

May 15, 2020: Letter from the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) regarding COVID-19

Dear Families and Members of the Canadian Armed Forces,

I write to you this week as we continue to do our part in Canada's concerted efforts to fight the spread of COVID-19. The health of the CAF remains critical and I want to update you on current operations as well as how your CAF plans to operate in a prolonged COVID-19 environment. As the curve continues to flatten and regional discussions have moved towards easing social restrictions, you must continue to follow the measures the CAF has implemented to ensure a healthy force. Follow regional guidelines on social interaction, but do not relax those measures put in place by the CAF. We must remain committed to a healthy force.

Resumption

I have directed the senior leadership of the CAF to plan for the controlled resumption of critical activities with specific measures to allow for continued operations in a COVID-19 environment. What is clear is that CAF readiness must be maintained and not allowed to erode. It is a conditions-based approach. Health and safety are key planning principles. Consideration is also being given to issues such as the ability to carry out family care plans, the availability of daycare centres, the reinstatement of the school year, the availability of public transportation, the lifting of regional movement restrictions, and access to telecommunications and IT infrastructure.

What does this mean for those currently dispersed? As plans are formalized from the strategic to the tactical level, and in the coming weeks, you will begin to have a better understanding of how you will carry out your duties. You may continue to work at home, or work on site, or a mixed approach, all with new safety protocols in place. In the coming weeks plans will be formulated for the resumption of critical activities, with dates and timings to be determined. Plans will be regionally based, conditions-based and continuously reviewed for health and safety. I want you to know that critical activities must resume to ensure the CAF meets its obligations but we will need to work as a whole Defence Team. I ask that you continue to demonstrate your professionalism and patience and that we must collectively look at employing creative opportunities in order to carry on with critical activities.

Take the time now to get ready. Focus on your mental and physical fitness. Make sure your PT regime has prepared you to return to work. If you are not ready, make PT a priority. Get ready now for tasks, if there is any self-directed professional development and education available, now is the time to get the courses done.

Op LASER

Operations continue in support of requests for assistance from provinces and territories. Of note, approximately 1350 to 1400 CAF personnel are committed to the support of 25 long-term care facilities in Quebec. Of this number about 1000 medical and support

personnel are contributing inside the facilities. The remainder are providing essential day-to-day support, such as delivering personal protective equipment and other needed supplies, maintaining liaison with the Province, as well as planning to refine operations to better support the patients of the long-term care facilities.

This is an important and necessary mission and it is not without risks. Some of our CAF personnel working in these facilities have tested positive for COVID-19 while others have been quarantined for assessment. We continue to work to mitigate the threat, employing all the necessary protocols, with advice from our CAF Surgeon General, but the reality is our personnel are working in an environment where the threat is high. To those tasked to assist these facilities, I thank you for your ongoing professionalism and dedication to the mission.

Op REASSURANCE

Under Op REASSURANCE, HMCS FREDERICTON has resumed her duties with NATO's Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) and is currently sailing without an air detachment. Pending RCAF direction on the operational pause of the fleet, a CH-148 Cyclone may be transferred to HMCS FREDERICTON to resume maritime aviation operations, however many factors will be assessed including lifting the operational pause which remains in place for the Cyclone fleet. 337... you inspire us all.

Plans to recover Callsign *Stalker 22*, are well advanced and details will be provided publicly in the coming days. We are committed to making every effort to recover the aircraft and by doing so determine the cause of the accident. We will also remain in close contact with the families and the crew of HMCS FREDERICTON throughout the process, and provide them with the support they need.

Op INSPIRATION

The past week we have seen our Canadian Armed Forces Snowbird demonstration team fly across the eastern portion of Canada as part of Op INSPIRATION. They have now commenced their western leg and can be followed on Twitter @CFSnowbirds for the daily updates of their proposed routes. The fly pasts have been positively received by Canadians and I thank the team for taking on this initiative.

As I close, this weekend is the Victoria Day long weekend. Please enjoy the weekend and continue to follow regional and CAF directives pertaining to what is allowed publicly such as recreational and sports activities. As stated last week, for those assigned to Op LASER, or any other operational function, you are required to continue to abide by my latest directions given as part of Tasking Order Op LASER 20-01 to remain home and remain ready.

Proud to serve you as your CDS.

Stay Fit to Fight!

J.H. Vance
General