**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JOINT DEFENCE COMMITTEE WELCOMES PROGRESS ON INVESTIGATION INTO LYTTLETON MILITARY BASE BREAK-IN**

**Parliament, Friday, 28 August 2020 –**The Joint Standing Committee on Defence welcomed information that suspects connected to the break-in and theft of assault rifles at the Lyttleton Military Base are due for trial and that all firearms have been recovered. The swift investigation and cooperation by the Joint Investigating Team should be applauded, especially retrieving the stolen weapons, as these could have been used for nefarious activities.

While the committee welcomes the arrest and retrieval of weapons, it was unequivocal in its concerns for theft of military hardware, especially in the context of the three break-ins at military bases in the recent past. “This is the third time it is happening in the past three years, which is concerning. The break-ins undermine the authority of the state and the more it happens, it raises questions as to whether these weapons are properly looked after. We must not wait for the next break-in to happen before we strengthen our security. Also, the day we deal more harshly with those responsible is the day this thing will stop,” said Mr Cyril Xaba, the Co-Chairperson of the committee.

The committee was also unanimous in its condemnation of such break-ins and has called for the full might of the law to take its course.

Meanwhile, the committee emphasised its support for the extension of employment of 20 000 members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) for a period from 27 June 2020 until 30 September 2020 at an expected expenditure of R1.5 billion in the fight against Covid-19. The extension is in terms of Section 201 (2)(a) of the Constitution. The committee’s support rests on the belief that their employment has been mostly positive.

The committee also expressed its appreciation for the frank and open discussion on Operation Notlela. “The presentation shows a high level of accountability and will give confidence to the people of South Africa that the SANDF accounts on all its allocated funds,” Mr Xaba said.

Some of the noteworthy interventions in the fight against Covid-19 include 39 primary healthcare teams comprising 185 members (36 doctors, 84 nurses and 65 auxiliary staff) deployed to all nine provinces; 180 engineers in support of Department of Water and Sanitation in all provinces; and companies that have enforced compliance of regulations with the South African Police Service. The committee urges the SANDF to continue its good work in this regard.

Regarding Operation Corona (the safeguarding of South Africa’s border) the committee has called on the Department of Defence to consider technology as a force multiplier at the border. While the committee is cognisant that the fiscal space within which the department operates in is constrained, it believes that diversifying capabilities will ensure that our borders are safe.

Also, the committee welcomed the signing into law of the Border Management Authority Act, which should elevate capacity securing our borders. The committee urges the SANDF to proactively work with this agency, once established, to set up efficient strategies to secure our borders.

The committee has committed to visit the border, especially areas of concern, to assess first-hand necessary interventions to secure South Africa’s borders.

Meanwhile, the committee has learned with shock of the untimely passing of the former Surgeon-General of the SANDF, retired Lieutenant-General Vejaynand Ramlakan. The committee conveys its condolences to his family and friends.

**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**