**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**JSCD VIEWS FEEDER SYSTEM TO REJUVINATE SANDF AS TOO THIN TO ADDRESS AGEING FORCE AND IMPACTS NEGATIVELY ON MORALE**

**Parliament, Saturday, 11 March 2023 –** The Joint Standing Committee on Defence is of the view that the thin feeder system currently prevalent within the defence environment presents a major risk factor that has a potential to paralyse the future of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and diminish its capabilities for deployment.

The committee is cognisant of the funding challenges faced by the SANDF, but has called for reimagination of alternative solutions especially in light of the fiscal challenges the country continues to face. “The committee is supportive of enhancement of initiatives such as the Military Skills Development System (MSDS) and the University Reserve Training Programme, but is acutely aware of the funding challenges.

“The question that must worry us is how, within the current budgetary constraints, do we ensure the rejuvenation of skills within the SANDF and improve morale of our soldiers,” said Mr Cyril Xaba, the Co-Chairperson of the committee.

While the committee understands reasons behind the decision to reprioritise budgets and implement cost saving initiatives such as implementing the MSDS intakes for every alternative year, it is concerned that the continued implementation will have an adverse effect of reducing military capabilities to execute the defence mandate.

The committee has called for the SANDF together with the Joint Standing Committee on Defence and the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans to interact with the National Treasury to highlight the unique impact the lack of funds has on the SANDF.

The lack of a fully-functional feeder system has led to an ageing force especially with the Reserve Force with an average age of 45 years. Compounding this challenge is stagnation within the system with soldiers occupying the same rank for a prolonged period of time. This stagnation has a direct link to the neutral morale results of the Department of Defence (DOD) Morale Survey FY2021/22.

The committee is concerned that the morale index highlighted two negative ratings on availability of equipment and quality of equipment. The availability of capabilities and defence platforms represents a key pillar on functionality of the SANDF and the fact that these two critical components are lacking, is an issue of serious concern for the committee.

Also, the committee was apprehensive that the overall morale index registered a neutral rating especially because a positive rating is desired. Furthermore, the committee was of the view that the results don’t correlate with the interactions the committee has had with members of the SANDF. The committee called for the SANDF to present the questionnaire used to ascertain where the disparities might have arisen.

The call for an interaction with the National Treasury is influenced by the need to have a fully-functional value chain that is able to address an ageing force, sustenance of the DOD training system and have a force with adequate capabilities for deployment. The committee said workable solutions have to be pondered as interactions with treasury continue to address the funding challenge before the system collapses.

**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**

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