



defence

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SPEECH

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Closing remarks by Minister of Defence and Military Veterans on the occasion of the National General Council of SANMVA, St Georges Hotel

Programme Director.
President of SANMVA
Compatriots
Colleagues

I want to thank the President of the South African National Military Veterans' Association (SANMVA) for asking me to be the guest speaker today and thank you for inviting me to share with you some of the work we are doing and will continue to do for our military veterans. Ensuring that we not only acknowledge their role but support in them throughout their lives.

I am humbled to stand before you as a person responsible for our most esteemed South Africans who contributed immensely to the struggle and the emancipation of the people of South Africa – our military veterans. I greet you all in the name of these men and women for their illustrious contribution and sacrifices to the liberation of South Africa and its democratisation which accounts for where we are today.

Some of you have endured great hardships, separation from family and drastically altered lifestyles. Some of you have experienced the horrors of liberation wars throughout the fight against colonialism not only in South Africa but in the Southern Africa region. All sacrificed something so that we could enjoy the freedoms we have today.

Often their service did not end when they took off the uniform. But their story does not end there nor does their sacrifice for this country end their service to his country. They must to be active in the development of our young democracy in whatever capacity they can, for this has been their lives.

This being the National General Council, the second most important structure outside the national elective conference, we need to have taken stock of what has been achieved by this esteemed association of military veterans in ensuring that the needs of all our military veterans in particular those from the non-statutory forces have access to social and economic support.

A major milestone after your formation as SANMVA in 2008 has been the reconfiguration of the ministry of defence to the ministry of defence and military veterans and the subsequent establishment of the department of the military veterans. The establishment of the department of military veterans has given us an opportunity to delivery on all matters related to military veterans in a coordinated and efficient way. The Military Veterans Act of 2011 gives us the legal framework, mandate and obligation to ensure rollout of benefits and services to all military veterans of our country.

This is a major achievement in recognition and appreciation of the role our people have played to bring about democracy and nurturing it. It is indeed painful that this has come after 18 years into our democracy, but it is no small feat that you have achieved to date. This legal stipulation enjoins us to forthwith move with speed with the implementation of the programmes, benefits and services as required.

The enactment of Military Veterans Act will bring a sigh of relieve to many families and communities. The previous efforts by government to support demobilised soldiers were grossly inadequate. In all fairness, the many unsung heroes and heroines of yesterday's fierce battles against apartheid-rule and their courageous families have to this day bore their pain on sacrifices made, with dignity and patience.

The wise decision by government to correct what is a glaring omission to all can never be too late. We can always draw comfort from the experiences of many other countries that "it is better late than never", when it comes to the neglect of former combatants or demobilised soldiers.

The Minister and the Deputy Minister, and their department, the Department of Military Veterans, have the responsibility, subject to available resources and any regulation that may be prescribed in this regard, to ensure that benefits are paid or provided to military veterans, either through the Department or through other organs of state.

Section 5 of the Act clearly states that all organs of state that are responsible for the payment or provisioning of benefits to military veterans are obliged to cooperate with the Minister and the Department in respect of the payment or provisioning of those benefits.

At a workshop held on the 27th March 2012, all stakeholders that included SANMVA, of which uMkhonto we Sizwe is an integral part and leader thereof, and the DMV, this was recognised as a statutory requirement as articulated in the Military Veterans Act.

The stakeholders noted the challenges that will be faced in the allocation and rollout of the budget and undertook to collectively and urgently address these concerns, in collaboration with other stakeholders in government, especially the National Treasury regarding the progressive realisation of required resources for the delivery of benefits to military veterans, in particular those who suffered tremendously and have had not any benefits the Act spells out since the dawn of democracy in 1994.

In this regard we have already started rolling out access to healthcare in accordance with the Act. We are now in a position to provide Universal Access to Health care

through our Military Health Services. This benefit, like all other benefits as outlined in the Act will of course be subject to means test. We have also started with the issuing of military veterans health cards to senior military veterans and I want to congratulate those that have received the cards to day right here. This is the beginning of the roll of the military veteran's health cards throughout the country in the immediate period.

Over the past years we have witnessed a number of our military veterans who died and were never accorded nor given a decent burial. Similarly we have begun to provide burial support to those deserving military veterans. In this regard, we are concluding the Burial Policy, which will include recognition and honorary services, linked to the burial. We are also engaging our counterparts at provincial levels regarding the establishment of Heroes Acres in those respective provinces.

As we move ahead we are working to finalise the Memorandum of Understanding related to different services and benefits in cooperation with other line function national and provincial departments together with municipalities across the country. This is in accordance with Section 5 of the Act which enjoins all institutions of state to delivery to military veterans in their respective line functions responsibilities.

Critical work around the consolidation of the data-base of Military Veterans has commenced and is in an advanced stage, having completed the first phase in December 2011 and the second phase due to begin in May until the end of June. However, Military Veterans Associations, with whom we must collaborate, have a responsibility to ensure that they fully and effectively participate in the process of ensuring that we have a consolidated, correct and auditable data-base for military veterans.

Reliable data on the profile of our community of Military Veterans with regard to among others is age composition, economic status and educational qualifications and skills is very critical if we are to effectively support of military veterans. This demographic information is critical for the purposes of planning for the services and benefits.

Therefore to give effect to this process, all stakeholders are being engaged to ensure the success of this exercise, as well as overall delivery of benefits to military veterans, especially those who have been historically disadvantaged and we regard as an urgent priority.

Another challenge we have relates to the plight of African soldiers who were in the former SADF. It is my humble appeal to SANMVA to commit to assisting such veterans. A particular case that we have had to deal with is that of "Cape Coloured Corps" and the recognition of their Military Veteran Association. The position we have taken is very much in line with the act. I am informed that SACCMVA has applied for recognition and SANMVA membership. I hope you will consider this application favourably.

As we implement the Act, we have already drafted the regulations that spell out in more detail and to a large extent clarify aspects that would allow the Department to facilitate access to service and benefits by yourselves. I am particularly pleased to note that you have had a detailed discussion on the roles and responsibilities between the

Department and your association.

In conclusion, I would like you to take note of the fact that the Military Veterans Act, 2011 provides for the establishment of a National Military Veterans Association with certain prescripts.

It would be therefore be in your interest individually and collectively deliberate on this matter for you to move forward in unison.

I thank you.

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