**MEDIA STATEMENT

Committee On Defence Calls For Sandf To Be A Balanced, Modern And Technologically Advanced Military Force

Parliament, Wednesday, 16 February 2022 –** The Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans received briefings from the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and Armscor on the future of Projects Biro, Hotel and Hoefyster, including past payments, and plans to address the combat vehicle requirements for the South African Army and an update on the status of maintenance of the South African Air Force fleet by Denel and other service providers.

Project Hoefyster was conceived in 2006 to replace the Ratel Infantry Fighting Vehicle fleet that dates back to 1976. The committee is concerned that the Ratel fleet is facing obsolescence and is an antithesis to the idea of an Army that is efficient, effective and technologically advanced military force, capable of executing its mandate in a modern society.

The committee heard that the project has been delayed by more than a decade due to Denel's inability to honour its contractual obligations and that the Department of Defence is weighing its options to save itself from further disappointment by Denel.

Project Biro which consists of three Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) and three Inshore Patrol Vessels (IPV) was launched to replace the refitted strike craft and minehunters. The committee welcomed the news that the Project is on course and the department will take delivery of the first vessel by March.

Project Hotel was initiated to replace the ageing SAS Protea, the SA Navy's hydrographic vessel which is more than 50 years old. The committee noted that the project remains fully-funded despite the budget constraints.

The committee maintained that acquisitions, maintenance, repairs and upgrading of equipment is essential for the SANDF to maintain its combat readiness.

The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Thandi Modise, who led the delegation told the committee that one of the weaknesses of the department relates to the maintenance of its Prime Mission Equipment (PME). She stressed the need for solid and sustainable maintenance systems to ensure the continued operation of the PME. She also referred to Denel's location and asked whether it is correctly located, or whether it should revert back to the Department of Defence.

The committee was also briefed on the status of the SAAF's fleet with specific reference to the maintenance of the fleet. Concern was expressed by Members of the committee that only about a quarter of the fleet is serviceable with dire consequences to its ability to perform its mandate.

The Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Cyril Xaba, said the information the committee received from the briefings was valuable and is going to assist it on its oversight role. He stressed that the SANDF must maintain its core defence capability because the future is unknown.

The suggestion by the Chairperson of the Armscor for a strategic discussion on the future of Denel and Project Hoefyster, was welcomed by both the Minister and the committee. Such a discussion can assist with pragmatic proposals to National Treasury which the Minister undertook to lead.

In this regard Mr Xaba emphasised the committee's support for an increase in the department's budgetary allocation to assist with addressing some of these challenges.

Mr Xaba concluded that the committee will schedule meetings with the Chiefs of the Arms of Services to further drill down on their requirements and the condition of their core capabilities to determine how best the committee can support them.

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

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