

Press Release UK Veterans-One Voice

UK Veterans Press Release - For release 0600 22nd January 2016

Received notification of Statement from Number 10 Downing Street LONDON
0600 Friday 22nd January 2016 as follows:

UK Veterans One Voice is delighted to receive notification of the statement released today as follows:

The Prime Minister has ordered a major crackdown on abuse by lawyers pursuing soldiers through the courts for simply serving their country and doing their jobs on operations overseas. This follows the manifesto commitment to ensure that the Armed Forces are not subject to persistent legal claims that stop them from doing their job.

The Prime Minister said: "It's clear that there is now an industry trying to profit from spurious claims lodged against our brave servicemen and women.

"It's unacceptable and no way to treat the people who risk their lives to keep our country safe.

"It has got to end.

"So I have tasked the National Security Council that I chair to produce a comprehensive plan to stamp out this industry.

"Our armed forces are rightly held to the highest standards - but I want our troops to know that when they get home from action overseas this Government will protect them from being hounded by lawyers over claims that are totally without foundation"

It is understood that NSC Ministers have been tasked with pursuing all options that will cut off the money that firms make from spurious claims, including:

Clamping down on schemes used by law firms to make money in these cases - known as Conditional Fee ('no win, no fee') Agreements - and the costs that can be awarded through these arrangements so that there simply isn't the financial incentive to pursue these claims.

Speeding up the planned legal aid residence test, which is due to come in to force in the summer and will require claimants to have lived in the UK for 12 months; and

A broader legislative package to strengthen the investigative powers and penalties that can be used against those firms found to be abusing the system.

The clampdown on the financial incentives will be accompanied by firm action against any firms found to have abused the system in the past to pursue fabricated claims:

Leigh Day have now been referred to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal as a result of the failure to disclose a key document to the al-Sweady Inquiry. The document showed that the claimants had been members of the Mahdi Army and not the innocent civilians they made themselves out to be.

Once disciplinary proceedings have been completed against any firm, the Defence Secretary has been commissioned to prepare the ground for seeking to recover as much of the £31

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million of taxpayers' money spent on the al-Sweady Inquiry as possible, including the millions of pounds awarded to some law firms involved in the inquiry.

The Legal Aid Agency has also been asked to review all legal aid contracts to establish whether legal aid should be restricted on an interim basis in relation to any firm under investigation for misconduct, and whether such contracts should be scrapped entirely after disciplinary proceedings have been completed.

A No.10 source said: "It would be unprecedented for the Government to sue a law firm in this way - but if they are found to have acted improperly, then it will be the right thing to do. The public, and the soldiers who have been subject to malicious lies, would expect nothing less."

The PM has also asked the Defence and Justice Secretaries to accelerate a legislative package that has been developed since the election to redress the balance for future military action and protect our troops. It is understood that this includes the option of new legislation to time limit all civil claims made in relation to military operations overseas. The Minister for Human Rights and Minister for the Armed Forces will chair a working group of senior officials from across Government to pursue every possible avenue for protecting our troops and ending the industry of malicious claims against them.

About:

UK Veterans - One Voice formed to campaign for fair treatment for all veterans. We aim to attempt to unite all the groups who are fighting for justice or seeking help for serving military personnel and veterans in need. We are not a political organisation but people who have served their Country with Professionalism, Honour and the hope that we would always be supported by the Government we represented. Though we are in support of other groups, each must take responsibility for its own actions. We WILL NOT support any criminal activities.

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