

Speaking Notes

Bruno Hamel

Chairperson

Canadian Forces Grievance Board

10th Anniversary celebration

June 15 2010

National Arts Centre – Ottawa

Guests, colleagues and friends,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome and thank you for joining us in celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board.

Ten years ago to the day, 15 June 2000, the Canadian Forces Grievance Board officially opened its doors and commenced operations. I would be remiss if I did not tell you the circumstances under which the Board came to exist.

The Canadian Forces Grievance Board is the product of changes to the *National Defence Act* in December 1998, changes inspired by the findings of several inquiries and by the reports of study groups who examined military justice in Canada. The goal was to modernize and reinforce the military justice system and guarantee its transparency and independence. And one way of achieving this goal was to simplify and speed up the review process for military grievances.

At that time, the redress of grievance process had too many review levels, and the study group members felt that it was too lengthy and too rigid. They also found that it was too closely tied to the chain of command and didn't allow for possible outside intervention.

These amendments to the *National Defence Act* provided for the creation of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board, an agency external to the Canadian Forces and independent of the Department of National Defence, an administrative tribunal whose mandate was to examine certain grievance categories that are referred by the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Established on 1 March 2000, the Board began its work on 15 June 2000, the date that the new law came into effect. At the time, I remember, I myself was a CF member and a senior analyst of military grievances for the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Maurice Baril.

15 June 2000 will remain forever etched in my memory. At the end of this rainy day, Lieutenant-Colonel Dave Belovich and I, in a taxi, personally delivered over 150 files to the Canadian Forces Grievance Board in downtown Ottawa. As someone who has worked in this complex but exciting field of military grievances since 1997, I can assure you that I have

never in my 13 years of experience seen as much enthusiasm and determination to dive headfirst into work, plough through files, overcome obstacles and surmount challenges.

We believe that this value added goes beyond reviewing individual grievances and writing recommendations. Indeed, the expertise acquired by the Board, its impartiality and its external position allow it to see what the other parties, who are overly wrapped up in the details of the individual cases, are unable to see. The Board gets a clearer insight into the flaws in certain policies and into divisive issues that threaten to become conflicts. For this reason, the Board also plays an important role in diffusing conflicts and stabilizing the particularly difficult environment in which CF members live and work.

I think I speak for myself, for the members of the Board and its employees, and for our partners when I say that the Board has become a crucial element in the military grievance process, an indispensable ally. No one said it better than the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Walter Natynczyk, when he paid us a visit last September. "We need the Board," said General Natynczyk. "Not only because the Board conducts external assessments of grievances, but also because interpreting policies and the means of enforcing them allows us to verify that these regulations are equitable and well-founded." We are honoured by this praise from the CDS, our primary partner.

Thanks to these strong foundations, patiently constructed by everyone involved over the past ten years, we are currently preparing for an even brighter future.

However, as a famous French writer once said, "we don't predict the future, we allow it to happen." So, at this stage in our short history, we are trying to equip ourselves with ways and means that will allow us to face the future with confidence and realize our vision: serving as the centre of expertise for military grievances and a model administrative tribunal.

I'll just digress here for a minute to identify another important aspect of this new initiative. In fact, this initiative is the fruit of ten years' worth of joint efforts aimed at improving the review and resolution process for grievances. It attests to the solid and strong working relationship that we have established with our partners, in particular, the Canadian Forces Grievance Authority, which is well represented here today. This initiative is also a sign of the trust that the Board inspires in its partners and in CF decision makers as a centre of expertise and

excellence with regard to the review and resolution of military grievances. The Board strongly supports this new approach and is eager to see it implemented.

The Board, I would remind you, has examined some 1,200 cases since its creation. Our teams have worked on every case while keeping the interests of justice at heart, and their objective has always been the maintenance of orderly and productive working conditions within the CF, the guarantor of our peace and freedoms.

We have also done our work by trying to look beyond the names and numbers. The fact is that, behind every complainant's name, behind every file number, there is a member of the CF who wants to be heard, a person who feels aggrieved and who has rights.

We will continue our efforts to live up to expectations as a model administrative tribunal, a faithful partner of the CF and, most importantly, a government organization worthy of the trust of Canadians.

This morning, in recognition of the contributions of those who came before us, I proudly unveiled a small historical exhibit in the Board offices where photos of the original presidents and members of the Board are displayed. You are all welcome to visit us one day and see this permanent exhibit. This is but a modest way of expressing our appreciation for your role in this Board's beautiful history.

Now I'd like to invite Diane Laurin to join me in cutting the 10th anniversary cake. The first Co-chair of the Board, and the Chair from 2004 to 2008, Mrs. Laurin was there when it all started. She was one of the founding members of the Board. We continue to benefit to this day from the work she accomplished. She has made our job easier and, for that, the Board is eternally thankful. Diane...

Welcome and Introduce the Minister:

- We are honoured to have the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of the Department of National Defence, here with us today, whose unconditional support allows us to celebrate our past with pride and look forward to a bright future.