The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, The Chief of the SANDF, Gen S.Z. Shoke, the Secretary for Defence, Dr Sam Gulube, the Incoming Chief of Staff of the SANDF, Lt Gen L. Yam, Chiefs of Services and Divisions, Members of the Military Command Council, Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council, Generals and Flag Officers, Senior Officers, Officers, Sergeant Major of the SANDF, MCWO Kgaladi, Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, Fellow Soldiers, Acting Chairperson of the Defence Service Commission, The CEO of Armscor, Captains of Industry, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted that you could join us here this morning as the office of Chief of Staff of the SANDF changes hands from one General Officer to the other. I am deeply privileged that you took time off your busy schedules to come break bread with us, bid me a hearty farewell and welcome into this vital office of our military, an equally committed soldier, distinguished officer and compatriot in the person of Lt Gen Lindile Yam.

As I round off my tour of duty as Chief of Staff of the SANDF, I am emboldened by the knowledge that the officer that steps into this mammoth responsibility is equal to the task, and will efficiently carry the baton with pride and continue delivering the necessary strategic direction for our armed forces and support the Chief of the SANDF. I know Lt Gen Yam from my days at the SA Army. I have previously handed over the reins of command of our landward forces to him and he has acquitted himself very well at SA Army Headquarters. There is no reason that being a patriot and dedicated militarist that he is, he should not excel even here.

Not so long ago, three or so years back when I assumed this office, the environment was still known as Corporate Staff Division and there was a need to put systems in place to have it function as a fully-fledged Chief of Staff office. The guidance provided by the Chief of the SANDF in establishing a fit-for-purpose Chief of Staff environment that would better serve the SANDF was invaluable.

Looking back, as leader of a team tasked with inaugurating the office of Chief of Staff, I am proud to hand over this responsibility, the human infrastructure and its systems to my successor who will surely take it forward and ensure that the office continues to respond positively, swiftly and resourcefully to the SANDF’s strategic needs that support our country’s government
I am convinced that the incoming Chief of Staff is up to the task to ensure that South Africans continue having a defence force that our constitution demands, a force structured and managed as a disciplined military force, whose primary object is to defend and protect the Republic, its territorial integrity and its people in accordance with the Constitution and the principles of international law regulating the use of force.

The mammoth task that lies ahead for Lt Gen Yam and of course the entire Military Command Council will require the rigorous continuation of unity of effort by everyone entrusted with leadership positions. If all of us exert the same energy and effort, putting our shoulders to the wheel to collectively make the SANDF the pride of the nation, no mountain or obstacle can prove greater than the sum of our resolve to overcome any size of difficulty.

As we go about our daily business of bearing arms on behalf of the people of South Africa, I want to urge all of us to profoundly ponder the timeless words of Tanzania’s finest, a son of the soil and one of Africa’s giants and venerated OAU founding fathers, Julius Nyerere when he said: “Unity will not make us rich, but it can make it difficult for Africa and African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated. And it will, therefore, increase the effectiveness of the decisions we make and try to implement for our development.” These words by Mwalimu Nyerere must be the mantra through which we live and breathe so that we speedily help realise our betterment as a people and the SANDF in particular.

Allow me to speak on the issue of civil control of our military.

As the Military Command, we are obligated to uphold the constitutional tenet and imperative that there be civil control of the SANDF by working closely with the Defence Secretariat to empower the military to be able to efficiently respond to the direction provided by our principals in government.

As outlined in the guidelines issued by the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, the National Defence Force and the Secretariat are obligated to work together seamlessly without any undue competing attitudes but for the betterment and realisation of a stable, effective and efficient Defence Force, and this is an area that the Office of Chief of Staff must constantly look into to help maintain that delicate balance and cordial relations between our
military and the Defence Secretariat while at the same time ensuring that the SANDF is not hamstrung from swiftly executing its constitutional mandate.

During my tenure as Chief of Staff, always in support of General Shoke, the Chief of the SANDF, I have seen first-hand how the continuous budget cuts on the DOD allocation are seriously limiting the National Defence Force's ability to expeditiously deliver on its Constitutional mandate.

As Chief of Staff, I have seen and been part of a corps of committed military leaders who have always been determined to do more with little or non-existent resources in pursuance of the noble cause to create and maintain capacity for the People's National Defence Force to support government programmes at the back of constrained budgetary allocations, owing to our snail-pace growing economy and amidst competing service delivery requirements our government still needs to satisfy.

Over the years, I have seen the trend of steady decline in the budget allocated to the National Defence Force and its effects on the efficiency, responsiveness, morale and combat readiness of our forces. It has not been pretty, but I have always encouraged those who served with me, superiors and subordinates alike, that we cannot afford to let this vital state organ supporting our democracy to deteriorate. We need to do all in our power to keep this ship afloat, within this climate of austerity, prosecute our constitutional mandate and steer it until the state is able to pump in the necessary funds to expedite the crucial milestones called for in the Defence Review.

I have always said and will repeat without any fear of contradiction that South Africa needs and deserves a responsive, capable, properly resourced and accountable National Defence Force structured and managed as a disciplined military force, whose primary object is to defend and protect the Republic, its territorial integrity and its people in accordance with the Constitution and the principles of international law regulating the use of force.

Taking a cue from our executive authority, the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and the Chief of the SA National Defence Force, in my capacity as Chief of Staff, I have raised the issue of these near crippling fiscal constraints to our principals in government at various fora and platforms, including but not limited to the Portfolio Committee on Defence, and we are both in agreement that the SANDF is in dire financial straits and its
resourcing must be prioritized once the fiscal purse gives a space to move. The Defence Review 2015 has also been adopted and there is an overwhelming affirmation from all political divides that more funding needs to be allocated towards the military to maintain its potency and ability to respond to the vast array of roles domestically, in support of other state departments and as a part of the fulfillment of South Africa’s obligations towards peace and security on the continent.

There are brighter days ahead, and we must be innovative in our approach when executing tasks and adopt approaches that will ensure that we achieve a greater yield while sparingly and wisely applying our limited resources.

Like American Civil Rights leader, Dr Martin Luther King Jr, once said: “If you can't fly, then run, if you can't run, then walk, if you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward.” Let us not allow this climate of austerity to hold us back. The SANDF needs to keep moving forward and fulfill the mandate our forebears had in mind when they established this National Defence Force that captures the aspirations of all our people, united in their diversity.

As Chief of Staff, I have occupied myself with providing strategic direction that ensures that our systems supports speedy delivery of our mandate as a defence force, greater fiscal prudence, enhanced good governance, efficient management and greater accountability at all levels of our military. We have of course made great strides, but we are still nowhere close to where we would want to be as a defence force, bearing in mind that we are obviously unique from other state departments, through our make-up, but are still expected to follow the stringent checks and balances imposed on all those entrusted with state resources.

The Office of Chief of Staff has adopted a zero tolerance approach to misconduct and ill-discipline at all levels. We have made marked progress in the fight against fraud, corruption and maladministration to ensure that the SANDF does not bleed its already stretched resources to greed and self-serving actions of financial sabotage and malfeasance. It is our responsibility to improve systems to hold our officials to account in line with the Auditor General and DOD Inspector General requirements. I would like to once more encourage all patriotic members of the SANDF to support the Defence Secretariat’s Operation Clean Audit to strengthen systems of clean governance and financial management with the intention to maintain
unqualified audit opinions and achieve clean audits for the National Defence Force.

As part of the Chief of Staff’s wide-ranging catalogue of responsibilities, we have also been pivotal in facilitating the SANDF’s compliance with United Nations requirements on operations and orchestrate the SANDF interventions against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse through Joint Operations Division and other stakeholders.

As Chief of Staff, I have also served a role of being a link to various entities whose mandates are intimately related to the SANDF. Entities like the Defence Force Service Commission, the Military Ombud and the National Defence Industry Council with whom I have extensively worked in pursuit of the goal to have a responsive National Defence Force that is well resourced, efficiently prosecutes its mandate, takes good care of its soldiers and ensures that they are treated with respect and human dignity. These entities together with the South African Aerospace and Maritime Defence Industries have been and are pivotal to the SANDF executing its mandate and will always form part of our country’s efforts to provide reliable and cost-effective defence solutions to its people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have given all I have to this national project that is our defence force. I have dedicated the latter part of my life to strive towards the creation and maintenance of a defence force that future generations will be proud of, a responsive, apolitical defence force that understands its place within a democratic state and puts the interests of South Africans uppermost in its mind.

During my tenure there were milestones achieved, and of course there has been setbacks, but we soldiered on, supported by a team of patriots and distinguished officers who understood that the task at hand was not one to be tackled in isolation by a single person, but one that required a collective that brought together the minds of some of our country’s finest officers to complete.

I now hand over the office of Chief of Staff of our military to an equally capable officer and venture into the next leg of my life as the Military Ombud, optimistic that the support the Chief of the SANDF and his entire force gave me, will equally be extended to Lt Gen Yam.
I also challenge you to also extend with the same measure, an unwavering support to the General Officers and Flag Officers recently appointed to senior positions across our National Defence Force, because their success depends on the efforts you put in as a collective to advance the mandate of the SANDF.

As I conclude, let me take this opportunity to thank our constitutionally elected principals in government for affording me the opportunity to serve the people of South Africa as a career soldier at this level. My gratitude goes to the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans for her guidance and support throughout my tenure as Chief of Staff. I shall be forever grateful for the opportunity I had to serve and be led by the Chief of the SANDF, General Shoke. Let me also thank the entire Military Command Council, other command bodies and the entire South African defence industry for their support and joint efforts to help make our defence force an efficient military that is looked upon as an organ that contributes towards peace and security on the continent.

I also want to pay tribute to my late parents who have shaped me to become the person I am today. They instilled in me the values of honesty and integrity. By their example, I learnt to put the interests of our country above my own interests and serve wherever I am required to with absolute commitment, dedication and selflessness. I equally want to thank my family starting with my brothers and their wives, my partner, my children and extended family members for the support they have given me throughout my career. If it was not for their support, I would not have been able to fully commit myself to my work. I am conscious of the sacrifices they had to make and I am greatly indebted to them all.

Last but not least, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my personal staff for the love, support and respect they have given me. It was a very emotional moment for me to bid them farewell as I end my military career after a period of 43 years of service. I am equally indebted to them.

I pledge to further serve the interests of South Africa to the best of my abilities as Military Ombud.

I thank you.