**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JOINT DEFENCE COMMITTEE DEFERS DISCUSSION ON FOOD CONTAMINATION INVESTIGATION TO A LATER DATE**
Parliament, Friday, 22 April 2022 – The Joint Standing Committee on Defence has resolved to defer to next week discussions on the report on investigations into allegations that soldiers deployed to Mozambique were fed rotten food. This will give the Minister of Defence the opportunity to give proper consideration of the report and the appropriate response to the committee.

The committee received the report from the South African Military Ombud, which contained some worrying findings. The committee considers it unacceptable that soldiers were fed spoiled food, which has a direct impact on their ability to deliver on their mandate. The committee welcomed the comprehensive report that included a clear methodology to enhance its reliability.

Findings included confirmation that the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) was served rotten or spoiled food; that a mobile pantry was intermittently malfunctioning between 20 and 24 October 2021; no dedicated environmental officer was present during this period, and some of the members of the SANDF were negligent in failing to ensure that all food stored in the mobile pantry was properly disposed of.

“Our decision to defer the discussions is to ensure that the Minister gives an account of what the Department of Defence plans to do in light of the recommendations. We are primarily concerned about the welfare of our soldiers and that due regard must be made to ensure that they are given adequate support to enable them to perform their mandate,” said Mr Cyril Xaba, the Co-Chairperson of the committee.

The committee also highlighted that logistical planning and asset maintenance must improve to properly support deployed soldiers. The committee would also like to hear from the Minister how planning will be improved to ensure that adequate preventative measures are put in place.

Meanwhile, the committee considered three letters from the President on the deployment of SANDF members to various missions. These include 200 SANDF members deployed to counter threats of piracy and other illegal activities in the Indian Ocean; the extension of employment of 957 members plus 241 additional SANDF members to the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and the extension of employment of 1 495 SANDF members to assist in combatting acts of terrorism and violent extremism in northern Mozambique. The committee supports these peace-keeping efforts on the African continent and resolved to engage the department on the finer details of the deployments at a later date.

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

For media enquiries or interviews with the Chairpersons, please contact the committee’s Media Officer:
Name: Malatswa Molepo (Mr)
Parliamentary Communication Services