

Ties with Indonesia quietly renewed

By Joseph Barratt

New Zealand's military ties were quietly re-established with Indonesia last month, despite ongoing concerns of human rights abuses.

Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters announced the move late last year, and last month an Indonesian officer arrived in New Zealand for military training.

Ties were cut in 1999 because of human rights abuses by Indonesia during the bloody invasion of East Timor.

The Indonesian Government is yet to hold anyone responsible for the conflict that saw between 100,000 and 200,000 people, more than 20 per cent of East Timor's population, killed in their struggle for independence, say human rights groups.

Defence Minister Phil Goff claims Indonesia has made vast improvements since the invasion. He points out that over the past few years Australia, the US and the UK have all reintroduced military ties.

"Indonesia has made impressive steps to strengthen democracy," he says. "Sufficient good things have happened so [we need] to acknowledge they have made steps towards reform."

This is despite ongoing human

rights abuses in the Indonesian-controlled West Papua, where there is an enduring struggle for independence.

At a small protest outside the New Zealand Army headquarters in Auckland, Green Party foreign affairs spokesperson Keith Locke challenged Goff's assertions, asking whether the New Zealand Government's decision was one of principle or merely followed other countries.

But in emails to Locke, Peters cited a number of examples of improvements in Indonesia.

They included the "removal of the armed forces from an active role in politics, the establishment of civilian control over the military, the removal of the armed forces from commercial activity, and the strengthening of military professionalism - including respect".

Indonesian Human Rights Committee chair Maire Leadbeater says the New Zealand Government's move defies logic.

While conceding there has been some democratic reform, she says the Indonesian military was still "a law unto themselves".



DISAPPOINTED: MP Keith Locke was part of a small protest outside army headquarters in Auckland.

She says Indonesian armed forces get "70 per cent of their funding from commercial activities" and are still involved in protection rackets, illegal logging and prostitution.

The Green Party has also shown its disapproval at the Government's decision, citing that in 1999 Goff, then foreign affairs minister, argued for the

"Indonesia has made impressive steps to strengthen democracy."

suspension of ties because no Indonesian military officers had been held legally responsible for the killings in East Timor.

Since that continues to be the case, military links should not be resumed, the party says.

Goff claims that the Indonesian military "proved themselves responsible" in the aftermath of the 2005 tsunami in Aceh.

Before the tsunami, Aceh was under a virtual lockdown with

the military attempting to suppress separatist movements. The tsunami and resulting disaster saw an opening of the area for foreign aid and the media.

But Locke says improvements in Aceh were because the tsunami disaster brought the world's media into the area.

International condemnation of Indonesia gained momentum in 1991 after the Dili Massacre that saw the killing of more than 250 East Timorese children. In West Papua more than 100,000 people have reportedly been killed since 1962.

The government "continues to have concerns over activities", Goff says. "We are not happy with what happened in West Papua."

He says the Government will continue to work with the Indonesian Government to ensure that democratic and human rights reform continues.

New Zealand "can't just stand on a soap box", Goff says.

"Perfection is difficult. We're looking to find a balanced aim for

progress."

"Limited re-engagement can be used as a reward," counters Locke. But Indonesia "must be told to further their reforms".

The announcement of the re-introduction was a one-line mention in the middle of a speech by Peters to the Centre for Strategic Studies conference at Victoria University in Wellington on December 13.

It went unnoticed until a human rights group in Thailand reported on it and it was then picked up in New Zealand several months later by Indonesian human rights groups.

Locke was disappointed by the way it was announced without warning, saying the Green Party has had an interest in the issue for some time.

"MPs should have some sort of dialogue," he says.

Goff points out Peters' speech was sent to the media, which was "all it warranted".

He said it was a limited re-engagement with Indonesia and "not a big deal".

Growing up playing games with bullets

By Tess Woolcock

Covering windows with towels and then barricading them with sandbags is not something many seven-year-olds have had to do. But for Marina Culibrk, growing up amidst daily gunfire, 45 minutes from the Croatian-Serbian border during the Bosnian war, it was just life.

"It was living in darkness," says Culibrk, now 22, a receptionist at an Auckland recruitment agency.

"The towels always had to be up and sandbags in place to protect us from gunfire.

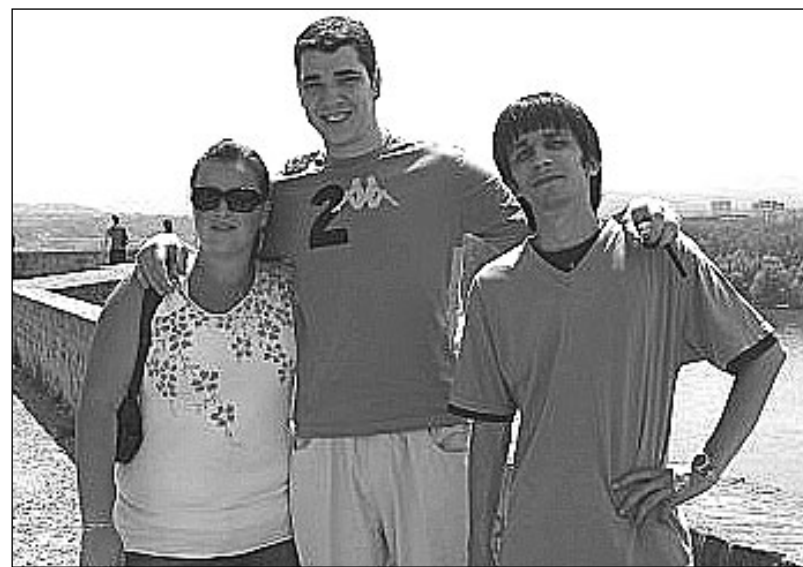
"You couldn't even turn a light on in the house because you would be shot at."

On May 29, Culibrk and her family celebrated their 13th anniversary since immigrating after the war. "We stayed until the end because we didn't want to be refugees," says Culibrk.

"My dad was too proud. He wanted us to pay our own way and emigrate to a country we wanted to go to. He didn't want people to feel sorry for us. Staying on in Croatia was never an option, it was too painful."

This is the first time Culibrk has talked publicly about her experience of living through war.

Her family lived in the



HIDING IN BASEMENTS: It may be safe in Croatia now for Marina, with her cousins Gradmir and Branimir (right), but during the war her family were in constant danger.

Croatian city of Osijek, close to the Serbian border. She and her older sister, Maja, are of mixed descent, their mother Croatian and father Serbian. This had huge implications for her family during the war.

"My mum told us that the war was between the Croats and the Serbs. She told us that we were both and, although this was confusing, we would be okay."

Culibrk and her family lived through the war from 1991 until

it ended in 1994. She was home schooled by her mother in the basement of their house, with life dictated by sirens warning of gun fire.

"We could go outside but always had to stay close to home," says Culibrk.

"Whenever you heard a siren go off you knew the shooting would begin and they would shoot you, even if you were a child. My cousins and I would always run home and hide

together in the basement."

Culibrk remembers their childhood game of collecting fresh bullets after a round of fighting.

"We would have a competition to see who could find the most bullets," she says. "I know it sounds terrible but that was just what we did. We were kids and the power was often out so we had to be creative."

It was during one such game of collecting bullets that gunfire resumed without any warning sirens. Culibrk, who was eight at the time, saw her playmate killed in front of her.

"It is painful for me to talk about but I saw her die. It was a regular occurrence, but that was life. It was what I thought the world was like because I was so young. I don't need people to feel sorry for me."

Berta Borich, vice president of the Dalmatian Cultural Society, says the war was a difficult time for Croats and Serbians here in New Zealand.

She says although most stayed united, another smaller group developed very racist attitudes, which shocked the community.

A former president of the club, Borich says, welcomed all new immigrants, and a lot of families joined that were of mixed ethnic-

ity, like Culibrk's.

"We were here to help anyone that came, regardless of being Croatian, Serbian or from anywhere in the Czech Republic. That is why we are called the Dalmatian Cultural Society. We stayed Yugoslav."

Culibrk had not even heard of New Zealand until her parents told her they were emigrating here. She says she knew they were going to move away from Croatia as soon as the war ended to "leave the bad memories behind".

After living through a war that divided her family, Culibrk says she never felt like she belonged anywhere.

She was half Croatian so could not move to Serbia and half Serbian so was not safe in Croatia either.

"We were in limbo. My sister and I just did not have a place to belong."

Although her early days in New Zealand were difficult, without a word of English, 13 years on Culibrk feels she has finally found her place in the world.

"Yes I am from Croatia but it is not my home any more and hasn't been since I can remember. I feel like I belong here in New Zealand. I can finally say I have a real home."