



MINDEF's Reply to SMA

We refer to your request made through Dr Maliki Bin Osman, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Community Relations in Defence, for assistance to mitigate the impact of SAF's call-ups on Operationally Ready National Servicemen (NSmen), who are doctors undergoing the residency programme.

All NSmen are called up based on the SAF's operational and manpower requirements, and NSmen from the same unit are called back for In-Camp Training (ICT) together so that they can train as a cohesive unit. We are unable to defer a specific group of NSmen for an extended period or not issue call-ups for them as it would affect the SAF's operational readiness.

We recognise that National Service requires significant commitment from our servicemen. Currently, MINDEF already exercises flexibility to assist our NSmen in managing their NS and work commitments. SAF commanders are given the discretion to grant deferment to residents who are called up during their residency, subject to unit's training requirement; and the majority of deferment requests from residents have been granted. MINDEF will continue to advise our Unit Commanders to exercise more flexibility in managing NSmen who are doctors undergoing the residency programme. In the event that we are unable to accede to an NSman's deferment request, the Unit Commanders may also grant them time-off to facilitate their work commitments when the training schedule permits.

We have also been in touch with the Ministry of Health (MOH) on this matter. We note that the policy governing the leave of absence from residency training is pertinent in ensuring that the time away due to ICT will not adversely impact residents' clinical training and ability to acquire the clinical competencies within the standard duration of residency training. As NSmen are typically given a three-month and six-month notice for low-key and high-key ICTs respectively, MOH has advised the designated institutional officials to remind residents to give advance notice of their ICTs to their programme directors (PDs) for advance planning. The PDs will avoid placing residents on short rotations during the period of their ICT so that they need not repeat their residency training. We will engage the residents on this issue so that they are aware of the avenues for seeking assistance.

Thank you for sharing your concerns with us, and we look forward to your continued support of National Service.

Ms Aw Wen Ling
for Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Defence

We appreciate the clarifications from MINDEF and the three DIOs, and that the relevant authorities are looking into this matter. SMA would continue to

work closely with the DIOs to iron out any additional queries about leave criteria within the respective organisations' programmes. ◆