**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS EXPRESSES ITS UNHAPPINESS WITH THE DEPARTMENT’S UNDERSPENDING**

**Parliament, Wednesday, 10 March 2021** – The Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans was today briefed by the Department of Military Veterans on quarter 2 and 3 performance reports, as well as on progress in the process of finalising the national database of military veterans.

The committee noted with concern an admission of underspending by the Department of Military Veterans of below 50% of its budget in the current financial year.

The Chairperson of the committee, Mr Cyril Xaba, said the committee has previously raised the issue of serious structural and systemic challenges in the department, and that until those were addressed there would not be any improvement, and the reported underspending will continue.

He said: “We are concerned about the department’s underspending, this means that some targets have not been met. The department, by its own admission said its performance is under 50% and is attributing that partly to the Covid-19 pandemic, we accept that but it is also testimony to a deeper problem. At this time of the year the department should be over 75% spending, but it is still under 50%, an indication of underperformance by the department.”

Due to the history of the department’s underspending and its history of returning money to the National Treasury, its budget has been reduced again. Mr Xaba was, however, happy that the matter is receiving attention and hoped the intervention processes will yield positive results and the department will be able to spend its allocation and deliver on its mandate.

“We are happy that the situation at the department is receiving attention of the Presidency, with a number of work streams established to focus on certain weaknesses in the department,” he said.

With the help of the State Information Technology Agency (SITA), the department was working on cleaning the national database of military veterans and have it fully automated. The committee hoped the department will be able to have a clean and secured database that could not be tampered with.

The committee was also briefed on the operations of the Military Veterans Appeals Board and it has discouraged the department and the board from using the courts to resolve disputes, and should instead use the intergovernmental framework to address issues of concern.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS, MR CYRIL XABA.**