Ladies and Gentlemen form the Media

We have invited you today to join us as we hold the very first consultative meeting between the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans and all the Generals and Staff Officers of the SANDF. This is the first time that this team of senior officers have ever had a platform, in a structured way, to engage with the Minister.

It was important for me that this team, which exercises strategic leadership function at the highest level, be given an opportunity to share with the Deputy Minister and I, their experience of the organisation, its current challenges and its future trajectory.

For me, the meeting was long overdue and I had hoped that we could have held it much earlier. Owing to the many challenges we faced in the past year and half, it had not been possible to pull the full team of 250 Generals and Flag Officers together, but I’m glad that we have finally set the ball rolling in this regard.

As you may be aware, it is quite easy for the Minister, in the environment of the Defence Force to spend a considerable amount of time engaging with the Military Command Council and the various Chiefs, with very little opportunity to deal with your other levels of leadership and going down to the ordinary soldiers themselves.

As an organisation going through fundamental change in its design, positioning and future trajectory, we needed to find a way of ensuring that everyone is involved in the process and we have a full buy-in and common understanding of the tasks before us. We need to do this always sensitive to the need to preserve Command and Control, while allowing effective dialogue. It is a balance that we have to negotiate if we are to fulfil the principle that this organisation belongs to all of us.

We have succeeded in the past 20 years to build a united force that enjoys legitimacy amongst all the people and has served the country with distinction overall.

Over the past 20 years, the SANDF has protected our democracy and created an environment within which our democracy can realise true benefits for our country.
It has secured our land and maritime borders as well as our air space. In addition to its military mandate, the defence force has and continues to render humanitarian assistance to needy communities. We have helped in building and restoring infrastructure. We have positioned the SANDF and the Defence Industry to contribute to economic development; including in scientific research and technological innovation, as well as the training and skilling of our youth.

Outside our borders the defence force is currently deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Darfur region in Sudan where it monitors and enforces peace, and is part of the anti-piracy operations in the Mozambique channel. As you are aware South Africa is one of a few countries that will commit troops and other resources to a rapid deployment force under the "African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crisis" initiative by the African Union. Our soldiers have performed very well wherever they have been deployed on the continent and we salute them.

We have now reached the stage at which we must assess the performance of this new Force over the past 20 years, and to consider the plans and programmes that will define the future of the SANDF.

We called this meeting as a platform to initiate a dialogue the Minister and the leadership. It needs to be seen as an initial effort to structure this much needed interaction. We therefore had set a few objectives for the meeting:

• We can establish a standing and structured forum for dialogue and exchange

• We establish this platform as a consultative forum for change management in the organisation

• That we can share ideas on some of the key issues facing the organisation in the short, medium term, particularly those that require urgent attention.

In my address to the meeting this morning, I had highlighted few areas where, despite our proud record in the past 20 years, we need to pay attention to, if we are to do better.
These included:

1. The need to address issues of our capacity in line with the determined strategic mandate of the organisation. In this regard I’ve raised concerns about the manner in which our planning for capacity is done in silos and without consideration for the changing nature of our mandate and tasks.

We need to pay attention to how the support environment always supports the execution of our mandate in the areas of Human Resource, Budgeting, Acquisition of capability and organisational design.

The realignment of our human resource as a key strategic support is necessary. This realignment should respond to issues of recruitment strategy. The SANDF needs to recruit high calibre people into its ranks in response to the future trajectory of this organisation and the kind of Defence Force we want to build. We need to pay close attention to the kind of people we should be recruiting, where they are and how best to attract them in the SANDF.

We should consider the current instruments and institution we have that can assist our process of skilling and professionalising the SANDF, and whether these are adequate.

From a leadership point of view we are discussing the challenges we face in the area of leadership in the short and medium term. We have an urgent need to prepare future layers leadership through a focused strategy with clearly outlined outcomes.

We should position our military training produce more competent officers and non-commissioned officers, given that we currently have an ageing force that is in dire need of rejuvenation.

It is also my belief that, as in many other successful nations, the SANDF, should play a visible role in preparing leadership of the country and for the different sectors of our society.

We have also raised concern about issues of discipline and the worrying signs that slackness, unprofessionalism, corruption, and
other ills that threaten to degrade our defence force and undo the good work done over the past twenty years.

Another concern that we seek to address, relates to the fact that, over the past 20 years we have not paid enough attention to the servicing and improving the state of our facilities. The general state of our hospitals, barracks, and all our bases leave a lot to be desired. The recent establishment of the Defence Works Formation is a development that should assist us in this regard, but there are too many issues that need to be addressed if this unit is to function effectively.

It is important that we pay urgent attention to this issue, including funding options that should be considered to improve the general conditions of our infrastructure.

We have a responsibility to equip this Defence Force with the necessary capabilities to ensure its operational readiness. We need to resolve the problems relating to the efficient use of our budget to resolve problems of our acquisition of capabilities. The acquisition of capability and plans thereof, should be realigned with the new strategic outlook for the SANDF and not simply follow the plans that had stagnated since the past 10 years or more. With the continued reduction of our budget, it will be important that this leadership discusses alternative ways for funding of our requirements. Since 2008/9, reductions and reprioritisation of the defence budget has resulted in cuts amounting to about R18 billion.

I have however expressed my disappointment that while we decry the underfunding of the Defence Force, we continue to see huge areas of underspending and wastage of resources.

The discussion that we will continue with after lunch will discuss these issues and others that we have raised including the issue of our combat readiness, communications and security in general.

We are determined that in the short term some of the basics that should have always been in place should be established. There is no long term plan that will ever succeed in the absence of these basics.
As you are aware, the work of the Defence Review Committee is nearing completion.

The Review is only awaiting Cabinet approval and if its vision for the defence force is accepted, then this leadership should stand ready for its implementation. The Review will inform the role, shape, design and trajectory of the SANDF for the next 20 to 30 years.

I have emphasised that although the review is a long term outlook, it can never be realised unless we resolve some of the current issues I've raised here that need immediate attention from all of us.

Our imperative is the commitment of all of us to build a Defence Force we can all be proud of.