THURSDAY, 15 MAY 2025

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE HYBRID NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

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The House met at 14:00.

The Speaker took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT OF JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE ON MIDTERM STRATEGIC REVIEW OF SA NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE

Mr K M N GIGABA: [Interjections.]

The SPEAKER: Order, hon members! Allow hon Gigaba to start.

Mr K M N GIGABA: Hon Speaker, hon members, some years have passed since our people proclaimed, in the face of naked violence, that there shall be peace and friendship. This proclamation was prophetic, as the apartheid regime would

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subsequently embark on a vicious campaign of cross-border raids and regional destabilisation.

The Freedom Charter would therefore constitute our pledge of good neighbourliness with our neighbours all over our continent. It is the heartbeat of our democracy, and its vision of a better world serves as our moral compass, guiding our efforts as we engage with the world. Today, as we table the Medium-Term Strategic Review of the South African National Defence Force, SANDF, we are cognisant of our historic mission to peace, both in our country and abroad, achieved through dialogue, rather than armed conflict.

However, when forces with underlying and malicious agendas threaten to undermine our sovereignty or that of our neighbours, we must be prepared to defend ourselves vigorously. This review was commissioned as part of the oversight of the Joint Standing Committee on Defence in the Sixth Administration. The aim is to critically examine the current state of our Defence Force and to present a realistic outlook for the future.

A vibrant state always seeks renewal and modernisation in an ever-evolving world of statecraft, while upholding its

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fundamental constitutional obligations, which are to defend the country, protect its people, and uphold its sovereignty. Today, it is clearer than ever that a disciplined, highly competent defence force is an asset to any nation that seeks peace and stability in a volatile world. Our armed forces remain the ultimate guarantors of our sovereignty, peace, and territorial integrity.

They are the guardians of our democratic state. This report therefore expresses one of our responsibilities as Parliament, which is to ensure that our military is fully equipped and supported for the execution of its solemn mandate as enshrined in the Constitution. In addition, our Defence Force is instrumental in fostering peace within our borders, in our region, and across the continent.

They are expected to play a meaningful role in the protection of people, common values, and the prosperity of our nation. This mid-term review reminds us of the importance of our Defence Force and the fact that it does not operate in isolation. It stresses long-term planning, the availability of resources, and the need for ongoing transformation.

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Though published in 2023, subsequent events in the DRC should serve as a catalyst for Parliament to debate the country's defence needs more frequently. This debate should spark a broader debate about the type of defence force we seek, as a country.

Among others, the report did warn Parliament about the state of the South African National Defence Force as well as the risks and challenges this posed.

Through its capabilities and structure, the SANDF is a microcosm of our democratic state, propelling us forward in unison with other wheels of the state. It is critical, therefore, that we align this report with the National Development Plan and the 2015 Defence Review, which was about creating a defence force that is responsive to modern trends, that is technologically advanced, and most importantly, is people centred. Even as the refinement of the Defence Review 2015 is still pending, it is important to propose that perhaps the time has come to draft a new White Paper, in order to map our way forward in terms of our country's defence needs.

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However, it has been almost a decade since the Defence Review 2015 was implemented, making this an opportune time to reflect on some notable strides. These have been attained in the midst of funding constraints and general infrastructure decline, which press upon us the urgent need for rejuvenation and increased oversight. The document under consideration acknowledges these challenges, but it also urges us as members of this House not to be despondent, but rather to tackle our challenges with a great sense of purpose and resolve, coupled with innovative thinking and a solutions-driven approach.

It is well documented that over the years, our Defence Forces experienced severe budgetary constraints, which has led to a gradual decline in operational readiness and affected other aspects such as the morale of our troops and the capacity to mitigate complex challenges. It is important to realise that the cost of maintaining a highly challenged defence force is greater than the cost of beefing up its infrastructure and resources timeously. Peace has no price tag, but an ill-equipped defence force with low morale can cost us dearly as a nation.

It is imperative that the Defence Force is able to maintain our sovereignty, respond to disasters and continue as an important

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partner in regional and global peace operations. We must therefore prioritise sustainable and strategic funding for our military. It is imperative to implement the President’s directive issued in 2024, aimed at halting the downward funding spiral of the National Defence Force, by finding innovative ways gradually to increase defence expenditure to 1,5% of GDP. We must be mindful of the positive externalities of such actions, not only in relation to building defence capabilities, but increasing our manufacturing research output and the defence industry’s contribution to our country’s overall GDP.

It would be an injustice to speak about a 21st century South African National Defence Force without tackling the urgent task of transformation. Our Defence Force must be a true reflection of the nation that it defends, and a mirror that reflects the key trends of a democratic state, such as equality, dignity and nonracialism. This includes ensuring that there is gender equality across the ranks, and that meaningful career pathways are created to attract ambitious young people who should see, in their Defence Force, an opportunity to serve our nation with pride and purpose.

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This is where the Military Skills Development System, MSDS, plays a vital role. The programme must be an enabler of participation and advancement in the Defence Force. Through this programme, we have witnessed thousands of young South Africans from different parts of our country, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, acquiring skills and lifting themselves out of abject poverty. In addition, they gain something more intangible, yet just as important, a strong sense of identity.

The MSDS goes beyond the ambit of the Youth Employment Programme. It is a critical tool for nation-building, and acts as a unifier between service and society, and a seedbed for future military and civilian leaders alike.

This report also shows our commitment to peacekeeping efforts on the continent. From Mozambique to the DRC, our men and women have stood together with fellow Africans to protect civilians, prevent violence, and serve continental peace. These efforts are not just about charity; they are about solidarity and strategic necessity. Instability in the region threatens our national security and economic development.

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Moving forward, we must always base our strategic approach on the unwavering commitment to silencing the guns. This is both a continental goal and a moral duty. The Defence Force does not seek war.

We are trained for it, but we are also trained for peace building, safeguarding human security, and supporting national development. To silence the guns means investing in early warning systems, mediation mechanisms, border security, and the well-being of citizens. It is about ensuring that no child in Africa grows up in the shadow of a soldier’s rifle.

Let us approach this task of defence force renewal with the energy, resources, and resolves it deserves. Thank you very much.

Mr W M DOUGLAS: Madam Speaker, thank you House, I greet you all in the name of my Lord and saviour Jesus Christ and I want to just say it is a blessing to be here. Hon Speaker, esteemed Members of Parliament and the proud people of South Africa, today I stand before this House, not merely as a Member of Parliament for the uMkhonto weSizwe party, but as a voice for every soldier who defends our borders, every veteran who

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sacrificed their youth, for our liberation and every South African whose security and sovereignty hangs in the balance today.

We gather here to consider the mid-term strategic review of the SANDF but let us not be fooled. What we are truly examining is a strategic collapse, a systemic dismantling of our military might and a betrayal of our veterans by a Government of National Unity that has chosen IMF austerity over sovereignty, corruption over accountability and political cronyism over military readiness.

The Department of Defence's budget for 2025-26 is set at R55,941 billion, a slight nominal increase from R55,50 billion last year. But this is not a growth. It is a 3,74% decrease in real terms. How dare this government speak of modernisation and readiness when our Defence Force is being bled dry by budget cuts and bureaucratic negligence?

In 1994, South Africa spent 2,7% of its GDP on defence today that figure has withered to a pitiful 0,7% of GDP. This is not just mismanagement. It is strategic sabotage. Our Gripen fighter jets are grounded. Our maritime defence programme is crippled. Our borders are porous and are wide open, leaving South Africans

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vulnerable to trafficking in drugs and humans, terrorism and foreign incursion. Our nation is not at peace. We have threats on the continent that will push southward one day. Our communities are under siege from drugs, human trafficking and violent crime. Yet our borders are unmanned, our seas are unguarded. It is not incompetency, hon members, it is wilful negligence. Our air defence programme, which is supposed to be the backbone of our military strategy, saw a 1,98% real term decrease this year.

In 2023-24 flying hours plummeted from the planned 12 000 hours to just 6 904 hours. Our pilots are trained but grounded. Our jets are operational but unfilled and our sovereignty hangs by a thread. Gripen fighters, once the pride of our air force, now sit decaying in hangars, stuff the maintenance and spare parts. It is a national shame that while our skies go unguarded, this government spends R1,62 billion on contractors who deliver nothing but invoices. These are the vultures feasting on our sovereignty while our defence capability rusts away. Imagine hon members, our skies unprotected, our pilots are trained but are unable to fly. If we were to be invaded tomorrow, we would not even be able to get a defence off the ground.

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The maritime defence programme has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. In 2023-24 the Navy achieved only 2 641 hours at sea, despite a requirement of 10 000 hours. This is not a military force, it is a defenceless fleet rustling away while illegal fishing vessels plunder our waters, and human traffickers smuggled across our shores with impunity. How did we get here? How did the once mighty SANDF become a paper army, a symbol of neglect and decay? The answer is simple, corruption, mismanagement and political cowardice.

The Special Defence Account, which was once the lifeline of military procurement, has been slashed from R7,2 billion in 2015 to R2,8 billion today. Our ports are exposed, our shores are vulnerable, and our navy is hollowed out while illegal trawlers rip billions from our oceans. Our government fiddled with budgets and catered to contractors who have never set foot on a ship.

Hon Speaker, let me say this without hesitation. Foreign governments cannot dictate how South Africa spends its money. The IMF and World Bank are not partners they are economic hitman extracting our wealth and crippling our sovereignty. Their so-called austerity measures are nothing more than modern economic

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colonisation designed to keep us weak, indebted and compliant, but not under uMkhonto. Since the ANC signed us over to these financial overlords, our defence budget has been hollowed out. They tell us to cut defence spending, to downscale military readiness and to deprioritise sovereignty. The ANC and GNU who are now crippling each other are spineless and corrupt. They bow its head in submission, sacrificing our sovereignty on the altar of foreign approval from Brussels and Washington. They sold our sovereignty, not with guns, but with pen strokes, not with tanks, but with loans.

In 2025-26 the SANDF is expected to waste another R1,62 billion on contractors, many of whom are politically connected. These are not strategic investments. These are payouts to cronies bleeding our Defence Force while our soldiers go without modern equipment and die in the field. Last year R1,97 billion was spent on travel and subsistence another R1,077 billion is projected for this year. While our soldiers sleep in crumbling barracks and eat rationed food, government officials jet set across the globe burning through public funds with reckless abandon. This is not mere mismanagement. This is the theft from our soldiers and the theft of their lives, and the theft from our veterans and the theft from the people of South Africa.

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Let us speak about our military veterans, the uMkhonto weSizwe soldiers and those who stood on the frontlines of our liberation struggle. They were promised dignity, respect and economic freedom - they were promised that. But what do they have? Broken promises and empty pockets. The Department of Military Veterans, the DMV, is a monument to the ANC and GNU failure, and this budget proves it. According to the 2023-24 Audit Action Plan, the DMV failed to account for R6,5 million in irregular expenditure, including expenses for the MK unification conference in East London. Millions worth of military equipment cannot be accounted for. This is not an oversight, it is organised corruption designed to loot under the guise of bureaucracy.

Under the MK things will be different. We will rebuild the SANDF to full combat readiness by investing in local manufacturing, creating jobs, cutting out corrupt contractors and redirecting funds to soldier welfare. We will restore our air force and naval command with a full fleet of Gripen fighters, maritime patrols and state-of-the-art equipment. We will launch a forensic audit on every single contract issued by the DMV and SANDF over the last decade. We will end foreign economic colonialisation. We will establish a national sovereignty fund,

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independent of the IMF and World Bank control. We will codify unannounced oversight visits into law so that we as Members of Parliament can go into any base. We can go into any part, and we will go anywhere. We will go and see what's going on there and not be stopped at the gates and be told you are not welcome here. We are the representatives of the people. We must be allowed to go into a base and go and see what's happening there.

We will honour our veterans with a dignified housing, medical care and economic inclusion that they were promised that they paid for with their lives. They went and fought for us on the borders. They fought for us in this country, and we are their children, and we are the ones that stand with them. In their honour we stand here today.

So, Mr Chair, hon Speaker, this mid-term strategic review is not just a report is a confession of state betrayal. We, the uMkhonto weSizwe party, reject it with a contempt that it deserves. We demand its immediate overhaul and call for the Minister of Finance to account before this House for treason against our Defence Force and against our veterans. We are uMkhonto weSizwe and we will not stop until our military is rebuilt, our sovereignty is restored, and our veterans are

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honoured with the dignity they deserve. ... [Inaudible.] I thank you.

IsiZulu:

Gwaza Mkhonto, gwaza!

English:

The SPEAKER: Hon C Hattingh, Order, hon members! Order! Hon Cameroon and hon Manyi, can you be in order? No, no, you don’t have to assist anybody by howling across the floor.

Mr C HATTINGH: Hon Speaker, the Joint Standing Committee on Defence's midterm report of 23 March 2023 lays bare the stark and sobering reality. A reality that has been reported in almost every portfolio committee and joint standing committee report for the past decade. South Africa's defence capabilities are deteriorating and collapsing. An urgent reform is imperative. The SANDF's failure during its ...

The SPEAKER: Hon Hattingh, if you can take your seat. What is the point of order, hon member?

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Mr C M DUGMORE: The point of order is whether the hon member will accept a question.

The SPEAKER: Hon member, I would say let's allow the member. It’s still very short in the programme to have a question. Let's allow the member to proceed.

Mr C HATTINGH: The SANDF's failure during its deployment in the DRC earlier this year is not merely a humiliating setback for the SANDF and South Africa, it is a clear warning of the dangerous vulnerabilities within our armed forces. Once a force of regional influence, the SANDF today is unable to meet the evolving security demands of our time. The cause is no mystery, chronic underfunding and the absence of strong principled leadership.

Despite the pressing need for modernisation and readiness, our forces were deployed in the DRC poorly equipped, unsupported logistically and without air cover. Instead of neutralising the M23 rebels, our own troops were neutralized - a national disgrace. This is more than a military failure, it is a national security crisis. Our forces are unprepared, our deterrent capability is nearly zero, and our country is exposed to

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insertions operating in Mozambique and to possible conflict spill over from neighbouring countries.

The failure to prioritise defence is now putting the safety and sovereignty of South Africa at risk. The committee's report rightly calls for a serious reconsideration of the 2015 Defence Review, which remains unfunded, ignored and unimplemented. Ten years after its adoption we still operate under the outdated frameworks adopted in 1998. The SANDF is expected to face the 21st century threats with 20th century military doctrine structures and landward equipment, a recipe for continued failure.

The latest Department of Defence Annual Performance Plan is sterling. It highlights an ever-growing operational version paired with a rapidly shrinking budget in real terms, and yet the department continues to pursue unrealistic ambitions while ignoring the core need for military modernisation. It is a business as usual attitude. The question must be asked, how long will we allow fantasy to dictate policy? The lack of progress on the Defence Review has left the SANDF rudderless. The absence of clear leadership and funding has crippled - not only operations - but force preservation, procurement and equipment maintenance.

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What we are saying is not an accident, it is a result of continued political neglect.

The DRC deployment is not an isolated failure, it is a product of deep-rooted systemic flaws, inadequate funding, poor planning and a government unwilling to confront the truth. This has cost us more than military credibility. It has diminished South Africa's once respected role as a regional peacekeeper and a stabiliser. To restore this role, we must urgently invest in modernisation. Our ability to respond to today's complex threats and to lead peacekeeping on the continent depends on it. Without this investment, we are not only failing our soldiers, but we are also failing South Africa, the SADC region and Africa.

We must also confront the hard truth; not all missions are equal. We must distinguish between wars of choice and wars of necessity. While peacekeeping is valuable, our first duty remains the defence of South Africa's sovereignty and territorial integrity. SANDF must be capable of both, external missions and homeland defence.

Speaker, our maritime security is collapsing. The navy and air force tasked with defending an exclusive economic zone of

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1,8 million square kilometres are hopelessly under resourced. We are losing this vast space to illegal fishing, piracy and trafficking because we lack the means to patrol or protect it. With key assets grounded and withdrawn, our coastal defences are compromised. This put not just our marine economy, but our national security at grave risk.

The cost of inaction will be felt in both rands and lives. We must act decisively and immediately. South Africa is at a crossroad. The SANDF must be restructured, re-equipped and re-invigorated. The security of our nation, the protection of our sovereignty, and our international standing depends on it. Continuing to neglect these precious issues are no longer an option. Hon Speaker, we cannot afford to delay. I thank you.

Mr C G NIEHAUS: Hon Speaker, the EFF rises in this debate with grave urgency. The SANDF is collapsing, threatening our sovereignty and safety. The Midterm Strategic Review tabled on the 23 March 2023 exposes a force crippled by corruption, maladministration and shocking lack of vision. Parliament's two-year delay in addressing this crisis reveals a shameful failure to prioritise defence and grasp the SANDF's decay. Only the EFF's bold interventions can salvage our nation shield.

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The review rooted in the 1996 White Paper of 1998 and 2015 Defence reviews shows hollow progress. African representation in the SANDF has risen from 38% in 1994 to 76%. This is notable progress, but corruption and maladministration undermine this achievement. Sixty-nine percent of the budget is going to salaries, far exceeding the 40% target, starving equipment maintenance and acquisition. The Department of Defence's unfunded organogram mocks accountability and betrays our troops. The absence of strategy is a travesty.

The SANDF's Road to Greatness document meant for President Ramaphosa last October, remain secret, withheld from Parliament, a blatant assault on our oversight function. Our soldiers' disastrous role in the SADC mission in the DRC, ill-equipped and unsupported, proves the SANDF cannot execute foreign missions or ensure troops safety in its current state. Over extension is killing the SANDF. Beyond defending our borders, it is burdened with untrained roles, fighting crime, tackling illegal mining and disaster response, draining resources and eroding readiness. The military skills development system is skewed, risking future imbalances. Force rejuvenation is stopped with the average soldier's age now over 40.

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The Defence budget is a mere 0,76% of GDP. It is an insult compared to the global 2% norm. Our equipment crisis is a disgrace. Gripen fighters have been unserviceable since 2022. Naval frigates and submarines rot without upgrades. The Armscor Dockyard is in shambles and Project Hoefyster for infantry vehicles is stalled, risking billions in wasteful expenditure. Training has collapsed. Air force flying hours have plummeted with barely any planes operation. 1 Military hospital, a dysfunctional construction site for over 15 years is mired in legal disputes over corrupt tenders. The consequences are deadly. On the 14 April, warrant Officer MP Mncube was denied admission to 1 Military hospital and tragically passed away. May his soul rest in peace. The EFF extends heartfelt condolences to his family. This speech is dedicated to him and to all our heroic soldiers who lost their lives in the DRC. We honour their memory by refusing to let the SANDF collapse.

Hon Speaker, without the EFF's proposals, the SANDF will indeed collapse, leaving us defenceless. The EFF demands - as a bare minimum - the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, her two bungling deputies, the Chief of the SANDF and the senior command, callous, corrupt and incompetent, must be relieved of their duties and replaced by capable leaders. An independent

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anticorruption unit in the Department of Defence reporting to Parliament to ensure transparent procurement. Defence spending raised to 1,5% of GDP within five years, restoring the 40-30-30 budget ratio. A National Defence Summit to revise the 2015 Defence Review for a 10-year modernisation plan, improved soldier welfare, salaries, housing, health care and the military skills development system aligned with equity targets, increased training funds, multinational exercises with Brics partners and support for Denel to ensure self-reliance.

The SANDF's collapse is a crisis we can avert. These EFF proposals are the only path to a disciplined and equipped Defence Force. We must act now to honour our soldiers and to secure our future or face catastrophic consequences worse than the disastrous DRC deployment. The hour is upon us. Let us rise with courage and do what is right. Thank you.

Inkosi R N CEBEKHULU: Thank you, ...

IsiZulu:

... Somlomo, ...

English:

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... as the cornerstone of national security, the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, ensures the protection of citizens against both internal and external threats. Beyond traditional defence, it contributes significantly to peacekeeping operations across the African continent, supports disaster relief efforts and aids in maintaining stability during a crisis.

Its presence reinforces South Africa's commitment to peace, security and regional co-operation, while also fostering discipline, unity and national pride in an evolving security landscape, the SANDF remains essential to South Africa's resilience. The IFP notes with growing concern the increased reliance on the SA National Defence Force for internal deployments. While we welcome initiatives such as the deployment of SANDF engineers to assist with air pollution in the Vaal River, we caution against the routine use of the military in civilian affairs. Even where such deployments fall within constitutional parameters, their broader implications cannot be ignored.

The SANDF, though disciplined and professional, is not primarily structured, trained and resourced for internal operations. Such deployments risk diminishing its core defence capabilities and

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undermines its state of readiness to respond to genuine threats to national security. Overstretching our armed forces in this way is neither sustainable nor prudent.

The IFP urges the government to strengthen civilian institutions and ensure the SANDF remains focused on its principal mandate, the protection of the Republic and its people from external threats. The IFP remains deeply concerned by the ongoing decline in the budget allocation for the SA National Defence Force. While we acknowledge the prevailing economic challenges facing the country, these difficulties cannot justify South Africa's defence spending falling so significantly below international and regional norms.

Globally, a 2% of GDP benchmark is often regarded as the minimum threshold for adequate defence funding, yet South Africa currently allocates only 0,76% of GDP to its defence budget. This is particularly troubling, given our strategic role in regional peacekeeping, border protection and disaster response. The disproportionate share of the budget absorbed by compensation costs leaves little room for capital expenditure.

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The growing misalignment between policy objectives and the budgetary reality must be addressed. The IFP calls for a more strategic, sustainable and balanced approach to defence funding. One that preserves the SANDF's ability to fulfil its constitutional mandate and upholds South Africa's national and regional security obligations.

IsiZulu:

Somlomo, kuyishwa ukuthi umnyango awunakho ukuqikelela ukunakekela kokuhlinzekelwa kombutho wezokuvikela kwaleli lizwe. Abakugqizi qakala ukwehla kwezinga lokuphathwa kwezombutho obhekelele ezokuphepha kwezwe. Sikhuluma nje, silahlekelwe amasosha amaningi engaphandle ngenxa yokuthi akubanga khona ukuhlinzekelwa kombutho ngesikhathi belaphaya e-Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC. Lokho kwenza ukuthi baphelelwe yizinto zokuzivikela ngenxa yobudedengu. Amabhanoyi ezwe lakithi ...

English:

... more especially the Rooivalk helicopters ...

IsiZulu:

... athanthwa njengezinye yezindiza ezinophephela emhlane ezinokusebenza ukusiza nokulekelela ekuvikeleni empini uma

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kuhlaselwa. Konke lokhu akunakiwe. Izimali sezehla ngemilenze kulabo abaphezulu. Imikhumbi imile ayisebenzi. Amabhanoyi wonke amile awasebenzi. Konke lokhu kubangela ngenxa yokuhluleka kokuphathwa komnyango. ... [Akuzwakali.] ... Ngithokoza kakhulu, Somlomo. [Kwaphela isikhathi.]

Ms J S PETERSEN: Madam Speaker, no debate from the PA.

Mr W W WESSELS: Hon Speaker, the hon Gigaba is correct that South Africa should be ready to defend our borders and to protect our people. Furthermore, an ineffective defence force that lacks resources, training and the ability to maintain law and order is one of the characteristics, ... [Inaudible.] ... speaking, of a failed state. Put differently, an ineffective defence force can contribute to the failure of the state as it leads to internal conflicts, vulnerability to external threats and the collapse of the state’s complete authority.

In the report, the committee reaffirms the finding of the 2015 Defence Review, that the SANDF is in a critical state of decline, with little progress made since then to address the challenges. A lack of training and functioning equipment are prevalent in the SANDF. The hon Gigaba refers to budget

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constraints, and the hon Douglas also emphasised the underfunding of the defence force, but whilst being correct that there is a budget problem, the most severe crisis is not spending the limited funding effectively.

Rather than procuring essential items for deployed troops, luxury vehicles for its top brass are procured. In 2019, R20 million was spent on luxury vehicles for the chiefs. A little while ago, another R10 million was spent. Whilst troops do not have functioning vehicles, whilst they are deployed in the DRC and whilst these under-resourced troops are killed, the chiefs justify the procurement of Q7 Audis at nearly R2 million each as security vehicles. This, Madam Speaker, needs to be addressed.

We can have an efficient budget, but if this misalignment of the correct priorities continues, the defence force will not be effective. Whilst we are rather looking at luxury items for the chiefs who are in our country, whilst our troops are suffering and our borders are vulnerable, we will not address the challenges that are identified in the report and have been identified many years ago already in the different reviews.

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We need real action. Whilst the chiefs are ill-disciplined to spend this type of money on luxury vehicles and other luxury items and luxury houses for themselves, that talks to ill-discipline and then you cannot expect the whole military and defence force to be disciplined. We need an effective, disciplined, and resourced defence force to protect our sovereignty and to protect our citizens and our people. This is what is needed, and this report need to be taken seriously, and the necessary steps and consequences needs to be taken. I thank you.

Ms L M NGOBENI: Madam Speaker, we welcome the hon Gigaba's remarks and we pay respect to our fallen heroes. I think in this particular regard, this House is unanimous in our review of this report and also the performance of the SA National Defence Force, SANDF.

At first instance, it becomes immediately apparent that there is shared recognition that, firstly, the SANDF is in a state of operational decline; and secondly, chronic underfunding directly and immediately threatens its ability to execute its constitutional mandate.

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Let us not mince our words. The SANDF is in free fall. Chronic underfunding isn't just a problem; it's a national threat. Behind it is a government paralysed by confusion, indecision and a staggering lack of strategy.

It is also very clear that our country is facing a leadership failure of historic proportions. There is no coherent defence plan. Mission readiness is collapsing and operational doctrine is missing in action. This isn’t about numbers on a spreadsheet. It's about survival. Years of mismanagement, corruption and weak leadership have gutted our Defence Force. Morale is shattered and capacity is gone. The SANDF is a shell of what it once was.

Let’s be clear. This institution is not a back-up plan for broken municipalities. It is not a political convenience. It is the last line between order and anarchy, and this government treats it like an afterthought.

The Mid-Term Review confirms what we already know. Problems are obvious, solutions are nowhere. Just look at the state of our prime mission equipment — aircraft grounded, ships rusting, weapon systems offline. It is not a Defence Force. It is a disaster.

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The days of debates are becoming another talk show ... are over. Doing so would make us all complicit in the collapse of our sovereignty. Action SA has warned before that rising global and regional threats demand a strong, ready Defence Force, but instead our borders are wide open, our troops are underequipped and our government is asleep at the wheel.

This review is two-years-old. The situation is worse. The question is, do those in charge even realise that we are heading for a cliff? Because, if they do and still do nothing, it is unforgivable. South Africa is approaching strategic failure, the kind you don't come back from.

Action SA believes in a professional, well-resourced and corruption-free Defence Force that can protect our sovereignty, defend our borders and serve with pride. We reject the dangerous notion that accountability can be optional. We demand that the Minister of Defence and senior leadership be held accountable for this catastrophic decline.

South Africans deserve better than hollow reviews and tired excuses. They deserve leadership that prioritises their safety, sovereignty and stability. We must act swiftly. The government

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must move from paralysis to action. Parliament must do more than spectate. We demand accountability. This is not just about soldiers or budgets. It is about the survival of the Republic.

Finally, we say to the Defence Force and the department that they must act now or step aside for those who will. I thank you.

Mr S N SWART: Speaker, the ACDP welcomes this report, and whilst it is belated — it's two-years-old — having been filed in March 2023, it does give an indication then of the implications of the shrinking budget and its impact on defence readiness.

What we now see is, as indicated, a catastrophic decline in our SANDF, where the international norm of two per cent of GDP is far beyond what is being spent. Only 0,7% of GDP is being spent and this has had a devastating impact on defence readiness as well as on the domestic defence industry, which is a crucial contributor to defence readiness. The misalignment of expenditure between cost of employment and spending on operations and equipment has further aggravated the situation.

Yes, this report confirms what we already know and the fact that there has been significant further deterioration since

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March 2023, which in our view has resulted in the recent tragic loss of life in Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Whilst the report is helpful, it is outdated and we as the ACDP still believe a full parliamentary oversight inquiry must be held into the deployment to the Democratic Republic of the Congo once our troops are safely home. This will enable us to ascertain the impact of a shrinking budget, which is now costing the lives of our troops that are deployed.

We held such inquiries after the Battle of Bangui in the Central African Republic in 2023 and the Lesotho deployment in 1998. Full parliamentary inquiries were held and we believe this will assist us in understanding the critical state of our Defence Force. The ACDP will support this report. I thank you.

Ms C T NONTENJA: Hon Speaker, I rise today not just in defence of our Defence Force, but in defence of our democracy. The SANDF is on the brink, not from battle wounds, but from budgetary neglect. Year after year we have seen the SANDF have to do more with less — protect our borders, respond to natural disasters, suppress unrest, lead peacekeeping missions — all while operating on a shoestring budget. This isn't just unfair; it's

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dangerous. Our national security is not a luxury; it's a necessity.

The latest Defence Review recommendations are clear. Firstly, we must align the SANDF's mandate with realistic funding. We cannot expect positive results on a tap water budget. Secondly, we need to modernise and capacitate the force to meet 21st century threats, including cyber warfare and regional instability. Thirdly, there must be a clear road map for implementation, with oversight and the political will to drive reforms forward.

The current administration inherited the Southern African Development Community Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, SamiDRC, and the UDM is happy to see that project coming to an end. It is high time that the nation focuses on capacitating our Defence Force, which is struggling with underfunding and ill equipment. We cannot afford to lose more soldiers on missions like the SamiDRC while we know very well that our defence is not well equipped to participate in such missions.

South Africa must start looking at global norms when it comes to budget allocations to the Defence Force, taking into

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consideration the mandate of the SANDF. The UDM supports the report of the joint standing committee. I thank you.

Mr S S ZIBI: Hon Speaker, the decisive question in this debate should be how do we arrest the decline of the South African armed forces? I will not restate the reasons our armed forces are in terminal declined because my colleagues from all political parties have already eloquently done so. What is left is for us to decide specifically what is to be done. Firstly, we all need to stop living in the universe we wish we had and face the reality before us. For too long, successive Parliaments and administrations have lived under the mistaken belief that we can reduce defence resources and expand the mandate at the same time. If this Parliament cannot appropriate a significant budget allocation for the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, then we must accept that it cannot play the continental role we are so attached to.

Next week, the Minister of Finance will table a revised budget. It is a proposal to this House, not an instruction. It is up to Members of Parliament to draw a list of priorities and decide what is less important than defending our borders and allocate

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resources accordingly. Failure to do this will demonstrate that even this debate is worthless.

Secondly, the history of corruption and maladministration in the defence force shows that it is not just Ministers who must take accountability, but also senior officers who have overseen atrocious procurement. According to the Auditor-General's report, they even show a reluctance to accept civilian oversight in the form of the Secretary of Defence. We cannot renew our defence force under the same senior leadership that has failed to manage effectively this scant resources Parliament allocates to them.

Thirdly, we need to change recruitment and personnel policy and stop the practice of an infantry force with permanent contracts. The most successful armies in the world, have infantry ranks that are in the late teens to mid-20s. In our case we have corporals and surgeons who are in their 40s and 50s and would not realistically last in a battle. This put their lives and our security at risk, except for those who have the potential to be part of the general staff, infantry should exit the defence force by age 35, with skills they can use in the real world.

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Finally, we need to formalise through legislation incremental expenditure on the defence force so that we can modernise and renew it, to meet the demands of the modern age. There is no further justification for more debates unless we are discussing what and when and what needs to be done is to be done. The proof of our seriousness should start showing with the 2025/26 budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mrs N L HLAZO-WEBSTER: Hon Speaker, I think I want to start with the call from Build One South Africa, which is to say that this is one of those reports that cannot afford to be another paper that gathers dust. It has got to be a wakeup call and it has got to be one that we finally head. South Africa’s national defence is no longer a shield, it has actually the become a net and one that is riddled with holes that are barely held together by outdated hardware, overburdened personnel and really chronic underfunding. If an enemy were to come and invade South Africa today, we would literally have to politely ask them to wait while we look for one plane that still works and board in it and flee.

Hon members, the findings of the strategic review should actually send shockwaves through this House, and it should ring

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the alarm through every single corridor of government. The report is a warning siren that our defence force is in a state of quiet crisis. The SA National Defence Force, SANDF, is underfunded, overstretched and unprepared when you consider the numbers, an inconsequential 0,76% of GDP is what South Africa's defence budget is. It is therefore among the lowest of any major middle-income country.

We are still nearly 69% of the entire defence budget is swallowed up by personnel costs, and that leaves crumbs for operations for maintenance or procurement. It means we have a defence force that cannot train properly. It cannot maintain its equipment, it cannot fly its aircraft and it cannot deploy at scale unless it is already in the middle of a crisis.

Hon Speaker, as of 2022, not one of our Gripen fighter jets was serviceable. Only one C130 Hercules transport aircraft was flight ready. One, one single airplane. Our navy's frigates and submarines are drifting toward obsolesce and all the while Treasury has stubbornly ignored the defence committees' recommendations to ring fence the funding for critical mid-life upgrades. I say this because this is a 2-year report. Here is the paradox. While we cut the budget in real terms, we actually

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ask SANDF to do more and more. We asked them to do flood relief, pandemic response and again deployments in the Cape Flats and border patrols. We treat it as an all-purpose emergency service without the budget and without the tools.

The defence committee was very clear that this is not sustainable. We are wearing down our armed forces and we are using them to plug gaps in civilian capability and the result is that both systems suffer. It's not merely a budgeting issue. We actually are risking national security. So again, I say this report cannot afford to be another paper that gathers dust. It has got to be a wakeup call. Thank you.

Mr V ZUNGULA: Hon Speaker, this report confirms what many in the defence environment have long warned that the SA National Defence Force, SANDF is overstretched, underfunded and misaligned with the threats of the 21st Century. The reduction in defence spending is not just a budgeting decision. It is a national security risk. Hence, we have porous borders in our country that are not protected by the defence that is obligated to protect the territorial integrity of our country. It is a contradiction of the highest order that we deploy our troops to Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, while

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failing to provide them with the adequate resources, mental health support and modern equipment.

We have come to debates and praise their heroism but we fail to protect them. This cannot continue. The ATM refuses to sit silently whilst our troops are treated unjustly, or worse lied to by the Department of Defence and Military Veterans. We have received credible first-hand reports from the deployed members in the DRC that the soldiers are entitled to $1,28 per day for water, $5 per day in cash $11 per day for recreational allowances. But these are given with stern warnings and threats limiting their ability to raise concerns. Even more troubling is a fact that the troops are told they will receive R108 000 per month in deployment allowances only after returning to South Africa. Yet, some are already receiving this money while others are not. This proves that the statement that everyone will be paid upon return is a blatant lie.

So ...

IsiXhosa:

... siyabuza siyiATM ukuba ingaba ikhona kusini na enye into ekuxokiswa ngayo abantu?

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English:

It is very clear that the department is lying and misleading the people of this country and misleading the soldiers who are risking their lives in the missions across the continent. We want to ask whether the ghost deployments' funds redirected somewhere is a deliberate effort to collapse the defence of our country and render the country vulnerable to any foreign interests that may come. We already see in droves multitude of military age men coming to South Africa, and they come through our borders without any form of accountability in the defence.

Also, we want to say, the defence must take good care of the soldiers and pay them what is their worth.

IsiXhosa:

La masela ...

English:

... must not be allowed to continue undermining the people of this country, come to Parliament and play political games. Keep on making lies talking about how they are serious in protecting the sovereignty of our country, yet, in practice, they are deliberately sabotaging our country.

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Mr W T D PLAATJIES: Speaker, I thank this august House for the opportunity.

Firstly, let us not forget under whose leadership the underfunding of the Defence Force started. The midterm review of defence coincides with a crucial point in our country, our continent, and the world. I would like us to consider what it means to be a sovereign country in a global world amidst complex security challenges ranging from cyber threats, maritime insecurity, climate-driven disruption, and widespread human displacement. Therefore, it demands a Defence Force that is fit for purpose and able to respond effectively to the state of almost constant disruption. For this, we need time to examine the capabilities and infrastructure, morale, and overall direction of the critical institution.

At the centre of this review lies a simple but powerful truth that should resonate with all of us: Without peace, there can never be development. Peace is dependent upon a number of factors, some being justice, equality of opportunity, sound institutions, excellent service delivery, and then also a strong Defence Force.

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A strong, capable Defence Force is able to fulfil its constitutional mandate of protecting all of these other critical services. Many misconstrue that the Defence Force is simply a body tasked with defending our borders. Whilst that is certainly part of its work in the context of the world we are living in, our military also has the responsibility of protecting our maritime trade routes and responding accordingly when we are confronted with internal emergencies, preserving the integrity of the state, our democratic ideals, and everyone that lives within our borders. It is therefore important that we have a force that not only boasts critical capabilities but that is nonpartisan and well respected in domestic and continental warfare.

Our country operates within a global ecosystem. Our security as a nation is intertwined with that of our neighbours. From Cape Town to Zaire, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, conflict and instability are ever present and have the potential to send ripples throughout the continent, affecting our development and growth and, ultimately, undermining livelihoods and leading to the disintegration of institutions in our region. This is the reason why the Defence Force continues to play a leading role in contributing to continental peace missions.

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I would like to use this platform and opportunity also to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the 14 South African soldiers who lost their lives whilst deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC. Their sacrifice was not in vain. These brave men and women laid down their lives in pursuit of peace beyond the borders, embodying the highest ideals of service. We honour their memory, and we are using the trinity to examine our defence critically, seeking ways to improve our communication, infrastructure, morale, and overall efficiency. In the DRC, our forces deployed under the Southern African Development Community, SADC, Mission in the DRC have played an important role in protecting the civilian population. These peacekeeping and stability missions point to the fact that our Defence Force, whilst in need of improvement, has the capability of navigating complex security environments. In the DRC, we have gained valuable operational experience, whilst advancing important diplomatic ties in pursuit of a better Africa and a better world.

Our pursuit of peace and stability on the continent is anchored by our participation in multinational defence co-operation platforms, in particular SADC and Brics. Through the security architecture of our regional bloc, SADC, we have been able to

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contribute to stability through joint exercises, and we have supported the establishment of rapid response capabilities through the SADC Standby Force. Our participation in the body ensures that we are able to move in unison as a region and tackle security threats.

I think it is also critical that we deepen our interaction with the SADC Regional Logistics Depot in Gaborone to effectively co-ordinate humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. It is institutions like these that enable us and our neighbours to effectively respond to the security challenges that face our entire continent and advance the principles of the African Union, AU, to silence the guns, as outlined in the AU Agenda 2063.

Our involvement in Brics defence co-operation has also fostered a strategic competitive edge. Through Brics, we partake in joint training programmes and exchange knowledge in research and development. These platforms are extremely valuable, as no institution can remain vital and effective without constant learning and growth.

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Whilst defending our sovereignty is our Defence Force's primary duty, we must bear in mind that we are only able to do so by training and by producing the necessary equipment for defence ourselves. It is where the revitalisation of Denel and Armscor comes in. These institutions must be treated as the national strategic assets they are. Denel is critical to our sovereignty as a nation. We have to return Denel to its former glory as a world-class defence manufacturer capable of stimulating our economy through localisation and innovation. We need to ensure that we strengthen its core business areas, protect its intellectual property, and, through the African Continental Free Trade Area, unlock new markets on the continent, whilst abiding with legislation to govern ethical arms trade practices. Denel would be an anchor for creation and enable people to gain valuable skills in the high technology sector.

Equally so, Armscor's procurement function must be responded to and also to the needs of SA National Defence Force, SANDF, itself. Lacking a reliable, credible procurement system has an adverse effect on the Defence Force, particularly in the areas of modernisation and dynamic security environments.

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In short, it is our duty as the House to ensure that our men and women in uniform are supported and properly resourced, as is any other high-functioning institution. Whilst we build the just and democratic society we have always envisaged, we must know the guardians of our constitutional state are equipped, trained, ready, and well resourced. This will require energy, determination, and also resources. I thank you.

Adv S SALIE: House Chairperson, the SANDF's current state is a reflection of broader challenges facing South Africa — a lack of investment, poor leadership, and a failure to prioritise national security.

The standoff with Rwanda and the DRC conflict have exposed these weaknesses and highlighted the urgent need for reform. South Africa has the potential to rebuild its military and reclaim its role as a continental leader, but this will require bold action and long-term commitment. The consequences of inaction are dire. The question is not just whether the SANDF can take on a force like Rwanda but whether South Africa is willing to do what it takes to ensure that it never has to face such a challenge unprepared.

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The SANDF has long been a symbol of national pride, a force that once projected power across the African continent and played a pivotal role in peacekeeping missions. However, the current state of the SANDF paints a troubling picture, one of decline, neglect, and vulnerability. With our geopolitical climate, it is vital that we be alert to our vulnerability. We need to understand the decreased budget through the years has crippled our Defence Force. We cannot afford not to look after our Defence Force. We need to ensure adequate resources. We cannot fail to realise the importance of creating adequate skills, qualifications, and abilities in a Defence Force with modern equipment. We need accountability, transparency, and action. We need to respect and appreciate our soldiers and compensate them adequately. Give them the needed resources.

This report needs to be taken seriously, and an increased budget is urgently needed. I thank you.

Sesotho:

Mong L W MAHLATSI: Kgotso Maafrika!

English:

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The UAT rise today with the principled Pan-African response to the report tabled by the Portfolio Committee on Defence. We do so, not as an isolated South African voice, but as part of the broader African soul. We do so, not merely as politicians, but as children of the soil. The descendants of the warriors of our liberation armies of Umkhonto Wesizwe, Frelimo and the Maumau.

We began with the truth; we must never forget. Every troop, everywhere in Africa, is our troop. Every African soldier in the continent is our soldier. Their lives are not our strategic assets. [Interjections.] They are the blood of our brothers. The soldier ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Just hold on for a moment. Hon Mahlatsi, just hold on for a moment. Hon members on the virtual platform, please ensure that you remain muted. You are not yet recognised to speak. Hon Mahlatsi, please continue.

Mr L W MAHLATSI: What about my time?

Sesotho:

Hoba nna le wena re na le ho ...

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): I will use my discretion in your favour.

Sesotho:

Mong L W MAHLATSI: Eya, ke o tseba hantle ntate. Ke mokgwa oo ke sa o dumedisang kajeno.

English:

We begin with the truth; we must never forget. Every troop deployed everywhere in Africa is our troop. Every African soldier in our continent is our soldier. Their lives are not our strategic assets. They are the blood of our brothers. When a soldier falls in Goma, in Cabo Delgado and in Sudan, that loss is no less than a South African life; it is our African blood spilling. It is a life worth saving under the circumstances.

The committee know the finalisation of SA National Defence Force integration process and raise concerns about the representatives. We acknowledge the work done since 1996 to make our military look like South Africa, but we must ask a harder question: Representation of what purpose? If African’s faces dominates the barracks, but the SA National Defence Force is guided by doctrine not rooted in African liberation, then what

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are we doing in decorating colonial frameworks with African faces?

That is not transformation. That is tokenism. Our military must be Pan-Africa, not only in personnel but in purpose, in training, in strategy and in ideology. The committee is right to observe that the morale is low. Defence readiness is declining. The strategic capabilities are eroding, but the question remains: Why? [Interjections.] And, here is our answer ... [Interjections.]

Sesotho:

Modulasetulo, a ke o ntshireletse, monghadi.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Mahlatsi, just hold on again! Hon Dunjwa, it is now the second time that you have unmuted and spoken over the speaker on the platform. If it happens again, I will ask that you be removed.

Mr L W MAHLATSI: Remove him!

Sesotho:

Re theohetse mona! O seke wa lebala nako ya ka, ntate!

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English:

Because the SA National Defence Force has been reduced to a reactive institution, it is thrusting between internal domestic deployment and external peacekeeping efforts, with no clear vision of what is meant to become. It is a local riot force when the police fail. It is a protector of corporate assets, or it is what UAT envision: A liberation army in service of African unity, peace and sovereignty. What cannot boost morale without belief in mission? And, that mission must be Africa?

Xitsonga:

Kanimambo!

Mr M L SHELEMBE: Chairperson, the DA wants to express ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Shelembe, you don’t have the type of rally voice that the hon Mahlatsi have. Just move the microphone down slightly.

Mr M L SHELEMBE: Thank you. Hon Chairperson, the DA wants to express its appreciation that the Mid-term Strategic Review Report of the SA National Defence Force is finally being debated

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today, after so many years. The Joint Standing Committee on Defence is required to conduct a strategic review on the SA National Defence Force mid-term in the life of a particular Parliament and submit it to the Houses on its transformation, integration, equity, morale and defence readiness.

These issues are discussed against the background of the 1996 White Paper on Defence, the 1998 Defence Review and the 2015 Defence Review, respectively. Chapter 11, section 200 of our Constitution, clearly states that the SA National Defence Force must be structured and managed as a disciplined military force. The primary object of the Defence Force is to defend and protect the Republic, its structural integrity and its people, in accordance with the Constitution and the principles of international law regarding the use of force.

The question we ask ourselves is: Does the SA National Defence Force possess the operational capability and combat readiness to undertake the constitutional obligation? The simple answer is no. This is premised on the defence committee’s observation on the defence readiness after its engagement in oversight of defence bodies that impact directly on combat readiness. Our country is not adequately protected against all threats.

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IsiZulu:

Sibi kakhulu isimo sombutho wezokuvikela engicabanga ukuthi le Ndlu le kumele ivumelane isebenze ngokubambisana ukusilungisa ngoba sibi kakhulu.

Our prime mission equipment is in a terrible state, and most is not serviceable. The combination of maintenance constraints and the lack of investment into new prime mission equipment is another area of concern, and it impacts directly on the level of the SA National Defence Force readiness. The continued reduction in the defence allocation has a direct negative impact on defence readiness and it diminishes their funds available for key readiness activities - notably, training, operations, acquisition and maintenance of relevant prime mission equipment.

Additionally, it impacts that negatively on the domestic defence industry, which is crucially a contributed to defence readiness. This is premised on the fact that the lack of vibrant and self-sustaining defence industry in any country should be seen as a conventional military limitation as it breeds reliance on its international arms import.

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As the Joint Standing Committee in the sixth Parliament, after extensively interacting with the South African defence industry, we noted that the defence industry relies almost exclusively on exportation for its income due to lack of acquisition by the SA National Defence Force. This House must note with concern that the continuing challenges, which include financial mismanagement and the corruption in Denel, undermines the defence industry as a whole, with many smaller suppliers reliant on Denel for its subcontracting.

Without the realignment of Denel and defence industry as a whole, the domestic defence industry runs the risk of losing the key sovereign capabilities, which impact on the defence readiness. The Joint Standing Committee on Defence further noted, during the period preceding the sixth Parliament and increasingly so since 2019, amplified reliance on the SA National Defence Force for the internal support to other government departments, as well as external conventional military support.

This increased reliance on the SA National Defence Force was noted after consideration of many Presidential letters of deployment related to, inter alia, the following internal SA

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National Defence Force Defence deployments: In 2018-2019, the President deployed SA National Defence Force engineers to address the pollution on the Vaal River; in 2019, the President deployed soldiers to the SA Police Service Combat to combat crime in the Western Cape; several large-scale deployment in 2020 and 2021 as part of the efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic by the President; large scale deployment in 2021 to Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal due to the widespread civil unrest by the President; the 2022 deployment to KwaZulu-Natal, following the flooding in the province; and all those deployments were in addition to the SA National Defence Force standing deployment of 15 subunits for the purpose of border safeguarding.

The Joint Standing Committee further consider several external deployments, including the continued provision of 1 000 soldiers to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operation Mission in the DRC; and the deployment of more than 1 000 soldiers under Operation Thiba by the Southern African Development Community for peacekeeping in the DRC. The internal deployment of soldiers in support of the police and other government department is aligned with constitutional mandate of the force, but our soldiers are not fully suited, trained, funded and equipped for internal deployment.

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Having said that, the increased deployment of soldiers under these conditions adds additional strain on the defence force to maintain high levels of defence readiness. In terms of defence readiness, the DA confirms that the findings of the 2015 Defence Review that the SA National Defence Force is in a critical state of decline and there is little progress being made to address these ongoing challenges.

The increasing compensation of employees and the decreasing availability of prime machine equipment is a serious concern, and we look forward to the SA National Defence Force engagement with this crucial report.

IsiZulu:
Siyabonga kakhulu ukuthi isiphakamiso seqembu le-DA ukuthi amasosha ethu alaphaya e-DRC abuye ekhaya i-Southern African Development Community, SADC, isamukelile.

English:
Our soldiers are now being withdrawn from the DLC and on the on the way home as we speak. Thank you.

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Ms T SOKANYILE: House Chair and hon members, we gather at this discuss critical time to discuss the current state and future of our defence force, recognising that people are its greatest asset. A great nation through strength lies not only in its ideals and institutions, but in its ability to defend and protect these assets. For this, it needs both equipment and disciplined and dedicated armed forces. However, our armed forces do much more than defending us, militarily. As we reflect on the mid-term strategic review of the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, we need to be aware that the role of the military extend beyond the military barracks. Its actions touch the lives of ordinary people on a daily basis through its ability to maintain peace, bring order where there is chaos, assist with efficiency, where there are disasters, and in these ways, to be a catalyst of development.

The SA National Defence Force, SANDF, has reached a critical point in its life. It is called upon when there are conventional threats. It has also played a peacekeeping and development role in the context of changing domestic and global environment. This debate will allow us to reflect on the stride that have been made in confronting the various challenges faced by our defence force and to devise solutions which will propel us forward as a

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nation. At the centre of this mid-term strategic review is the imperative of transforming the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, into a force that mirrors the values of our democratic dispensation. This transformation is not just an abstract concept, but speaks to its daily operation, such as recruitment, the way it trains its people and the way it engages with the society itself. It is important from time to time to reflect on and appreciate our history, as this gives us the insight and the clarity to forge a future that builds on the successes and side steps the errors.

It in the past, the Defence Force was used to advance the interest of the minorities at the expense of majority, and to suppress all efforts to establish justice and liberty for all. Today, that is no longer the case. Since 1994, we have been able to transform the SANDF into a force that reflects the demographics in our society that is diverse and inclusive in terms of race and gender, and that seeks to contribute to society rather than to impose itself on society for oppression and restriction. The defence force that we have today, is no longer the preserve of the few. Instead, it is playing a vital role, not only on its core mandate, but in uplifting, upskilling and imparting direction to countless young lives. The

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transformation of the Defence Force, an ongoing project is multifaceted. It includes changing the demographics, expanding its positive role in the developmental state and adhering, rigorously, to the ethical principles that the country as a whole uphold. Ethical means being against corruption, sexual misconduct, the abuse of power, and any other act that erodes the legitimacy of our Defence Force. It also means having the will and the whistle to act when infringement occurs.

Hon members, this review will not be complete without attention paid to the critical issue of the state of the infrastructure of our military bases facilities and training academies, years of defunding and aging stock, much of which has now reached the end of the lifespan, is having an adverse effect on operation efficacy. The issue needs to be addressed. It is also important that we recognise our defence first triumph in the midst of these challenges. For instance, the defence works formation is a creative model that has been integral in arresting some infrastructural decline by using internal capacity. To deal with some of the infrastructural challenges, we will be able to reduce dependency on external contractors, which will save us from dipping into the fiscus. While this programme is underway, it is also important that we empower our personnel with skills

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and invigorate them with renewed dedication and morale for the essential role they play in our country and the continent.

It is vital that the defence swept formation is expanded to include personnel and a holistic infrastructure revitalisation plan. This can form part of public works programmes which should be tasked with upgrading our barracks, Amaris and clinics. The revitalisation of these entities has the potential to contribute quite meaningfully to the socioeconomic development. Hon members, a reliable. defence force must be equipped to upgrade its own skill. That is why it is important that our training academics and colleges are in the best possible space in the quality of the infrastructure and personnel to develop such successive generation to serve our armed forces with pride and excellence, from the SA Military Academy in Saldanha to the infantry school in Oudtshoorn. It is critical that we see improvement in the standard of training. The training offered in our schools must be up with the best practices, globally.

We simply cannot afford a relaxing of standards and lowering of morale in these vital sides of training and attitude formation in this institutions that must produce not only soldiers, but vigorous co-operative problem solvers ready to contribute to our

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nation-building project in a variety of capacities. In conclusion, hon members, let us remember that the defence of the country is not exclusive to men, evoking the spirit of uMama Charllotte Maxeke, let us ensure that our commitment to gender parity is extended to battlefield and the barracks. Many strides have been made in this regard. South Africa currently ranks among the few countries where women serve in active combat roles, commanderships and lead military units. We are proud to count among our pioneers, Major Mandisa Mfeka, who made history as a South Africa's first, black female combat pilot. Her role in SA Air Force, SAAF, and her presence during the major national fire pass, has captured the imagination of young girls across the country.

She has become a powerful advocate for gender equality in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, STEM, fields and an inspiration to the many who may not thought they belong in uniform, let alone in the sky. You know, House Chair, it gives me a worry that there are some hon members that are here just to reject everything that is presented here, and then, hon members, as we debate this report, let us reset the idea that has transformed the defence force, is one that not only defend against threat, but that actively build peace, stability and

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opportunity for all. For this, it needs equipment, infrastructure, excellent personnel and ... [Interjections.] ... training and growth. Thank you, I rest my case. [Time expired.]

The CHIEF WHIP OF THE LARGEST MINORITY PARTY: Sir, good afternoon to you and good afternoon to hon members. I want to move that to this report to be adopted. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon members, the motion is that the report be adopted. Are there any objections? Hon Manye.

THE CHIEF WHIP OF THE OPPOSITION (Mr M Manyi): The MK Party rejects this report with contempt it deserves.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Any other objections? With that objection noted, the report is accordingly adopted.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORT OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON PETITION CALLING ON ASSEMBLY TO INVESTIGATE PROVISION OF FREE SANITARY PADS AND MENSTRUAL HEALTH

Ms L L VAN DER MERWE: Hon House Chairperson, I rise on behalf of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth, and Persons with

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Disabilities to affirm our committee's commitment to ensuring sanitary dignity for all. We add our voices to all those calling for an end to period poverty. For period poverty sees far too many young girls and women suffering the harsh reality of not having access to affordable sanitary products.

The lack of sanitary dignity is not just a matter of inconvenience, it is a barrier that robs many young women of their dignity and their future. When girls are unable to manage their menstruation safely, many are forced to stay at home, missing vital days of school. This ongoing cycle of exclusion perpetuates gender inequality.

The Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities met on 29 October 2024, to consider a petition submitted by Ms Nokuzola Ndwandwe, the founder of #TeamFreeSanitaryPads. Her clarion call "access to sanitary products" is not just a privilege, but a fundamental human right, that it is about dignity, health and potential futures at stake. The petition also maintains that sanitary dignity is a basic human right as protected by section 27 of our Constitution.

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#TeamFreeSanitaryPads further proposed addressing the need for its sanitary dignity through a Menstrual and Hygiene Management Bill, emphasising that menstruation should be recognised and managed as a health issue, not merely a hygiene concern.

Apart from hearing the petition, the Portfolio Committee on Women, youth and Persons with Disabilities also afforded our department the opportunity to hear the petition. Our department did not support the proposed legislation as outlined. Instead, the department maintained that the current Sanitary Dignity Implementation Framework was a more cautious and realistic approach to implementation. However, there was an acknowledgement that government currently due to financial constraints were unable to reach all learners.

The committee having deliberated and engaged with the petition and the response by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities resolved on specific recommendations. Due to time constraints, I will just focus on two. Firstly, we resolved that we must ensure that education and awareness on menstrual health is integrated into the life orientation curriculum at primary school level. We also resolved that it is imperative to

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review existing policies and conduct comprehensive assessments to identify gaps in the Sanitary Dignity Programme.

To this end, there has already been progress. Since the committee heard this petition, it has already called all nine provinces, along with the National and Provincial Departments of Basic Education and Social Development to report on the implementation of the Sanitary Dignity Programme. We have already engaged with premiers and MECs. In addition to committee, undertook an oversight visit to KwaZulu-Natal to assess the implementation of the Sanitary Dignity Programme.

As the committee conducts its oversight, it intends also speaking to National Treasury and holding to account all provinces. The committee has already started looking into the financing of the Sanitary Dignity Programme gaps in the provision of sanitary tiles and SABS compliance.

While we support and applaud Ms Nokuzola Ndwandwe’s efforts, our committee agreed not to proceed with the petition because fundamentally, it is calling for a Health Bill, and we are not the Portfolio Committee on Health. It does not fall under our mandate.

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In the Seventh Parliament, as this portfolio committee, we will however, focus all our efforts on dismantling the barriers that hinder the progress of girls and women. We will put the interest of women in youth ... [Interjections.] ...

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon van der Merwe just hold on for a moment and please take a seat. Hon Manyi, why do you want to be recognised now?

THE CHIEF WHIP OF THE OPPOSITION (Mr M Manyi): I just want to find out if the member will take a question?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): No, just hold on, don't tell us what the question is yet. Hon van der Merwe, are you prepared to take a question?

Ms L L VAN DER MERWE: ... Can I please finish my report? Thank you so much.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Manyi, no.

Ms L L VAN DER MERWE: As I said earlier, in this Seventh Parliament, as the portfolio committee remain committed to

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ensuring health dignity for all, and we will focus all our efforts on breaking down the barriers that hinder the progress of girls and women. We will put the interests of women, young people and people with disabilities at the heart of our actions and leave no stone unturned to ensure that we work within our mandate towards a future where no child or woman is forced to drop out of school because of period poverty. I table this report for consideration by this House. Thank you.

Declaration(s) of vote:

Ms T A KHANYILE: Hon House Chair, hon members, we upload the initiative taken by the #TeamFreeSanitaryPads by bringing a petition before Parliament, raising critical issues which affect young girls who are in school.

According to a study conducted by South African Journal of Child Health, approximately seven million girls are reported to me school each month due to a lack of access to sanitary pads resulting in them missing about 25% of their learning during the school year. The issue is particularly prevalent in rural and under-resourced areas where in an inadequate sanitation facility and the high cost of menstrual products exacerbate the problem. Additionally, cultural stigma surrounding menstruation can lead

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to embarrassment and fear of accidents further discouraging school attendance during periods.

While we commend the government's commitment to provide free sanitary towels for indigenous schools that was announced by former Minister of Finance, the late Tito Mboweni in 2018, we must acknowledge that more work still needs to be done to ensure this resolution is successfully implemented to ensure that the sanitary towels reach intended recipients.

While the Free State province has assured us that they have dealt with their problems in procuring sanitary towels for learners, we will keep a close eye on whether any girls have been disadvantaged. Some of the issues that we raised during our deliberations, we inquired if the department worked in collaboration with the nongovernmental organisations, NGOs, that were also distributing sanitary towels, and if not the reasons, thereof for the lack of collaboration.

We also registered our concerns that there was insufficient engagement between the Department of Women, youth and Persons with Disabilities, and the Department of Basic Education on the implementation of Sanitary Dignity Programme. We were also

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concerned that the distribution and provision of sanitary towel in certain instances, were kept in the offices of school secretaries. This in turn, led to the learner's dignity being impaired, having to request for sanitary products as opposed to being issued this discretely. We were also concerned with the distribution of sanitary towels that were not South African Bureau of Standards, SABS, approved and the distribution in general to the relevant beneficiaries.

Chairperson, we emphasise that there was a need to engage the Department of Trade Industry and competition to address the issue of retailers that were selling sanitary towels that were not SABS approved. We also questioned the number of actual beneficiaries that were targeted in each province versus the number provided in the presentation. The signed receipt registered by beneficiaries and detailed break breakdown of the budget spent on sanitary towels and transportation thereof.

Hon Chairperson, this Parliament cannot turn a blind eye when Gauteng Premier Lesufi 'sat' on dignity pack fraud report dating back to September 2020. Some of the recommendations that we made in the portfolio committee were that the non-delivery of the sanitary towers to all provinces need urgent monitoring and

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evaluation and the report back to the committee accordingly. And that in respect of the sanitary towers procurement that was considered expensive in the Northern Cape, the committee resolved that the department had to consider other available interventions like procuring the products from other provinces that could be proposed to the Northern Cape province.

The monitoring and evaluation of the SDP implementation should not be limited to the provision of sanitary towels but broadly focused on menstrual health. Hon members, we also know that the Minister of Basic Education has eradicated 97% of the pit toilets. We believe this plays a huge role in implementation of water supply, sanitation and hygiene programmes.

As the Democratic Alliance, we call on the Gauteng Premier Lesufi to act on the sanitary dignity report, which details how officials in the provincial social development department divide a scheme to circumvent procurement processes, to unlawfully and wilfully enrich themselves and certain suppliers to the detriment of the public. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Manyi, do you want to be recognised first?

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THE CHIEF WHIP OF THE OPPOSITION (Mr M Manyi): House Chair, I rise on a point of order. As the MK Party, we are very concerned about the way in which work is being carried out in this House. There are two items on the agenda today for debate and this item for debate, which is to be turned into a declaration. What procedure was used to achieve this. And why was it not even announced? Because we agreed at the Chief Whip's Forum that we would conduct these matters as debates. Nothing was changed in the programming committee this morning. What procedure and structure has been used to undermine the decisions of these duly constituted and mandated forums that make such decisions?

So, we would like to object to the agenda being changed unilaterally, I do not know by whom, and for us as the MK Party, because we have prepared for the procedure, our speaking time is ten minutes, as provided for in the debate.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Thank you hon Manyi. Hon Dugmore, as the Programming Whip, I am going to recognise you. But the one thing we cannot do is to convert a sitting of the National Assembly into a programming committee. I would suggest strongly to all members that any grievances about what occurred here. And I also do not know. That that be dealt with in the

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appropriate forum, which is the programming committee. Having said that, I will recognize that it is a plea for us to maintain the decorum and deal with the matters at hand, but I will not suppress anyone, hon Dugmoore and then I will go.

Mr C M DUGMORE: Thank you very much, Chairperson. I think it is clear that the medium-term strategic review that we have just completed was clearly programmed for debate. The matter of the standing committee report was not, and if we can present this programme again, was not programmed for debate as we discussed it this morning. That does not prevent anyone from making a declaration, although we agreed that we should try to announce it in advance. And indeed, hon Manyi is not right. Only the medium-term strategic review, the Defence Strategic Review, was scheduled for debate. This particular committee report was not scheduled for the debate. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): As it is, it would seem there is a disputed fact. Hon Ntlangwini, I will recognise you. And then we must move on.

Mrs E N NTLANGWINI: House Chair, indeed there is a confusion here, and this confusion is, I do not know, intentionally or

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unintentionally brought about by the ANC, we have agreed that this will be a debate, and hence it has a bearing on our minutes. Hence, we are asking. We are turning it into a declaration now, which is fine, but at least make us aware that it is now a statement and not a debate and therefore, it will affect your minutes. So, I think next time the Programming Whip you should just get the programme in order, Mr Dugmore, and get your stuff up to date. But it has indeed been said that it will be a debate and not a declaration on both issues. In fact, we have been told that it will be a debate. But that is fine, we can make the declaration. But we have been told that it will be a debate. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): I do not think it is in the best interest of sittings of the National Assembly to deal here with procedural issues. May I ask that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next programming committee as it is or Order Paper for the day makes it clear that this is for declarations only. We will now proceed with the declarations. Thank you.

Ms M RWEQANA: Hon House Chairperson and hon members, today we rise not to beg but to expose. As the MK Party we are not here to decorate the failures of this so-called Government of

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National Unity, GNU. We are here to tear down its mask of compassion and reveal its cold calculated neglect of black girl children across South Africa. This government has reduced the most basic human dignity, menstrual health, to a luxury ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon member at the podium, just hold on for a moment. Hon Legoete, on the virtual platform, you are formally warned that if you again unmute and interject you will be removed from the platform. Hon member, please continue.

Ms M RWEQANA: Government has reduced the most basic human dignity, menstrual health, to a luxury. Girls in shacks and rural villages are still bleeding into socks, newspapers and shame. They are skipping school, missing opportunities and carrying the cost of a crisis this government refuses to fix. The state has blood on its hands.

The Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities noted this crisis in its November 2024 report, following the desperate petition by Team Free Sanitary Pads. However, the ANC-led state responded not with action, but with

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bureaucracy, more meetings, more frameworks and more broken promises. We do not need another report, we need radical change.

President Cyril Ramaphosa introduced us to his fairytale character, Tintswalo, in February 2024. A symbolic democracy baby supposedly thriving under 30 years of ANC's ruling, but we know the real Tintswalo. She is 15 years old, living in a shack in Dimbaza, raised by a grandmother who is surviving on a R2 180 grant. She bleeds every month but cannot afford R45 for pads – that's 25% of the child support grant gone just to manage menstruation.

Her crime is that of being born black and being born a girl. She loses 60 days of school every year - two full months. Her education is stolen, her dignity is shattered and her government missing in action. The facts expose a national disgrace. One in ten girls miss school due to lack of pads. Only three provinces have partial sanitary pads programmes.

The National Treasury allocated just R200 million over three years, less than the VIP protection budget for Ministers in a single year. Progress reports are non-existent, implementation is incompetent, and money meant for advocacy is redirected to

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administration and salaries. The amount of R10,3 million underspent is proof of criminal neglect. No mere oversight.

Menstruation is not a choice, silence is. This government hides behind a toothless Sanitary Dignity Implementation Framework. There is no law, no enforcement and no urgency. The department claims it is a service delivery institution yet still draw salaries and luxury vehicles while young girls ... [Time expired.]

Ms N M MHLONGO: Greetings to the commander-in-chief, officials and ground forces of the EFF and fellow South Africans. Let’s first take this opportunity to thank Ms Ndwandwe on behalf of free sanitary pads. She submitted this motion to Parliament in August 2024, where she asked for an investigation into the feasibility of the provision of free sanitary pads and menstrual health generally.

This is in line with the long-standing position of the EFF that the state has the ultimate responsibility towards the girl child and to women more in general to ensure that their biological necessity of menstruation does not hamper with their ability to function.

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We took this position after realising that most children in rural areas and in townships miss out on schooling for at least one week per month when they are on their periods. This is because they cannot afford sanitary pads during this period and therefore opt to stay at home rather than go to school without the protection offered by free sanitary towels.

This petition, therefore, is and was fully supported by the EFF. We were pleased with the presentation by Ms Ndwandwe, particularly her emphasis on the need for menstruation to be addressed, recognised and framed as a health issue, not just a hygiene issue, as also referred by the World Health Organisation in 2022 to include conversations to deconstruct a narrative by ending the stigma through various activities, education and awareness campaigns, workshops, reference materials, field visits by engaging communities and experts, as well as collaborations.

The presentations by the department were underwhelming. They, for instance, argued that it was too expensive to deliver sanitary pads to provinces such as the Northern Cape. This means that children from provinces such as the Northern Cape are left to suffer with no help in sight.

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Access to sanitary towels is a fundamental need for all females, and a lack of access to these towels makes life very difficult for many females who struggle to afford these. We should be ashamed that in 2025 children are missing out on school because they have no sanitary towels, and their dignity is compromised - something that should never happen again as we move forward. I thank you.

Ms B E MACHI: House Chairperson, the IFP notes the report following the petition on the Sanitary Dignity Programme. We reaffirm our belief that menstrual health is not a luxury; it is a basic human right and a matter of dignity, equality and access.

We note with concern the gaps in distribution, particularly in the Free State, and inflated procurement costs in provinces like the Northern Cape. The IFP calls for improved interdepartmental co-ordination and the review of procurement practices. We also welcome resolutions for menstrual education at the primary level and a broader policy review that ensures quality and accessibility.

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The IFP urges that community voices remain central to implementation. It is time for real practical interventions that uphold the dignity of every girl child and women in our country. In light of the issues we have raised, the IFP accepts the report. I thank you, House Chairperson.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): The PA?

Ms J S PETERSEN: House Chair, no declaration from the PA. We support.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): The FF Plus?

Mrs H DENNER: House Chair, we are not interested in making these cheap politics like the MK. No declaration. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Action SA? Order, hon members. We have a speaker at the podium.

Dr T K S LETLAPE: House Chair, Action SA would like to bring to the attention of the House that this should not be about the provision of sanitary pads but about menstrual health, which is more than just provision of sanitary pads. There are issues of

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pain, discomfort and there are people that will stay home because they've got intractable pain.

As a health issue, the leading Ministry should be the Ministry of Health in terms of provision of services. The Committee for Women, Youth and People with Disabilities should have oversight about access to our young women. We need to ensure that we create a responsive government that is not reactive ... [Interjections.]

Mr D M SKOSANA: House Chair, I have had my hand raised for some time.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Letlape, just take your seat for a moment. Hon Skosana, my apologies, I have not been alerted to that fact. Why do you want to be recognised?

IsiNdebele:

Nom D M SKOSANA: Sihlalo Wendlu, ngiphakamisa umraro lapha: Kunodade omncani lapho ...

English:

... who is saying something about cheap politics. What is that?

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IsiNdebele:

Yinto enjani leyo, Sihlalo Wendlu? Ngibawa ungirarulule.

English:

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Skosana, firstly our Rules say that if one wants to raise a point of order, you need to do it in the moment. We are now two minutes into Dr Letlape's declaration that you raise that point of order. So, that cannot be entertained at the moment. As it is, we will take that comment from the FF Plus as their declaration and they are entitled to an opinion.

Mr D M SKOSANA: That is an insult and not an ...

[Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Yes, please mute yourself. We will continue with the declaration.

Mr S NOMVALO: House Chair, my hand is up.

Dr T K S LETLAPE: What we would like to raise is the fact that this should be an opportunity ... [Interjections.]

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Mr S NOMVALO: House Chair, my hand is up.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon member, do you want to raise a new matter? I have already ruled on the previous point of order.

Mr S NOMVALO: No, once again the MK Party is a casualty of your wrong rulings. This is not for the first time you are doing this ... [Interjections.]

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): No, hon member, I am not going to listen to further arguments around this point of order ... [Interjections.] ... Table Staff, please mute that specific member. Hon members, the ruling has been made. If you are not happy with the ruling, deal with it in terms of the Rules.

Hon Letlape, please continue.

Dr T K S LETLAPE: What we would expect as Action SA is to ensure that we be provided with a plan of action from the Ministry of Health about the provision of menstrual health services, including sexual and reproductive health education and empowerment of the girl child.

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What we cannot do is continue to do work piecemeal without effect. So, we need to seize this opportunity to ensure that 31 years into democracy, none of our girl children, whether they are rural, urban, black, white, rich or poor, would suffer this indignation.

We need to ask that there be a plan from the department just like we have a plan for provision of condoms. We need to take women and girl children seriously and we need to put our money where our mouth is. This programme should be properly funded. Let's stop complaining, it is time to act. Thank you, House Chair.

Mr S N SWART: House Chair, the ACDP supports the report, given the very important role that the provision of free sanitary products and more importantly, menstrual health, plays in the dignity and good health of women in the country, and we commend the initiative of Ms Ndwandwe of Free Sanitary Pads Movement.

She explained that this programme was initiated to ensure that menstrual health rights were recognised and treated as human rights. This is indeed much wider than just the provision of sanitary products.

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In response to her petition, the department outlined key benefits and challenges of the departmental Sanitary Dignity Programme. Whilst some progress has been made with the programme, the ACDP believes that far more needs to be done in this regard.

We also agree with the committee that far more concrete action is needed. This, as committee members, when exercising their oversight functions, found that many eligible girls at schools did not benefit from the programme and that this results in thousands of girls being absent from schools. This as well as the non-delivery of free sanitary products to the Free State, which is indeed concerning. The committee also questioned the number of actual beneficiaries that were targeted in each province versus the number provided in the departmental presentation, and the ACDP believes that these figures must be closely monitored.

Lastly, the ACDP agrees with the committee’s concerns that the programme focused only on the provision of sanitary products and not on menstrual health holistically. This is an aspect that must be further pursued as it affects the holistic health,

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wellbeing and dignity of millions of girls and women in the country. The ACDP supports the report. I thank you.

Ms C T NONTENJA: Hon House Chair, in South Africa over 7 million women and girls suffer from period poverty, despite the 2019 launch of the Sanitary Dignity Programme. This initiative was meant to provide free sanitary pads and ensure menstruation is managed with safety and dignity. Yet, five years later, its impact has been severely undermined by poor funding, slow procurement and government mismanagement.

In provinces like Mpumalanga, the situation is worse riddled with corruption, inflated prices and substandard products, and there has been reportedly non delivery of sanitary pads in the Free State province. Some girls received only six months' worth of pads instead of a full year and many go without. This failure has real consequences.

Around 30% of school girls miss four to five days of school each month. That's a quarter of the academic year lost simply because they cannot afford sanitary products. Latest research suggests that over 1700 schools still use unsafe pit toilets or have no sanitation at all. These strips the girls of privacy and

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dignity, especially during menstruation, forcing many to stay home.

It’s not just about hygiene; it’s about equity, education and basic human rights. No girl should have to choose between her period and her future. It is this House’s constitutional duty to ensure oversight and accountability in service delivery. The UDM demands urgent action. Fully fund the Sanitary Dignity Programme, fix the supply chain, ensure quality ... [Time expired.] ... I thank you.

Xitsonga:

Tat S M GANA: Ndza khensa, Mutshamaxitulu wa Yindlu. Ndzi kombela ku khensa na vanhu lava tshameke eka tlhelo ra voko ra mina ra ximatsi.

English:

We must equally thank Ms Ndwandwe and the Team Free Sanitary Pads organisation for submitting this petition, and we also thank the portfolio committee for consideration. So, from ourselves as RISE MZANSI, we see menstrual health and equity as something that is of vital importance to us, which is why we even have a menstrual equity policy. This is so given that 30%

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of young girls in South Africa face period poverty, and we encourage the expansion of and increase in funding to the Sanitary Dignity Programme, particularly to ensure that eligible school girl child have access to sufficient sanitary pads to cover their needs.

We believe that period poverty is a human rights concern affecting many young girls in South Africa. So, there's something that the hon Letlape said, and I nearly donated my time to him. When we talk of period poverty, we should not only look at period poverty as a lack of access to sanitary products, it has to encompass sexual and reproductive education. That's something that I think must be covered from the recommendations. On behalf of RISE MZANSI, we support the work of the portfolio committee and support their work going forward.

Xitsonga:

Ndza khensile swinene, Mutshamaxitulu wa Yindlu.

Mrs N L HLAZO-WEBSTER: House Chair, BOSA supports the recommendations and actually the work of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. But I do have to say that we do so with a heavy sense of frustration because year

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after year, the House sits and speaks about advancing the rights of women and girls. The House adopts reports, passes budgets, but one of the most basic barriers to education for millions of girls in this country remains unsolved. That's the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products. Research from the Stellenbosch University shows that up to 30% of South African girls miss school during their periods due to the lack of access to sanitary products. That's equivalent to an entire term. So, for many girls, this is the beginning of a pattern of disengagement from the school system. Ultimately, it leads to dropouts.

This issue is then further exacerbated by pit latrines in schools and poor water and sanitation. It's not a side issue. It's actually an education crisis because we can't speak about empowering young women and achieving gender parity in education and ultimately access to economic participation while we ignore the injustice that is bleeding literally and figuratively, our education system and economic system. And yet, what do we see? What we see is that despite years of advocacy, court challenges and policy proposals, and even a proposal like this via a petition, there's still no coherent, funded and implemented national plan between the Department of Women, Youth and Persons

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with Disabilities and the Department of Basic Education to ensure that no girl misses school due to menstruation. This lack of co-ordination is actually inexcusable. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities is mandated to drive gender equality and youth empowerment and Basic Education is responsible for ensuring access to education for all learners.

Mr V ZUNGULA: Chair, we have a crisis of girls missing days of school due to being unable to afford sanitary products. This is a widespread problem that affects mostly the poor and vulnerable. We want to make it clear as the ATM, that there should be no girl that will miss a day of school due to being on periods. The government must make whatever means possible to ensure free sanitary towels are provided to all girls.

We also want to sound caution on the implementation of the Sanitary Dignity Programme that has objectives of distributing sanitary towels to girls in different districts. In the Eastern Cape, suppliers from the province are sidelined and companies from outside the province are given the work yet there is capacity in the province. The Eastern Cape department of social development gives contracts to companies who buy and sell

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sanitary towels and ignores companies that manufacture sanitary towels and are also in the business of sanitary towels.

This is a backward, short-sighted arrangement as companies that manufacture sanitary towels can also create jobs in the Eastern Cape. We know the Eastern Cape has got the highest unemployment level in the country. It is also deeply troubling that black women-owned companies like Ntombam Sanitary Towels with sanitary brands are sidelined in favour of companies that are not manufacturers but rather procure from companies like Johnson & Johnson that already have a big share of the sanitary towel market. Why sideline an existing local black female-owned company that is fully in the business of sanitary towels for a middleman-based company unless it is to self-enrich. We want to encourage the officials and the political leadership of the province to prioritise their own people, and they need to prioritise companies from the Eastern Cape instead of utilising companies from ... [Time expired.].

Adv S SALIE: Chair. Al Jama-Ah supports the report.

Ms T M CHAUKE-ADONIS: Chairperson, hon members, fellow South Africans for this opportunity. As the ANC, we stand with the

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adoption of this particular report that seeks to advance and promote the rights of the most vulnerable in our society. As the ANC, we have been very clear on promoting the rights of women and young girls. This has been done and seen through the programmes that we have implemented across the country, one of them being the Sanitary Dignity Programme.

In this report, we had the opportunity for it to be tabled before the portfolio committee for us to review, but also to interrogate, also taking into consideration that we have had high increased rates of reporting where service delivery on these essential products has not reached those who need it the most. On 29 October 2024, it was tabled in front of the portfolio committee for us to consider, to deliberate, and also to review the presentation that was put before us.

This is a critical report, not only for us as Members of this Parliament, but as South Africans to consider. Taking into consideration the report also reflected on nondelivery of products in certain institutions and places of basic learning, where learners who are most deserving were not receiving these products. This further brought concern to the portfolio

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committee and further instigated an investigation that seeks to address the challenge that has been brought forward.

Now, South Africans, it is imperative for us to realise that a child who misses out on their education is a child who is left out from social and economic opportunity. We must understand the importance of menstrual hygiene and their products, and how they contribute towards restoring and protecting the dignity of our young girls and women. As the ANC, we firmly believe that when we say condoms should be easily accessible, sanitary pads should be easily accessible too.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): Hon Chauke-Adonis, please just hold on for a moment. I have a hand from the floor. Hon Manyi, why do you want to be recognised?

THE CHIEF WHIP OF THE OPPOSITION (Mr M Manyi): Chairperson, we can’t find a closure that contradicts the report from the same party. This party has rejected the petition.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr W Horn): No, hon Manyi, that is a point of debate, and that’s not the point of order. Hon Chauke-Adonis, please continue.

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Ms T M CHAUKE-ADONIS: Thank you very much. Perhaps hon Manyi should familiarise himself with the stance of the ANC on this matter. As I proceed, as the ANC, we have been very clear in supporting the petition that seeks to advance and accelerate the rights of women and young girls in accessing menstrual hygiene products. It is equally important for us to ensure that there is accountability and consequence management in the distribution and procurement of these products. As the portfolio committee, these were part of our recommendation and additionally, as part of our follow-up, we had it instilled in our oversight programmes. We also further note that we need to increase the distribution channel by affording opportunities to more women, youth and persons with disabilities becoming distributors of these products.

Additionally, as part of the recommendation that was made by the portfolio committee, it is for us to ensure that we must have a programme that seeks to have cross-sectional intervention from various departments. This programme must seek to ensure that there is accountability from various departments, having reporting system and matrix that ensure that the efforts are interlinked. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities has an oversight responsibility on this initiative.

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It requires those departments that are instilled with the responsibility for the successful implementation to do so, such as the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Social Development. We do take note that in various provinces, these two departments are the custodians and those who are responsible for the successful distribution and implementation.

We also call upon South African citizens to report any cases of mismanagement to us so that we can ensure adequate consequence management and accountability. This is to ensure that learners with special needs, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those in dire need and women in dire need of this particular product are receiving them in time and adequately. We also further note and request that the relevant department ensures that these products that are being distributed in the various institutions must be accredited and qualified. We cannot promote service delivery of these products where we are not ensuring that the quality and standards are those that are adequate and sufficient for these learners.

Additionally, and lastly, as the ANC, as we adopt this report, we further note and further put ourselves forward as leaders in government, as members of the Government of National Unity, GNU

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to say we are heavily invested and committed in advancing, protecting and promoting the lives of the most vulnerable, irrespective of what others, those who are in the green or whatever colour and those who are in the red, might say. The ANC stands very firm on its mandate and agenda in advancing economic and social transformation and eradicating poverty for all South African citizens. Chairperson, I thank you.

The CHIEF WHIP OF THE LARGEST MINORITY PARTY: I move that the report be adopted.

Question put.

Agreed to.

The House adjourned at 16:21.

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