MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
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MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS RESERVE FORCE INDABA 1, 13TH SEPTEMBER 2019

Secretary for Defence Dr. Sam Gulube
Chief South African National Defence Force General Solly Shoke
Service and Division Chiefs
Members of Secretariat for Defence
The Reserve Force Council
The Defence Force Service Commission
The Office of the Military Ombud

Ladies and Gentlemen
As we start this Reserve Force Indaba I, I want us to observe a moment of silence for one of our own and your former colleague, who passed away yesterday, Major General (Retired) Sazi Veldtman.

This Reserve Force indaba takes place after I had declared my intention to convene it during the recent Defence Budget Vote on the 17th July 2019 following the 6th administration assuming office as well as the 6th parliament. My convening it was with the recognition of the “enormous contribution to the operational performance of the Defence Force during the last financial year, by providing over 14 000 members for various tasks.” I am grateful to these Reserves who serve voluntarily each year. They make a significant contribution to the SANDF and to Operation CORONA in particular.

When I directed that there needed to be this indaba, it was on the heels of the directive I had given in the 2018 Defence Budget debate, for “the development of the new Reserve Force system”. I can say as we gather at this indaba that the Deputy Minister and I received an extensive briefing on the 08th July 2019 about the status of the reserves and implementation of the updated Reserve Force system from the Reserve Force division, after it had been presented to the Military Command Council and the Plenary Defence Staff Council respectively.

Chief Defence Reserves, Maj Gen Roy Andersen, has briefed us fully on these Updated Regulations for the Reserves (June 2017) and the Updated Reserve Force
Service System (Oct 2018). These are the two documents whose implementation I will closely monitor.

I have called for this Indaba to raise certain matters that are of concern to me. These include some areas I want us to engage on. Of utmost importance to me is the extent to which the Reserve Force system has adapted with the changed and changing country’s landscape. Originally called the Part Time Force, it was meant to supplement the regular force system at the height of the apartheid system. The premise was also on guaranteed force levels at any given time, especially given that the country at the time had a system of compulsory national conscription for white males.

Therefore the Part Time Forces of the time guaranteed force levels for military utilization in all fields, in internal and external deployments. To this end, employers, both within the state, parastatal and private sector knew that they had an obligation to absorb, through employment, the white youth who did not have service commitments when not called up after their two years of conscription. The system ‘worked’ at the time because it was a smaller pool of the population to draw from (only white males).

With the advent of democracy in 1994 and significant policy changes, primarily the White Paper on Defence in 1996, major policy changes were pronounced in relation to the Part Time Forces. These were provisions that “the Defence Force will be structured to have a sufficiently large reserve force” with a smaller regular force component. The conceptualization was that given the new priorities of “Defence in a Democracy”, the country had other pressing socio-economic challenges that had to be met, therefore a smaller full time, regular force was needed, with the
expansion capability of the defence capability through a large reserve force, who would be utilised at less cost than the regular force, but within the principle of the one force (regulars and reserves) concept.

With the change to an all-volunteer defence force and after integration, there needed to be a change of tack. The newly established South African National Defence Force now constituted and represented the demographics of the country, thus meaning that even when matters of the reserves are attended to, this needed to be taken into account. The previous obligation of employers to take in reserves when not in call up became unhinged, for now there was a much bigger pool to cater for and take into consideration. This then brought this challenge, which we still live with today and which has become even sharper considering the high unemployment rate.

Today’s reserve force member expects that upon enlistment, they would be kept for a significantly longer period, effectively in a permanent period similar to a regular force member. It is no longer like previously, where a reserve force member would, upon completing their call-up, of whatever period, have a guaranteed employment outside the defence force. Today’s expectation is full time call up.

This and many other challenges are what we need to address as we have this frank and open indaba. We need to come up with options and also illustrate what steps are being taken about the corruption that has crept in within the reserve force system, and should form part of what I had instructed in 2018, the “overhauling of the entire reserve force system”.

In addition I had indicated that there needs to be specific actions to rejuvenate the personnel component of the SANDF to enhance its effectiveness. In this regard, the
combat capability of the SANDF requires that it is staffed with existing young, fit and healthy soldiers. This would improve the average staffing of units, as well as mean-age of those units. In addition, the need for the retention of technical, medical and other specialized capabilities.

Having said so, we cannot escape the realities of severe budget constraints, resulting in the lack of an effective feeder system of new recruits, limited leader group development, and restricted continuation training. We must admit however that the utilisation of reserves, if well managed, does result in cost savings compared to the regular force elements. That said, we need to, in this regard, recognize the sterling work done by the reserves in all areas of deployment, including in the Vaal River System project which we have been involved in since late 2018 and to which we undertook an inspection with the Deputy President just yesterday. This is in addition to other deployments across the length and breadth of the country as part of border control, even as we have fifteen (15) instead of twenty two (22) companies due to budget constraints. Similarly, in external deployments there is a fair complement of reserve force deployments. All make up what I said at the beginning, recognizing the work that is executed by the country’s 14 000 members in the recent period. We need to recognize reserves as a force multiplier, and deepen the understanding of the “one force” policy. As we do so, the Services and Divisions need to have a clear indication of how much they budget for reserve force utilization, and thus create a balance with the regular force elements. In addition, how will we effect rejuvenation of the SANDF, not only the reserves?
We have continuously had new intakes, however reduced in recent years. But we need to pause and ponder about the efficacy of this as we already have a glut in those members enlisted into the Military Skills Development System (MSDS) but who upon completion of training cannot be absorbed into the reserves. The system design originally meant to do this, but is no longer coping. Should we not, instead of recruiting afresh, concentrate on the young people whom we have already recruited and trained for the two years, to fill the rejuvenation gap? The cost becomes less as we have already invested in them. In the outer years we can then resume gradual rise in the numbers of new recruits. The danger if we do not keep and contain those whom we have trained, some deployed, then throw them out in the street, is that we are creating a different problem for our society and which will come back to bite us as the defence establishment. Those youth who have gone through our MSDS system but never got absorbed into the reserves can be found all over the country. Do we have a system to track and trace their whereabouts and ability to call them up when we need to? This and many other questions we need to explore and find answers to, for we cannot satisfactorily say we have an overhauled reserve force system without attending to these matters.

In addition, how have we recruited and maintained professionals in all fields within the SANDF? Many a professional, especially those from the previously disadvantaged communities that never had exposure to military service, are ready, willing and able to enlist into the SANDF reserves. Some are even willing to give of their time with no expectation of remuneration. I am talking here about health professionals, lawyers, accountants, etc. the scope is wide. We also need to have the capability to assist those already enlisted with the ability to be absorbed into the job market when not called up. Opportunities abound in the state owned
enterprises for us to enter into agreements with them to do so – be it state owned armament entities Armscor and Denel; logistics and rail freight Transnet, Eskom, and many others. It will only be once we have clinched these arrangements that the private sector will realise the state’s capacity to take in our reserve force members.

Colleagues I wish to address the matter of the changing of reserve force unit names. This is a matter that has been very emotive for members in those units. This was undertaken after a lengthy consultative process involving the membership of these units, led by the Chief of the Army. General Yam, instituted the Name Review Steering Committee to assess and consider the various names against the guidelines as set out and advise accordingly. This entailed extensive research and road show, ensuring that the overall military history of our country is taken into account, drawn from prominent military leaders, chiefs, important military battles and events, amongst others. All South African Army Reserve units had to submit their proposals in line with the afore-mentioned guidelines, as well as the predetermined format of the proposed name; motivation for either the new name or retention of the existing one; an explanation of the new name if the meaning is not obvious; the summary of the consultative process followed, including the list of persons and entities consulted, lastly, any other relevant comments.

The additional criteria was to consider geographical regions; names of people; ethnic and indigenous African names; numbered units; colours and banners. I must say with the submission that was then made for my final approval, I was satisfied that the name changing did indeed reflect our country’s history. What we need to do is to now popularize these new names changes not only within the units
themselves, but also throughout the SANDF at large. We now have units such as the Andrew Mlangeni Regiment, which replaces the South African Irish Regiment; the Solomon Mahlangu unit, replacing the Transvaal Scottish regiment; the Bambatha Rifles, replacing the Witwatersrand Rifles, and many others such as Regiment de la Rey replaced by General de la Rey Regiment. There are many other units to mention in this indaba and I urge that we duly communicate internally and externally in this regard. I have thus, after this lengthy consultation I have outlined, signed into effect these name changes, striking a healthy balance reflecting our military history.

I would also wish that this 1st Reserve Force indaba, in addition to deliberating on areas outlined within the programme, also examine and come with strategies to address the following:

a. Action plans following the report of the SA Army Board of Inquiry into corruption in the call-up of Reserves and are the accused being pursued;

b. Address the matter of the crews provided by the Air Reserve Squadrons and them being made representative;
c. Effective Communication of the plans and time frames for the new names of certain of the SA Army Reserve Force units; this must also be extended to other reserve force units outside the SA Army.

d. The statutory Reserve Force Council working with the mandate to support the DOD and advise the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans on reserve force matters; in addition, establishing clear boundary management with SANDF Reserves division;

I trust that by the end of this Indaba these and other issues will be clarified and I look forward to being fully briefed on the outcomes.

I thank you