



news release

Date **July 18, 1991**

No. 163

For release

CANADA CONTRIBUTES LARGEST PEACEKEEPING FORCE SINCE 1974 TO UN OPERATION IN THE WESTERN SAHARA

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, and the Minister of National Defence, the Honourable Marcel Masse, today announced that Canada has accepted the formal request of the United Nations Secretary-General to participate in a peacekeeping operation in the Western Sahara.

Canada will contribute a contingent of approximately 740 troops drawn from the Canadian Airborne Regiment, which is based in Petawawa, Ontario. Canada is also providing the force commander, Major-General Armand Roy, for the military component of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in the Western Sahara (MINURSO). This represents the largest peacekeeping commitment Canada has undertaken since the Canadian contingent in Cyprus was augmented during the crisis there in 1974.

"Our decision to contribute such a major force to this UN operation highlights Canada's long-standing commitment toward international peacekeeping," stated Mrs. McDougall.

"Canada is one of the leading nations in the world in terms of numbers of troops serving in international peacekeeping operations," said Mr. Masse. "Canadian Forces participation in MINURSO demonstrates the professionalism and the devotion of our soldiers to serve the cause of peace globally."

The overall MINURSO operation will require approximately 1,700 military personnel from 36 nations including Canada, 300 civilian police and 900 civilian staff. The operation will last until a national referendum is held in early 1992 to determine whether the population of the former Spanish colony of Western Sahara favours independence from or integration with Morocco.

The Canadian troops will begin to deploy later this summer, with the major portion of the contingent, the Canadian Airborne Regiment, moving to the region in the fall.

-30-

Further details about Canada's role in MINURSO and Canadian troops deployment will be made available at a background briefing to be held later this summer at the Canadian Forces Base in Petawawa. The time and date will be announced by the Department of National Defence.

For further information, media representatives may contact:

Media Relations Office
External Affairs and International Trade Canada
(613) 995-1874

or

Media Liaison Office
Department of National Defence
(613) 996-2353