**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**FRIDAY, 26 MAY 2023**

**DUE DATE: 9 JUNE 2023**

**2072. The Leader of the Opposition (DA) to ask the President of the Republic:**

(1) With reference to his statement on 11 May 2023 in response to allegations by the United States ambassador, Mr Reuben Brigety, that the Republic provided materials of war to the Russian Federation, stating that he has appointed an independent investigation into the matter to be led by a retired judge, (a) on what date did he first hear that there were allegations of war materials having been loaded on the Russian vessel, Lady R, at Simon’s Town Naval Base in December 2022, (b) what did he do about it then and (c) on what date did he first ask the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans to brief him on the serious issue;

(2) whether he had sight of the ship manifest of Lady R; if not, (a) why not and (b) what are the reasons that he appointed an independent investigation by a retired judge instead of asking the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans to furnish him with the information he requires; if so, what are the relevant details;

(3) on what date is it envisaged that the independent investigation will be completed, given that this is an urgent matter where the global reputation and trade benefits of the Republic are at stake?

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**REPLY**

I have appointed an independent panel to enquire into the circumstances of the docking of the Russian vessel known as Lady R in Simonstown in December 2022. The enquiry was established because of the seriousness of the allegations, the extent of public interest and the impact of this matter on South Africa’s international relations.

The inquiry has to establish the circumstances that led to the docking of the ship and the alleged loading of cargo, and the departure of the Lady R cargo ship from Simonstown, during the period from 6 to 9 December 2022.

The panel has been tasked to:

* establish the circumstances that led to the docking of the ship and the alleged loading of cargo, and the departure of the Lady R cargo ship from Simonstown, during the period from 6 to 9 December 2022;
* establish persons who were aware of the cargo ship’s arrival, and, if any, the contents to be off-loaded or loaded, the departure and destination of the cargo;
* evaluate whether constitutional, legal or other obligations were complied with in relation to the cargo ship’s arrival, its stay, the loading or off-loading of its contents, and its departure.

The investigation will ensure all aspects of the docking are comprehensively and independently dealt with and will include recommendations on any steps that may need to be taken in light of their findings or as a result of any breaches that may have occurred.

The panel has been given a specific timeframe to finish its work and barring any challenges that could delay its work it is expected that it will finalise its investigation within the specified timeframe and to submit its report to the President after concluding its work.