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Media Statement

Government takes offensive against knife crime

Justice Minister Simon Power today announced a package of initiatives to address New Zealand's emerging knife crime problem.

Mr Power ordered a report into knife crime after concerns were raised by a High Court judge and the Youth Justice Independent Advisory Group.

"When judges at the coalface of offending raise these issues, the Government needs to take them seriously," Mr Power said.

"Knife crime is regarded as a significant problem in some overseas jurisdictions, and I am determined to stop it escalating in New Zealand, which is why I'm taking action now.

"The measures I am announcing today are aimed at reducing the number of young people carrying knives without a good reason, reducing knife-related offending, and increasing public safety."

The measures include:

- **Increasing the penalty for possession of an offensive weapon**

Legislation will be introduced to Parliament to amend the Crimes Act to increase the maximum penalty for possession of an offensive weapon from two years' imprisonment to three years' imprisonment. This brings the penalty into line with the penalty for possession of burglary instruments. We propose to retain the current legislative requirement that a sentence of imprisonment must be imposed for second convictions within two years for possession of an offensive weapon.

- **Police Education Officers in schools**

Police Education Officers in schools will provide information about the dangers of carrying knives, especially when combined with alcohol and situations involving conflict. Education Minister Anne Tolley has also asked the Ministry of Education to provide guidance for schools to assist in the appropriate searching of students or their property, and the possible seizure of items such as knives.

- **Using Fresh Start to prevent knife offending and re-offending**

Child, Youth and Family will work with Fresh Start providers to ensure their programmes and orders address the dangers of carrying knives, and teach young

people other ways of dealing with conflict. They will ensure that where a young person has committed an offence involving a knife the conditions of any Family Group Conference plan or court order are closely monitored. Risk management and public protection will form a strongly monitored component of plans where violence is an issue.

- **Limiting the sale of knives through a voluntary accord with retailers**

Ministry of Justice officials will investigate the development of a voluntary accord with Police, local authorities, and retailers to restrict the sale of knives to young people. The accord may include the safe display and storage of knives in shops, signs about the dangers of carrying knives, and information sharing between retailers and the Police about knife sales to young people. It will provide guidance to retailers around the sale of knives, and reinforce their right to refuse a sale if they have concerns about the uses of the knife. Preliminary discussions have been held between officials, the Retailers Association, and the Police.

- **Improving information sharing between justice agencies**

Information technology changes will be developed to improve information sharing within the Justice sector on knife and other weapon use in order to improve the sector's understanding of the problem.

Mr Power said the measures show how serious the Government is to ensure knife crime does not get a hold in New Zealand.

“As we have tragically seen in recent times, the possession of a knife or other offensive weapon can easily turn what would otherwise be a minor assault into a life-threatening situation.”

"There should be no doubt about the seriousness with which the Government views knife crime."

The Cabinet paper can be found at <http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy-and-consultation/crime-prevention/reducing-knife-crime>.

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