

**Keynote Address: for the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans
at the Consultative Workshop on Women Economic Empowerment.**

Venue ; Southern Sun, OR International Airport, Ekurhuleni

Date: 20th August 2014

Programme Director

Acting Director General of the Department

Senior Managers

The President and NEC of SANMVA

Representatives of the Defence Industry

Representatives of the various government departments

Representatives of City of Ekurhuleni

Representatives of the private sector

Fellow Women Military Veterans

The veterans community at large

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to greet you all in the name of the many women, you amongst them, who have fought on the different side of our liberation wars, bringing about our freedom and democracy.

I am must express my gratitude that we are today able to convene this first ever Consultative Workshop, giving us a much needed opportunity to deliberate and give impetus to one of the critical challenge still bedeviling our society today. The socio-conomic empowerment of women, including military veterans, and the acceleration of the women emancipation agenda in our country, can no longer be pushed to the back of our transformation efforts.

In this context therefore, the theme of this Workshop **“Women Military Veterans - Together Moving Towards Economic Emancipation”**, could not have been more relevant and appropriate.

The workshop takes place as our nation celebrates the 61 years of the Women’s Charter, the 60th Anniversary of the adoption of the Freedom Charter at the Congress of the people in 1955, and as we prepare to mark next year the 60th anniversary of the great women’s march of 1956 and the memoranda of demands thereof.

These historic policy documents constitute for us the political baseline and are a proper starting point for our assessment of progress made in our quest for women emancipation in general.

Both charters, adopted within a year of each other, were consistent in the articulation of the aspirations of our people, including the context within which the emancipation struggles of women were engaged a part of the struggle for national liberation.

In this regard the Women’s Charter, adopted earlier in 1954, had been even more succinct in placing the struggle for women’s emancipation as an integral part of our people’s struggle for freedom. It declared that:

“We the women, do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress.”

This historical perspective is an important one, even in the context of this historic workshop, because urgent task of accelerating women’s empowerment, should not be seen as sectarian and isolated, as an important precondition for the socio-economic upliftment of all our people.

Programme Director, the workshop also grows in its significance from the fact that the country has committed itself towards the second phase of our transition to transformation, pursuing a radical socio- economic change agenda. This accelerated program of change is embodied in the government’s National Development Plan, clearly articulating the development path towards a better future for our country.

Women’s economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and therefore a necessary building block for the successful achievement of the goals outlined in the National Development Plan (NDP).

For its part the NDP, consistent with the thinking of the Women’s and Freedom charters, calls for investments in gender empowerment and equality, arguing that this will result in the highest returns of all development investments.

This gendered perspective to our developmental agenda, not only ensures the economic emancipation of women, but is also supports the strengthening women's rights. This will allow women to have control over their lives, freeing their potential to contribute to, and influence change in our country.

While the strategic and policy fundamentals have been in place, and remained consistent, even from a historical point of view, the challenge we face is one of ensuring structured and coordinated implementation across all sectors of society.

This workshop should seek creative ways of harnessing the opportunities that arise from the expressed commitment for transformation in our economy for the betterment of the lives of military veterans in general and of women military veterans in particular. Keeping in mind that the dire situation of our veterans, requires that we act now and identify the low hanging fruits in this program.

We recently concluded a successful military veterans indaba where we painted the broad strokes for harnessing these quick wins in addressing the plight of our veterans in the immediate to medium term period.

We have clearly identified the need to improve the capacity of the department of military veterans to lead this program. Many of you whom I have been consulting on the constitution of the team for a Turnaround of the department can attest to the complexities we have had to deal with in finding the right mix of people who are available for this work. I am glad that we have now put formidable team to be led by comrade Siphon Majombozi to drive the Turnaround within the DMV. I will be making a formal announcement of the team after my first meeting with them next week in Pretoria. The team will also be supported by a

technical team in the full time Program Management Office constituted by experts from the Defence Decision Support Institute of Armscor.

Fellow Military Veterans,

When we met last year we made a decision recognising the need to organise ourselves as women military veterans and advocate for the plight of women veterans and within defence sector.

We vowed to unite military women military veterans and to work towards economic emancipation and empowerment of women military veterans. This we said we shall do by mobilising and creating close partnership with military veterans formations and association in the country and abroad including through the South African National Military Veterans Association;

We should use the opportunity of this workshop to reflect critically on the journey thus far traversed; looking at the achievements made, and reflecting honestly on the challenges we continue to face.

Having done this assessment, we should then together, determine the cause of action, in the light of developments, on the tangible practical programs we should pursue in the next 12 to 24 months to jumpstart sustainable socio- economic emancipation for veterans, and women in particular.

It is absolutely fundamental that we convince both government and the private sector to realize that the transformation of the economy, should involve active participation and empowerment of women.

Fellow veterans,

I am elated by the report that since we last met 17 months ago a lot of progress has been in breathing life into the Declaration we made at Royal Elephant in Pretoria. An inclusive and representative Interim Gender Forum was established composed of all military veterans formation lhas now been established under the leadership of Cde Nomsa “Sally” Mkwanazi. I take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Gender Forum for the commitment and dedication to the noble course of empowering women military veterans that you have shown over the past 17 months.

Working with no dedicated budget and resources, with no offices, and no means of transport, and for long hours you soldiered on. We commend this dedication and offer that more support will be given to you to support the good work you are already doing.

Programme Director I am told that the Interim Gender Forum notwithstanding the fact that it had to work under strenuous conditions of adversity, been able to hold a workshop in August last year during womens’ month that was attended by over 100 military veterans including women in business, the State Owned Enterprises, Professionals, women in the DOD.

The report I got indicates that very pertinent critical matters were discussed including amongst others:

1. how women military veterans can contribute in the creation of an enabling policy and legislative environment that affirms women military veterans;
2. how women can go about in empowering themselves; how women military veterans can organise and unite themselves;

3. how women can leverage the opportunities within society to better their lives;
4. how women military veterans can develop their skills.

I want to take this opportunity to commend all of our women military veterans for all that hard work. I also want to commend the DMV for having been there at the best and at the worst of time for the Gender Forum. I am looking forward to a detailed report for the Interim Gender Forum and all of you on what has been and still needs to be done.

Fellow Military Veterans, let me take this opportunity to say this important historical fact that some often take for granted and at times ignore. The establishment of a dedicated Department to serve the needs of military veterans in a focused manner five years ago was a significant achievement that ought not be undermined and thanks to the visionary leadership of President Jacob Zuma.

Within a period just five years, **over 3600 military veterans and their dependants are in receipt of education support** both in basic and tertiary level **at the tune of about R135 million.**

No less than 14 000 are in the healthcare system. Over 78 million Rands has been transferred to the Department of Human settlements for the building of no less than 1000.

Over 90 cooperatives have been established and the process towards the establishment of 200 cooperatives to create 1500 jobs is on course. Skills training and development, creation of job opportunities, heritage and memorialisation programmes as well as exhumation and reburials are being undertaken.

The process of legislative review to ensure more adequate support for military veterans and their dependants is underway. Notwithstanding the teething challenges faced by a relatively new Department, these are remarkable achievements that ought to be applauded and welcomed and most importantly supported by all of us. It is not all doom and gloom after all.

Let me indicate that while the Ministry is busy with ensuring capacity for the department, we have been in touch with various partners, including the Defence Industry, to look at how additional alternative funding models can be established to alleviate the budgetary burden and shortages in support of our programs. I am happy to report that many of these are feasible and that the Turnaround team, will in the next six months consolidate and bring these into fruition.

I must indicate that since the successful conclusion of our first ever Indaba with military veterans at the Birchwood Hotel, we have all come to appreciate even much better the challenges you face as military veterans and women in particular.

Institutional mechanisms and technical support processes are paramount if we are to streamline the work of both the DMV and SANMVA.

During my budget vote speech in May this year I announced the establishment of an Appeals Board headed by an experienced public servant Mr. Mavuso Msimang and we are also ready to appoint the long outstanding Advisory Council, again following extensive consultation with many of you.

In this regard, let me indicate that we have faced serious frustrations with lack of response from veterans in coming forward to avail themselves when we advertise or request nominations to serve in these structures. This has caused delays as we have had to literally go knocking on individual doors to pursue veterans to come in and assist. I once more urge you to avail yourselves and that we should create a database of skills and competences of veterans that we can tap into whenever we need your assistance.

Lastly let me emphasise that, for all the interventions I am mentioning to have meaning, it is vital that women military veterans and the military veterans community at large; military veterans formations; SANMVA and indeed all three spheres of government, the private sector, the state owned enterprises, labour, civil society and communities at large, work in partnership.

I look forward to fruitful, constructive and robust deliberations and realisable and realistic recommendations that will give true meaning and essence to changing the lives of military veterans, their dependants and those of you women veterans in particular.

Allow me to close with a quote from the first late President of a non-racial and non-sexist SA and the first Patron in Chief of the Military Veterans, uTata Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela in his message on Women's Day on August 9th 1995” **Together we have it in our power to change South Africa for the better”**

Asante sana! Ndiyabulela! Thank You