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MINI PLENARY - NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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PROCEEDINGS OF MINI-PLENARY SESSION – GOOD HOPE CHAMBER

Members of the mini-plenary session met at Good Hope Chamber at 10:00.

The House Chairperson, Mr C T Frolick, took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 23 - Defence, including Vote 26 - Military Veterans:

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Chairperson, the Deputy Ministers of Defence and Military Veterans, Chairpersons and Members of the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans, and the Joint Standing Committee on Defence, hon members. Let me also welcome our newly appointed

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Secretary for Defence, Mr Mthimkulu, acknowledge the Chief of the National Defence Force and the Acting Director-General of the DMV, Chairpersons and Executive Officers of our state-owned enterprises, SOEs, and distinguished guests.

Hon members, it is important for us to remind ourselves of our core business of the defence establishment and its importance, because the defence establishment is mandated by the Constitution of the Republic to defend and protect the Republic, its people, safeguard South Africa's sovereignty and constitutional order.

The Department of Defence is located in the Medium-Term Development Plan, MTDP, which continues to guide the focus of the Seventh Administration. So, Budget Vote 23 is aligned with the adjusted Department of Defence Strategic Plan and the Annual Performance Plan for the 2026-27 Medium Term Expenditure Framework, MTEF.

The Minister of Defence is also guided by the new Performance Agreement with the President, outlining priority commitments aligned to the MTDP.

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Members, the Department of Defence has received a total budget allocation of R57,6 billion. This budget has been allocated as follows: R37,7 billion goes to compensation of employees, R2,5 billion to the SA Army, R2,7 billion to the SA Airforce, R1,9 billion the SA Navy, R1,5 billion to the military services, R4,5 billion to the logistics division and R1,5 billion to joint operations.

Also included in the budget allocation of R57 billion are the following earmarked allocations and transfer payments: R557 million is earmarked for border safeguard and technology, R427 million is earmarked for the Air Force to maintain the fighter capability, R6,7 million is earmarked for the Navy to repair and maintain the platforms, R80 million is earmarked to provide uniforms for our military members, R1,5 billion will be transferred to Armaments Corporation of South Africa Armscor, R76 million will also be transferred to the ombuds, R4 million will be transferred to the Castle Control Board.

But furthermore, members, R150 million has also been allocated to the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, to support the upcoming local government elections.

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Members, South Africa is a democratic state, a regional economic powerhouse and a technology hub on the continent of Africa. We are also a maritime and trading nation. We are thus affected by and must respond to global economic and security dynamics prevalent across the world, whilst also focussing on our own homeland security.

The Cape Sea Route, as a shipping route, has assumed global significance as the route to transport economic goods between nations of the world. Increasingly, maritime traffic along the Cape route heightens both security and economic risks, underscores the need to be comprehensive in terms of national maritime security strategy.

In addition to the Navy's primary function, are to safeguard maritime sovereignty, it also must support civil authorities in maintaining the safety of vital maritime trade routes. So, South Africa's maritime geography makes this non-negotiable, and therefore, making our Navy ... [Inaudible.] ... strategic area ...

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon Minister, let me just ... will you just give an opportunity to hear what the hon Reddy has to say.

Why are you rising, hon member?

Mr V G REDDY: Hon House Chair, I rise in terms of Rule 83. Which reads, a member must as far as possible refrain from reading his ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon member, you're your seat! Please take your seat!

Mr V G REDDY: No, no. This is serious because we need to hear clearly ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T FROLICK): Take your seat! I rule against you, take your seat!

Mr V G REDDY: You're not being ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T FROLICK): Take your seat! If you don't want to accept my ruling, you may leave the chamber.

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Please continue, hon Minister!

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Chair, in addition to the Navy's primary function to safeguard maritime sovereignty, it must also support civil authorities in maintaining the safety of vital maritime trade routes.

The Navy is therefore a strategic necessity of our time. To neglect our national maritime capability would risk strategic self-harm and global irrelevance.

But to maintain balance and consolidate our resources, government has made two policy adjustments: firstly, to withdraw from regional support operation; and secondly, to pay more attention to domestic operations.

In addition to the allocated budget, government has announced an amount of R823 million to enable the SA National Defence Force to support SA Police Services, SAPS.

At the core of the defence dilemma lies a fundamental and persistent misalignment between mandate, expectations and funding. And this is a strategic national concern requiring a

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structured compact between strategic intent and fiscal planning sustained over multiple planning cycles.

So, the strategic work has already been undertaken within government to restore coherence to defence planning and the department has completed a series of strategic documents.

Together, these represent work to reconnect defence policy, military strategy, force design, force structure and long-term capability planning to a feasible future pathway.

An Interim Force Concept was developed against a defence funding level of 1,5%.

Consequently, a Long-Term Force Evaluation Strategy on Defence Planning was approved by Cabinet on 6 May and it is awaiting parliamentary processes.

Regarding the ongoing natural disasters such as floods, I can confirm, Chair, that we are working with the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs to provide a coherent programme which we will share with the portfolio committee and Cabinet.

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Hon members, regarding border safeguarding, porous borders do not only compromise the territorial integrity of the state, but it lays a fertile ground for the emergence of several other national security threats including threats to the economic wellbeing of the Republic as well as the discord between the citizens and foreign nationals. This also goes beyond the region but the continent and beyond. Such action has to be taken into consideration and something done, to ensure safe and legal movement of people in our country.

Border safeguarding is a very complex activity which demands a multipronged response because it has to respond to criminal value chains, cross-border syndicates, illicit flows, unauthorised movement, trafficking, logistical staging areas and the blending of local and international threats.

The SA National Defence Force, in partnership with SAPS and border management, has not merely apprehended individuals or smugglers, it has disrupted transnational criminal value chains, recovered stolen vehicles, contraband and contributed to the denial of economic resources to organised syndicates.

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With an intelligence-led safeguarding, supported by sensors, radar and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, UAVs, allows movement away from traditional patrolling towards targeted and responsive action. And these are very important to show that where limited resources are used well, much is being achieved.

But we must also admit, Chair, that we have lots of challenges in the department. Our ageing and unserviceable fleet of patrol and support vehicles constrains the mobility and endurance. We also have challenges with our infrastructure shortfalls, which remain acute.

The SA Air Force provides essential support not only to the border area safeguarding, but also to disaster aid and relief, search and rescue, reconnaissance and rapid deployment. Helicopter numbers and serviceability are inadequate - as we speak - to sustain rapid response across domestic and national security tasks. Radar and air traffic control infrastructure also need more resourcing and upgrading.

I can also refer to the dockyard, that we have challenges which have reached a critical point. Essential equipment and

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port infrastructure continue to deteriorate and need to be repaired or replaced.

In this regard, the SA Navy, SA Air Force and Armscor are hard at work to remedy this.

But despite all these challenges, we have recorded some successes. The SAS Amatola has just completed a long-range deployment to India and participated in Exercise MILAN 2026.

The acquisition of three Multi-Mission Inshore Patrol Vessels has enabled coastal patrol activity. Multilateral anti-piracy skills have also been exercised and developed. So, the subsequent port call in Shanghai marked a notable diplomatic milestone.

We need to also state that these kinds of exercises are an integral part of furtherance of our defence military diplomacy across the world, wherein we have memoranda of understanding across the globe, including multilateral bodies and in furtherance of defence diplomacy.

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Chair, we want to announce that we will be hosting the biennial African Aerospace and Defence, AAD, 2026 from 16 to 20 September this year. This is a prime exhibition which showcases South Africa's defence industry and partner nations. Of importance during this event is also the programme which brings young people from across the country to expose them to careers in the aerospace and defence environment.

Hon members, the department carries a personnel structure that the budget does not sufficiently fund. Numerous engagements are taking place with National Treasury to find a solution to this funding conundrum.

But as part of its rejuvenation strategy, the department will pursue a gradual increase in the number of military skills development systems recruits within the funding limitations of the budget constraints.

In line with the Reconstruction and Development, RDP, Act of 1996, which advocates for the establishment of a national youth service, the SANDF has been identified as a lead partner in the war on youth unemployment with other government

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departments and private sector, through the SA National Service Institute, SANSI.

Hon members, the department has accepted the ministerial priority of putting the soldier first, which includes ensuring soldiers are properly equipped with uniforms, boots, protective gear and habitable facilities catering for the needs of all, including women soldiers and persons with disabilities.

We have selected models which will receive priority upgrades to ensure that the safety and security, there are well-maintained bases for sports and recreation.

Hon members, furthermore, the recovery of the SA Military Health Service is a national security issue. A force without a robust health support, a functional primary military hospital and a sustainable medical support chain is a force whose personnel resilience is degraded. And again, I can confirm, Chair, that a lot is been done in that area. I hope we'll find time also to report to Cabinet, to Parliament and the respective committee on the work that is taking place in that area.

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In respect of the Army Foundation, Chair, which is already in the paper. The fraud case whereby the foundation resources were reported to have been stolen, I've been receiving reports and we can assure the House that the necessary legal and administrative steps are being followed, and we will keep the committee informed.

The current Legacy Defence Information and Communication Technology, ICT, Management systems are very old and need urgent attention. So, the Department of Defence is undertaking a comprehensive digital transformation.

Again, Chair, on our repositioning and economic growth, we are looking at hosting the Industry Lekgotla on 20 to 27 July 2026, will bring together the relevant actors to stabilise the sector.

On the other hand, in the light of changes to the defence environment, the validation of Armscor's draft new value proposal will happen at this Lekgotla.

On the other hand, again, Chair, Denel board has been appointed and its leadership team will create a stable

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executive structure to drive the entity forward. The sustainability of Denel as South Africa's strategic sovereign defence industrial capability remains directly linked to the operational readiness and sustainment requirements of the SA National Defence Force.

Chair, on the issue of military veterans, the Department of Military Veterans remains one of our most important institutions meant to fulfil and manage the needs of military veterans, especially those who sacrificed their lives for our country's freedom. Its vision and mission are to provide for a dignified and self-sufficient military veterans' community and build a better and brighter future for military veterans.

These provisions draw from the constitutional principles, particularly the Bill of Rights, which affirms human dignity, equality, social justice and the progressive realisation of socioeconomic rights.

The budget allocation for the Department of Military Veterans is R912 million and it is allocated as follows: R158 million has been allocated to cost of employees, R566 million to socioeconomic benefits, which include healthcare, military

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veterans' pension, housing, compensation for injuries and education, and R188 million for administration.

So, whilst we appreciate the allocation, we wish to indicate that there are areas of improvement which can ensure that our work is more efficient and we wish to highlight, as indicated in our submitted annual performance plan, APP, the department ... we wish to indicate as we have done in our annual performance and I want to just list a few of these risks: that we are still experiencing delays in the finalisation of our organisational structure; we lack of automated information technology, IT, systems; there are inadequate business systems not integrated to support the strategy of the department; there is a misalignment between the organisational structure, legislation and policies to the service delivery; there are limited desktop research on services and benefits for military veterans; there's an absence of a consolidated stakeholder engagement plan and there's lack of effective performance.

In an attempt to mitigate some of these challenges, we have appointed the Ministerial Transversal Task Team led by Ambassador Mseleku. The department continues to be under the leadership of the Acting Director-General Mafu and together

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with the Ambassador, are leading all process to begin to systematically address the challenges that I've highlighted above.

Chair, in conclusion, the SA National Defence Force remains essential to sovereignty, central to internal stability and critical to the Republic's and regional commitments.

Parliament is encouraged, member Reddy, to support the department's effort to adequate resources.

We must choose to align defence ambition with an increased funding trajectory, restore coherence between policy and force design, protect the soldiers as the centre of capability, rebuild critical domains, correct governance failures, stabilise operational financing and renew the defence-industrial base in support of long-term sovereignty.

We will continuously work hard for the improvement of the lives of our military veterans. The Deputy Minister Hlophe, my colleague here, will elaborate further on the operational matters for the Department of Military Veterans.

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Chair, with the remaining minutes I want to quickly go to some of the areas that I think we also need to highlight, which include the work that we are doing in terms of the ombudsman and we want the House to join me in wishing General Masondo well as he's going to be finishing his term this year. But it is an important structure for us and we want to thank him most sincerely.

Again, I want to acknowledge the presence of our colleagues who come from the reserve force who are here advising the Minister on the different things that we have to do to improve the lives of veterans, and for that, we are very grateful and highly appreciate it. Thank you, Chair.

Ms S P JAMA: Hon House Chairperson, hon members, peace-loving South Africans, our Constitution reminds us that national security must reflect the resolve of South Africans to live as equals, to live in peace and harmony, to be free from fear and want. That constitutional responsibility rests heavily on the shoulders of the SA National Defense Force, SANDF.

Today, the SANDF continues safeguarding our territorial integrity, protecting our borders, participating in

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peacekeeping missions on the continent, and supporting internal stability operations under difficult and evolving conditions. These responsibilities are not symbolic. They are essential to the sovereignty, stability, and security of the Republic.

At the same time, we must honestly acknowledge the pressures confronting the defense environment. Through our engagement with the strategic plan, annual performance plan, and budget allocations of the department, Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, Denel, and related entities, serious concerns continue arising regarding aging infrastructure, maintenance backlogs, procurement delays, and operational sustainability. These challenges cannot simply be viewed as administrative matters.

They directly affect operational readiness and the long-term capability of SANDF. A defense force that cannot sustain readiness due to infrastructure renewal is continuously delayed, maintenance systems remain under pressure, and technical capability becomes increasingly strained over time. We must therefore confront the reality that the operational expectations placed on SANDF continue growing, while the

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resources required to sustain long-term readiness remain under significant pressure.

The current allocation of R57,6 billion for the 2026-27 financial year, which represents only approximately 0,7% of the GDP, remains well below the 1,5% target required for a modern and sustainable Defence Force. This funding gap continues to constrain SANDF's ability to meet its expanding mandate effectively.

Chairperson, we also recognise that many of these structural challenges developed over a prolonged period and require discipline, strategic, and long-term intervention.

In this regard, we welcome the continued efforts by the Minister and the department to strengthen governance, improve accountability, and reposition the defense environment within difficult fiscal conditions. The strategic direction towards rebuilding operational readiness, improving institutional stability, and strengthening long-term planning certainty is both necessary and important. We further emphasise the critical role the SANDF plays in supporting internal stability operations against gangsterism and illegal mining syndicates.

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These deployments have helped restore hope in affected communities and must be adequately supported to ensure continued effectiveness. For this reason, sustainable and predictable defence funding remains critically important. We cannot continue expecting SANDF to expand operational responsibilities without ensuring that maintenance capability, infrastructure investment, and institutional support remain sustainable over the long term.

We have also consistently raised the importance of strengthening procurement oversight, improved consequence management, and addressing governance weaknesses across the defense environment. Weak procurement systems do not only create financial risk, they weaken operational effectiveness itself, delays in acquisition projects, failures in contract management, and weaknesses in oversight ultimately place additional strain on operational readiness.

This is why Parliament's oversight role over the department, Armscor, and Denel remains essential to protecting both accountability and institutional capability. We further recognise the strategic importance of Denel and the broader domestic defence industry in supporting sovereign capability,

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local industrial development, and the retention of critical technical expertise. South Africa must continue strengthening its own institutional and industrial capacity to support long-term defence sustainability.

As domestic deployments continue in support of internal stability operations, we must equally ensure that constitutional safeguards, civilian oversight, and proper command structures remain firmly protected. The SANDF must continue operating as a disciplined, professional, and constitutional force rooted in the democratic values of our republic. While the fiscal environment remains constrained, abandoning investment in defence capability would carry far greater long-term consequences for national security, border safeguarding, and the operational integrity of the state itself.

For these reasons, the ANC supports Budget Votes 23 and 26 and reaffirms our commitment to building a transformed, ethical, professional, and operationally ready SANDF capable of defending the sovereignty and democratic future of South Africa. I thank you.

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Mr P KUBUKELI: Hon Chairperson, hon members, while military background is not a constitutional requirement for the executive office dealing with the Defence and Military Veterans, but when political decisions undermine combat readiness, capability, or discipline and amount to a direct failure of constitutional duty, everything begs for scrutiny. The President has failed his most basic constitutional obligation to ensure continuity of command.

The failure to appoint a Chief of the SANDF and a Director-General for the Department of Military Veterans is not an administrative delay. It is a dereliction of executive responsibility with direct national security consequences. This is not administrative oversight. It is institutional sabotage. One of the most crucial arms of the state is being run without accounting officers, without strategic leadership, and without constitutional stewardship.

The pattern of this rot is monotonous throughout my presentation. For instance, the Military Veterans Act is unambiguous when it declares that the SA National Military Veterans Association is the statutory National Military Veterans Association. Sections 5, 7, and 8 are not optional.

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Any verification policy or benefit process that excludes Air defence Regiment, Samba, is unlawful, illegitimate, and unconstitutional.

A department that refuses to comply with its own legislation is not exercising discretion. It is defying Parliament. The amended Act and benefits regulations may authorise a means test, but authorisation does not equal constitutionality.

The benefits threshold is irrational, outdated, and indefensible. It excludes the very veterans the Act was created to uplift. It disproportionately does more harm to former freedom fighters, those who spent decades without pensions of formal employment.

The Minister is implementing an arbitrary means test. She is applying to the letter of the Act without the spirit. The letter may be cited, but if the spirit, the restorative justice, the dignity, the redress has been abandoned, then we might as well stop pretending that this government cares for the plight of Military Veterans.

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When the spirit dies, the law becomes a weapon against those it was meant to uplift. The Constitutional Court is unambiguous when it says that remedial legislation must advance the disadvantaged, not exclude them. Yet, this means test forces liberation fighters to prove poverty before accessing restorative benefits. That is not dignity. That is not justice. That is not constitutional. The MK Party rejects this means test.

We are dealing with constitutional delinquents, leaders who treat constitutional obligations as optional and ignore statutory duties. As a result, the SANDF is operating without strategic direction. Parliament required the defence capstone, military strategy, force design, force structure, and journey to greatness by the end of 2025. None were submitted. Bases are dilapidated, equipment obsolete, readiness at historic lows.

This chronic underfunding will ultimately force the state to outsource core defence functions to private contractors. And this, we believe, is the end game of the SANDF, Commander-in-Chief, because, as we speak, there's a US company interested in buying Denel Denel Pretoria Metal Pressings, PMP. Defence

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intelligence receives a minimal increase of only 0,29%. This is strategic blindness in the era of cyber warfare.

South Africa faces no conventional land invasion. Our real threats are smuggling, trafficking, illegal mining, cyber-attacks, and maritime crime. Yet the land-wide defence programme consumes the largest share of the budget, while remaining the least modernised.

South Africa is a maritime nation with a land-heavy defence force, and this imbalance is a strategic liability. This is a 20th century strategy in the 21st century.

The MK Party is advocating that part of our existing army personnel be retrained, moved entirely out of the Defence Force, and integrated into the South SA Police Service as a specialised policing support unit, deployed specifically for policing functions in similar troubled spots where the SANDF is currently being used to assist the police.

That will afford the Navy the opportunity to recruit marines, that is, the amphibious infantry to patrol our 3 000 kilometres coast coastline. Marines offer dual domain

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capability. Infantry does not. The Eastern Cape has 800 kilometers of coastline, yet no naval base, no marine unit, no permanent patrol.

Our economy is maritime. Our vulnerabilities are maritime and our future prosperity, oil, gas, fisheries, offshore minerals, and protection of undersea data cables is maritime, yet the SA Navy remains underfunded, under-equipped, and unable to meet its CR targets.

The government has repeatedly claimed that Denel has been transferred to the Department of Defence, yet Denel remains funded under Vote 26, not Vote 23. Denel was transferred in policy but not in law, in intention, but not in budget, in rhetoric, but not in the Public Finance Management Act, PFMA. This fragmentation is a national security risk. The delays in the Armscor acquisition and procurement processes must be fixed. Yes, rigid processes are a necessity, but they must be on time, in time, all the time, as the motto of Armscor says.

The Air Force is not a luxury. It is a pillar of national security. No credible maritime security posture exists without air-lift surveillance, reconnaissance and rapid response.

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The MK Party wishes to place it on record that the austerities in the budget of the Defence and Military Veterans are a risk that cannot be reversed because the Defence budget, all the time there are cuts, and our defence Force is suffering. Our support for this Budget Vote, that is Budget Vote 23 and 26, are conditional. We support these Votes on a strict condition that all the structural failures will be corrected.

IsiZulu:

Gwaza Mkhonto, gwaza!

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Order! Order, hon members. Order! Please continue. Order, hono members. Discuss your conditional things outside of the Chamber, not here. Please continue, hon member.

Mr M L SHELEMBE: Hon Chairperson, I stand here today to debate the budget allocation to the Department of Military Veterans Vote 26. This department derives the mandate from the Military Veterans Act No 8 of 2011, which is the primary legislation governing the affairs of former soldiers. It establishes a framework for the Department of Military Veterans to provide

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socioeconomic support, benefits, and recognition to eligible military veterans and their dependents.

Chair, the Act is clear. It aims to improve the quality of lives of military veterans and their dependents so that they realise their socioeconomic progress, recognise and honour military veterans in life, and remember them in death for their sacrifices on behalf of the nation.

The Act places an obligation on the state to roll out the following services and benefits to the military veterans and their dependents. Compensation, pensions, access to military health services, subsidised access to public transport, education support, job placement, and burial support.

Chairperson, it is with a heavy heart that the Department of Military Veterans has remained dysfunctional and chaotic since the Act was passed over 15 years ago. The Minister's failure to appoint a competent director general in the Department of Military Veterans has contributed immensely to the leadership instability and chaos in the Department of Military Veterans.

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Despite numerous letters that I have written to the Minister asking her to appoint a director general in 2024, 2025, and 2026, she has not even acknowledged receipts of my letters. House Chair, the Minister's silence is not a diplomatic tool, but a stark confession.

As I speak now, hundreds of our heroes have no roof over their heads, have no food to eat, and can't access health facilities. How long must our heroes wait for food whilst the Minister and her officials enjoy a life of luxury?

Minister, a hungry veteran is a national disgrace. If anything, all this department and the Minister have delivered is excuses and empty promises. The military veterans prescribe the Ministers to ensure that military veterans are vetted to qualify for benefits.

Minister, there are serious allegations that some officials within the Department of Military Veterans are the beneficiaries of these benefits. This clearly demonstrates that the Act and pension benefit regulations are not being applied by the Department of Military Veterans.

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Last year, I submitted a written question to Minister Motshega, asking how many of the Department of Military Veterans officials are benefiting from the veteran's fund and why? To date, the Minister is yet to reply.

Thousands of military veterans who apply for pension benefits do not get replies from the Government Pension Administration Agency, GPAA, acknowledging receipt of their application within 90 days as stipulated within the regulations. A number of them have been waiting for more than a year to receive replies.

During the presentation of the recent annual performance plan, APP, the Department of Military Veterans annual performance plan revealed that the department ran out of funds for its pension benefit in September last year, and had to reprioritise money from its internal budget to continue the payments which resulted in a financial headache to the department, thus limiting its ability to pay pension, education and health care benefits.

Disappointingly, the allocation for this programme has been decreased for this financial year. Provincial offices are not

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fully operational. While call centres are non-existent, there is a budget allocated for that, and the Minister has been in the office for more than two years with no visible improvement.

The Minister's foreword emphasizes that the establishment of transversal ministerial task team as a key development to drive the department turnaround strategy, including ... [Interjections.] ... the only solution to rescue the department is to appoint a director general now, not tomorrow.

Thank you.

Mr C G NIEHAUS: Hon House Chairperson, hon members, the EFF rises to reject, in the strongest possible terms, Votes 23 and 26. The budgets for the Department of Defence and the Department of Military Veterans, including Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, Denel and the Castle Control Board, we cannot and we will not support these Votes.

These budgets represent not mere fiscal failure, but a deliberate managed decline of our national defence capability

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and a shameful betrayal of the men and women who sacrificed everything for South Africa's liberation.

Let us be clear about the facts staring us in the face from the documents before this hon House. The 2026-27 allocation for the Department of Defence is only R57,6 billion, a nominal decrease from last year and a real-term cut of over 5,6%. Defence spending remains stuck at a pathetic 0,7% of gross domestic product, GDP.

This is not austerity. This is national suicide dressed up as fiscal prudence. The SA National Defence Force, SANDF, is in the throes of collapse. Eight billion rand in maintenance backlogs, unfunded capabilities across air, sea and land, and yet more unauthorised expenditure looming on compensation of employees.

Meanwhile, the Department of Military Veterans is in terminal decline. Programme 2, responsible for housing, pensions, healthcare and counselling, has been slashed by R39,4 million, an 11,35% real cut.

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Housing targets have collapsed to a mere 450 houses over the past three years. The database remains fraudulent and incomplete. Pensions collapse mid-year. The director-general post has been vacant since December 2024, while the acting director-general clings to the office despite serious allegations of mismanagement and corruption.

This is not consolidation. It is an abandonment of our military veterans. The rot runs deeper. Armscor's corporate plan exposes shocking procurement failures that reek of corruption and incompetence. Project Hotel that was supposed to have delivered a new hydrographic survey vessel remains stalled after nearly 10 years, with a hull and fittings barely 60% complete, despite billions spent through endless variation orders.

The SA Ship, SAS is in Tijuana, frigate refit is long overdue, and the Armscor Dockyard in Simons Town is in chronic collapse. Low bids followed by massive variation orders have become the standard corrupt practice. This is not procurement. This is looting.

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Denel, our vital state-owned defence industrial asset, continues its chronic crisis with operating losses exceeding R600 million annually. Catastrophic revenue shortfalls against every plan, and the bulk of its R5,2 billion recapitalisation squandered on legacy debts rather than genuine growth, confirming the EFF's outright rejection of its failed corporate plan and budget.

At the same time, we are asked to rubber stamp R4 million from the cash-strapped SANDF budget to the Castle Control Board, a 359-year-old symbol of colonial invasion and Black subjugation. This is ideological betrayal. Every rand spent on this colonial relic is a rand stolen from soldiers and veterans.

The EFF has long demanded radical transformation of the defence sector. The so-called journey to greatness plan will remain empty rhetoric unless it is properly costed, has proper timeframes and implementation, and is fully funded without increasing the defence budget to at least 1,5% of GDP. There will be no genuine modernisation, no youth rejuvenation of the force, and no real industrialisation of the defence sector.

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We in the EFF are patriotic fighters for a sovereign South Africa. We insist on a professional, combat-ready SANDF that secures our borders, combats crime, syndicates, and illegal mining, protects national key points, and contributes to genuine African unity. But above all, we insist on an SANDF that actually cares for its soldiers and veterans.

We cannot tolerate senior officers living in luxury while the rank-and-file endures squalor, while veterans die in poverty, and while procurement scandals enrich the connected few.

Hon members, the EFF therefore rejects Votes 23 and 26. We demand the immediate redirection of resources towards genuine military modernisation, veteran welfare, forensic audits, and all irregular procurement and those responsible for it must be held accountable. Military veterans and serving soldiers deserve radical economic transformation, not managed decline.

A luta continua! [The struggle continues!]

IsiZulu:

Ink R N CEBEKHULU: Mhlonishwa Sihlalo, mhlonishwa uNgqongqoshe nabaseki bakhe, amalungu ahloniphekile ale Ndlu, ukhona yini

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ongasho ngokuziqhenya athi siphephile ezweni uma izigebengu zikwazi ukungena ephandwini wezikhali kwebiwe izibhamu namabhomu.

Mihla namalanga imibiko yabezindaba ibika ngokubanjwa kwenkunzi, izimoto ezithwala imali ziqhunywiswe ngeziquhumane namabhomu. Kuzothatha isikhathi noma iminyaka eminingi ukuba iNingizimu Afrika itakulwe kulobu bugebengu nalenkohlakalo.

English:

Hon Chair, a capable Defence Force is not a luxury; it is a constitutional necessity. Yet, year after year, South Africans are asked to approve increasing allocations to a department that continues to fail operationally, administratively and morally. There are persistent concerns regarding governance, infrastructure maintenance, operational readiness and financial management with the department.

The IFP is deeply concerned about the collapse in the maintenance of critical military assets. Our air force is struggling with grounded aircraft due to spare part shortages. Helicopters are reportedly being scavenged for components simply to keep a few operational.

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Naval vessels and submarines remain docked for extended periods while contractors continue withdrawing funds from the public purse with little to no consequence for delays or underperformance. It is not just mere insufficiency. It is a national security risk.

The continued failures surrounding Project Hotel are a prime example. A vessel intended for research and maritime capability enhancement has consumed public funds for nearly a decade, with minimal progress to show. Contractors continue to benefit while subcontractors reportedly remain unpaid. This reflects a culture of weak oversight and failure to enforce accountability by entities such as the Armaments Corporation of SA, Armscor.

The IFP further notes with concern the growing allegations of cadre deployment, politically connected appointments and institutional decay within the security cluster. South Africans are witnessing the consequences of weakened governance structures.

The poor state of military facilities is another failure of the department. Military hospitals, including the dire state

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of the one in Pretoria, continues to deteriorate. Soldiers and veterans are expected to serve their country while living in unacceptable residential conditions. Even more concerning are the reports that some SA National Defence Force, SANDF, members are forced to purchase their own uniform and attire due to supply failures within the department.

The department equally continues to fail many who once defended this nation. Veterans still struggle to access housing, health care, education opportunities and administrative assistance.

South Africa requires a Defence Force that is professional, well equipped, accountable and capable of protecting our borders. However, this cannot happen while corruption, procurement failures and poor consequence management continue unchecked.

The IFP supports the defence capability that serves the people with honour, professionalism and integrity, not weakened by mismanagement and political interference. It is in this spirit of hopelessness that we support Vote No 22. I'm sorry, Vote No 23 and Vote No 26. I thank you, Chair.

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Mr S H M VAN WYK: House Chairperson and hon members, the PA rises in support of Vote No 23 and Vote No 26, with a clear warning.

Afrikaans:

'n land wat nie sy mense of sy borders [grense] kan protect [beveilig] nie is 'n land wat sy dignity [waardigheid] verloor.

English:

On Vote No 23, Defence ...

Afrikaans:

... Suid-Afrika kan nie van sovereignty [soewereiniteit] praat as jy nie eers jou eie waters, jou eie borders [grense], jou eie mense kan secure [beveilig] nie.

English:

We are a coastal nation with 3 000 km of coastal line, yet our navy is expected to defend it with too few seaworthy vessels, too little funding for maintenance and too little urgency from leadership.

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Illegal fishing syndicates, trafficking networks and foreign vessels exploit our waters because they know ...

Afrikaans:

... Suid-Afrika kan nie enforce [afdwing] wat op papier staan nie.

English:

The air force is grounded due to aging aircraft. The army is overstretched, with equipment older than the soldiers themselves.

Afrikaans:

Die is nie 'n budget issue [begrotingskwessie] nie. Die is 'n ...

English:

... national security crisis.

Afrikaans:

Ons kan nie sovereignty [soewereiniteit] defend [verdedig] met speeches [toesprake] nie. Jy defend [verdedig] dit met capability. [vermoë.]

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English:

The PA therefore asks the Minister, what is the concrete plan to restore naval readiness? What are the timelines for the refurbishment and acquisition of vessels? How will this department ensure that South Africa is not reduced to a spectator in its own territorial waters?

A nation that forgets its veterans forgets its history. Hon Minister, today the PA acknowledges the SA Cape Corps, SACC, whose members have been overlooked for far too long.

Afrikaans:

Hulle het gedien, hulle het "gesacrifice" [opgeoffer] en hulle verdien beter as die administrative [administratiewe] chaos wat hulle nou kry. Hoe lank moet hierdie mense nog wag vir dignity [waardigheid] wat lankal hulle s'n is?

English:

These are men and women who served, who sacrificed, who carried the weight of this country's conflicts on their backs ...

Afrikaans:

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... maar vandag moet hulle vir benefits [voordele], vir health care [gesondheidsorg], vir housing [behuising], vir recognition [erkenning] baklei.

English:

The department has failed to deliver consistent, dignified, and lawful support. Veterans wait for years for pensions, housing, medical support.

The SACC in particular has been sidelined, despite their service and despite their legal standing as recognised veterans.

The PA says that every veteran – SANDF, uMkhonto weSizwe, MK, the Azanian People's Liberation Army, Apla, SACC – deserves dignity, fairness and equal treatment. Veterans must not be used as political tokens. Veterans must not be divided by history. Veterans must not be punished because departments cannot get their house in order.

A strong Defence Force protects its nation. Respecting the veteran community protects our history ...

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Afrikaans:

... maar op hierdie stadium wys ... [Onhoorbaar.] ...

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Hon member, your time has now expired.

Mr S H M VAN WYK: We support. Thank you.

Mr W W WESSELS: House Chairperson, the Minister speaks about the defence's dilemma and she says that it is due to a funding gap. Many other members have also alluded to the fact that these two Votes are insufficiently funded. We know that all departments and all Votes are under constraints due to our fiscal dilemma and the fact that we do not have sufficient funding in our fiscus to fund all our needs and our priorities.

However, the only problem that this department faces is R270 million in irregular personal protective equipment, PPE, contracts due to a funding gap or budget shortfalls, while spending R178 million on Armed Forces Day a while ago, while necessary maintenance is not done due to budget shortfalls,

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while procuring luxury sport utility vehicles, SUVs, for generals rather than uniforms for the armed forces due to funding gaps.

Procurement scandals are not a result of a budget shortfall, hon Minister. We can't speak about the modernisation of our military and our Defence Force when frontline troops do not even have boots or proper uniforms. Military veterans suffer, frontline troops are in a hopeless situation, whilst fat-cat generals live in luxury. That is where the problem is. Wrong priorities. The budget is not spent on what is needed and where the priorities are.

The little that there is, is also wasted on unnecessary expenditure, lost due to corruption and lost due to ill-discipline and the lack of governance structures within the department and its entities. Denel and Armscor remain a disgrace and a crisis. The very little progress that there is, is not enough.

We are losing. We have a brain drain in those two entities and more scandals than actual benefit is derived from those

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entities. We need discipline to be instilled in this department and we need correct priorities.

The money that is appropriated here must be spent on protecting our sovereignty, protecting our borders and enabling our troops to do what they are there to do, not for generals to act in their own interest, for their own luxuries and remain fat cats while South Africans are suffering. We need better discipline. I thank you.

Ms L M NGOBENI: Hon House Chair, perhaps let me begin by acknowledging our defence force. We salute you absolutely. Today, South Africa faces three undeniable defence failures. A defence force that is being stretched far beyond its constitutional mandate, a military leadership crisis driven by chronic underfunding and political neglect, a military veterans who continue to be abandoned by the government they once served.

Despite the repeated deployment of soldiers across our country, communities plagued by gang violence, organized crime, and porous borders continue to suffer with little meaningful improvement.

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The men and women of the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, continue to serve South Africa under increasingly difficult circumstances and the real failure lies with political leadership that has allowed the defence force to deteriorate through a complete disconnect from the operational realities facing our defence force.

Over the past year, South Africans have witnessed unprecedented public disagreements within the defence establishment itself, with senior generals openly criticising leadership, strategic direction, and operational execution.

This report warns of acute underfunding that threatens not only the South African National Defence Force operational effectiveness, but also South Africa's sovereign defence capabilities. Defence intelligence is reportedly underfunded by nearly 48%, despite being central to national security, strategic planning, and informed decision-making.

The crisis extends to maritime, landward, and air defence, as well as military health support, all reportedly facing underfunding shortfalls ranging between 40% and 54%.

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A defence force that cannot fulfil its constitutional mandate when its core capabilities are systematically weakened year after year. While at the same time, the department continues to face growing compensation crises with warnings that the defence force remains unable to align personnel expenditure with Treasury expenditure ceiling. This raises the very real risk of unauthorized expenditure while operational capabilities continue to decline.

The South African National Defence Force is being increasingly called upon to compensate for failures elsewhere in the security cluster. Soldiers are deployed to support SA Police Service, SAPS, in crime-fighting operations, assist the Border Management Authority, BMA, and combat illegal mining operations across the country.

Yet despite these deployments, illegal mining continues to thrive, border security remains compromised, and violent crime continues to devastate communities. This raises serious concerns about whether the defence force is being stretched far beyond its constitutional mandate without the resources and strategic support required to succeed.

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The department has also failed military veterans. Veterans across South Africa continue to struggle to access pensions, housing support, healthcare and other benefits owed to them after years of service to this country. While administrative expenditure continues to grow, too many veterans are still waiting for their dignity and to be supported by this department.

The President has indicated that more funding may be available for the defence force, but South Africans deserve clarity on where this funding will come from and how it will be spent and whether it will genuinely restore operational capability. Throwing money at a broken system without reform is not resolving the crisis.

And so, as Action SA, we do not support these votes while the department continues to fail, both serving soldiers and military veterans. I thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS (Mr C R Hlophe): Hon House Chairperson, hon members of this august House, my colleagues, Minister Motshekga and the Deputy Minister in his absentia, Ministers and Deputy Ministers

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present, all military veterans of our country, ladies and gentlemen. Allow me to reaffirm the long-standing commitment of the ANC in honouring the sacrifices of our military veterans and former liberation fighters through accelerated and improved access to their legislated benefits, including pension, housing, health care, and education, to name but a few.

Since the beginning of the Seventh Administration, we have been focused on resolving both internal and external challenges of the Department of Military Veterans by strengthening governance, improving service delivery, and reposition the department to adequately address the needs of the military veterans.

The Minister referred to this in her speech, allow me to expand on aspects of our work in this regard. This year, the department will finalize work on ensuring that our database is credible, reliable, and up to date, which has taken years to conclude. In this regard, the department is pleased to report that there is significant progress in the data verification process since it was reported on in our last budget vote.

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The task team responsible for consolidating and finalising applicants of former non-statutory force members for inclusion in the military veteran's database is now left with only some parts of KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape Provinces to verify and should be finished with this work by the end of September this year.

Similarly, we have requested the team from Treasury that is working with the departments to identify and get rid of ghost workers to start working in the Department of Military Veterans, to cleanse our database of people who are there fraudulently while also assisting us identify those who should not be receiving benefits from the DMV as they do not qualify.

We are also reviewing the manner in which we deliver services to military veterans. The Department of Military Veterans does not deliver services directly but works through other line function departments where service delivery is located. This sometimes creates a challenge for the department as it is required by this Parliament to quantify its deliverables as performance indicators.

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While it does not actually control the quantity to be delivered per annum, the department in conversation with the Department of Public Service and Administration, DPSA, is therefore investigating ways in which it can improve its coordination function to ensure that the relevant departments deliver service to the veterans.

For example, the department is working closely with the Department of Human Settlements to quantify the need for housing among the most vulnerable in order to develop an integrated plan for the delivery of houses that will not be dependent on plans for the delivery of Reconstruction and Development Programme, RDP, houses by each province, but will have its own program and time frames, which will be agreed upon between the two departments and supported by Treasurer.

The department is also investigating ways in which it can use the limited funds effectively and efficiently to address the most vulnerable military veterans. It does not make sense to pay pensions to people who are working for government and are contributing to the pension fund and to others who take a pension payout. And then when that is finished, they come back

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for the pension from the Department of Military Veterans, which happens currently.

While there are military veterans out there who are destitute and have never, ever had any source of income, in this regard, we are strengthening our regulations to spell out clearly how the means test will apply to each category benefits. And if thus far issued new regulations of burial support and pensions, others will follow soon.

The department is aware that there are military veterans that are waiting to apply for education bursaries to continue their studies as well as educate their children.

The efforts I have outlined so far are also aimed at improving our use of the money we have while recognising that our budget is currently stressed and does not enable us to meet our responsibilities to military veterans. We are in constant conversation with the Treasury to find ways to address this challenge. At the same time, the department is also looking at mechanisms to deliver quality healthcare to military veterans while curbing escalating costs which are not affordable.

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On governance, the department is reviving all its governance structures as legislated. The Minister recently appointed the appeals board, which is meant to consider appeals from the military veterans who believe the decisions of the officials of the department may be unfair and may prejudice them in any manner.

This committee has already undergone orientation and will begin its work soon, especially to attend to a backlog of appeals that have been waiting consideration for some time... Thank House Chairperson. [Time expired.]

Mr W T D PLAATJIES: Hon House Chairperson, hon Minister, hon chairperson in absentia, hon members, I rise in this House today with profound sense of responsibility and patriotism, conscious of the historic duty that rest upon all of us as representatives of South African Republic. We are the custodians of a democratic order that was not handed to us freely but through immense sacrifice that gave birth to the Constitution. It is thus this Constitution that guarantees the rights and freedoms we enjoy today. It is our solemn obligation to defend, uphold and respect protect against threats of both internal and external. Is therefore as

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parliamentarians for us to exercise rigorous oversight over the Defence environment at all public resources entrusted to the democratic state. We reaffirm this responsibility without hesitation.

Hon members, the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans has undertaken a detailed and rigorous assessment of the department's strategy annual performance plan and the budget allocations. Relating to the Department of Defence, Armscor, Denel and associated entities. While areas of progress have been acknowledged, particular regarding operational deployment, border safe-guarding efforts and ongoing modernisation initiatives serious structural challenges remain and require urgent intervention.

The sustainable and adequate Defence funding is no longer a matter of choice; it is a strategic national imperative. The current allocation of approximately R57,6 billion representing a real term decline and remaining at roughly 0,7% of the gross domestic product, GDP, is insufficient to sustain a constitutional and operational obligations placed upon the SA National Defence Force, SANDF. We cannot continue to expect the SANDF to defend our sovereignty, protect our borders,

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participate in peace-keeping mission and respond to natural disasters, combat transnational organised crime and support domestic stability operations while we reduce its real operational capacity year-after-year.

A state that neglects its Defence capability weakens its own sovereignty, compromise its developmental agenda and exposes the people to growing insecurity. Therefore, an urgent need for an engagement between the Department of Defence and Military Veterans, the National Treasury and the Presidency is needed. In moving South Africa through accelerated benchmark of 1,5% GDP, Defence capabilities must be understood as not an expensive alone but as an investment in sovereignty, peace, economic stability and democratic resilience.

Hon House Chairperson, the community remains deeply concerned by the declining conditions of the Defence infrastructure. A Defence Force operating with outdated infrastructure and constraint resources cannot effectively respond with the evolving security threats of the 21st Century. At the time when warfare and security threats are increasingly shaped by cyber warfare, the modernisation of the SA National Defence

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Force is therefore not optional it is essential for the protection of our national interest and democratic stability.

Hon members, we must equally intensify our procurement oversight. Strengthening governance systems and decisively confront corruption across the entire Defence environment. Corruption with each institution responsible for national security is not merely financial misconduct, it is a direct assault to our sovereignty and the security of the Republic.

The Armscor, Denel and all entities within the Defence environment must therefore lead by example to clean governance. The revitalisation of Denel and the broader Defence industrial base remain strategically important not only for national security but also for localisation and local industry.

A matter of increasing national importance required careful parliamentary oversight is the deployment of SA National Defence Force members in support of the SA Police internal stability operations across parts of our country particularly in the Western Cape communities continue to suffer. We support this budget. [Time expired.]

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Mr S N SWART: Hon Chairperson, the ACDP rises in this Budget Vote fully cognisant of the severe financial constraints facing the SA National Defence Force, SANDF. This is nothing new. We have lamented this for many, many years. Yet our voices and those of the Defence Force officers that are here their cause has largely fallen on deaf ears.

Yes, we need to address irregular and wasteful expenditure, but the SANDF's operational conditions are now critical the navy operates one of four figures and yes, it was excellent to see SAS Amatola traveling internationally, one of three submarines.

The Airforce keeps only a handful of Gripen fighter jets and Rooivalk helicopter, RX, while most of the C130 transport aircraft are grounded. The army's infantry combat vehicles and trucks many are over 30 years old have poor operational rates. Yet in the midst of this picture the SANDF is expected to fulfil its constitutional mandate, protecting the sovereignty of the country, being deployed on peace missions and now more recently assisting in flood ravaged areas, assisting the Police in fighting crime and gangsterism, illegal mining and patrolling porous borders.

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This they do despite severe financial constraints. We as the ACDP we salute the man in uniform but at the end of day, we as Parliament continue to ring our hands when we have the power to pass the budget. It is shameful that men and women in uniform are expected to offer the same sacrifice when we are not given sufficient budget.

Their response when they are called upon by the Commander-in-Chief is ours is not to question why ours is just to do or die.

Yet there is a glimmer of hope. The ACDP welcomes hon Minister the long-awaited Cabinet's approval of the Journey to Greatness, this long-term planning strategy to modernise, rebuild and reform the Defence Force. In our view a professional and well-resourced and combat ready Defence Force is not a like to have is an essential and it is critical for the success of this strategy that sufficient funding is made available. The challenge is that this is a 30-year strategy. It cannot be like the 2015 Defence Review that was drafted but just gathered dust. We cannot fail our Defence Force members in this regard. An urgent additional funding is necessary.

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Lastly, I would like to thank all members and support staff of the Defence Force on behalf of the ACDP, those who are under extremely difficult conditions are expected to make the supreme sacrifice in that role. We cannot fail them. We cannot fail our men and women in uniform. Let us look to ensure that they are sufficiently resourced and that those resources are properly spend. I thank you, hon Chairperson.

Ms C T NONTENJA: Hon Chairperson, on behalf of the UDM, I rise in support of Budget Vote No 23 and 26. The UDM believes that both the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, and the Department of Military Veterans are facing serious pressures. The Defence Force is increasingly overstretched, underfunded and expected to do more with minimal resources at their disposal. At the same time, many military veterans continue to struggle to access the support services and dignity they deserve after serving this country. Despite the critical role played by the SANDF in border protection, peace-keeping missions, disaster response and internal security operations. The current budget allocation remains insufficient to meet these growing demands.

Equally concerning, is the continued delay in the provision of housing, health care, pensions and other essential benefits

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for military veterans. This raises serious questions about the government's commitment to honouring those who dedicated their lives to protecting our country.

While the UDM is concerned about the underfunding of the Department of Military Veterans, the UDM is also concerned about the slow pace on resolving audit queries as this affects accountability by the department. Lack of new initiatives in addressing issues related to overspending on compensation of employees and the rejuvenation plans is concerning as it is not clear how is the department planning to address these matters. To address these interconnected challenges a co-ordinated reform approach is required across both departments.

Government should progressively increase Defence related allocations in line with the strategic requirements while restructuring expenditure to prioritise capital investments, equipment maintenance and capability development over personnel heavy costs. Only through stronger funding co-ordination and accountability can the dignity and sacrifices of those who serve and have served be truly honoured.

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The UDM is of the view that Denel's lack of accountabilities needs to be addressed immediately. We cannot have a situation where Denel fails to submit the annual financial statements. Thank you, Chairperson. [Time expired.]

Mr S M GANA: Minister, during the Easter weekend, I attended the Rand Easter Show with my 10-year-old son. Like many South Africans, we stood proudly watching the demonstrations by the SA National Defence Force, the discipline, the precision and the courage of our soldiers. It reminded us that this country still has men and women willing to defend its people with honour. My son looked at those soldiers with admiration. He even asked me whether one day he too, should join the army.

However, as I stood there, pride slowly turned into concern. Because, behind the demonstrations, behind the uniforms, behind the brave faces of our soldiers, there is a painful truth. The SA National Defence Force is declining before our eyes. Many of the vehicles on display are the same ones we saw years ago, similar to the one that's just parked outside. The same aging equipment and the same tired machinery. There were very few helicopters in the air because many are no longer

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functional. Our Defence Force is not modernising. It is merely surviving.

Chair, while funding constraints are real, Minister, lack of money alone cannot explain this collapse. The deeper problem is actually mismanagement. Basic maintenance is neglected.

Facilities are repeatedly broken into. Arms and ammunition are stolen from military bases with alarming frequency. Those weapons do not disappear into thin air. They end up in the hands of criminals terrorising our communities.

South Africans are increasingly convinced that many of the thefts we see in the army, are actually inside jobs. There are people within sections of the supply chain management within the army and even within senior ranks, whose mission is no longer to defend South Africa, but to strip the SA National Defence Force piece by piece for personal gain. A country cannot defend its sovereignty when corruption has infiltrated its barracks. Minister, this budget must become a turning point.

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Firstly, we must clean up corruption in Defence procurement and supply chain management. Every corrupt official stealing from the army is weakening the Republic itself. Secondly, maintenance and readiness must become the priority before grand announcements and expensive conferences. Thirdly, South Africa must begin a serious programme of modernisation, investing in technology, air capability, border protection and the development of young military talent.

Because the greatest threat to our Defence Force today is not a foreign army, it is a decay from within. As I left the Rand Easter Show I was asking myself, when my son turns 18, will there still be a capable SA National Defence Force worthy of his pride, his service and ... [Inaudible.] ... ?

Xitsonga:

Ndza khensa, Mutshamaxitulu. [Nkarhi wu herile.]

IsiZulu:

Mnu I ISMAIL-MOOSA: Malibongwe!

English:

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In the name of Almighty, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, I greet this House and all our beloved fellow South Africans in the name and prayer of peace. To our hon Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, we are proud of our military veterans. Al Jama-ah rises on the debate and supports Votes 23 and 26 of the Defence and Military Veterans.

We acknowledge the importance and the important role played by the men and women of the SA National Defence Force in protecting our sovereignty, assisting during disasters, securing our borders and contributing to peacekeeping missions across the African Continent. However, while we salute their sacrifices, we must also confront the harsh realities facing many of our military veterans today. Far too many veterans continue to struggle with housing, health care, access to benefits and economic opportunities.

Those who once served this nation with honour should never feel abandoned or forgotten. Al Jama-ah believes that caring for our veterans is not charity, it is a national responsibility and a moral obligation. We, therefore, call for greater efficiency, transparency and accountability in ensuring that benefits and support reach every deserving

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veteran without unnecessary delays and bureaucracy. We further urge that our defence capability be strengthened responsibly while always promoting peace, diplomacy and African unity over conflict and aggression.

South Africa must continue to be a voice of peace, justice and humanitarian values both locally and internationally. As we debate this budget, let us remember that true national security is not only measured by military strength, but also by how we honour those who sacrifice for our democracy and our freedom. Honour our veterans, defend our nation, a strong defence with dignity for every veteran, peace, justice, and support for all those who served.

IsiZulu:

Malibongwe!

English:

I thank you.

Afrikaans:

Mnr C HATTINGH: Agb Huisvoorsitter, Minister Motshekga, generaal en ander offisiere.

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English:

South Africans are repeatedly being told that the SA National Defence Force is on a journey to greatness. The truth is that, our Defence Force is on a journey of badly managed decline. In reality, this is not a journey to greatness, but a death march in parade uniform. The SA Defence Review 2015 warned explicitly that defence capabilities were already in critical decline and required a recovery path. Cabinet approved it. Parliament accepted it. Then, government and the SA National Defence Force simply ignored it. Eleven years later, we are still paying the price.

The Air Force cannot fly properly. The Navy cannot sail properly. Army cannot deploy properly. Military health is under severe strain. Border safeguarding is underfunded and failing. South Africa now has a Defence Force increasingly unable to safeguard our sovereignty on land, at sea, or in the air. The SA National Defence Force has vacancy levels of 30% in aircrew, 27,5% in nursing, 46% in engineering. That is not transformation. It is institutional collapse.

Yet, nearly two-thirds of the Defence Budget is swallowed by compensation of employees. In 2024-25 alone, cost of employees

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overspent by R2,5 billion, while flying hours, sea hours, maintenance, ammunition and training were cut. The Minister speaks of modernisation. Our soldiers need boots and uniforms and equipment before PowerPoint presentations. Sailors need working ships. Pilots need aircraft that can actually leave the ground.

When Cuban technicians are brought in at exorbitant cost to perform maintenance that their own skilled people are begging to do and government presents that as a glaring success, it shows how far our standards have fallen. Maintenance is not an achievement. It is the minimum requirement of a functioning military. Leadership is not about announcing plans. It is about making hardest decisions. Instead, we are giving another secret plan called Journey to Greatness, while the approved defence review was never implemented.

How do you promise greatness when Project Hoefyster, the Badger Infantry Combat Vehicle Programme, has already consumed nearly R8 billion, still has not delivered a single operational vehicle should have been completed by 2012, and is now drifting towards 2031? How can we speak of renewal when Project Hotel, the hydrographic survey vessel, announced in

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2017 at R1,8 billion for delivery in January 2021, is now heading towards 2031? After burning more than almost R3 billion and it's just still an empty hole, while frigates and submarines continue waiting for critically overdue midlife upgrades. That is not renewal. It is the client dressed up as progress.

How do we ask for trust when accountability is absent? And how do we speak of discipline when there are serious allegations that instructions from the President, as the Commander-in-Chief, were ignored? During the exercise World for Peace, serious concerns emerged regarding Iran-linked participation, and whether an instruction for the President to terminate that involvement was disregarded. If the Commander-in-Chief issued an instruction and senior military leadership failed to carry it out, this is not a mere administrative matter, it strikes at the heart of constitutional authority.

Section 202 of the Constitution is clear, the President exercises supreme command of the Defence Force. The Minister initially promised the board of inquiry with an outcome within seven days. Where is that report? Instead, the process shifted from a promised ministerial inquiry to vague references to a

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presidential commission with no transparency, no accountability or any timeline. South Africa cannot afford a Defence Force where instructions from the Commander-in-Chief are treated as optional.

Then there is the SA Army Foundation, this should protect soldiers' welfare. Instead, we now face reports of Financial Sector Conduct Authority, FSCA, fines of R40 million and persistence allegations that foundation money was used to settle the personal accounts of generals and senior officers. If hardworking soldiers' money was diverted to pay private bills of generals, that is not just corruption, it is betrayal. Betrayal of trust, betrayal of service, betrayal of every soldier standing on the border while senior elites help themselves.

The message is simple. For the ordinary soldier, sacrifice, hardship and declining conditions of service. For senior leadership and political office bearers, blue lights, red carpets, golf days and gala dinners. The contradiction is destroying morale, credibility and trust within the Defence Force. The Minister should now answer. Who authorised this?

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Who benefited? How much was involved? What recovery took place? Who was suspended or charged?

When generals use soldiers' money to settle their own accounts, morale collapses faster than the SA National Defence Force' already failing operational readiness. Then there is Denel. Denel should be a strategic defence asset.

Instead, it has become an international embarrassment, failing to deliver on prepaid contracts. Five consecutive disclaimer audit opinions, five years where the Auditor-General effectively says: The books cannot be trusted. Missing records, weak controls, no consequence management, repeated bailouts with little proof of recovery. That is not recapitalisation.

It is a state-funded survival attempt without any reform. The Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, faces delays, procurement failures and project overruns from Project Hotel to the growing ... [Inaudible.] ... tender controversy, while Parliament is expected to oversee plans built on unfunded assumptions. The real crisis in defence is not only money.

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It is leadership, the refusal to prioritise, the refusal to restructure, the refusal to hold people accountable, the refusal to tell South Africans the truth.

The DA believes South Africa needs a Defence Force that can defend, not a ceremonial force, not a paper force but a real Defence Force. That means honest budgeting, structuring reform, professional leadership, consequence management and restoring combat capability. South Africa cannot defend sovereignty with speeches. Parliament cannot keep funding failure and call it stability. The SA National Defence Force does not need another slogan. It needs leadership. Hon House Chair, right now, that is exactly what we do not have. I thank you.

Mr T B MUNYAI: Hon House Chair, hon Minister, and the Deputy Minister and hon members. Allow me to pay a solemn tribute to the brave and gallant members of SA Defence Force, SANDF, who paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving under the SA Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, SAMIDRC, and United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, MUNOSCO.

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Their courage, discipline, and unwavering commitment for peace, regional stability, and the defence to humanity shall forever remain etched in the proud tradition of SANDF. I respectively dedicate the debate to their memory, honour, and sacrifice.

The ANC rises in support of the Budget Vote 23 and 26 because we understand that a capable Defence Force is not a luxury for a sovereign democratic state. It is a constitutional fundamental necessity.

The budget allocation is a critical instrument for the Department of Defence and Military Veterans to fulfil the constitutional mandate of defending and protecting the republic, safeguarding its territorial integrity, preserving its constitutional order, and protecting its people, as envisaged by the Constitution and the Defence Act.

It is our collective responsibility to resolutely protect the state authority. The Budget Vote is not merely about the expenditure lines nor the financial allocation. It is about safeguarding the constitutional democracy. It is about protecting the national sovereignty. It is about securing

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peace and stability in our region and on the African continent. It is about defending the gains of freedom. And it is about honouring the service and sacrifice of military veterans who contributed to the liberation of this country.

House Chairperson, the central question before this House is, what kind of state are we building and what kind of security architecture is required to defend our democracy? The department faces a key and central challenge related to fiscal resources, which constrains the operational pressures and our defence capabilities aligned to the complexities of both domestic and continental security demand.

Every allocation made by this democratic state takes place within a constrained fiscal environment, competing developmental priorities. Despite the limited public purse challenges, the department continue to fulfil and honour critical constitutional responsibilities in defence of our sovereignty and democracy.

The SANDF safeguards our borders and territorial integrity, continues to be a peacekeeping mission under the African Union, AU, SA Development Community, SADC, and United Nations,

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UN frameworks that support the communities during the disasters and humanitarian emergencies. And they assist in anti-crime intervention. And these contribute to regional stability in areas affected by conflict and instability.

The people of South Africa see these efforts in your action on a daily basis. The ANC welcomes His Excellency the President and the Commander-in-Chief for deployment of South African National Defence Force coordinated deployment cooperation with SA Police Service, SAPS, to combat escalating violence, violent crimes, gangsterism, illicit mining activities in the several provinces across the republic.

The people of Cape Flats want the Operation Prosper to prosper. Only the unpatriotic who advance the hogwash to demobilise our people, not to work with the police because they have a vested interest other than fighting crime.

The ANC welcomes His Excellency, that the state must continue to act firmly, lawfully, and constitutionally to protect the people of South Africa. The ANC supports the Department of Defence's long-term capability development plan, the journey to greatness, as a phased and sustainable strategy to rebuild,

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modernise, and digitise South Africa's defence capabilities. The plan recognises that the military readiness requires the long-term investment in technology skills, maintenance and research innovation, and strong institutional capabilities.

Hon members, modern security threats are evolving rapidly. The contemporary battle space now extends beyond the conventional warfare. Summary of the department is to understand that the evolving threats is in the context of evolving technology.

It is a force multiplier that is required to respond to the threat with the highest degree of precision. It is within this context that the Department of Defence developed a long-term plan, the journey to greatness, which was geared to deliver the mission focused capabilities in electronic, cyber, and information warfare that strikes across air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.

Hon Chairperson, the strategic importance of Armaments Corporation of South Africa, Armscor, and Denel and the broader South African defence industry cannot be overstated. This institution remains critical as our national essence for safeguarding our sovereignty, advancing industrialisation,

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driving technological innovation, and sustaining the defence capabilities within our borders.

Armcor continues to play a strategic role in advancing South Africa defence capability through defence acquisition, research and technology integration, and the sustainment of the mission-ready capabilities for the South African National Defence Force.

Equally, Denel remains a critical asset that provides advanced manufacturing aerospace, missile technologies, defence systems, precision engineering, and the specialised technical expertise that are necessary and essential for national security and strategic autonomy.

They serve as a catalyst for defence industrialisation to strengthen the country's defence capabilities. The SA National Defence Force continues to play an important supporting role in safeguarding our borders and supporting our national stability.

Border security is not xenophobia. It is an internationally recognised function of every foreign sovereign state.

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Integration of the Border Management Authority, BMA, into defence could be a strategic imperative for the border security.

We resolutely support the clarion call of one Castle Board and one management as part of the heritage resource of historical significance, such that they generate revenue to maintain this heritage site from generation to generation.

House Chairperson, the military veterans matter deserves special and urgent attention. The democracy we enjoy today was not free. It was won through sacrifice, struggle, imprisonment, exile, and resistance.

Many military veterans dedicated their youth, their families, and in many cases, their lives in the liberation of this country. Hon Minister, it is therefore unacceptable when the veterans experience delays in benefits, house support, health care access, education assistance, pension administration, and other forms of support owed to them by a democratic state for which they sacrificed so much for.

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The ANC supports the ongoing efforts to stabilise and strengthen the Department of Military Veterans, and to improve the governance systems, eliminate administrative failures, enhance verification, and restore the dignity to veterans and their dependents.

House Chairperson, accountability must remain a central democratic governance. Hon Minister, where there are weaknesses, there has to be consequence management. However, oversight must never descend into a political sensationalism, as we have seen by other two hon members who always reserve their comments in committees, and I thought today they will reserve their speech for another day.

Therefore, there is a difference between a principle oversight and reckless institutional destruction. We must avoid creating a false impression that South Africa is defenceless or incapable of protecting the constitutional order. Such narrative can weaken the investor confidence.

The ANC supports this budget.

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The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Chair, let me also thank the members who participated in the debate. I must indicate that I will not be able to respond to all the inputs and it is not out of disrespect but because of time.

Therefore, I will not be able to address all the points that were raised. I will only pick up on a few.

The one for instance, I want to say to hon Kubukeli that we have already appointed a new Secretary of Defence and maybe to share with you that the interviews for the new Director-General for the Department of Military Veterans, DMV, is underway. We should be making an appointment soon.

The SA National Military Veterans Association, SANMVA, Elective Conference, there's no fight about it. It's going to take place even if it's not taking place over the next weekend. Again, I want to mention that the policy document, which is in the speech, has been approved on 6 April and it has to follow parliamentary processes, as you will all know. Indeed, a member also said it's a 30-year plan. Yes, it is, but it has been broken into different phases.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Minister, will you please take a seat. Hon Reddy, do you have a point of order?

Mr V G REDDY: [Inaudible.] ... Keep your mouth shut!

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Reddy, hon Reddy!

Mr V G REDDY: Yes, thank you very much, Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Reddy, before I recognise you, will you please withdraw? That was not parliamentary to tell ... Please withdraw, hon Reddy.

Mr V G REDDY: He must keep his mouth shut.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Please withdraw, hon Reddy.

Mr V G REDDY: I withdraw, I withdraw, but he started it.

You know, there's rules of the House here.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Reddy! Please, members, quiet down. Hon Reddy, I couldn't hear, did you withdraw?

Mr V G REDDY: I withdrew, I withdrew, but ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): There's no buts, hon Reddy, you withdrew. What is your point of order? Continue.

Mr V G REDDY: You know, Speaker, in the Cape Flats, our children are getting shot and killed every day in spite of the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, being deployed there. Will the Minister, in terms of Rule 63 be prepared ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Reddy, you didn't quote ... [Interjections.] ... it's not a point of order. Hon Reddy! This is not a point of order. You are trying to debate. What is your point of order?

Mr V G REDDY: In terms of Rule 66(b), is the Minister prepared to take a question on the killings in the Cape Flats?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Thank you. Hon Minister?

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Mr V G REDDY: ... and the SANDF. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Minister, are you prepared to take a question?

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Ai, not at all. I'll be wasting my time with this one. No.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Thank you, Minister. You can continue.

IsiZulu:

UNGQONGQOSHE WEZOKUVIKELA KANYE NEZIGAYIGAYI ZEZIMPI:

Ngizozimoshela isikhathi ngalo. Ngalo ngizobe ngizimoshela isikhathi.

English:

Chair, as I indicated that the journey to greatness, it is a 30-year plan which has been broken and has been costed. But I also want to say to the IFP member,

IsiZulu:

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... ningamfakazeli nina, myekeni. Ngifuna ukuthi kulungu elihloniphekile le-IFP ngempela fakani imali nizobona ubuhle obuzovela. Okwamanje ukumane nithi kushoda lokhu uMnyango wezokuVikela awuziphi imali, uphiwa yiPhalamende. Uma imali isiyabiwe kahle sizoxoxa. Okwamanje akhomali ezozipha yona. Ngivumelana nawe uma kufikwa lapho.

English:

We will publish the speech on our website for members to appreciate what we have and what we are doing. Again, because of time, I was not able to read all the points, but we will get it on the website.

Member of the Patriotic Alliance, some of the points that you've raised are responded to. And as I said, to blame the department for underfunding, I don't know what it means ... raised by parliament.

To member Wessels, sometimes to really exaggerate and say the arms cost R700 million, it's an exaggeration ...

[Interjections.] ... which is 300% more. And I think ...

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon Minister, will you please take a seat. There is a point of order.

Hon Gamede on the virtual platform, what is your point of order?

Mr T I GAMEDE: Chairperson, I don't think it's correct for the Minister to say, I'm not interested to take a question "nalo". There is no "lo" in ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon member, that is not a point of order because it's within the rules that the request is to the Minister and the Minister can ...

Mr T I GAMEDE: ... but calling someone names ... "Lo"! ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Thank you, Minister, you can continue.

Mr T I GAMEDE: Chairperson?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): No, hon member, I've already ruled on that. The Minister will continue.

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Mr T I GAMEDE: But it's not correct to call anyone "lo" in the House. They are hon members.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon member, obviously you don't know the rules.

Mr T I GAMEDE: There is no "lo" in Parliament, there is no "lo". That is Mr Reddy or hon Reddy, not "lo".

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms C Labuschagne): Hon member, this is not a point of order. If you continue, you will be removed from the platform. Thank you.

Hon Minister, continue.

The MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS: Chair, to continue, I really want to say to Mr Wessels that to really raise points, exaggerate and make distortions, for me, tantamount to misleading the House. The points were saying that it's R700 million, I think it's a problem.

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Chair, I also want to agree with the ACDP member that, as I say, strategy has been divided into different phases. Again, when we start publishing it, the member will see that.

Again, in the speech, we have reflected on the auditing and all the other concerns which are legitimate about our disclaimers, about qualified reports and we did say what we are doing in correcting that matter. Deputy Minister Holomisa is leading and addressing the concerns both of the Auditor-General and findings from different agencies.

Again, to member Hattingh, I fully agree with you that we do need a defence force that can defend its people, different from the one that used to hunt its people, make them as their key targets, and kill leaders like Goniwe, hunt them, and burn them at Vlakplaas. So, we agree that we really need a defence force that defends, not one that kills.

In closing, Chair, as I said earlier, the Office of the Military Ombud does continue to play a very important role in our work. I want to take this opportunity, and members to join me, to thank the Military Ombud, Lieutenant-General Vusumuzi Masondo, whose term of office comes to an end this year in

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October. I also want to thank Ombud Advocate Simphiwe Damane-Mkhosana who has already left.

I did say that we have members of the Reserve Force Council, which is an advisory body for the SANDF, and mandated to represent and advocate for the part-time reserve force soldiers. I can report that it is fully functional with an appointed chairperson and deputy, and a complete structure. They are vitalising the Defence Reserve System in order to harness the South African youth vitality.

Lastly, what I also did not mention is the Cape of Good Hope, which is a military heritage site and the country's oldest colonial building. It is 360 years old and really provides a very beautiful, vibrant and inclusive space. I want to invite members to also participate and join the Castle of Good Hope, which is a testimony about reconciliation, healing and about our past. Thank you very much, Chair.

Debate concluded.

The mini plenary session rose at 11:53.