**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**PLENARY *(HYBRID)***

**TUESDAY, 23 MAY 2023**

**10:00 – 12:00**

**DEBATE ON VOTES 23 AND 26: DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS**

Hon. Chairperson,

The importance of the capable defence of our country is beyond question. Defence is our last vestige and insurance of national stability in times of crisis. It further plays a peace-keeping role on the continent and safeguards our porous borders from the ever-increasing threat of cross-border insurgency by criminal trafficking syndicates.

Hence, it is incumbent upon the government to prioritise national defence and ensure that all the necessary funding and resources are available for our defence whenever and wherever they are needed. This unfortunately, is not the case and with the meagre budget this Department receives, it is no wonder that it remains at its lowest ebb of functionality.

This has the knock-on effect of creating poor morale and ill-discipline within the ranks of our soldiers which translates into unnecessary accidents and in some instances deaths. Maintaining a skilled and motivated workforce is crucial. There must be greater professional development programs, better salary packages, and pensions for our military veterans.

We stand by and salute our brave military veterans, who risked their lives in the struggle against apartheid and have served in various peacekeeping missions across Africa.

Their sacrifices and commitment to peace and security are the foundations upon which peace and security are built in this country.

Although this budget has the potential to bring significant positive change to the lives of our veterans by promising access to education and training for thousands of veterans, integrating them into the national workforce, and securing business opportunities for them, a lot still needs to be done.

As we celebrate this potential progress, we must not turn a blind eye to past failures of this government and how it neglected military veterans for so long. For 12 long years, the government failed to fulfil its promise and obligation to provide pensions to military veterans, leaving them struggling financially.

This neglect is not just an oversight but a deliberate failure to honour military veterans. It mocks their sacrifice and raises serious questions about the government’s commitment to the welfare of our veterans.

The failure to provide pensions for military veterans has undermined their financial security, making them face hardships and struggles that they didn’t have to face if proper support had been provided to them.

Needless to say, the mental toll of such neglect cannot be overstated. The families of our veterans have been affected too. Children and spouses have borne the brunt of financial strain, and the negative effects on their welfare and education are profound.

Although the initiatives in the current budget come too late, particularly on socio-economic empowerment, the IFP believes that there is always time to right a wrong.

For this reason, we call upon the government to ensure the swift and full implementation of the budget. We will accept no more delays and no more excuses. The military veterans have waited long enough.

Given the rampant corruption in this government, we demand robust mechanisms of accountability and transparency in the administration of veterans’ benefits to prevent any taking of chances for self-enrichment.

In as much as the current budget proposes the creation of jobs in partnership with the private sector, we demand that such partnerships must not only bring jobs but also careers for our military veterans so that they can contribute to society and use their skills and experience for their economic advancement.

In conclusion, the IFP affirms our unwavering commitment to our defence and military veterans. We will continue to push for their welfare, honour their sacrifices, and ensure their contributions to our nation are never forgotten.

The IFP supports the budget vote.

I thank you.