualifications to succeed in civilian life. Without a proper demobilization programme, the armed forces of the parties involved become financially unsustainable. Without proper veterans' programmes, many former soldiers will be poorly reintegrated into society, if at all.

## **2. International Human Rights Commitments**

Like other citizens, veterans are entitled to social and economic rights. In this respect, all OSCE participating States have made commitments that apply to veterans. For example, states have committed themselves "to promote and encourage the effective exercise of ... economic [and] social ... rights".<sup>435</sup> To this effect, states are obliged to "develop their laws, regulations and policies in the field of economic, social, and other human rights and fundamental freedoms and put them into practice in order to guarantee the effective exercise of

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 167 and 169.

<sup>435</sup> Helsinki 1975, Principle VII, para. 2.

*Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1990 of Armed Forces Personnel* these rights and freedoms".<sup>436</sup> In this context, states "will pay special attention to problems in the areas of employment, housing, social security [and] health".<sup>437</sup> OSCE participating States have also promised that the exercise of these rights "will be not subject to any restriction except those which are provided for by law and are consistent with their international obligations under international law".<sup>438</sup> Last but not least, participating States have also committed themselves to "ensure that these restrictions are not abused and are not applied in an arbitrary manner".<sup>439</sup>

How do these rights apply to veterans? Like other citizens, veterans have the right to proper health treatment, housing, employment, and social security. Of course, it has to be underlined that these social and economic rights differ to a certain extent from political and

civil rights in that the former are an end to be achieved and aspired to. Civil and political rights, on the other hand, have to be applied immediately and fully. Another difference is that social and economic rights require policies and measures for their implementation on the national level, whereas political and civil rights require legal action at the national level. For this reason, an OSCE commitment in the sphere of social and economic rights does not automatically constitute a right at the national level unless a state has adopted such a right in national legislation. In addition, a general prohibition of discrimination applies to veterans' policies in terms of their enjoyment of social and economic rights. A state cannot exclude or favour one group of veterans over another group of veterans on the basis of gender, ethnicity, language, social origin, association with a national minority, or political or other opinion.

Another important right that applies equally to veterans is the right to a fair trial. If veterans have disputes with their government over their treatment, they should have access to the justice system.

### **3. Who Is a Veteran? – Different National Approaches**

There is no definitive answer to the question "Who is a veteran?" Depending on whether a country has been involved in war with another country, in civil war, or in peacekeeping operations, countries may opt for a different definition of a veteran. It is also a matter of a country's tradition of commemorating previous involvement in wars and conflicts. Box 18.1 gives an overview of approaches to veterans in selected OSCE participating States.

#### *All former servicemen and -women are veterans*

There is a group of OSCE participating States that take a broad approach by defining a veteran as anyone who has served in the armed forces, regardless of whether they were deployed in conflict zones. In the United Kingdom, for example, veterans are all persons who have served for more than a day, as well as their dependants. It has been estimated that the United Kingdom has approximately 10 million former servicemen and -women, widows and widowers, and other dependants; they constitute 16 per cent of the British population.<sup>441</sup> Implementation of the United Kingdom's veteran's policy is administered by the Veterans Agency, whose core functions are to administer the war disablement pension scheme and the armed forces compensation scheme (for compensating any service-related injury, ill health, or death), as well as to provide guidance, advice, and practical help.<sup>442</sup> In addition, veterans may visit battlefields and war cemeteries all over the world at the expense of the state.

Another example is the United States, where all former servicemen and -women are considered to be veterans, provided that they served for at least 90 days and were honourably discharged. In addition, those servicemen who have served in war circumstances, even if only for one day, are recognized as veterans with wartime service. War veterans are eligible for various special benefits. Wartime service can only be gained in a war declared by Congress. In addition, Congress can define a conflict as warlike circumstances, in which case the start and end of the conflict, as well as the geographical area, are precisely defined in legislation enacted by Congress.<sup>443</sup>

In Canada, a veteran is any former member of the Canadian Forces who has been honourably discharged and who has met all the professional military occupational requirements of the Department of National Defence.

What these three countries have in common is that they have a rather broad definition of veterans: everyone who has served is a veteran. However, a veteran has to meet specific criteria in order to benefit from special policies, e.g., disability, illness, or having served in war or warlike circumstances.

#### *Former servicemen with active service deployment*

A second group consists of states where only those former armed forces personnel who have served in wars or in warlike circumstances (e.g., peace operations) are qualified as veterans. This approach has been followed by the Netherlands since 1990, where those soldiers

who fought in World War II, Indonesia (1945-1950), New Guinea (1945-1962), and peace operations (starting with the UN peace operation in Korea 1950-1953) up to Afghanistan in 2006 have been classified as such.<sup>444</sup> Belgium also belongs to this second group of states, where all former servicemen and -women are counted as veterans if they have been deployed in wars, such as World Wars I and II, the Korean War, or hostilities in Congo, as well as in peace operations.<sup>445</sup>

France is another interesting example. Within the Ministry of Defence and under the responsibility of the deputy minister for veterans, two institutions are currently dealing with veteran's policy in France. First, the deputy minister is the chair of the governing board of the National Office for Veterans (ONAC). The ONAC is an independent public body under the auspices of the minister of defence, responsible for protecting the material and moral interests of veterans and war victims. The ONAC's central office is complemented by 100 decentralized services for each French county (*department*). These services are tasked with issuing veterans' cards and entitlements, providing special social services for veterans, providing the wider public with historical information about veterans, providing other specific services to veterans, as well as with maintaining relations between veterans and local administrative agencies. Furthermore, the ONAC maintains retirement homes and training institutes that deal with reintegrating veterans into society.<sup>463</sup> Though the ONAC falls under the responsibility of the minister of defence, it has a separate budget. Second, the 1990-91 Gulf War underlined the need for medical care for so-called new veterans (active personnel who serve in operations other than wars, e.g., UN peacekeeping operations). In this context, France created an agency for monitoring the health of veterans (see Box 18.3).

### Box 18.3

#### France: Monitoring Agency for the Health of Veterans<sup>464</sup>

The French Monitoring Agency for the Health of Veterans (OSV) is in charge of co-ordinating actions and policies aimed at improving medical care for current and former armed forces personnel. It is part of the Directorate for Statutes, Pensions and Social Reintegration under the Secretary General for Administration of the Ministry of Defence.

The OSV has four missions: (1) mapping the occupational risks for armed forces personnel with a view to clarifying possible patterns; (2) supporting the collection of information about the careers of armed forces personnel, as well as participating in the co-ordination of the network of civilian and military institutions providing care; (3) ensuring that health care is provided, notably in the field of emerging pathologies, and initiating relevant epidemiological surveys; (4) providing relevant scientific advice, without substituting the responsibilities of departmental directorates dealing with veterans and military disability pensions.

<sup>464</sup> Decree No. 2004/524 of 10 June 2004 on the establishment of a body to monitor veterans' health (Observatoire de la santé des vétérans), available at <<http://www.admi.net/jo/20040612/DEFD0400560D.html>>.

In a third group of states, e.g., Norway and Finland, care for veterans is entirely the responsibility of a general (not military) ministry dealing with social affairs and health. In these countries, there is no special or exclusive care for veterans, but their interests and needs are addressed by general health- and social-care systems. In this group of states, there is often a special veterans association that represents the interests of veterans, e.g., the Association of Veterans of the Armed Forces (*Hermandad de veteranos de las Fuerzas Armadas*) in Spain, which provides members with support and some financial assistance for volunteer activities.

Veterans associations and not-for-profit private organizations exist in states across the OSCE region. The World Veterans Federation (WVF), an international non-governmental organization, includes 164 veterans' associations in 84 countries all over the world. The



WVF brings together war veterans and victims of war from different conflicts that have occurred since World War II, including veterans of peacekeeping operations.<sup>465</sup> At its 24th General Assembly in Johannesburg, South Africa, in December 2003, the WVF adopted a Declaration on Rights of War Veterans and Victims of War (see

Box 18.4).

#### **Box 18.4**

##### **Art. 6 of the Declaration on Rights of War Veterans and Victims of War<sup>466</sup>**

The World Veterans Federation,

...

6. Calls upon the United Nations Member States to undertake urgent measures providing for:
- o improvement and updating of legislation concerning war veterans and victims of war;
  - o social security, medical care and other relevant benefits;
  - o alleviation of hardships of psycho-social consequences of war and integration of war veterans and victims of war into society;
  - o adequate care for former personnel of peace-keeping and similar operations, before, during and after the mission.

An interesting example of networking care for veterans is given by the Danish practice. Denmark has developed what it calls the partner model, where the government, military associations, and veterans' organizations work closely together in providing support and care to veterans. According to the partner model, the three aforementioned actors are represented in a steering group, chaired by the director of the Personnel Service of the Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, the military and veterans' associations appoint their representatives to the steering group. The steering group co-ordinates the activities of these three actors, which include, among others, family support and a hotline provided by veterans organizations, medical and social support provided by the government, and specific support activities for current and former armed forces personnel provided by military associations. In fact, EUROMIL has recommended the partner model for all of its member countries.<sup>467</sup>

#### *What type of benefits?*

Three types of benefits and support activities can be distinguished. First, benefits consist of material or financial support for veterans, e.g., disability pensions, free or partially subsidized use of public transportation, health care, etc. A second group of benefits addresses the non-material problems of veterans. This can include psychological help, social work, and counselling. This is a very important area, as many veterans are exposed to the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during their deployment in zones of conflict. PTSD is a stress-induced illness with various symptoms, such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and depression. PTSD is not a new illness; it has been diagnosed among veterans of armies involved in conflict or war for a long time. PTSD requires care not only immediately after deployment; it also needs to be addressed before and during deployment. Box 18.5 provides an overview of the recommendations for systematic treatment of PTSD drawn up by the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman.<sup>468</sup>

<sup>465</sup> See the World Veterans Federation website, <<http://perso.orange.fr/fimac/english/default.htm>>.

<sup>466</sup> Declaration on Rights of War Veterans and Victims of War, available at <<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/4db255c28ac256fec1256e660035174a?Opendocument>>.

<sup>467</sup> "Social Protection and Problems related to Veterans ('New Veterans') from International Peace Support Missions", EUROMIL report, 29 October 2005, available at <<http://www.afmp.nl/documenten/euromil/addonnewveterans>>.

### **Box 18.5**

#### **Systematic Treatment of Armed Forces Personnel with PTSD: Recommendations of the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman<sup>469</sup>**

Responding to a complaint by a member of the Canadian Forces with PTSD, the Canadian Ombudsman initiated thorough research into how systematic treatment of PTSD can be improved in the Canadian Forces. To this extent, the Ombudsman drafted 31 recommendations. Some of them are listed below and can be useful for states developing or reviewing their approach to PTSD among current and former armed forces personnel.

The Ombudsman recommended that:

1. The Canadian Forces develop a database that accurately reflects the number of Canadian Forces personnel, including members of both the Regular and Reserve Forces, who are affected by stress-related injuries.
2. The Canadian Forces develop a database on suicides among members and former members.
3. The Canadian Forces conduct an independent and confidential mental health survey that includes former members, as well as Regular and Reserve Components. ...
7. Specific and detailed education and training objectives dealing with PTSD be included in curricula of all Canadian Forces education and training establishments ... .
8. Canadian Forces units be mandated to provide ongoing continuation training about PTSD to all members at regular intervals, in addition to any deployment-related training. ...
11. The Canadian Forces include members or former members who have experience of PTSD in all education and training initiatives relating to PTSD. ...
19. The Canadian Forces audit and assess the effectiveness and procedures designed to assist Reserve Force members and augmentees pre- and post deployment. ...
27. The Canadian Forces take steps to deal with the issue of stress and burnout created by lack of resources and high case-loads among Canadian Forces caregivers.
28. The Canadian Forces take steps to improve support programmes designed for the families of members diagnosed with PTSD, at all elements and locations. ...
30. The Canadian Forces initiate an end-to-end review of the rules dealing with confidentiality of medical information. In the short term, breaches of confidentiality must be dealt with quickly and visibly to re-establish confidence in the Canadian Forces' commitment to protect personal information.
31. The Canadian Forces create the position of PTSD coordinator, reporting directly to the Chief of Defence Staff and responsible for coordinating issues related to PTSD across the Canadian Forces.

"Special Report: Systematic Treatment of CF Members with PTSD", Ottawa, 2001, available at <<http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/rep-rap/sr-rs/pts-ssp/doc/pts-ssp-eng.pdf>>.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid.*

#### *Transition from military to civilian life*

As is the case with other (non-veteran) former servicemen and -women, it is in the interest of society in general, the armed forces, and the individuals concerned that special measures be taken so that (especially young) veterans are in a position to have a successful career as civilians. This is important not only to individual servicemen or -women, but also to the armed forces as an employer. If job seekers see that armed forces have an active policy in place for former servicemen and -women, they may be more interested in working for the armed forces. In the same way, such a policy also reassures current armed forces personnel.

#### *Veterans in post-conflict situations*

The concept of *veteran* has a special meaning in post-conflict states. Unfortunately, some OSCE participating States have experienced war, e.g., the countries of the western Balkans. Since the end of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, all western Balkan states have entered a phase of downsizing and restructuring their armed forces. In the countries involved, each warring party brought many men to arms who became redundant after peace agreements were reached. Though each country faces different challenges, they have all laid off armed

forces personnel. Not all veterans have the needed expertise and qualifications to succeed in civilian life. Without a proper demobilization programme, the armed forces of the parties involved become financially unsustainable. Without proper veterans programmes, many former soldiers will be poorly reintegrated into society, if at all.

## **2. International**

### **5. Best Practices and Recommendations**

- The framework for a veterans policy should be regulated by law in accordance with international obligations, notably OSCE commitments made during the Helsinki 1975 and Vienna 1989 summits;
- Veterans policies need to be based on: (1) societal and official recognition of veterans; (2) effective communication between veterans and care-providing agencies; and (3) effective care meeting the demands and needs of veterans;
- Veterans policies and/or care providers should not discriminate against veterans on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.
- All former servicemen and -women who have been involved in war or warlike circumstances should be included within the definition of *veteran*;
- Veterans should have the opportunity to communicate their wishes, demands, and questions with one point of contact in order to avoid miscommunication and duplications;
- Veterans belonging to vulnerable groups in society, e.g., homeless people and prisoners, need to receive special attention. Special attention is also needed with regard to domestic violence and with regard to the risk of suicide;
- Benefits packages for veterans could include rehabilitation programmes; financial benefits; health care/insurance; job placement (including priority job appointment in civil service); disability awards, as well as other benefits in case of death; a clothing allowance, and financial advice;
- Defence agencies should co-ordinate their veterans policy with, first of all, veterans organizations/associations, as well as with other ministries and local government agencies. Co-ordination should cover the development, implementation, and evaluation of Veterans' policies.