MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
Republic of South Africa

Private Bag x427, Pretoria, 0001, Tel: (012) 355 6119, Fax: (012) 347 0118
PO Box 47, Cape Town, 8000. Tel: (021) 787 6045, Fax: (021) 465 5870

http://www.dod.mil.za

MILITARY OMBUD SWEARING-IN CEREMONY: MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND
MILITARY VETERANS’ ADDRESS, 08TH NOVEMBER 2019, THABA-TSHWANE

High Court Judge Malope-Sethosa

Secretary for Defence Dr. Sam Gulube

Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Solly Shoke

Retired Military Ombud, General T. T. Matanzima

Deputy Military Ombud, Advocate Damane-Mkhosana

Chiefs of Services and Divisions

Generals and Flag Officers

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am happy to officiate at this swearing-in ceremony of South Africa’s second
Military Ombud, Lieutenant General Vusumuzi Masondo. He assumes the position
following the retirement of the first Military Ombud, General Matanzima, earlier in
the year. This smooth transition is an illustration of the maturity of our stable democracy, the armed forces and the entire defence establishment. For that, we must thank our country’s leadership, led by Commander-in-Chief President Cyril Ramaphosa for the appointment.

To remind us, the origins of this office stems from the first White Paper on Defence in 1996 and the 1998 Defence Review respectively. Having completed the full seven year term of the Office of the Military Ombud, a firm basis has been laid by the predecessor, General Matanzima. The office scored successes on most of the cases referred to it. As I reported during my Budget Vote in July 2019 at the start of the 6th Administration and Parliament, the Office of the Military Ombud had at that time dealt with 525 cases before it, finalizing 246 thereof. However, the challenges that remain is on some of the outstanding cases, for different reasons. Some of these have to do with the understanding by complainants of the role of the office, whilst others, whilst completed, have yet to be implemented by the South African National Defence Force.

The challenge I put before you is to ensure that the office is not reactive to cases brought before it, but also serves to educate and raise awareness to our serving men and women about the importance of the office, as well as civil oversight. Most important within these is the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of members of the armed forces, and ensuring that there is minimization of the violation of human rights.

As you take over the role of the Military Ombud, be and remain ever-cognisant of the institution’s independence and impartiality, and ensuring that justice is delivered to serving or retired members, as well as South Africa’s public at large.
Draw no comfort that the big part of the institution you are now taking over has an oversight role to play over the one you are now leaving – the defence force! Use that to your advantage, but also elicit the cooperation of your former peers and colleagues, including the Chief of the South African National Defence Force. Cynics will find it easy to point fingers at the institution you are taking the helm of ... that as the Military Ombud, it will continue to be “the old boys’ club”! I do not want to believe that would be the case, as I will place reliance on you to assist me fulfil my role of civil oversight over the SANDF as the Executive Authority.

You are taking over the institution from the country’s first Military Ombud in good condition, functioning as a well-oiled machine. In addition, we appointed the Deputy Military Ombud, Advocate Damane-Mkhosana who has been at the helm ensuring it is in good running condition, filled with men and women you can rely on. As you take over, you will be more conversant with the fact that the institution has built national and international networks, culminating in the holding of the international conference of military ombud institutions and the first of such a kind for the African continent. I therefore urge you to pick up and even deepen these relations, and explore other and new areas of cooperation. As South Africa, our entire African continent is looking at us and eager to learn from institutions such as the Military Ombud, which forms an important pillar of our country’s civil-military relations and Defence in a Democracy as envisioned in the White Paper on Defence.

During your tenure, serve with honour and dignity, and continue to have our men and women in uniform, as well as our citizenry, deepen respect for this office. In addition, although not in the judiciary of our country, the presence of Judge Malopa-Sethosa signifies the important links you must deepen with the judiciary.
You have the unique place to have your feet on both sides. In addition to this, parliament has during September 2019, re-emphasized the institutional independence of the Military Ombud and institution. In this regard, even as Minister, and the Department of Defence, am not allowed to interfere with the exercise of the powers and functions of the Ombud. General Masondo, you now assume a very powerful institution which even I have very limited capacity to intervene in, except parliament, even if you are very broadly part of the defence family.

As you start your tenure, I wish you all the best. By the time it comes to an end, we shall be in the 7th Administration and most of us will no longer be there. I wish you all the best as you start another chapter in your illustrious career in our country’s defence establishment in a democracy, and the sacrifices you have made to achieve that.

I herewith hand over to Judge Malope-Sethosa to conduct your swearing-in as South Africa’s second Military Ombud.

I thank you...