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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SECRETARY COHEN CALLS FOR ACTION PLAN TO REDUCE HARASSMENT

Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen announced today that he is setting up a working group of senior leaders from the services to draft an action plan focusing on the measures necessary to address the problem of harassment based on perceived sexual orientation. Following is the complete text of the memorandum he sent today to the services:

"On March 16, the Office of the Inspector General, DoD, provided me with the 'Report on the Military Environment With Respect to the Homosexual Conduct Policy.' I had asked that this assessment be conducted in order to evaluate the climate at representative military installations in each Service with regard to our policy on homosexual conduct. I asked that the Inspector General include in the review an assessment of the extent to which harassment of servicemembers based on perceived or alleged homosexuality may occur or be tolerated, as well as the extent to which disparaging speech concerning sexual orientation may occur or be tolerated. The report is based on a survey of more than 70,000 service members worldwide. A copy of the report is attached for your review. [Online](#)

"The Inspector General's report convinces me that additional actions are necessary to address the problem of harassment of service members who are alleged or perceived to be homosexual. Over one-third of respondents participating in the survey reported that over the past year they had either witnessed or experienced some form of harassment based on perceived homosexuality. Although the most frequent type of harassment identified was offensive speech, a small but significant percentage of respondents reported that more serious matters were involved. In most cases, the harassment was not reported to the chain of command.

"We have no way of knowing the extent to which the results of this survey reflect a larger societal issue. Nonetheless, we simply cannot tolerate harassment in the Armed Forces. I know that you share my view that harassment of our service members for any reason seriously undermines the good order and discipline that is critical to an effective fighting force. The leadership of each Service must continue to work to ensure that everyone in the Armed Forces understands that harassment, whether based on race, religion, gender, perceived sexual orientation, or any other basis, is unacceptable.

"We have taken a number of steps in the past year designed to improve implementation of the homosexual conduct policy. In August 1999, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness reissued guidelines reiterating our policy regarding investigations of threats against or harassment of service members based on alleged homosexuality. That guidance, widely disseminated, is intended to ensure that service members feel free to report crimes and harassment free from fear of harm, reprisal, or inappropriate response, and that commanders take appropriate action to hold those who engage in threatening or harassing conduct accountable. The leadership of each of the Services also issued a strong statement to the field in December 1999 that harassment for any reason, including harassment based on perceived sexual orientation, will not be tolerated and that commanders are expected to take prompt, appropriate action in cases of harassment. The report shows that military leaders must do more to make it clear that harassment based on sexual orientation violates military values.

"Also in August 1999, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness asked that the Inspectors General of each of the Services include, as an item of specific interest in their inspections, review of the training provided commanders, attorneys, and investigators concerning how homosexual conduct cases should be handled. More broadly, each of the Services undertook a comprehensive review and revision of the training materials used to educate all service members about the homosexual conduct policy. I approved those training materials on February 1 and directed that they be incorporated promptly into Service training programs. The Army has undertaken a special effort to ensure that every member of the Army receives training on this policy by April 2000.

"The Inspector General's report makes clear, however, that there is still more to do to fully address these issues. In that regard, I am establishing a working group, composed of senior military and civilian representatives from each of the Services, [to review the Inspector General's report and to draft action plan that can be provided to each of the Services. This draft action plan should focus

on the measures necessary to address the problem of harassment based on perceived sexual orientation, and the other issues raised by the results of the Inspector General's survey. The draft plan should concentrate on Department-wide measures, although it may contain Service-specific items as well.

"I request that the Under Secretary of the Air Force, the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower & Reserve Affairs) and the General Counsel of the Navy be made available to serve on this working group, and that the Under Secretary of the Air Force serve as chair. I also request that each Service designate a General/Flag officer from their respective services to join this group. The group should report to the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness by July 31, 2000.

"I appreciate your assistance in this important endeavor."

The IG's review, entitled "Report on the Military Environment with Respect to the Homosexual Conduct Policy," No. D-2000-101, is available on line at <http://www.dodig.osd.mil/audit/reports/00report.htm>