**MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (NA)**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER**

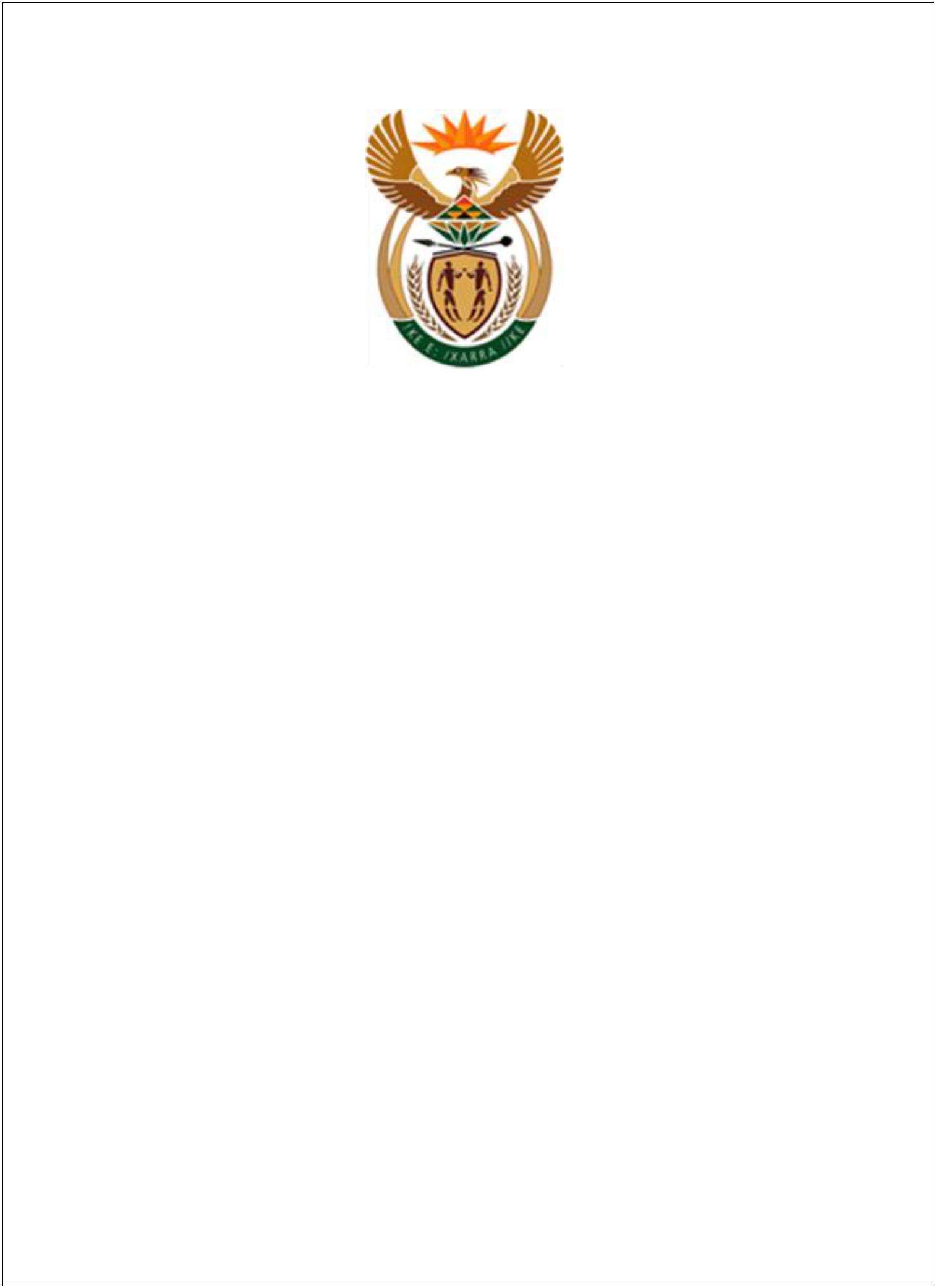
**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO: 457**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION: 25 FEBRUARY 2022**

**REPLY RECOMMENDED BY:**

**MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS:MP**

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**Mr S J F Marais (DA) to ask the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans:**

(1) With reference to the approximately 250 members of the SA National Defence

Force (SANDF) who were flown to Cuba for training at the end of August 2021, (a)

from which SANDF formations and/or divisions are the specified members and (b)

for what reason was it decided that the best possible training available to them was

in Cuba;

(2) on what basis was it resolved that all the relevant SANDF members must attend

training in Cuba, where the only language of communication is Spanish, given that

all trainees must spend one year in Cuba learning Spanish;

(3) whether she has found that it is cost-effective to spend and/or waste one year

to be taught Spanish before actual training can commence; if not, what is the position

in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;

(4) whether she has found that it is acceptable that the SANDF soldiers are (a)

used for obligatory garden work where grass must be cut with machetes under

instruction of their Spanish-speaking instructors and (b) not provided with balanced

meals, but rather a low standard of food (details furnished); if not, what is the position

in each case; if so, what are the relevant details in each case;

(5) what are the reasons that (a) interpreters are not assigned on a full-time basis

to the trainee soldiers and (b) the specified training is not available in the Republic,

where similar and higher grade training used to be available in the past?

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**REPLY:**

(1) (a) There are a hundred and five (105) SANDF members from all Services who

departed to Cuba for the following training programmes at the end of August 2021:

(i) 30 x members for Senior Courses (SDSP & JSCSP).

(ii) 75 x members for various vocational/cadet training.

(b) From the SANDF appreciation with specific reference to medical expertise and

their ongoing assistance to the Department of Health, Cuba was the obvious choice

to train and qualify medical specialists. Through Project Thusano, Cuba also

demonstrated their skills and knowledge in terms of the maintenance and repair of

various technical capabilities. In addition, Cuba was the only country that has opened

its training opportunities in bigger numbers to the SANDF and that could tailor make

training programmes according to the SANDF's unique training requirements.

(2) Only the extended courses i.e. medical and pilot courses are presented in

Spanish which requires the one (1) year Spanish Language Training. All the other

courses are presented in English.

(3) It is in the interest of the SANDF that members are conversant with other

foreign languages including Spanish due to the multi-lateral military relationships of

the SANDF with the international community.

(4) The SANDF only became aware of the allegations of ill-treatment of Cuba

learners via the social media platform as no formal complaint has been received in

this regard. The organisation has however directed the Defence Attaché in Cuba

to look into these allegations.

(5) (a) As indicated in par 2 above, not all courses are presented in Spanish. The

one year language intervention for extended courses is of such a nature that learners

are able to grasp the learning material without any additional intervention. However,

it must be noted that, where further language interventions are required, learners are

provided with interpreters and or translators. (b) Even though the training is available

in South Africa, the SANDF did a skills gap analysis and ascertained that there is a

backlog which necessitated the current arrangement with the Cuban Government.

**Ms T.R. MODISE, MP**

**MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS**

