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SENIOR LEADERS RENEW ARMY COMMITMENT TO FAMILIES AT HEIDELBERG COVENANT SIGNING

By Spc. Joseph McAtee

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. George W. Casey Jr. joined U.S. Army Europe Commander Gen. David McKiernan and other senior leaders in signing the Army Family Covenant before an enthusiastic crowd at Campbell Barracks here today, renewing the Army's commitment to its Families.

Casey and McKiernan's signatures were joined by those of Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston; USAREUR Command Sgt. Maj. Iuniasolua Savusa; Col. Robert J. Ulses, U.S. Army Garrison Heidelberg commander, and USAG Heidelberg Command Sgt. Maj. Yolanda J. Lomax.

Casey spoke at length about the Army's commitment to its Families, calling the covenant a way to show that it takes that obligation seriously.

"The Families support the Soldier, who supports the Army, who



KEVIN KOEHLER

U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. signs the Army Family Covenant in a ceremony on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany Oct. 26. Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston (left) also signed the document, along with U.S. Army Europe Commander Gen. David McKiernan; USAREUR Command Sgt. Maj. Iuniasolua T. Savusa; Col. Robert J. Ulses, the U.S. Army Garrison Heidelberg commander, and USAG Heidelberg Command Sgt. Maj. Yolanda Lomax. The covenant is being signed at Army installations worldwide as a show of commitment to support the Army's Families.

supports the nation,” said Casey.

“We felt that we needed a covenant; a statement of our commitment, to really tell Families that we are taking our support to another level.”

The covenant consists of five areas the Army will develop to better assist Army Families: programs and services; health care; housing; youth needs, and spouse education and employment.

Casey said he has centralized these services under Lt. Gen. Robert Wilson, the Army's assistant chief of staff for installation management and commander of its Installation Management Command, to help strengthen those services' availability to Families. “The same person who is in charge of installation readiness (will be) in charge of Family readiness,” said Casey. “All of the execution of Family programs will now be under one person.”

Additionally, Casey said development of the Army Integrated Family Support Network has begun. The AIFSN will allow Families to easily find a vast array of military and civilian services available in their neighborhoods.

Casey added that the covenant is bolstered by a bill awaiting congressional approval asking for \$1.4 billion for Family and Soldier programs.



SPC JOSEPH McATEE

8-year-old Alyssa DeMarco (left) and her sister Cayla, 6, hold up the Army Family Covenant following its signing on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany Oct. 26. Alyssa and Cayla are the daughters of Sgt. 1st Class Gordon DeMarco of the 202nd Military Police Group (CID) and his wife, Staff Sgt. Brandy DeMarco.

“We’re trying to put our money where our mouth is, so that this isn’t just a piece of paper,” Casey said of the covenant.

The general addressed the areas the covenant and its attendant funding are designed to improve.

To upgrade housing, the Army has begun the Residential Community Initiative, an effort Casey said has already privatized nearly 80,000 units across the Army under military and commercial contracts. The general said he hopes to institute the RCI Armywide by 2010.

In speaking of health care, Casey said Families have often asked him to improve mental health care for spouses and children. Responding to those pleas, the Army has recently invested \$50 million in boosting mental health services.

Casey said that although 30 child care facilities have already been constructed under the commitment of the covenant, he expects that by the end of 2008 the Army will have added another 170.

To help connect spouses to employers, Casey said the Army Spouse Employment Program is being given greater emphasis. The program, designed to make it easier for spouses to get jobs, has already helped 27,000 spouses find employment.

Several Family members who attended the ceremony seemed pleased with the commitment the covenant pledges to them.

Staff Sgt. Brandy DeMarco and Sgt. 1st Class Gordon DeMarco took part in the signing with their daughters, Alyssa, 8, and Cayla, 6. “Hopefully the Families are going to feel more comfortable knowing that the Army is taking more of an interest in them and giving them more money to support their needs,” Staff Sgt. DeMarco said.

Julie Johns of the USAREUR operations division, wife of Maj. Todd Johns, attended the event accompanied by the couple’s two children, Amanda, 11, and Ethan, 8. Julie said she was “impressed” by the Army’s show of support. “I think it’s a step in the right direction,” she said. “I’m extremely proud that they signed the Army Family Covenant today, and I’m extremely proud to be the spouse of an Army Soldier.”



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