**Media Statement: Joint Standing Committee on Defence Supports Deployment of Additional Members of SANDF**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 22 April 2020 –**The Joint Standing Committee on Defence today unanimously supported the employment of additional members of the South Africa National Defence Force (SANDF) to assist government’s intervention in the fight against Covid-19. Today, the committee considered a number of letters from the President of the Republic on the employment of the SANDF. The President is compelled in terms Section 201 (3) of the Constitution and Section 18 (2) of the Defence Act (No 42 of 2002) to inform Parliament regarding the reasons, place, number of soldiers, cost involved, as well as the period of employment, to which Parliament must apply its mind and express its view.

The committee is satisfied by the reasons given and the necessity to employ an additional 73 180 members of the SANDF in the fight against the spread of the Covid-19 virus, particularly in light of the information that South Africa is still in the early stages of the pandemic.

“Of critical importance is the deployment of the South African Military Health Services and its capabilities, which is necessary to support the Department of Health when considering the trajectory of infections expected as per research by experts,” said Mr Cyril Xaba, the Co-Chairperson of the committee. Furthermore, the committee is satisfied with the reason that the initial 2 820 deployed was insufficient, considering the expected scale of the disease.

While the committee is cognisant that this deployment is large and has huge financial implications, with the injection of R4.5 billion, it considers the cost implications necessary in the context of the unprecedented nature of the disease, which demands an extraordinary response.

Furthermore, the committee is also cognisant that some of the cost drivers include the procurement of personal protective equipment, equipment necessary for testing and analysis and preparation of field hospitals, all of which are necessary to protect SANDF members and fight this disease. The safety of members of the SANDF is of paramount importance and no cost should be spared to protect the lives of South Africans and members of the SANDF, Mr Xaba emphasised.

Meanwhile, the committee has raised concerns about the sporadic cases of alleged abuse of power by some members of the SANDF, which has the potential to damage the legitimacy and image of the SANDF in this fight against Covid-19. The committee calls on all members of the SANDF to act within the confines of the law and SANDF’s Code of Conduct, which guides the conduct of all uniformed personnel, especially during deployments.

The committee is confident that the Military Ombud is committed and capable to deal with this matter and that reports on the investigations will adequately address those worrying actions. The committee will await the completion of the investigation into these cases and then analyse if the consequences are adequate.

Despite this, the committee has also called upon the citizenry in general to work with the security establishment by abiding with the regulations, which will go a long way to limiting any need to interact with security personnel. Furthermore, the committee condemns the circulation of false videos as a way of bringing the name of the SANDF into disrepute and undermining the legitimacy of the SANDF. The committee hopes that peddlers of such content will be subjected to the full might of the law as per the regulations.

Meanwhile the committee has resolved to refer the leader of the official opposition, Mr John Steenhuisen, to the Speaker of the National Assembly in relations to the publication of a letter, dated 21 April 2020, by the President to the Chairpersons of the Join Standing Committee on Defence even before the committee had interrogated the matter. “We view this in a serious light, as the publication seem to have been intended to create hysteria against the deployment,” Co-Chairperson Mr Mamagase Nchabeleng said.

The committee also extended its heartfelt condolences to members of the families of the two soldiers who passed away in the course of enforcement of the Declaration of National Disaster. “We would like to express our condolences to the families of the fallen soldiers. We hope that the families of these heroes find solace in the knowledge that they died in the line of duty protecting the lives of South Africans,” Mr Xaba said.

Regarding the mission to repatriate South Africans from Wuhan City, the committee congratulated the members of the defence force and all government departments involved in that mission. “That mission showed that the SANDF has the will and capability to respond and to any situation. The mission was a confirmation of the dedication and selfless commitment of our soldiers to undertake any given task. The mission has made not only the committee proud, but the rest of South Africa was also filled with pride to be associated with the SANDF,” said Mr Nchabeleng.

The committee noted and supports the extension of the period of deployment of 1 165 members of the SANDF who form part of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission (MONUSCO) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The committee is of the view that the stabilisation of the Southern African Development Community is an essential mission in ensuring the economic development of the region, as well as playing a key role in the attainment of the African Union’s Agenda 2063.

Furthermore, the committee noted and supports the extension of the period of deployment of the SANDF as part of Operation Copper in the Mozambique Channel and of the coast of Tanzania on anti-piracy operations. While the committee is cognisant that piracy has significantly decreased recently, the committee remains of the view that maritime piracy remains a threat that must be guarded against.

Meanwhile, the committee has requested a written report on the reported incidents involving two South African Air Force’s C-130 Hercules Aircraft in Goma and Waterkloof Airforce Base and the impact this will have on the deployment of this logistics capability.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE, MR CYRIL XABA AND MR MAMAGASE NCHABELENG**